



ART PRACTICAL

HATORADE RETROGRADE: THE MUSICAL at John McLaren Park
by Karen Cheung
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Stephanie Hewett. *HATORADE RETROGRADE: THE MUSICAL*, 2019; performance. Courtesy of Southern Exposure. Photo: Minoosh Zomorodinia.

The imagined future of San Francisco in the year 2069 looks grim to Danish artist Lise Haller Baggesen. Her most recent performance project, *HATORADE RETROGRADE: THE MUSICAL*, is set in a dystopian future of the city, but her fictional world forbiddingly reflects the challenges that San Franciscans face in their current realities: namely, the growing impacts of climate change and technocracy.

S O U T H E R N E X P O S U R E

Audiences began their journey at the Wilde Reservoir Overlook Tower in San Francisco's John McLaren Park. The traces of deterioration and abandonment of the modern concrete tower were a stark contrast to the rare clear skies in the notoriously foggy city: the perfect ambiance for Baggessen's seemingly utopian vision of an apocalyptic landscape.

The narrator's robotic voice broadcast over "silent disco" headphones. SAM_SAR_AI (also known as SAM_AI_AM), a "personal electronic companion," guided audiences on a picturesque walk through several locations in the park, and introduced the rest of the cast as the story unfolded. Following a transmission glitch that resembled a screeching fax machine, each protagonist gradually traveled from the omniscient Ministry of Stars (OVUM) to polluted hinterlands situated on the outskirts of OVUM.

As they attempted to decipher encrypted messages veiled in coded signals from Mars, the technocratic Bryotopians' exploitative pyramid scheme and their sinister plan to enslave the unborn chimeric mouse-human babies of DARWIINA (also known as MISTRESS OF THE UNIVERSE) were revealed. The characters danced infectiously to every r. young's upbeat and funky psychedelic musical score, while animating Stephanie Hewett's intricate choreography in each scene. Their groovy beats and rhythmic dance moves alchemized into visceral delight.

From their quirky names and origin stories to their grungy yet futuristic costumes, Baggessen and teen artists of Southern Exposure's Youth Advisory Board created multidimensional and idiosyncratic heroines that encompassed their hopes and fears for their future, and a chronicle that resembled a science fiction dream come true.

In blending 1960s counterculture nostalgia and futuristic fiction, the performance imploded the boundaries between speculative narrative and the surreal elements of reality. While the performance staged a battle against classism and colonization, the narrative is fundamentally a heartfelt story about love, motherhood (a continued topic of interest for Baggessen), and creation, offering its characters and audiences a glimmer of hope in their dystopian future.

HATORADE RETROGRADE: THE MUSICAL was presented by Southern Exposure in John McLaren Park, San Francisco, California, on October 12-13, 2019. It will be presented in Spring 2020 at Gallery 400, University of Illinois, Chicago.