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American Repertory Theater
in association with MIT's FAST Arts Festival
presents

DEATH AND THE POWERS: The Robots' Opera
by Tod Machover
directed by Diane Paulus
March 18-25
Cutler Majestic Theatre at Emerson College

When the eccentric patriarch Simon Powers departs his physical being and downloads himself into The System, his house assumes his immortal presence around his family and friends...

So begins **Death and the Powers**, a groundbreaking new opera created by **Tod Machover** and his Opera of the Future Group at the MIT Media Lab, which receives its North American premiere at the American Repertory Theater. Performances take place at the Cutler Majestic Theater in Boston on March 18 (press opening), March 20, March 22, and March 25.

The September 24, 2010 world premiere of **Death and the Powers** at l'Opéra de Monte-Carlo was praised by audiences and critics alike:

"A grand, rich, deeply serious new opera, presented by a team with manifold, coherent accomplishments. Machover has a command of expressive vocal gesture. Voices and electronic sound are well balanced, often with telling counterpoints. Diane Paulus's staging and Alex McDowell's scenes were dazzling in their inventions." — *Opera magazine*, London

"The technological triumph of linking voice to stage, and the acoustical instruments of the excellent orchestra to the synthesized instruments is impressive... Mr. Machover and his students invented magical machines. " — *Herald Tribune*

The libretto for **Death and the Powers** is written by U.S. Poet Laureate **Robert Pinsky**, story by Pinsky and **Randy Weiner** and directed by **Diane Paulus**, with choreography by **Karole Armitage**. Production design is by **Alex McDowell**, costume design by **David C. Woolard**, lighting design by **Donald Holder**, sound design by **Chris Full**, visual and software design by **Peter Torpey**, media design by **Matt Checkowski**, and sound technology by **Ben Bloomberg**. The music is performed by the **Boston Modern Orchestra Project**, conducted by **Gil Rose**.

Death and the Powers is a one-act, full-length work which tells the story of Simon Powers, a rich, successful inventor, who wishes to perpetuate his existence beyond the decay of his physical being. Reaching the end of his life, Powers uses his vast resources and devises a way to 'download' himself into his environment. This transformation turns every object in his surroundings—such as his books, furniture and walls—into a collective, living version of himself, called The System. His family, friends and business associates are left to explore how this transformation impacts their relationships and ability to move forward with their own lives and legacies. **Death and the Powers** introduces specially designed technology and an animated set—including a chorus of robots and a musical chandelier.

Developed by Machover's Opera of the Future Group at the MIT Media Lab, **Death and the Powers** sets itself apart from other operas with pioneering performance technologies. The stage is a vast, interconnected, intelligent 'System' of Powers' continuing presence. As the opera progresses, the set 'comes alive' with Simon's thoughts, feelings and memories through a new technique called **Disembodied Performance** which uses innovative sensors and analysis software to translate James Maddalena's sounds and gestures into the behavior of the set. The customized audio system boasts 143 separate speakers, which allows for a 'mini' surround sound system in each of the boxes and balconies. In coordination with his first-rate production team, Machover actively participates in the performance from his seat in the opera house. Working with a customized iPad, Machover literally keeps technology at his fingertips -- allowing him to make subtle electronic, robotic and acoustic changes throughout the opera so as to further enhance and refine all aspects of the live concert experience. In addition to the animatronic set, the opera employs several other inventions developed especially for the production including: a chorus of 'Operabots' which narrate and react to the story; and a spectacular musical Chandelier, comprised of long Teflon strings which resonate through remotely actuated electromagnets as well as on-stage performers plucking, strumming and dampening the strings.

Death and the Powers was fostered in the early stages of collaboration and development by new works generator, Music-Theatre Group (Diane Wondisford, producing director).

ABOUT THE CAST

Death and the Powers' cast features baritone **James Maddalena** as Simon Powers; soprano **Emily Albrink** as Simon's third wife, Evvy; soprano **Sara Heaton** as Simon's daughter, Miranda; tenor **Hal Cazalet** as Simon's research assistant and adopted son, Nicholas; countertenor **Doug Dodson** as 'The United Way'; baritone **David Kravitz** as 'The United Nations'; and bass **Tom McNichols** as 'The Administration.'

James Maddalena recently performed the role of Nixon in *Nixon in China* at the Metropolitan Opera, which he has also created and recorded for a Grammy Award winning recording, and stars on the Emmy Award-winning PBS telecast, now on DVD. He has appeared with the world's leading opera companies and orchestras, and has collaborated with Peter Sellars on a number of opera productions worldwide. He created the role of Simon Powers for the Monaco premiere last fall.

Emily Albrink has collaborated with conductors James Levine and Robert Spano, and performed with the Baltimore Symphony, Kentucky Opera, and Washington National Opera. She sang the role of Nuria in Osvaldo Golijov's opera *Ainadamar* at Carnegie Hall.

Sarah Heaton has performed locally in *Così fan tutte* with Boston Baroque, *The Bartered*

Bride with Opera Boston, *Rusalka* with Boston Lyric Opera, and *Die Fledermaus* with Opera Providence. She is joining the Santa Fe Opera Apprentice singer program this summer.

Hal Cazalet created the role of Nicholas for the Monaco premiere. Other operatic performances include *The Merry Widow* the English National Opera, *L'Orfeo*, *The Turn of the Screw*, and *The Abduction from the Seraglio* for English Touring Opera, and the world premiere of Philip Glass' *Les Enfants Terribles* at the Spoleto Festival and Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Doug Dodson is a performer of early and modern music, including Handel, Pergolesi, Purcell, Conradi, Telemann, and Carissimi, as well as Adès, Bernstein, and Britten. Recent performances include the 1731 version of Handel's *Rinaldo* with Opera Vivente in Baltimore, MD.

David Kravitz is well-known to local audiences for his many performances in concert and opera, and he recently performed in Strauss's *Intermezzo* at New York City Opera. He originated his role for the Monaco premiere.

Tom McNichols sang more than 300 performances domestically and internationally with the ensemble Cantus, and has been a featured soloist with The Boston Pops, the Minnesota Orchestra, and the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra. He reprises his role from the Monaco premiere.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

Tod Machover is Professor of Music and Media and Director of the Opera of the Future Group at the MIT Media Lab, and is also Visiting Professor of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London. Whether it is creating genre-breaking compositions for the concert hall, "robotic" operas for worldwide stages, software that allows anyone to compose original music, or musical activities that can diagnose illness and restore health, Tod Machover's unique vision is shaping the future of music. Machover is widely known for creating music that breaks traditional artistic and cultural boundaries, as well as for developing trailblazing inventions for music performance. His music has been commissioned and performed by many of the world's most important performers and ensembles and has received numerous international prizes and awards, including the "Chevalier des Arts et Lettres" from the French Culture Ministry. Machover has designed new music technologies—such as Hyperinstruments—for some of the world's greatest virtuosi, from Yo-Yo Ma to Prince, but also for young people, families, seniors, and the disabled. The popular videogames *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band* grew out of this Hyperinstruments work in Machover's Lab. His Hyperscore software—which allows anyone to compose original music using lines and colors—has allowed children around the world to have their music performed by major orchestras as part of Machover's Toy Symphony project. Machover is also noted for his visionary operas, including *VALIS* (based on Philip K. Dick's sci-fi classic), *The Brain Opera* (which invites the audience to collaborate live and online, and has been installed since 2000 at Vienna's House of Music), and *Skellig*, which premiered in the UK in November 2008 to rave reviews. He is currently working on a new piece for the Kronos Quartet celebrating the life and work of Noam Chomsky, and is starting on his next opera.

Robert Pinsky is widely considered to be one of America's greatest writers, and has received numerous international awards and consistently been on international best-seller lists. He served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 1997 to 2000, and is currently

poetry editor of *Slate*, a contributor to *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer* on PBS and a professor in the graduate writing program at Boston University. He is the author of six books of poetry, several volumes of essays, and numerous edited anthologies. Pinsky's book *The Inferno of Dante*, a new verse translation, was awarded the "Los Angeles Times Book Award" in poetry and the "Howard Morton Landon Prize" for translation.

Randy Weiner is a writer/director whose projects span theater, film, and television. He has been commissioned by such organizations as the Music-Theatre Group in New York City and the Ambassador Theater Group in London. Weiner co-wrote *Club 12*, a hip-hop version of "Twelfth Night," featuring Grammy Award-winning singers Lauryn Hill and Wyclef Jean, presented by the Shubert Organization. He has written music-based film and television projects for MTV, FOX, HBO, Quincy Jones Entertainment and Warner Brothers. In addition, Weiner founded Fan2Fan.com, one of today's leading music marketing companies. He is also co-founder and managing director of The Box theater club in New York.

Diane Paulus is the Artistic Director of the A.R.T. Her A.R.T. credits include *Johnny Baseball*, *Best of Both Worlds*, *The Donkey Show* (also six years Off-Broadway, tours to London, Edinburgh, Madrid, Evian, France). Other theater includes *HAIR* (Gielgud Theatre, London, Al Hirschfield Theatre, Tony Award, Best Revival for of a Musical, Tony Award Nomination, Best Direction of a Musical), *Lost Highway* (Young Vic/English National Opera), *Kiss Me Kate* (Glimmerglass Opera), *Another Country* (Columbia Stages), *Turandot: Rumble for the Ring* (Bay Street Theatre), *Swimming with Watermelons* (Vineyard Theatre and Music-Theatre Group), *Eli's Comin,'* (Obie Award), *Brutal Imagination* (Vineyard Theatre), *The Golden Mickeys* (Disney Creative Entertainment), *The Karaoke Show* (Jordan Roth Productions), *Running Man* (Pulitzer Prize Finalist, (Music-Theatre Group). Opera: *The Magic Flute* (Canadian Opera Company), *Death and the Powers* (Opera Garnier de Monte Carlo, to be followed by performances at A.R.T. and Chicago Opera Theater), *Il mondo della luna* (Hayden Planetarium at the Museum of Natural History, Gotham Chamber Opera), *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Turn Of The Screw*, *Così fan tutte*, *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, and *Orfeo* (Chicago Opera Theater). Upcoming at the A.R.T.: *Prometheus Bound*, *Death and the Powers: The Robots' Opera*, and *Porgy and Bess*. Ms. Paulus was named one of the 50 Most Powerful Women in Boston by *Boston Magazine* this year.

Alex McDowell has served as production designer for such films as *Fight Club*, *Minority Report*, *The Terminal*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Corpse Bride*. For *Minority Report*, McDowell established the first fully integrated digital design department in the film industry, enabling the strands of 2D and 3D design, set construction, camera, prop manufacturing and post-production VFX to be efficiently linked and managed by the Design Team. McDowell is the founder of the revolutionary design and engineering think tank known as 'matter,' and is co-founder of the 5D Conference of Immersive Design. *Death and the Powers* is his first opera project.

Karole Armitage began her professional career in 1973 as a member of the Ballet du Grand Théâtre de Genève, Switzerland, followed by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. She is Artistic Director of Armitage Gone! Dance, which was launched in 2005. She has created dances for numerous companies throughout Europe and America, directed operas from the baroque and contemporary repertoire for many of the prestigious houses of Europe, and choreographed videos for pop icons Madonna and Michael Jackson and the filmmakers Merchant and Ivory. Armitage's choreography was first seen on Broadway in the musical *Passing Strange*, followed by *Hair*, for which she garnered a Tony nomination for choreography.

Gil Rose is the founder of the Modern Orchestra Project, the foremost professional orchestra dedicated exclusively to performing and recording music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Since 2003 he has served as Music Director and Conductor of Opera Boston. As a guest conductor he has worked with the Netherlands Radio Symphony, the Warsaw Philharmonic, the Cleveland Chamber Society, and at Tanglewood. Mr. Rose is the recipient of several awards, including the Columbia University Ditson Conductor Award and an ASCAP Concert Music Award, and has been nominated for a Grammy Award.

MIT Media Lab and the Opera of the Future Group applies an unorthodox research approach to envision the impact of emerging technologies on everyday life—technologies that promise to fundamentally transform our most basic notions of human capabilities. The Lab's Opera of the Future Group – founded and directed by Tod Machover – explores concepts and techniques to help advance the future of musical composition, performance, learning and expression, with a particular focus on opera. The scope of research includes musical instrument design, concepts for new performance spaces, interactive touring, permanent installations, musical toys, and some very unusual operas. Through the design of new interfaces for both professional virtuosi and amateur music-lovers, the development of new techniques for interpreting and mapping expressive gesture, and the application of these technologies to innovative compositions and experiences, the Opera of the Future Group seeks to enhance music as a performance art, and to develop its transformative power as counterpoint to our everyday lives.

The American Repertory Theater (A.R.T.) is one of the country's most celebrated resident theaters and the winner of numerous awards including the Tony Award, the Pulitzer Prize and regional Elliot Norton and I.R.N.E. Awards. In 2002 the A.R.T. was the recipient of the National Theatre Conference's Outstanding Achievement Award, and in May of 2003 it was named one of the top three regional theaters in the country by *Time* magazine.

Founded by Robert Brustein in 1980, the A.R.T. during its 30-year history has welcomed many major American and international theater artists, presenting a diverse repertoire that includes new American plays, bold reinterpretations of classical texts and provocative new music theater productions. The A.R.T. has performed throughout the U.S. and worldwide in 21 cities in 16 countries on 4 continents. It has presented over 200 productions, over half of which were premieres of new plays, translations and adaptations.

The A.R.T. is also a training ground for young artists. The Theater's artistic staff teaches undergraduate classes in acting, directing, dramatic literature, dramaturgy, design and playwriting at Harvard University, and in 1987 the A.R.T. founded the Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University in conjunction with the Moscow Art Theater School. The Institute provides world-class graduate level training in acting, dramaturgy and voice.

In 2009, the A.R.T. welcomed its new Artistic Director, Diane Paulus. Armed with the A.R.T.'s mission to expand the boundaries of theater, Paulus and her team have engaged thousands of new theatergoers at performances of *Sleep No More*, *The Donkey Show*, *Gatz*, *Best of Both Worlds*, *Johnny Baseball* and *Cabaret* as well as festivals like *Emerging America*. Critics and audiences have embraced the immersive environments that have become hallmarks of A.R.T. productions. The Theater has broadened its focus to include the audience's total experience, providing them with a sense of ownership in the theatrical event. Initiatives like the A.R.T.'s new club theater OBERON, which Paulus calls a "second stage for the 21st century", is an example of one initiative that has not only become an incubator for local artists but also has attracted national attention as a groundbreaking model for programming. Through all of its work, the A.R.T. is committed to building a community of artists, designers, technicians, administrators and audience.

The American Repertory Theater located at the Loeb Drama Center, 64 Brattle Street, Harvard Square, Cambridge, is accessible to persons with special needs and to those requiring wheelchair seating or first-floor restrooms. Deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons can

also reach the theater by calling the toll-free N.E. Telephone Relay Center at 1-800-439-2370.

Public transportation and discount parking are available nearby.

DEATH AND THE POWERS: *The Robots' Opera*
at a Glance

Composer/Creative Director	Tod Machover
Librettist	Robert Pinsky
Story	Randy Weiner and Robert Pinsky
Director	Diane Paulus
Conductor	Gil Rose
Choreographer	Karole Armitage

Production Designer	Alex McDowell
Costume Designer	David C. Woolard
Lighting Designer	Donald Holder
Sound Designer	Chris Full
Visual and Software Designer	Peter Torpey
Media Designer	Matt Checkowski
Sound Technology	Ben Bloomberg

Orchestra Boston Modern Orchestra Project (BMOP),
New Performance Technologies by MIT Media Lab

CAST

Simon Powers (Baritone)	James Maddalena
Evvy (soprano)	Emily Albrink
Miranda (soprano)	Sara Heaton
Nicholas (tenor)	Hal Cazalet
The United Way (countertenor)	Doug Dodson
The United Nations (baritone)	David Kravitz
The Administration (bass)	Tom McNichol

Instrumentation: 3 Winds, 4 Brass, 1 Percussion, 2 Keyboards (with electronics), 5 Strings.

WHEN:

Friday, March 18 at 7:30pm **(PRESS OPENING)**

Sunday, March 20 at 3:00pm

Tuesday, March 22 at 7:30pm

Friday, March 25 at 7:30pm

WHERE: Cutler Majestic Theatre at Emerson College, 219 Tremont St. Boston

TICKETS: Begin at \$25. Seniors \$5 off regular ticket price. Group Rates available.

On Line: <https://www.aestages.org> Phone: 617-824-8000

RATING: Recommended for 12-year olds and above.

RUNNING TIME: 90 minutes, no intermission.

MEDIA LINKS

<http://www.americanrepertorytheater.org/events/show/death-and-powers-robots-opera>

Photos: <http://www.americanrepertorytheater.org/media-room/press-kits/death-and-powers>