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Troupe takes to stage with puppet version of 'Charlotte's Web'

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It's not easy to come up with a more divergent trio of plays than the campy, sexually charged fun of "The Rocky Horror Show," the family-friendly tone of "Charlotte's Web" and the intense psycho-drama of the Martin McDonagh work "The Pillowman."

It's also not easy to imagine that one company has done or will do all three plays in its first two seasons. It's even harder to imagine that it's a theater company starring puppets.

Kevin Christopher and Jess Wilson founded The Saints & Poets Production Company last year and opened in October with "The Rocky Horror (Puppet) Show," which Christopher said went over so well that the Colchester-based troupe will keep going this year. "Charlotte's Web" opens next week at the Off Center for the Dramatic Arts and "The Pillowman" runs Nov. 3-13.

Christopher, known as an actor in the works of Burlington playwright Maura Campbell, studied puppetry at West Virginia University. He wanted to produce a version of "Rocky Horror" locally and found that it lent itself perfectly to puppet performers; eight people in black hoods manning the puppets were willing to go places actors in the flesh might not, according to Christopher.

"Charlotte's Web," based on the endearing children's book by E.B. White, is also an obvious choice for puppetry with its characters based in the animal world (the production will also feature live actors and music). McDonagh's "The Pillowman," by a writer known for sardonic scripts such as the play "A Behanding in Spokane" and the Oscar-nominated film "In Bruges," might seem less likely for a puppet performance. Christopher notes, however, that like "Rocky Horror," the "humorous grotesqueness" of "The Pillowman" means puppets can go places actors might fear to tread.

Saints & Poets plans to continue doing two shows a year, one for all audiences and one that's a little more mature. In general, the company operates under one key guideline, according to Christopher: "It has to be something we would do with our without puppets."