Love Machine – Review

Posted on May 14, 2013 by Charles Battersby

Science fiction tells us that robots can be used to do our menial labor. They can also fight our wars. But long before sentient janitorbots, and robosoldiers come to pass, there will be lovebot. Forming a meaningful relationship with a human is hard, but the sleek bodies and programmable minds of robots offer an easy opportunity for companionship and more. Just how does the exponential advance of technology affect this unquantifiable property that humans call love? This question is answered in three short plays by the Incubator Arts Project.

The trilogy starts out with the sweet and funny tale of an awkward teenaged girl in the 80's who falls in love with the satellite Skylab. This is the most overtly farcical of the three plays and the one that deals with the idea of love in the most abstract and poetic manner. In it, Cindy (Played by **Nikki Calonge**) is a nerdy teen who struggles to find a prom date. Audiences hear her desperate phone calls to local boys who are basically unaware of her existence. Calonge's portrayal of an unpopular geek is almost painfully accurate, and audiences suffer along with her in her flustered efforts to find romance. Luckily for everyone, Cindy eventually does find love with the silent and graceful satellite that passes by her window.

The text and performance are both delightful. Sadly, this part of the show is also filled with an excess of physical humor and slapstick. It's almost as if Director **Andrew Scoville** was unconvinced that the piece could hold an audience on its own merits and tried to bolster it with extra gags. A prudent measure, but ultimately unnecessary.

The second part of the evening might sound like the wildest of science fiction, but it was actually inspired by a very real love story. It is set in the near future, and audiences meet Maxine31 (**Lynne Rosenberg)** a female android that contains the consciousness of a transsexual scientist. Maxine is in love with another android patterned after her wife Bina. She tells her story of transferring her consciousness into a robot body, and explains to the audience the ideas behind transhumanism.

What makes this piece so remarkable is that Maxine and Bina are based on two real people. Martine Rothblatt is a scientist who has worked to develop the technology to duplicate human personalities as artificial intelligences, and one of Martine's accomplishments is an android replica of her wife Bina. It's a case of truth being as inriguing as the best of fiction.

The (Real) Bina android was present for a talkback after several performances of *Love Machine* and audiences who caught these particular shows were able to see how the dialog in this piece was patterned after the way an actual AI speaks.

Also impressive is Rosenberg's portrayal of an android. Her voice and movements had the calculated fluidity of a machine programmed to move in a simulation of grace. One part of the performance involved improvised audience interaction and Rosenberg maintained the persona flawlessly. Excellent sound design accentuated the illusion with mechanical whirs that accompanied Rosenberg's movements.

The evening closed with a very abstract piece about a digitized consciousness searching for love after being uploaded to a network of other such beings. This was presented mostly through a light show projected on the upstage wall of the theater. "Modern dance… with lasers" is now a genre of theater.

Like all good science fiction, *Love Machine* tackles some fascinating ideas that aren't so far away from what society has currently achieved. It addresses these matters with a humorous wink and some avant garde style which might not appeal to fans of hard sci-fi, but it still suits the subject matter. It's running in Manhattan through May 19th. Alas, the post-show talkbacks with the Bina android were only scheduled for opening weekend. Tickets and more information are available at **www.incubatorarts.org**.

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