There aren't many theatrical enterprises that are able to persevere based solely on the entertainment value of everything going wrong every single time.

Jerry Springer, maybe. The entirety of MTV is another possibility, as is any project involving Charlie Sheen. And then of course, there's Cleveland sports.

But there's another that stands out as the prime example. So much so that it's difficult not to imagine that all of Cleveland's professional sports franchises are actually mirroring the success of this ill-fated production known mostly for poor organization, comical public explosions, and elaborate song and dance numbers featuring livestock.

Yes, friends – it's time to play the music. It's time to light the lights.

Really, it's not difficult to envision the theater of Cleveland sports as *The Muppet Show*, the ingenious creation of the magnificent Jim Henson in the late 1970s. Like the Muppets, the characters of the Cleveland sports scene are hilarious, filled with reticulated polyfoam, and their arms don't move.

So rather than dwell on the Cavs' 59-game losing streak, the Browns' latest front-office junta, or the Indians' ability to blow their entire offseason building an awesome snow fort, let's pause for a moment to envision the people we know as the Muppets we love.

I think you'll find Cleveland has more in common with that wonderful old show than you'd think…

Terry Pluto as Kermit the Frog

Thoughtful and sincere, he's the sole voice of reason in this cacophony of madness, desperately trying to hold this whole thing together with positive thinking and good grammar and just get through the day while keeping everybody from killing each other.

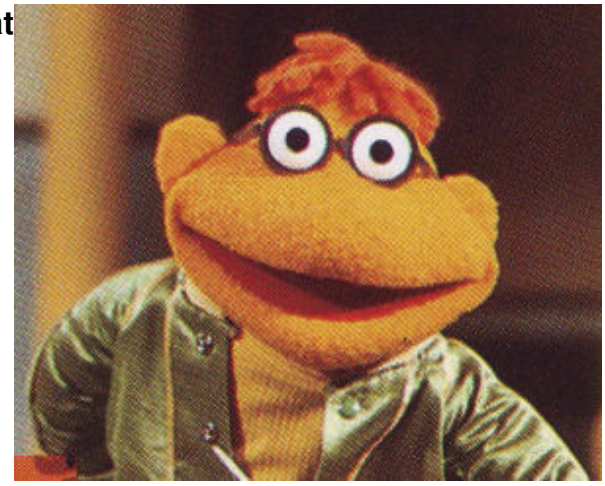
Dan Gilbert as Fozzie Bear

Goofy and lovable in his own way, his primary role is to stand up at odd times and say things that aren't funny. Hard-working and well-meaning, though void of any discernable talent.

LeBron James as Miss Piggy

With a self-inflated sense of entitlement and importance, believing the entire show revolves around him/her, this character is universally despised by all the others. Never performs solo, always needs to have supporting characters to help him finish the number.

Byron Scott as Gonzo the Great



No one's exactly sure who he is, where he came from, or why he's here. Most of the time his attempts to entertain end in dismal failure, but there's something vaguely genuine about him

that keeps us from booing him off the stage.

Tom Hamilton as Rowlf the Dog

Rarely taking center stage, he generally stays in the background providing as much toe-tapping harmony as he can while far less talented characters repeatedly screw up and disappoint everyone.

Chris Antonetti as Scooter

The show's "gofer," he generally just runs errands when asked and performs menial duties no one else wants to do. Perpetually trying to show guests he can make it in the business though he's inherently charmless and unskilled. Given the job because his uncle owns the theater.

Peyton Hillis as Animal

Randomly explodes through walls and into situations that originally had nothing to do with him. Can destroy and subsequently eat an acoustic drum set when angry.

Mike Holmgren as Sam Eagle

A bit too dignified and intelligent to be consorting with this cast of characters, he's the self-appointed censor of the program, attempting desperately to make sure things don't get too embarrassing.

Mike Trivosanno as Sweetums

Dim-witted and deep-voiced, his primary feature is his cartoonish magnitude, as he dwarfs any other character he comes in contact with. Comically lifts impossibly heavy things when asked.

Larry and Paul Dolan as Dr. Bunsen Honeydew and his assistant, Beaker

This soft-spoken, melon-headed character toils away in his laboratory coming up with bizarre new experiments that everyone in the audience knows are doomed to fail before they begin. Still, he perseveres, usually testing them out on his frazzled and angular assistant, who often bursts into flames and/or electrocutes himself in the process.

Matt Underwood as Link Hogthrob

The matinee idol of the program, he appeals to the audience with his dapper fashion sense and rich voice. His primary talent is surrounding himself with people far less good-looking than himself.

Jim Donovan as The Muppet Newsman

Eagerly runs on stage to offer breaking news flashes in a professional, enthusiastic manner, only to have something large and heavy drop onto his skull from a great height before he can finish. Audience has become so accustomed to associating him with disaster it winces upon just hearing his voice.

Randy Lerner as The Swedish Chef

No one can understand what he's saying or what he's trying to do but we just shrug and write it off because he's clearly far more interested in what's going on in another country. On the plus side, he has human hands.

Bruce Drennan as Dr. Julius Strangepork

The moral core of "Pigs in Space" (actually the working title of *All Bets Are Off*

on STO), this elderly, bespectacled, but oddly enthusiastic old porker offers sage advice and intelligent critique to his fellow swines.

Josh Cribbs as Dr. Teeth

Talented, bling-covered bandleader beloved by all but dragged down by his untenable ensemble, better known as the Electric Mayhem. Dresses like a pimp.

Manny Acta & the Indians as Lew Zealand & His Flying Boomerang Fish

Evidently straight out of the circus, this upbeat spirit really has no idea how overmatched he really is, sending his associates flying off into space (in this case, Columbus), only to have them repeatedly return to him in the exact same condition – smelly, slimy, and usually dead. No one knows why this is considered entertaining.

Bud Shaw and Bill Livingston as Statler and Waldorf

Perched up in the balcony far from the action, this pair of grumpy old men razz and taunt everything taking place on stage. Though they have different names, no one really knows which is which. One of them has a moustache.

And our very special guest star…Albert Belle! Yaaaaaay!

We could go on, but I think the parallels are well established. With the passing of each season, we really are witnessing a live-action *Muppet Show*, only with suits, ties, and jockstraps. And Doug Dieken.

When you come right down to it, the Muppets truly personify Cleveland. From 1976 to 1981, they cocked everything up constantly and yet it never bothered them. They'd land awesome guest stars who'd stay for a while, sing a couple songs, and then leave to do bigger and better things. They never landed a primetime network deal, making their living through random syndicated viewings and a passionately loyal fan base.

Yet through it all, they just kept on keeping on, doing their thing in front of a packed theater time and again. Now that I think of it, maybe that's why *The Muppet Show* was so endearing.

It would have been easy for them to fall in step with Statler and Waldorf's musical litany in the opening theme…

Why do we always come here?

I guess we'll never know

It's like a kind of torture

To have to watch the show

…yet they didn't. Every time out, they promised the "most sensational, inspirational, celebrational, Muppetational" show their little fleece-skinned hearts could produce. And dammit if they didn't always deliver, even if the stage collapsed after the opening number and the Swedish Chef blasted a cannonball through the back wall of the theater during the finale.

There's much Cleveland can learn from these frogs and bears and chickens and things. They never complained when things went wrong. They never wallowed in self-righteous pity. They never jealously projected their own inferiorities on Nickelodeon or *Sesame Street* like we do with ESPN and the Yankees.

They just played the music and lit the lights.