

Hello, Winnipeg! Are you ready to rock?



STACEY
ABRAMSON

Exhibit shows how stagecraft changes concert experience

Do you remember your very first major arena concert? Remember that unmistakable feeling of excitement when the band or artist you no doubt paid a large amount of money to see walked on stage amidst the flash of lights, booming speakers and, most importantly, that sweet, muggy scent of dry ice and smoke? It's a pretty intense and thrilling feeling.

My real first encounter with this exhilaration (however embarrassing) was seeing Bon Jovi and Skid Row when I was only eight years old. I remember being blown away when the fireworks blasted simultaneously with key guitar chords and Jon bounced across the catwalk set up along the front section of the Winnipeg Arena.

This culture surrounding arena shows and large venue concerts has mesmerized audiences since that day when smoke first met spotlight and magic was made. Toronto-based artist Robert Hengeveld has attempted to capture everything that encompasses this in his interactive installation, *Staging the Gap*.

Winnipeg Square was to be the installation place, but due to concerns surrounding the tiny puffs of dry ice that jet out at timed intervals, the venue had to be shifted. The piece has now been installed on the third floor of Video Pool Media Arts Centre's production space in the blue screen room where patrons experience a unique concert.

Inside the unlit space sits a miniature white amphitheatre with a glowing red button. Once the viewer presses the button, the ride begins. The stage begins to glow with tiny sets of stage lights. It's pretty funny to see a baby stage be overcome with its own theatrics. The viewer must now choose a set of headphones to experience the



work (although I suggest watching the work through as many soundtracks as you can).

Eight separate headphones stream different soundtracks, specifically created to co-ordinate with the light show. A woman scats and screams on one set, while *Bohemian Rhapsody* gets a *Star Wars* twist on another. Each soundtrack gives the stage a very different feeling. While piano chords creep through the spotlights on one set of headphones, a dramatic and synthetic soundtrack plays. Hengeveld lets the viewer choose multiple genres and emotions through which to experience the work.

While the work may seem like something of a novelty, Hengeveld is commenting on how different the concert and musical experience becomes with the addition of smoke and lights. The stage in Hengeveld's installation is where the viewer examines the connections between music and theatrics. When thinking of the lip-synching glamour girls and boys of popular music, this concept becomes clearer in a Marshall McLuhan-esque fashion -- the

medium is the message. By leaving nothing on stage except technical theatrical devices, the artist lets the viewer connect with the stage environment and become slightly detached from the music. The viewer gets to experience the smoke and mirrors separate from the live performance. The spectacle takes hold of the musical experience.

Though the premise behind the work may be a heavier look into the semiotics of live performances, the result is playful and engaging. It is also a great example of good, fun art, as it's an entertaining work that can be appreciated on many levels. And let's face it: everyone loves a good show.

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Art Review

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