A Monster Calls

Based on the novel by Patrick Ness / From an original idea by Siobhan Dowd / Devised by the company

Directed by Marco Munoz

Dramaturgy by Dr. Thomas Oldham
A Monster Calls
Based on the novel by Patrick Ness and inspired by an original idea by Siobhan Dowd, devised by Sally Cookson, Adam Peck and the Company

The Cast
Sydney Marie Avilés..............Sully/Ensemble
Megan Bain.................................................Mum
April Bourg.............................................Lily/Ensemble
Elijah Galvin.............................Anton/Ensemble
Ethan Inglis...............................Mr. Marl/Ensemble
Luke Leal........................................Dad/Ensemble
Hunter J. Pittman....................Harry/Ensemble
Monroe Verette......Miss Godfrey/Ensemble
David Wheelis..........................................Monster
James Williams............................Conor
Paige Woelke.........................Grandma/Ensemble
A Note from the Director:

I did not direct this play. I did not direct this play. I did not direct this play. Instead, I did my best to try and remain open to collaborating at every turn with my fellow artists. Together, the ensemble, my colleagues, our technicians, designers, and crew came together and plunged into the great undertaking of telling a story. Our Company did this together. I have come to find through this process that the truth is easier to obtain when you are not alone in the quest to find it. So to our Company...Thank you. Thank you to my companion Dr. Oldham who kept me on track with our sacred text and made sure our truth was being told fully. Thank you to Mason, my First Mate, and new artistic brother, whose talented hand and creativity can be seen throughout the story. To the designers, Phil, Kevin, Ruby, Cora, Jaydn, and Mitchell - Thank you for putting up with my madness and for bringing every ounce of your skills and talent to this endeavor. All of you have given so much for this story and your truth shines through it all. To the technicians and crew members who put hours of work into this project to help bring this story to life. You all are the running blood of this beast. To the Ensemble...each and every one of you will always be apart of my Artistic Family Tree. All of you can add another person to your corner. Finally, to you the audience, for whom this story is intended for. As you receive this tale, please also take our thanks. For without your eyes, ears and hearts, our truth would go untold. We hope together we can come together to mourn, to heal and to grow as we reflect upon the last few years through this story. Our intention is to unify our collective mind and soul through active learning and catharsis. All this we offer you and give thanks for your presence.
A Note from the Dramaturg

*Monster Calls* is the third TAMUCC production I’ve worked on that began life as a novel, became a film, and then was later turned into a stage play. In all the classes I teach, whether that be Theatre Appreciation, Playwriting, or Theatre History, I always ask some variation of the question: *“What makes theatre theatre?”* How is theatrical storytelling different from that of the written word or a motion picture? My three experiences here tell very different stories about that theatre magic: *Let the Right One In* was created by a visionary Scottish director/choreographer combo who put their indelible stamp on it; *A Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder* turned to songs as a full-blown Broadway musical; and *Monster Calls* is a prime example of devised theatre.

**What is devised theatre?** Simply put, it is a play that doesn’t really know its endpoint when rehearsals begin. You could begin with virtually anything: a theme, an image, in the case of *Monster Calls*, an award-winning children’s novel…but what you don’t begin with is a script. For *Monster Calls*, we have the testimony of the “writer in the room” who gives an insight into the process. Together with the director, he created a “blueprint” from the original novel, which he brought into rehearsals. “The actors then play, improvise and devise, generating new dialogue and new ideas. It is my job to write the script based on what is created.” We also have the words of the original director, who says that she knew “a big part of how we’d end up telling the story would involve drawing on the imagination of the audience.”

Having observed many of our cast and crew’s rehearsals, I can tell you that TAMUCC’s production fits in quite well with this aesthetic. While we did not devise the script (we are producing the published and licensed text), we did spend an extraordinary amount of time on devising exercises to create movement and character development. There were several weeks when the actors did not even look at the script. They improvised, guided by director Marco Muñoz, discovering relationships, patterns, and aesthetically pleasing stage pictures. These were honed, collated, edited, and refined by the entire production team including the director, his assistant, the designers, the cast, myself, and my assistant. What you see before you tonight is the work of dozens of individuals and countless hours of devising. We hope you enjoy this uniquely theatrical show.
PRODUCTION STAFF

Director                      Marco Muñoz
Assistant Director            Mason Todd
Assistant Choreographer       April Bourg
Stage Manager                 Brandon Bankston
Assistant Stage Manager       Joan Albor
Dramaturg                     Thomas A. Oldham
Assistant Dramaturg           Kate Hawkins
Scenic Designer               Kevin Loeffler
Costume Designer              Cora Daniel
Lighting Designer             Phillip Johnson
Sound Designer                Jaydn Johanson
Hair & Makeup Designer        Mitchell Zillmer
Properties Designer           Ruby Buitron
Technical Director            Jordan Bohl
Costume Shop Supervisor       Alexandra “Alex” Shaw
Scenic Run Crew               Cy Bryan
Properties Run Crew           Paulina Orellana
Wardrobe Run Crew Head        Mac McIlendon
Wardrobe Run Crew             Naomi Medina, Nico Montalvo
Hair & Makeup Run Crew Head   Hannah Anderson
Hair & Makeup Run Crew         Braeden Brotherton, Kamryn Lewis
Light Board Operator          Gabriel Almager
Sound Board Operator          Jedidiah Barker

Scenic Construction Crew     Mason Bowling, Nina Brager, Daniella de la Rosa, Kole Dornseifer, Chelsea Enriquez, Preston Sneed, Monroe Verette, Sarah Garcia, David Wheelis

PRODUCTION STAFF (CONTINUED)

Marketing / Graphics Designer
Alison Frost

Box Office Faculty Supervisor
Meredith Melville

Box Office Student Supervisors
Lanie Gullett, Mac McLendon

Front of House
Nate Staggs, Nic Sears, Shelby Clark

SAMC Event Specialist/Box Office
Wes Jones

SPECIAL THANKS
Lisa Owen, Department of Nursing

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The educational essays in this program were written by the dramaturgical team.
WHO’S WHO IN THE CAST & CREW

Sydney Marie Avilés (Sully / Ensemble)
-Year: Senior
-Home: Lewisville, TX
-Favorite role: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Hermia)

Hunter J. Pittman (Harry / Ensemble)
-Year: Sophomore
-Home: Bulverde, TX
-Favorite role: *Book of Days* (Len Hoch)

Megan Bain (Mum)
-Year: 1st-Year
-Home: Boerne, TX
-Favorite role: *What Rhymes with America* (Marlene)

Monroe Verette (Miss Godfrey / Ensemble)
-Year: 1st-Year
-Home: Canyon Lake, TX
-Favorite role: *Six Years Old* (Kim)

April Bourg (Lily / Ensemble / Assistant Choreographer)
-Year: 1st-Year
-Home: Euless, TX
-Favorite role: *DNA* (Cathy)

David Wheelis (Monster)
-Year: Junior
-Home: Houston, TX
-Favorite role: *A Monster Calls* (Monster)

Elijah Galvin (Anton / Ensemble)
-Year: 1st-Year
-Home: Corpus Christi, TX
-Favorite role: *DNA* (Adam)

James Williams (Conor)
-Year: Sophomore
-Home: Brownwood, TX
-Favorite role: *Book of Days* (Earl Hill)

Ethan Inglis (Mr. Marl / Ensemble)
-Year: Senior
-Home: Elkhart, IN
-Favorite role: *A Monster Calls* (Mr. Marl)

Paige Woelke (Grandma / Ensemble)
-Year: Junior
-Home: Lewisville, TX
-Favorite role: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Helena)

Luke Leal (Dad / Ensemble)
-Year: Junior
-Home: Brownsville, TX
-Favorite role: *A Monster Calls* (Dad)
WHO’S WHO IN THE CAST & CREW

Marco Muñoz (Director)
- Assistant Professor of Theatre
- MFA (Penn State University)
- Marco Darien Muñoz’s focus is the Sanford Meisner Acting Technique, along with devised playwriting. He originated the role of Helix in the devised play *I.D.* in its 2015 international debut at the National Arts Festival in Makhanda (Grahamstown), South Africa and its U.S. premiere at Centre Stage Theatre at Penn State. Marco aspires to continue producing and directing culturally influential plays for a 21st Century stage and inspire South Texas students and artists to create self-devised shows, cultivating a voice for a new generation.

Joan Albor (Assistant Stage Manager)
- Year: Sophomore
- Home: Kerrville, TX
- Favorite experience: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (hair/makeup crew)

Thomas A. Oldham (Dramaturg)
- Assistant Professor of Theatre
- MFA (Columbia University); PhD (Indiana University)
- Tom teaches courses in theatre history, playwriting, script analysis, and dramaturgy. His writing has appeared in a number of publications, and he has dramaturgy credits from professional and educational theatres in Nebraska, Maine, New York, and Indiana.

Mason Todd (Assistant Director)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Damon, TX
- Favorite role: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Bottom)

Kate Hawkins (Assistant Dramaturg)
- Year: Sophomore
- Home: Kaufman, TX
- Favorite role: *Bethany* (Crystal)

Brandon Bankston (Stage Manager)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Lewisville, TX
- Favorite experience: *The Convent* (sound designer)

Kevin Loeffler (Scenic Designer)
- Associate Professor of Theatre
- MFA (University of Iowa)
- Kevin teaches courses in design/collaboration and has worked as Scenic Designer for Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center and TheatreWorks, and as Scenic Artist for Santa Fe Opera, Utah Shakespeare Festival, and Colorado Shakespeare Festival.
WHO’S WHO IN THE CAST & CREW

Cora Daniel (Costume Designer)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Corpus Christi, TX
- Favorite experience: *A Monster Calls* (costume designer)

Philip Johnson (Lighting Designer)
- Professor of Theatre
- MFA (Michigan State University)
- Phil teaches courses in Lighting Design, Technical Direction, Drawing, and Rendering. He has enjoyed teaching at TAMUCC for 35 years.

Jaydn Johanson (Sound Designer)
- Year: Junior
- Home: North Texas
- Favorite experience: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Stage Manager)

Mitchell Zillmer (Hair & Makeup Designer)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Conroe, TX
- Favorite role: *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (Bartender, Melvin’s Assistant, Aggie, Heckler)

Ruby Buitron (Props Designer)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Gregory, TX
- Favorite experience: Bailando International Dance Festival (Stage Manager)

Jordan Bohl (Technical Director)
- Departmental Technical Director
- MFA (University of Alabama)
- Jordan has worked professionally in seven different states. Credits include *The Importance of Being Earnest* (TD), *Little Women* (Scenic Designer), and *The 39 Steps* (TD).

Cy Bryan (Scenic Run Crew)
- Year: 1st-Year
- Hometown: Houston, TX
- Favorite role: *DNA* (Richard)

Paulina Orellana (Properties Run Crew)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Needville, TX
- Favorite role: *Ugly Lies the Bone* (Jess)

Mac Mclendon (Wardrobe Run Crew Head)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Lampasas, TX
- Favorite role: *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (Ginger)

Naomi Medina (Wardrobe Run Crew)
- Year: Sophomore
- Home: San Antonio, TX
- Favorite role: *Accelerando* (She)

Nico Montalvo (Wardrobe Run Crew)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Conroe, TX
- Favorite role: *The Birds* (Freddie Mercury/Chorus Leader)
WHO’S WHO IN THE CAST & CREW

Hannah Anderson (Hair/Makeup Run Crew Head)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Canton, TX
- Favorite role: *The Private Lives of Eskimos* (The Woman)

Braeden Brotherton (Hair/Makeup Run Crew)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Pflugerville, TX
- Favorite role: *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (Governor)

Kamryn Lewis (Hair/Makeup Run Crew)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Kemp, TX
- Favorite role: *The Convent* (Jill)

Gabriel Almager (Light Board Operator)
- Year: 1st-Year
- Home: Midland, TX
- Favorite role: *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (Aggie)

Jedidiah Barker (Sound Board Operator)
- Year: Junior
- Home: Wills Point, TX
- Favorite role: *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* (CJ Scruggs/Ensemble)

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Join us after the April 22 show for FREE improv:
The Breakers’ Friday Freebies
The concept for *A Monster Calls* came from the brain of Siobhan Dowd, a talented author of children’s literature and anti-censorship activist. Dowd was born in London on February 4th, 1960 to two Irish parents. She attended grammar school in south London, going on to earn a degree in classics from Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford University, and an MA from Greenwich University.

In 1984, Dowd joined the writers’ organization International PEN as a researcher for the Writers in Prison Committee. With PEN, she transferred overseas to New York City for seven years, where she founded the Rushdie Defense Committee and traveled to Indonesia and Guatemala to investigate human rights conditions. She particularly emphasized the living conditions and cultures of marginalized peoples, including the Roma and Irish Travelers.

In September 2004, Dowd was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer but began to write prolifically. Her first published novel, *A Swift Pure Cry*, was met with immediate critical acclaim, and her subsequent books earned her many accolades, including the Carnegie Medal. Before her death in 2007, Dowd set up The Siobhan Dowd Trust, wherein the royalties from her literary work assist disadvantaged children and young adults with their reading skills.

Dowd began one more book before her death, a novel about a young boy coming to terms with his mother’s terminal illness. Unfortunately, she passed before she could really start writing the story. Patrick Ness, who worked with the same editor as Dowd, undertook the project, and *A Monster Calls* was published in 2011 in Siobhan’s honor. Ness has said that he felt as if a baton had been handed to him with the message, “Go. Run with it. Make trouble.” We here at TAMUCC are carrying that baton a little farther. It is our effort to join Ness in celebrating Dowd, while also mourning her and all that has been lost in our own lives; it is perhaps fitting that we mark her passing with her own remarkable statement on grief.
Why Do We Tell Stories?

More than anything, *A Monster Calls* is a story about stories. The monster arrives, not to help Conor in the way he wants - - saving him from bullies, silencing his grandma, healing his mum - - but to tell stories. The monster’s stories are elusive, strange, dark, and in many ways deeply unsatisfying. Yet such stories form the backbones of many literary traditions.

Folk tales and fairy tales in their earliest, non-Disneyfied forms can be quite disturbing indeed. You may be familiar with the Grimm Brothers version of Cinderella in which the stepsisters cut off chunks of their feet and get their eyes pecked out by birds. Or perhaps you know that Rapunzel’s fate involved her wandering, miserable, with two infants, for years until the gruesomely blinded prince finds her. In this way, Stephen Sondheim’s *Into the Woods* is far more accurate than the animated versions.

Further, prior to the 17th Century, fairy tales would have nowhere near the nice, tidy moral endings we’re used to. In fact, good fortune often happens to fools, even outright bad people. This didn’t go entirely away: think about Jack and the Beanstalk. Did the boy deserve the good fortune that followed his foolishly trading his cow for beans...or his murdering a giant? We have, though, tended to moralize some of the rougher edges out of existence. One of the things that *A Monster Calls* does so well is to remind us that “stories are the wildest things of all” and the ultimate moral is that, while stories and life can contradict themselves, it is because “humans are complicated beasts.”

Psychologist Bruno Bettelheim studied the effects of fairy tales on children. He observed that such challenging, even dark stories were helpful to children, teaching them that “a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, [and] is an intrinsic part of human existence.” Fairy tales speak about “severe inner pressures . . . without belittling the most serious inner struggles which growing up entails” and can offer potential solutions. In *A Monster Calls*, Conor needs the stories to process what is happening to him.

Now, we come together in this theatre space, after two years of a global pandemic. We have a lot to process. In the words of director Marco Muñoz, we need to mourn: the loss of people, the loss of time, the loss of what we thought we knew. Speaking for myself, having lost someone close to me this year, I have found the process of putting on this play to be a great solace. I hope you can find a similar comfort if you need it.
Who or What is THE MONSTER?

The word monster comes from the Latin *monstrum*, or “evil omen,” but etymologists can trace the word back even further through older root words. These roots include words for “to warn,” “to remind,” “to instruct,” and all the way down to a base root word that means “mind” or “brain.” The richness of this word soon becomes evident: the many times our parents told us that the monsters are all in our minds; monsters in literature are often metaphors warning us of our dark, destructive natures; monsters like Elmo teach our children. The monster in *A Monster Calls* is a blend of all of these.

The monster comes primarily at night, around the same time Conor has his nightmare. The monster tells Conor stories to help him through his struggles. In the script, the monster describes himself in a number of ways: he is Herne the Hunter, a ghost from English folklore, associated with woods and green spaces and wearing antlers on his head; he is the Eternal Green Man, a legendary being found in many world cultures, a symbol of rebirth, representing the cycle of new growth that occurs every spring. Further, in the novel, he adds one more allusion, calling himself Cernunnos, a Celtic-derived deity with antlers, a god of nature and fruitfulness, a mediator between opposites. Of course, the monster is most directly depicted as a terrifying, stalking version of the ancient yew tree that grows in Conor’s yard. The yew is paradoxically poisonous yet serves as the source of many healing medicines. You can see much of the yew in Kevin Loeffler’s scenic design for our play.

This very British script and novel derive much of their inspiration from British and Celtic traditions, but there is something else at work too. Sally Cookson (director of the London production) and Patrick Ness (author of the original children’s novel) had a conversation about this, with Ness saying that “the tree represents in many ways a father figure who is estranged from Conor in his actual life.” In the film version of the story, there is a blink-and-you-miss-it shot of a photograph of Mum and her father—Conor’s grandpa—played by actor Liam Neeson. Neeson also provides the voice of the CGI monster. The nature of Conor’s struggles mesh quite well with this particular monster’s appearance, but to focus on this parental aspect denies much of the richness—the wildness—that lies at the heart of this story and this monster. It is the wildness that lies in us all.
FACULTY AND STAFF
Alison Frost, Department Chair of Theatre & Dance
Kevin Loeffler, Director of Theatre
Jilissa Cotten, Director of Dance
Philip Johnson, Professor of Theatre
Rosa M. Lazaro, Professor of Theatre
Kelly Russell, Professor of Theatre
Sarah Gonzalez, Assistant Professor of Dance
Meredith Melville, Assistant Professor of Theatre
Marco Muñoz, Assistant Professor of Theatre
Thomas A. Oldham, Assistant Professor of Theatre
J. Don Luna, Professor Emeritus of Theatre
Jordan Bohl, Technical Director
Alexandra “Alex” Shaw, Costume Shop Supervisor
Lanie Gullett, Student Office Assistant
Mac McLendon, Student Office Assistant
Brandon Bankston, Student Shop Assistant
Daniella De La Rosa, Student Shop Assistant
Elijah Galvin, Student Shop Assistant
Jamie Grime, Student Shop Assistant
Adam Nombrano, Student Shop Assistant
Ciera Rollins, Student Shop Assistant
AnnMarie Tapia, Student Shop Assistant
Mason Urias, Student Shop Assistant
Monroe Verette, Student Shop Assistant

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Dr. Shawnrece Campbell, Director of SAMC & Dean of College of Liberal Arts
Dr. Diana Sipes, Associate Dean of SAMC
Dr. Susan Wolff Murphy, Associate Dean of College of Liberal Arts
Adrian Rodriguez, Vice President for Student Engagement and Success
The Student Government Association
The Marketing and Communications Department of TAMUCC
Kim Newlin, Videographer

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