

THE HOSTS - AN INTERACTIVE OBSERVATION

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THE HOSTS: A MASQUERADE OF IMPROVISING AUTOMATONS, a grand, yet suitable title for Wade Marynowsky's newest composition. The robotic work is situated within the interactive and performative media of which Marynowsky has been exploring (in works such as the Bourgeois Robot) and is constructed with the aid of Aras Vaichas (Electrical Engineer), Jeremy Apthorp (Programmer), Mirabelle Wouters (Lighting Designer) and Sally Jackson (Costume Designer).

My journey with 'The Hosts' begins at the Performance Space at Carriage Works. It is a drizzly gloomy day on which the venue's curator ushers me into a dark silent hall. I am confronted with a novel site as my eyes adjust to the darkness. Five mysterious alien beasts reside in the room, observing them, I feel like I am intruding on unexplored territory. Roughly two and a half meters tall, their motionless figures are best described by their massive ball room dresses. Their corsets seem to act like a long neck holder that supports and covers half of their small spherical transparent heads.

I jump a little as one of the creatures begin whirring into movement. Perched above it's now neon-lit pupils resided a spinning spotlight of a third-eye, like a walking light house, it seems to be searching for something, possibly its fellow companions. The other creatures gradually begin lighting up and following suit in a symphony of choreographed movements, gliding side by side, their massive bodies dance elegantly around one another in complex rotations. Occasionally one of the creature's spotlights will hit you and you wonder if you

have been spotted by the creature as it surprisingly approaches you with slow, but grand gliding steps, however its attention eventually turns back to one of its fellow companions before getting too close.

With the collective spot lights, the garments worn by the beasts become much clearer, with observable patterns that seem to represent a multitude of personalities and cultures from different eras of time. There's the shy checkered joker with a misplaced bow-tie, a dirndl-clad dancer, a poised Elizabethan beauty, a sheriff, and a military commander. The hall is looking more and more like a ball-room where the creatures can gather socially, conversing through an uniting event.

As the movements of the creatures increase, the initial empty silence of the hall is filled with an epiphany of industrial whirls and ghostly alien calls. Each creature seems to possess their own unique set of vocals including whale, dolphin, seal cries, and an odd mix of human emotions, like laughter and crying which issues forth from the shy checkered creature that resides in the corner of the room. The collective vocals of the creatures and their movements reverberating throughout the hall induce a very under-the-water-like sound-scape that adds to the unique environment, enforcing the fact that I am a minor observer of a species in a selective, yet natural habitat.

With the increasing tempo of the creatures movements, their eyes shine brighter, revealing green and red colors, pupils that glitter with increasing excitement as the dance crescendos in pace, orchestrated beautifully by the creatures singing. The overall ambiance from sound and lighting (by Wouters) enables the setting of the changing moods in the performance. Altogether this creates a very rooted and relatable experience, however the novel setting of the experience does create a serenely unnatural vibe. Through the unique, though natural, sound-scape and programmed

choreography by Vaichas and Apthorp, the organic nature of the creatures are well established. Familiar stereotypes and cultures are well established in Jackson's costume designs which simultaneously convey the alien nature of the creatures.

The combination of these artists' contributions, directed by Marynowsky, successfully drags any audience into an uncanny experience, a goal that stems from Marynowsky's exploration of Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori's theory in 'The Uncanny Valley' whereby "...familiarity increases with human likeness until a point is reached at which subtle differences in appearance and behaviour create an unnerving effect.". This effect is induced by the creatures' human-like clothing and interactive nature contrasting novel characteristics such as their odd shapes and vocal calls.

As the creatures converse with each other amidst their twists and turns I begin contemplating upon their interactions. The similarities they possess with humanity in the way they hold themselves, search for others, questioning their every move, often shy to

unexpected events. Marynowsky brings forth a social event, uniting all through dance and novel cultures, not unlike how we socialize and gravitate towards others. The essence of human nature is presented at its core, emotions, communications, all depicted as transitory amongst species, encompassing all creatures and interactions, beautiful and serene in its existence.

Just as I am making a mental note to recommend this exhibition to others, which ends this Saturday 12th of September, a lone swirling siren-like sound bellows forth throughout the hall. The concluding note synchronizes the creatures into a final twirl, lights dimming and spotlights switching off. I exit the ballroom as the creatures' last glints of green, red and neon lights simmer out of existence, reverting them back to the same sleeping beasts I encountered when I entered. As my mind races, pondering upon society, humanity, interactions, culture and new found perspectives, the creatures simply wait silently for their next audience.



The five creatures.
[Photo by Garth Knight]