

New York Times review of *Sounding the Resonant Path* by [Laura Collins-Hughes](#)

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In “Sounding the Resonant Path” at the Ellen Stewart Theater, Tom Lee’s Woodcutter puppet profoundly and delicately embodies human vulnerability, our critic writes. Credit...Richard Termine

... My favorite festival performance was Tom Lee’s mesmerizing “Sounding the Resonant Path,” upstairs at the Ellen Stewart Theater...

The principal character is a puppet called the Woodcutter.

Entering with an ax slung over one plaid-shirted shoulder, he walks slowly and deliberately along a curving wooden track, ostensibly alone. Never mind the puppeteer (Lee) seated just behind him, dressed in black and scooting along on a small, wheeled box. That is part of the Japanese [kuruma ningyo](#) style, a relative of bunraku.

This charming, funny Woodcutter fells trees to carve and shape; in his studio, we see him transform blocks of wood into art. (Eventually, we also see him carrying an actual flaming torch, which is one way of getting us to worry about a puppet’s mortality, even if that is not the point.)

Solitary and self-sufficient, the Woodcutter possesses ineffable quality — a kind of projectability — that can make puppets profound and delicate vessels for embodying human vulnerability. His is the microcosmic life at the center of the show’s macrocosmic evocations.

Because what “Sounding the Resonant Path” sets out to do is briefly, bountifully recap all of our planetary history. Its inspiration is the August 1977 launch of the [Voyager 2 space probe](#), which carried the golden record of images, speech and music meant to explain Earth to any extraterrestrial life.

This show’s version includes minimal speech but many intricate projections (by Chris Carcione) and shadow puppets (by Linda Wingerter), as well as live music (by Ralph Samuelson, Perry Yung, Julian Kytasty and Yukio Tsuji) whose bandura, drums and haunting shakuhachi flute reach in and grab you by the soul. To mimic exquisitely the deep, shivery sound of rushing water, the show uses the “Rain Making Machine,” a kinetic artwork by La MaMa’s longtime resident set designer [Jun Maeda](#), who died of Covid in April 2020 and to whom the production is dedicated.

The cavernous Ellen Stewart Theater is an excellent space for contemplating vastness — of space, of time — but Lee and his Woodcutter do it especially affectingly, under an impossibly huge, star-pricked sky. (Lighting is by Federico Restrepo.) There is, at show’s end, a clear and lingering consciousness of being minuscule in the universe, and terribly, beautifully human.