

Marriage of comic and bizarre

Review **Concert**

DA:NS FESTIVAL 2014

FORECASTING

Esplanade Theatre Studio/Sunday

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Screenheads are rife in popular culture: robots with TVs for heads or models with iPads for faces, for example. So it is a logical leap for a dancer who replaces bits of her anatomy with a laptop to exist. Such a dancer is Croatia-born Barbara Matijevec (below) in the entertaining and thought-provoking *Forecasting*.

A hybrid piece of video and movement, it manages to marry stand-up comedy with a how-to lecture into bizarre arts.

Using found footage in the form of YouTube videos, Matijevec and her collaborator, Italian theatre practitioner (and former professional basketball player) Giuseppe Chico, have spliced together a weird and funny performance in a black-box setting, bare except for one woman, a computer and its thin black pedestal.

Positioning herself in various ways behind an Apple MacBook laptop screen, Matijevec inserts herself into these YouTube videos, which often feature only disembodied hands, feet or voices.

Here she is, masquerading as the person behind a pair of hands teaching us, the audience on and off the Internet, how to replace a laptop's hard drive.

With a jump cut, the hard drive disappears and she is suddenly the woman demonstrating how to cut carrots, tie shoe laces or get a cat to swallow a pill. Her madcap routine picks up steam: She is a pet owner lovingly coaxing her frog to hiss like a cat; the different persons firing a whole slew of pistols (first, with alarm at the recoil, then again, with glee, to synch with the varied responses of the users in the YouTube videos).

Much of the humour derives from the incongruity between Matijevec's physical body and her deadpan delivery, and the situations and images popping up on the laptop's rectangular display.

Her mock-serious expression and instruction, as she poses stock-still behind the laptop showing a pair of hands in red boxing gloves repeatedly

punching their own flabby stomach, is hilarious. And so are the inane scripts (presumably taken from these same videos) she recites, in her calm European-accented English.

Some videos, too, are poignant. There is the pet monkey, grooming the top of its owner's head – something that it does whenever the owner is about to go on a date with her boyfriend. Except, the owner and said boyfriend broke up a week ago. The monkey doesn't know. "Best not to disrupt the ritual," concluded the owner's commentary, in Matijevec's voice.

At times, the videos are fetishtic. A man is shown enjoying having his face stepped on, his body trampled by stiletto heels. There are squishy, mushy scenes of fake bloody wounds, entrails, X-rays, smashed apples, and it all

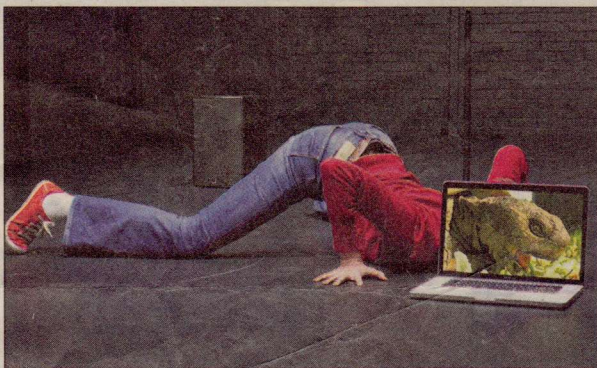


PHOTO: ESPLANADE

culminates in a video of a crystal-encrusted skull that recalls both Hamlet's poor Yorick and Damien Hirst's diamond-dipped artwork.

One cannot help but think of the modern human condition of being fragmented: We are all divided in terms of our physical bodies and online selves; our experience of other people online sometimes reduced to nothing but decontextualised body parts.

In a smart, frenetic but compact 50-minute production, Matijevec and Chico have thrown up many issues to think of, ranging from issues of authenticity (are YouTube videos nothing ever but performative, selling a version of the Self to the world?), privacy (who owns that version of you, if it can be so swiftly appropriated by these artists?), to transhumanism (what does the future hold for the fusing of your body and machines?).

And by its very inclusion in the Esplanade's da:ns festival, it challenges what is dance, even as it remains, on the surface, a pleasurable way to spend an hour in the theatre studio.