

SEATTLE
REPER



LYDIA AND THE TROLL

PLAY GUIDE

BOOK, MUSIC & LYRICS BY Justin Huertas

ADDITIONAL MUSIC, MUSIC PRODUCTION & MUSIC SUPERVISION BY Steven Tran

CO-CREATED & DIRECTED BY Ameenah Kaplan

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A NOTE FROM ARTS ENGAGEMENT

I once had an acting teacher tell me, “Television is a producer’s medium, film is a director’s medium, and theater is an actor’s medium.” In a sense, I understand what he was getting at—in each medium, the control over the final performance is up to different players. After all, no one walks onstage and yells, “Cut!” at theater performers. Theater actors don’t get a blooper reel.



But my teacher’s whole premise was really actor centric. There is just so much more to each theater performance than the acting! As we approach our final show of the season, *Lydia and the Troll*, I find myself reflecting back on a season absolutely made by fantastic lighting, complicated sound, ornate costumes, and detailed sets and props. *Lydia* is the perfect end to a season like this. Full of magic and wonder, this show has puppetry, lighting effects, original music well outside of the standard “musical theater” genre, and other exciting design elements. Yes, the actors will give amazing, nuanced, fresh performances every day—but audiences will also get to see the creative work of dozens of other theater-makers, too!

I am thrilled to welcome students, teachers, and community members to see this show full of local talent, on and off the stage. And, as young people see this show, I hope they find the inspiration to express themselves in a variety of artistic ways. Whether that expression leads into a lifelong hobby, a vocation, or a well-educated enthusiasm for the arts, I am excited that *Lydia and the Troll* will be a part of their creative journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deanna Martinez', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Deanna Martinez

Associate Director of Arts Engagement, Youth & Community

THE ORIGINS OF THE FREMONT TROLL



By Barbara Luecke, Maque Davis, and Cindy Krafft

Once upon a time, the land under the north end of Seattle's Aurora Bridge was a dumping ground for discarded mattresses and refrigerators, abandoned cars, and unwanted things. This little piece of forgotten ground, lurking in the shadows, called out to be transformed with public art to make it better, a place to meet your friends after brunch, to bring your aunt when she visited.

A landscape architect working on building a community park on either side of the bridge dubbed the area underneath it the "Hall of Giants," in honor of those who designed and built the majestic Aurora Bridge. During a Fremont Arts Council (FAC) meeting in 1989, a city staff person shared about an opportunity, a new Neighborhood Matching Fund, that was seeking applications from communities that described unique ideas to improve their neighborhoods. Volunteer hours (or "sweat equity") would be matched with cash from the City of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods. Peter Bevis, an artist instigator who hosted the FAC meeting at his Fremont Fine Arts Foundry, encouraged the FAC to apply for a grant to commission an artwork for the Hall of Giants that would change the character of the derelict space. He envisioned the artwork taking advantage of the view corridor under the tall columns of the bridge known as the "cathedral of Fremont," tying the sides of the developing park together, and that would include an aspect for people to help build the artwork itself. And he had the radical idea that people would vote for the artwork they wanted. Peter believed that "Art builds strong communities by fostering stewardship, which creates a sense of belonging."

THE ORIGINS OF THE FREMONT TROLL

The FAC was awarded a grant for the Hall of Giants and ran an open call for artists led by project coordinator Barbara Luecke. The request-for-proposals said three artists would receive a small honorarium to build a model of their concept to display at the Fremont Fair. “Buy a Vote in Fremont” became the project slogan. Vote with a buck to raise funds for the project because the grant budget was tight. The jury picked three finalists from around 40 applications. They really liked a fourth idea, but the plan needed adjusting. Since the RFP had only advertised for three funded finalists, the jury offered the fourth applicant team a chance to build an unfunded model if they revised their concept. The team agreed, and their proposal for The Fremont Troll won by a landslide.

The Fremont Troll team was led by Steve Badanes, a member of the Jersey Devils design-build architect group who was teaching at the University of Washington. He enlisted two of his graduate students, Will Martin and Ross Whitehead, and also brought on board his girlfriend at the time, Donna Walter. They invited locals to drop by the site and help build the concrete sculpture, made with a rebar frame, covered with layers of cement cloth, and ladled with ferrocement. There was some opposition from occasional naysayers, and art critics who thought selecting artists should be in the hands of experts, not the public, but the neighborhood came together in work parties throughout the fall of 1990 to make The Fremont Troll a reality. The artist team determined that The Troll would scoop a VW Beetle off the street as a symbol of resistance to the coming gentrification and urbanization, and to give The Troll a sense of his scale.

And so, the tale goes, when the community’s work was done, there was one Troll of Fremont. He, of course, was of the big silent type, patient and grey. He was alone in a sea of humans, surrounded by an urban world, far from the hollows he wished he knew. He had watched the urban changes around him as the neighborhood rapidly gentrified. And in a pique of frustration, he snatched a car from the bridge overhead, and held it in protest. But soon, one smaller person-sized troll found him and became his friend: Trolldebogen. Trolldebogen had one human friend, Dave McKay, an iconic local artist, who knew how to find other trolls. Dave led a search for more trolls. The late Roger Wheeler was one, who wrote a ballad about the Troll. Maque Davis is another, who has given hundreds of Troll cleaning and Troll grumbling hours to the community. Many more came to live in Fremont. And every year since then, the Fremont Troll celebrates his now beloved neighborhood with his Troll brethren and new human friends, at his birthday party called Trolloween.

Lydia and the Troll has been in the making for eight years! Take a look back at how this world-premiere musical came to be at Seattle Rep.

DEC 2015

COMMISSION WITH JUSTIN HUERTAS LAUNCHES

After the success of his world-premiere commission of *Lizard Boy*, Seattle Rep offered Justin a second commission for a new work. Our New Play Program offers artists the resources they need to bring the next great play to life.



Kirsten deLohr Helland, Justin Huertas, and William A. Williams in *Lizard Boy* (2015).

NOV 2017

THE FIRST WORKSHOP

The first workshop for a new theatrical work is the moment when the creator and collaborators can hear the play out loud, performed by actors for the very first time.



Creator Justin Huertas in a workshop for *Lydia and the Troll* (2018).

JUN 2018

AMEENAH KAPLAN JOINS

Co-Creator and Director Ameenah Kaplan came aboard the *Lydia* train and quickly provided inspiration for the show's visual aesthetic.



Adam Standley, Sarah Russell, and Ameenah Kaplan in a workshop of *Lydia and the Troll* (2018).

AUG 2019

CLEVELAND WORKSHOP

Why Cleveland, you may ask? Ameenah Kaplan was previously the Resident Director of Disney's *The Lion King*, so we travelled to her while she was on tour to continue *Lydia* development. Ameenah gathered three actors from *The Lion King* who read and sang through the play, adding their thoughts and dramaturgical information as they went.

DEC 2019

GUY GARRISON JOINS; PONCHO WORKSHOP

Seattle artist Guy Garrison joined the *Lydia* team as the puppet creator and puppeteer. Guy's creativity and ingenuity brought this story to a whole new level as the musical got up on its feet.



The 2019 workshop cast of *Lydia and the Troll* experimenting with shadow puppetry.

JUN 2021

PLAYS IN PROCESS

Shortly after the 2019 workshop, well... we all know what happened. The pandemic hit. Theaters, including Seattle Rep, were unable to produce live work. So, we took to Zoom! Our virtual Plays in Process series had an edition focused on *Lydia*, where we shared some pre-recorded clips of performances, puppet work in motion, and previewed exciting evolutions of the electronic/pop score as Additional Composer and Music Producer Steven Tran joined the team.



Former Seattle Rep Artistic Director Braden Abraham, Justin Huertas, Ameenah Kaplan, and Guy Garrison.

DEC 2022

DESIGN WORKSHOP

All of the pieces started coming together at this design workshop. Combining scenic, projection, sound design, and more, the elements of live performance were added in to recreate Seattle on stage.

MAR 2023

MEET & GREET AND FIRST REHEARSAL

The day finally arrived! After much anticipation, an invited audience of staff, artists, and supporters joined together with the cast and creative team to share about the overall show design and get the actors ready to jump into rehearsal.



Justin Huertas and Ameenah Kaplan at the *Lydia* Meet & Greet.



The cast and creative team of *Lydia and the Troll*.

TODAY

You and an audience, seeing this world-premiere musical!



The Fremont Troll was designed and built in 1990 by Steve Badanes, Will Martin, Donna Walter, and Ross Whitehead.

An Amazing Loop of Inspiration

An Interview with *Lydia and the Troll* Creator Justin Huertas

Seattle Rep: Where did the idea for *Lydia and the Troll* come from?

Justin Huertas (Book, Music & Lyrics): It started with the Fremont Troll. It's a magical question that I wanted an answer to—how did this troll frozen in stone even get there? It made me think a lot about the trolls in my everyday life—not just the people who've told me I'm not good enough for whatever reason, but the trolls in my head who reinforced all my insecurities. The idea with the magical troll of *Lydia* is that it preys on artists with unlimited potential who think they're not good enough. It uses those fears and doubts to steal that artist's life so it can live their life for them—better than they ever could. That was the root of the idea.

SR: How would you describe the writing and music style of *Lydia*?

JH: It's super different than anything I've ever made before. For the most part, the book reads like a contemporary straight play. These relationships are deep and these characters are complex and deeply flawed. It's also very adult. This is a script I couldn't have written ten years ago without the experiences and love and heartbreak and mistakes and repair. I wrote three very lost characters, and carving out their journeys has been very cathartic. The music, too, has evolved like crazy. *Lydia* was going to be a rock show and after two delays and a whole pandemic, it's become an electronic/pop score with touches of lo-fi and dubstep.

SR: *Lydia* has really taken shape with the support of your artistic collaborators. How have they influenced the evolution of the show over time?

JH: My collaboration with Ameenah has been one of the most rewarding in my career. She's my co-creator on this because she really helped me shape this narrative. Lydia's journey has a lot of Ameenah in it—and a lot of Sarah Russell. And now Steven Tran! We made the decision that beyond Lydia being an aspiring singer-songwriter, she'll be an aspiring music producer, which is very much the journey that Steven is on. It's this amazing loop of inspiration with Ameenah, Steven, and me as we continue building this world. I'll write something, they'll teach me something new as they interpret my writing, and I'll revise based on their thoughts.



Justin Huertas at the Meet & Greet for *Lydia and the Troll* (2023).

An Amazing Loop of Inspiration

An Interview with *Lydia and the Troll* Creator Justin Huertas

SR: How has your relationship with Seattle Rep helped you grow as an artist?

JH: Seattle Rep gave me my first job as a writer and now I'm a writer. That was unexpected for me! I came out of college thinking I was an actor-cellist, and now my primary job is writing and composing. It's a skill I learned literally on the job from the legendary [former Seattle Rep Artistic Director] Jerry Manning, and it's a skill I honed writing musicals for Book-It Repertory Theatre, ArtsWest, and other theaters. I feel extremely fortunate for Seattle Rep to lift me up in this way and really commit to the art I want to make.

SR: You have a multigenerational following, including many young theater fans. What advice would you give to emerging theater artists who want to enter the field?

JH: We're starting to get really bogged down in this idea that there are too many creators for us to stand out as individuals. And I totally get it—in the age of TikTok and content creation, it's hard to feel

unique. My hope is that young artists can trust that their life experiences and their points of view are valuable. You're the only one who can make the thing the way you would make it. You're the only one who can tell your story the way you want to tell it. Trust your intuition, find your people, make art with them and for them, and learn from each other's life experiences and points of view.

SR: What do you hope audiences take away from the show?

JH: I hope audiences see themselves or at least pieces of their lives in these characters. I think younger and older folks alike have heard trolls in their lives trying to hold them back, and I hope Lydia's journey of self-discovery and empowerment resonates with all of them.

SR: Is there anything else you'd want *Lydia* audiences to know?

JH: Get ready to play with us! We're making something new for you, and we want you to be part of it!



Ameenah Kaplan in rehearsal for *Lydia and the Troll* (2023).

ADDICTION AND RECOVERY THROUGH ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Lydia and the Troll explores the creativity and self-doubt of an artist who is struggling with addiction. In this part of the Play Guide, we provide articles and resources that further explore these topics. We hope that these articles provide you with further context and perspectives to help you reflect on the characters and what they are going through, as well as resources for working through any similar challenges that might arise in your life or the lives of those around you.

ADDICTION AND RECOVERY THROUGH ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

By **AvionaCreatrix (they/she/we)**

I must first start this essay by stating, these words, poems, and experiences are my own and pertain to my experiences with substance abuse and the tools that have helped me to overcome and stay drug-free these last eight years through various stressors. I also have awareness that without these experiences I may not have become the person and advocate for social justice and the arts that I am today.

I did not turn to drugs with an intent to become addicted. During this time in my life, I was freshly out of high school in musical theater training at an arts conservatory in an unknown-to-me city, New York City. Similar to Lydia's, my life was at the height of stressful. I was in school for nine hours a day, working night shifts for an additional eight hours a day, then on weekends would work, rehearse, and do homework or practicums on weekends. Sleep was lacking, expectations were high, and my scholarship was dependent on keeping good grades and attendance at every class.

NYC is known as the city that does not sleep. Being up and about in the late hours myself, I became friends with a group of people who introduced me to drugs and the nightlife activities around the city. I eventually became an active smoker, then I began demanding free time—cutting into my responsibilities and going out when at overly extreme levels of

stress to decompress. The drugs helped me to relax and forget my problems, and as my stress and problems continued to rise, so too did my drug use. After experimenting with various drugs— from naturally made to genetically engineered—one drug sunk its teeth into me and would not let go. I lost myself, acted against my foundational values, and started to lose relationships and the trust of family due to my usage.

FEAR THE MIRROR (excerpt)

I look in the mirror
I see a face that is not mine.
Touch hair that is very curly and not superfine like wine
Dip my finger into the dimple my grandma claims is hers,
'yo te di eso, mi amor'
Search my Teeth for the extra rows like my sister
My earlobe don't hang down next to my face,
instead they are attached at the base.
my nose is thick and wide like a stop sign,
Unlike those of my cousins and brethren.
I look in the mirror with doubt and fear that maybe
I don't belong here.
But wait-
There.
in my eyes!?!
My caramel brown eyes are the evidence I have to
remind me that I AM – my mother's daughter,
si, soy la nina de mi mama.
But how can I be all these things and all the things I am
not?
I am not here
I am not there
I am not anywhere

ADDICTION AND RECOVERY THROUGH ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

At the height of my drug use, I made an irreversible mistake that caused harm to my family and my community. Not only did the drugs not allow me to feel the drastic nature of my actions, but they helped me mask the guilt I would have felt. I went to a party that Halloween and looked around at the people who were drugged up, out of reality, some even sick in a corner, and realized I couldn't keep numbing myself and had to come back to reality.

I have learned by listening to many other addicts like myself the following:

The time between

Discovery ► Hunger ► Dependence

can vary for ALL and, all the while, it can be momentary and unnoticed by the user.

I can't tell you how long my journey between each step truly was, but for me, while it was happening, it was unnoticed by me yet noticed by many. After deciding to turn away from drug use, I very quickly needed something else to anchor me. My writing and poetry were the first artistic avenues to help me. I was able to write about my emotions, the withdrawal experiences, and the deep, deep hunger to use. If I was at a party and felt too tempted, I would leave immediately. I focused heavily on rebuilding my acting training and went back to NYC to continue working in Off-Broadway productions, re-laying the groundwork from before.

SINCERELY, YOUR REAPER (excerpt)

Obsessive, they will say, needy can be one way to portray
your behavior.

When we start to separate your
cries and shakes will annoy the neighbors your
mother will ask you to get it together-

Believe me you
the pain of saying goodbye
will never feel like it's worth the pain of breaking our ties.
Goodbyes are hard to find amongst those who have no
words to utter because they turned blue
from ODing without you.

Too bad we parted ways because I came to terrorize-
I wanted you to fall into the depths of my eyes.
Pull you further and further from that which you used to be
But somehow you still broke free.

I made it to two years clean, beginning to find balance with these two art forms. I was still attending raves and volunteering to help people during the party, however my world halted when my mother was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. My stress levels began to rise as I packed up my life in NYC and returned home to Seattle—with a need to stay on top of a busy schedule and assume head-of-household responsibilities, I was tempted to start using again. But I chose to try something different, thinking, "If I know what the result of using is, because we have done that, then what happens when I try something new?"

Writing my thoughts was no longer enough, I had to share them, so I started competing in poetry slams around town.

ADDICTION AND RECOVERY THROUGH ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Acting in a stagnant play was no longer enough, so I started with smaller educational tours and sharing my crafts as a teaching artist. Through exploration, I learned I liked using my hands, so I would be a model and pose for group drawing classes in exchange for free admission to future drawing classes. I followed my heart and started showing up at community jam sessions, freestyle singing and playing a few instruments occasionally.

WHO AM I? (excerpt)

Until the end of time,
I am free-
I am not your idea of me.
I am an afro latinx curvaceous they-dy!
I ride to the waves of my own personal sea.
Sit here and breath with me-
In-1-2 & Out-1-2
Share your thoughts and brainwaves with me
Let's hum a tuneand
see if it becomes a song,
because that's what life is.
It's ups // it's downs // it's full of run arounds
but together // we can create
and make things that are great.

All this is to say, I explored art the way I would have previously explored drugs and I found more of myself. I have been able to learn the many avenues of artistic expression that fuel my heart and soul. Somehow, a pandemic shut down and four years later, I have publicly shared all of my art forms, become recognized as a choreographer and mixed media artist, and received grants to continue sharing this message that “art can make us feel” as much as drugs do. My experience is simply an offering to share that the story you are watching is one many of us have had to live and experience.

ADDICTION AND RECOVERY THROUGH ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Suggested Reflection & Decompressing Activity:

When you return home, get a piece of paper or crayons/paint or whatever your expression of choice is and answer the following questions:

1. What do I recall hearing?
2. What do I recall seeing?
3. What do I recall feeling?

Feel free to tag me in your responses on IG!

@avionacreatrix_official

#LydiaandtheTrollSREP | #avionacreatrixsays | #addictiontalk



Aviona “Creatrix” Rodriguez Brown instills inclusivity and accessibility by creating multidisciplinary art to tell stories surrounding being multiracial, exploring queerness, working through mental illness, stress, navigating drug addiction, and homelessness. Through ongoing community-oriented youth projects, they aspire to educate the masses on self-awareness and the benefits of art alternatives when dealing with everyday stresses. Creatrix encompasses the many art avenues to which they contribute: Assoc. Director of Engagement at The 5th Avenue Theatre, (3) Board Memberships, Actor, Curator, Director, Teacher, Mentor, Stage Manager, Performer, Producer, Writer.

Connect: https://linktr.ee/avionacreatrix_official

HEALTHY VERSUS UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

When we meet Lydia and her boyfriend, Pete, they are going through a rough time in their relationship. It is clear they care for each other but may not be bringing out the best in each other. How do you know if you are in a healthy relationship? What does a healthy relationship look like?

A healthy relationship is built on trust, respect, honesty, and support. It isn't always easy and may not always look perfect, but your relationship should be bringing you happiness, not more stress. Some signs that this is being achieved in your relationship are being secure and comfortable with each other, being able to express yourself without fear of repercussions, and being able to navigate arguments respectfully.

Each relationship may look a little different as we are not all the same, but there are identifiable warning signs if your relationship may be on the unhealthy side. It is important to know these warning signs as a relationship could escalate from unhealthy to rather dangerous if these go unnoticed. Some of the characteristics of an unhealthy relationship can be a lack of communication, manipulation, constant fighting or controlling behavior, feelings of anxiousness in disagreement, or isolation.

If you start to notice these warning signs, you may be confused about what you can do. There are many resources available for people in these positions. First, know what you are not alone, and you don't have to do it alone. You can start by reaching out to a loved one to ask for their opinions and support. You can start by having a conversation with your partner, letting them know the actions or situations that you were uncomfortable with and explaining why it made you feel that way. Hopefully this can lead to a change in their behavior. You must make whatever decision feels right to you while ensuring that your mental and physical being is safe. Whether that means trying couples therapy or separating from the relationship completely, it is important that you are taking care of your individual needs.

HEALTHY VERSUS UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Consider these real-world scenarios and situations from the play to determine if each one describes a healthy situation. Why or why not?

- 1.** Sara and her boyfriend Jake are in the lunchroom having their lunch when Sara begins to talk about how she is feeling after her family cat passed away last weekend, but Jake doesn't seem to care and keeps talking about his video game session last night.
- 2.** Katelynn is comforting her girlfriend Jessica after having a bad soccer game.
- 3.** Harry tells his partner Alex that he has to cancel their plans this weekend because his family is going out of town and he has to go with them. Alex is upset but tells Harry that they understand and can reschedule.
- 4.** Daniella calls to tell her boyfriend Sam that her piano lessons are running longer than usual so she won't be able to make it for their dinner plans. Sam yells at her for cancelling their plans at the last minute and says he will not talk to her if she doesn't show up.
- 5.** Lydia and Pete have a goal to become sober together to work on their relationship, but they have been breaking their pact without each other's knowledge.
- 6.** Lydia does not want Pete at her concert, but Pete wants to be there to support her music.
- 7.** Pete and Lydia apologize to each other for their behavior and know that they want to make their relationship right.

RESOURCES

1. [Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships | Husky Health & Well-Being \(uw.edu\)](#)
2. [Healthy vs. Unhealthy Relationships – Counseling Center \(ua.edu\)](#)
3. [How to Have a Good Relationship \(plannedparenthood.org\)](#)
4. [A Brilliant Activity to Teach Healthy Relationships \(scholastic.com\)](#)
5. [Domestic Violence Support | National Domestic Violence Hotline \(thehotline.org\)](#)