

Monday, March 7, 2011 at 11:00 AM EST

Robot Opera And Immortality

We talk with Tod Machover, composer of “Death and the Powers” about human life, legacy and uploading the mind.



Operabots performing in "Death and the Powers."

In the new robot opera, “Death and the Powers,” humans are history. So is flesh and blood- as ‘so over’ as the dinosaurs.

The high-tech drama, composed by [Tod Machover](#), tells the story of how one eccentric billionaire led the way, by refusing to die. He uploads himself – his mind – into the realm of digital immortality, and leaves his worldly body behind. Machover, known as “America’s most wired composer” and director of the [Opera of the Future group](#) at the [MIT Media Lab](#), thinks of his character Simon Powers, as “a combination of Howard Hughes, Walt Disney and Bill Gates,” who rather than wanting to live forever, desired “to leave the world, but leave everything about himself here.”



Director Diane Paulus and composer Tod Machover of "Death and the Powers" in WBUR's On Point studio. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

It sounds like science fiction to some. And like new religion or “nerd rapture” to others. But it is seeming more and more like a near reality (time magazine link). This isn’t the artificial intelligence of man versus machine of Watson (our [show](#) with Watson creator), but rather man becoming machine. At its heart, the opera digitally dramatizes humanity’s oldest dream of the immortal living legacy.

[Diane Paulus](#), director of “Death and the Powers,” explains that the opera is “a meditation on the nature of death.” No longer is the after-life solely a matter of faith and religion, but with the world of operabots and the technology of the dematerialized, uploaded consciousness we have “man’s ultimate attempt to control the world an active attempt to define [the] future” says Machover.

In this hour, *On Point*, opera, like all technology, is as Machover tells us, “very seldom the way we imagine it.”

Guests:

[Tod Machover](#), composer and inventor. His new work is “[Death and the Powers: The Robots’ Opera](#).” He’s been called “America’s most wired composer” by the Los Angeles Times, and is professor of music and media and director of the opera of the future group at the MIT Media Lab.

[Diane Paulus](#), artistic director of the American Repertory theater, and director of “Death and the Powers.”

[Brian Dickie](#), general director of the Chicago Opera Theater, which will present “Death and the Powers” in Chicago in April.

Machover says “one of the ways that you make yourself immortal is by creating works of art,” take a look at his immortal creation:

Video:

More:

See the robot opera live:

[BOSTON](#): March 18, 20, 22, 25 by The American Repertory Theater, at the Cutler Majestic Theater

[CHICAGO](#): April 2, 6, 8, 10 by Chicago Opera Theater, at the Harris Theater

See **Robert Pinsky’s draft** of the “Death and the Powers” libretto [here](#).

See **more images** from the “Death and the Powers” [here](#).



Human performer dances with an operobot in "Death and the Powers"