

# Theater show brings beloved books to life

Performance at LMC's Mendel Center showcases Eric Carle's colorful characters

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**  
HP Features Writer

**BENTON HARBOR** — Eric Carle's 1969 children's book, "The Very Hungry Caterpillar," about a green baby caterpillar who famously eats his way through the days of the week before turning into a beautiful butterfly, is instantly recognizable for its distinctive collage illustrations.

That's good news for the author/illustrator, but a real challenge for anyone trying to move the insect larvae from the page to the stage.

"Anybody who was a child or has children know of Eric's books," says Jim Morrow, artistic director of Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia. "They have to look exactly like what children see in the books. If you're in the business of adapting storybooks children know and love, you have to satisfy their expectation that they are go-

ing to see the actual caterpillar on stage."

But that's just what Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia has done with their production of "The Very Hungry Caterpillar and Other Eric Carle Favorites," which will be performed in two shows Saturday at Lake Michigan College's Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

Adapted, designed and directed by Morrow, with music by Steven Naylor and narration by Gordon Pinson, the hour-long production uses ultraviolet light and stick or rod handle puppets to capture Carle's bright colors and simplicity. The caterpillar munches his fruit as the week progresses, getting fatter before he pupates. In the other two stories, "Little Cloud" and "The Mixed Up Chameleon," stick puppet clouds turn into different shapes, and the waddling, fly-eating chameleon appears in different-

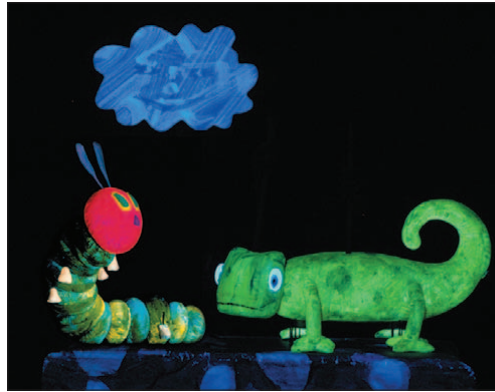


Photo provided

**Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia presents "The Very Hungry Caterpillar and Other Eric Carle Favorites" at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturday in the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.**

colored incarnations.

"When we first produced it in 1999 here in Nova Scotia, and I looked at Eric's work and saw the vibrancy of the objects and the characters, we made the decision to use black light theater," Morrow says. "We paint all of the objects and puppets you see on stage in fluorescent paint, and we project ultraviolet

light on the subject. It makes the objects glow, and effectively makes the performers disappear because they are dressed in black and against a black background. So what you are looking at is objects on stage moving around on their own independent of a performer. At least that's what it looks like."

Morrow has created pup-

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Mermaid Theatre of Nova Scotia presents "The Very Hungry Caterpillar and Other Eric Carle Favorites"

**When:** 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

**How much:** \$14-\$18

**Contact:** 927-1221 or [www.lmcmainstage.org](http://www.lmcmainstage.org)

**Artist info:** [mermaidtheatre.ca](http://mermaidtheatre.ca)

caterpillar, is a series of soft sponge foam circles carved with a pair of scissors and joined in the middle by a piece of rope that runs through the center."

Performers Jackson Follow and Graeme Black Robinson then create movements using sticks and rods inside the puppets. Each performance ends with a short question and answer session where performers show the children how the foam rubber puppets look without the black light.

"It's quality, elegant theater for children, and the type of theater I think people want to see," Morrow says. "There are very few of us out there who have the thrill and the joy of adapting the world's best storybooks into full stage productions. Having that trust from the authors that we're going to present their work honorably is something I don't take lightly. I don't ever lose sight of the fact that it's a real responsibility and joy to be able to do this. What a thrill, I have to say."

pets for shows such as "Very Eric Carle," "Guess How Much I Love You," "I Love My Little Storybook," "Inch by Inch," "Goodnight Moon" and "The Very Hungry Caterpillar & Other Eric Carle Favorites."

"The trees on stage are long pieces of painted fabric," Morrow says. "The puppets themselves, like the