



High tech Chicago opera takes a unique futuristic approach

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Chicago Opera Theater opened a new, high tech themed opera on Saturday, April 2nd. Entitled "Death and the Powers", the performance utilizes sets and technology developed by the MIT Media Lab.

The first performance was held this Saturday at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance in Millennium Park. The libretto was texted by U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky, and with music by Tod Machover.

The story focuses on a wealthy man named Simon Powers who, nearing death, integrates his mind and body into a computer "System" so that he can continue to exist in a digital form.

The process is successful but little does he know that his new digital mind will eventually prefer to live in perfection and dreams rather than speak with his surviving family members. This eventually creates strife between his wife, Evvy, who wishes to follow Simon to be part of the System, and between his daughter, Miranda, who wishes to remain human despite the pain of life that is unavoidable.

Director Diane Paulus wanted a very high-tech visionary appearance for this opera. The sets and backdrops are expressive and "alive" and which have been in the works for 3 years. Some of the cast, and characters in the story, are actually robots controlled by technicians offstage. The robots, created by MIT Media Labs, even take place of some of the singers as they mimic motions of people and move about on wheels around the stage.

Also among the impressive sets for "Death and the Powers" was a large chandelier that opened and closed and played music throughout the performance. It was impressively "alive" as it was essentially a large robotic creation from the MIT Labs. Another central piece to the story are three large rotating panels that lit up with complex computer matrix patterns and colors, flashback videos, and videos of Simon Powers singing to the other characters in a digital form after he is integrated into the System.

The opera concluded with an open ending that leaves the audience guessing, and also a message to think about about the issues from a personal perspective. The interpretation and outcome is left for the viewer to decide. Indeed, after the performance, our group discussed the story and its' meaning for hours afterwards.

"Death and the Powers" continues for 3 more performances on April 6th, 8th and 10th. Take a look at the [Chicago Opera Theater "Death and the Powers" Web site here](#) for tickets and further details.