

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Creative Outlet

Poem for a Tree

by **Ellen Chenoweth**

Kinetic Tree, you mystify me.

Billed as “the centerpiece of PIFA 2016,” the kinetic tree is a large-scale installation in the lobby of the Kimmel Center. The installation is open to the public any time the Kimmel Center is open. There is also a live performance each night of the PIFA festival at 7pm and 10pm. Directed by Kimmel Center Artistic Director Jay Wahl, each show has 12-14 local performers manipulating the branches with pulleys and ropes while a sound and light show spotlights the tree. The show ends with a dance party and the audience is invited to join. Several designers, including Mimi Lien (scenic design), Nick Kourtides (sound design), Scott Burgess (composer), and Tyler Micoleau (lighting design), contributed to the substantial collaboration. The tree is intended to illustrate the festival’s core idea of “We Are What We Make,” and plays with ideas of natural and artificial environments.

Outside, real trees provide daily delight.

You live in a lobby, work two shows a night.

There’s no roots, there’s no wind, no leaves on your branches.

I feel sadness for you, in such circumstances.

I look you up (you are tall), I look all the way down.

You're a bit like a pipe organ, minus the sound.

But no! I hear frogs and the chirping of birds,

The sounds are quite nice, so I make a quick search

Only to find that your speakers are hidden,

And nobody's here, except for us chickens.

The show begins. *This is it!* But your helpers confuse me—

With their britches and caps; in what era are we?

Are you a tree for the past, for the future, for now?

Are you desperate and dying or doing just swell?

Is it sunny or storming? I simply can't tell!

Now a woman is singing; she seems to feel something.

But I'm not sure what, and dancebeats start their thumping.

I want to rest in the shade, not under green neon.

I want some real frogs and some actual seasons.

Your 2x4 branches might look cool on the [screen](#),

But I crave deeper roots in my cultural streams.

Am I asking too much from your mobile invention?

I think that you had the best of intentions,

For fun and excitement and grand spectacle.

But the rhyme I can't find is the one for boondoggle.

Kinetic Tree installation, Philadelphia International Festival of the Arts, Kimmel Center, April 8-23, performances nightly at 7pm and 10pm, free.

By Ellen Chenoweth

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