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Carnegie Mellon Cyborg Cabaret Explores Human-Robot Relations

CMU and Community Talents Take Stage April 27

PITTSBURGH—Humans and robots will share the stage of the North Side’s New Hazlett Theater at 8 p.m., Friday, April 27, for the [Cyborg Cabaret](#), a variety show designed to make the audience laugh hard and think harder about how technology is changing society.

The interdisciplinary show will feature talents from Carnegie Mellon University’s Robotics Institute, School of Art, Entertainment Technology Center and the broader Pittsburgh community, including Assemble, VIA and Hack Pittsburgh.

“The show will be about one-third technology, one-third funny and one-third thought-provoking,” said Heather Knight, a CMU Ph.D. student in robotics. Knight co-hosts the cabaret with cyborg musician and Master of Fine Arts graduate student Dan Wilcox, aka robotcowboy, and Data, the stand-up comedian robot. Wilcox and Knight won the 2011 School of Art Interdisciplinary Award and have been collaborating during the past year with the local community to put the cabaret together.

“The seed money for this project came from the Interdisciplinary Award, and it allowed us to pull together volunteers from the many organizations involved,” Wilcox said. “We started in the fall by organizing brainstorming sessions at Assemble in order to throw out ideas from each area of interest, and together we came up with a lot of great ideas that, separately, Heather and I might never have considered.”

Cyborgs are a combination of people and machine, but Knight said she and Wilcox sought to make the show about much more than robots. “It’s about the relationship between society and technology,

about our expectations for what technology might do for and to us,” she explained. “We want to explore the ways this has worked out and the ways it hasn’t.”

Among the acts are a Robot Arm Quartet, a group of robotic arms assembled by Golan Levin, director of CMU’s Studio for Creative Inquiry, that perform as a barbershop quartet; an exploration by Knight of what makes robots come alive that features choreography by several robots from Professor Manuela Veloso’s research lab, known as Crebots; and Cyborlesque, a burlesque performance by graduating senior fine arts student Julia Cahill in which human and machine parts are revealed — or are they?

Wilcox will direct the Robot Rumble, which pits an unlikely array of real-life robots, including the CMU Crusher, Honda ASIMO, Boston Dynamics BigDog and the Google Self-driving Car against each other in one-on-one WWE-style wrestling matches.

Pre-sale tickets are available at Showclix, <http://www.showclix.com/event/223344>, and are \$8 for students, \$12 general admission and \$15 for VIP cabaret tables at the front of the theater. The performance includes some adult content that is not appropriate for youngsters.

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About Carnegie Mellon University: Carnegie Mellon (www.cmu.edu) is a private, internationally ranked research university with programs in areas ranging from science, technology and business, to public policy, the humanities and the arts. More than 11,000 students in the university’s seven schools and colleges benefit from a small student-to-faculty ratio and an education characterized by its focus on creating and implementing solutions for real problems, interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation. A global university, Carnegie Mellon’s main campus in the United States is in Pittsburgh, Pa. It has campuses in California’s Silicon Valley and Qatar, and programs in Asia, Australia, Europe and Mexico. The university is in the midst of “Inspire Innovation: The Campaign for Carnegie Mellon University,” which aims to build its endowment, support faculty, students and innovative research, and enhance the physical campus with equipment and facility improvements.