

Cultural Daily

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The Wonder of Hopscotch — A Mobile Opera in 24 Cars

Laura Sturza · Wednesday, December 2nd, 2015

How could one fully prepare for the mobile opera *Hopscotch*, which features 24 limousines traversing Los Angeles, carrying 120 performers who share their rides with an intimate audience? Who could imagine how they would experience a show of such scope – with cars stopping at rooftops, parks and historic buildings? What would it be like to piece together a story that is simultaneously performed by multiple casts in multiple parts of the city with musical compositions by six distinct composers?

To stretch the logistical complexity further, the limo audience wasn't alone in viewing The Industry Opera Company's show. Anyone could see it for free from the Central Hub, an enormous, open-air, temporary staging area where projections of the citywide performance were screened in shows that ran October 31 through November 22.

By watching it unfold from the Central Hub, I became part of a collective of viewers who saw a production that can't readily be described through its costumes, sets and music. The piece suggested that its impact could best be conveyed on a visceral level.



Central Hub, Courtesy of The Industry

Picture yourself in a semi-industrial area of downtown L.A. You're standing on the pavement of Sci-Arc (Southern California Institute of Architecture), the site for the Central Hub viewing arena. You stand in the center and move about, looking at 12 large-screen TVs positioned well above eye-level. You look up to see them. Each screen features a chapter of the narrative that's filmed live from inside and outside of a corresponding limousine as it travels the city.

You wear high-quality headsets that let you flip from one soundscape to the next, realizing you can even pair the audio from one scene to the visuals from another. You hear the work of composers who created an aural landscape as diverse as the city. You watch the close exchanges that takes place inside the vehicles as couple Lucha and Jameson meet, kiss, pull away and repeat the cycle. When they step outside the limos you see them in scenes in which they flirt, marry and disappear from the other's view. You can move your gaze from the screens to the sky to the city's streets. Then you notice the other people standing beside you, also taking in all the possible views.



Photo by Dana Ross

Chapters of Lucha and Jameson's story are delivered in timing that doesn't follow a straight through-line. You piece together your version of the plot.

While many of us appreciate a clear-cut tale with a start, middle and end, the messiness of life — and particularly life in a messy city like Los Angeles — means that's not how it's always lived.

Filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard helped popularize jump cuts in 1960s French New Wave Cinema. Industry Artistic Director Yuval Sharon brings us the jump cut opera.

Hopscotch replicates the excitement and disorientation that comes from not knowing what's next, being uncertain if you're viewing the show from the best possible angle, if you've picked the right limousine ride or if you're watching the screen most likely to illuminate your connection to the story.

The finale started at dusk in the Central Hub, an arena that expanded to include vehicles and live performers who had previously been viewed from the Hub onscreen. The limos slowly pulled inside the space. Passengers joined those who'd been viewing from the Hub.

Performers walked past us singing librettist Jane Stephens Rosenthal's words from as close as a foot away. We could feel the resonance rise off their bodies. A performer wearing wings brushed against some of us with her expansive costume.



Photo by Casey Kringlen

They sang plaintively about items that might be on their "to-do" list. "Still needing to go to the market, to change the sheets, to do the dishes, to feed the cat, to cut the roses, to gather up the leaves." By placing spectators and performers in close proximity, *Hopscotch* gave its audience the chance to live inside theater's fourth wall, to imagine each of us performs in our own opera as we go about the daily chores mentioned in the finale.

The effect of performers, crew and audience converging in one spot had me weeping. It was evidence we're part of something much bigger — a bigger stage, a bigger city, a bigger community that is interdependent — reliant on one another to create a work of staggering beauty.

The Industry's work is collaborative, immersive and humanistic, akin to the installations of artists Christo and Jean Claude, who involve an entire city in their productions. Even as the relationship between the opera's main characters thrives and fails, the production itself is testament to the improbability that a group of synchronized people can make something of jaw-dropping range and grace.

Unseen at the performance were the city staff, engineers and advisors who'd weighed in on how such a feat could be realized. They supported the vision of more than 200 artists, six writers, six composers, technicians and producers of the highest caliber, working together to create a piece that, by all accounts, should have been logistically impossible.

Hopscotch can restore faith in one's city (with all of its well-documented problems), and offer a remedy to those who wonder whether community-building is possible.

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