

THE HAWK EYE

MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2015

-No. 260

Mimes enchant Civic Music crowd

Swiss mask theater troupe plays auditorium.

By **BOB SAAR**
for *The Hawk Eye*

The name "Civic Music" implies singers and instruments, but last night at Burlington's Memorial Auditorium, the only sounds issued by Swiss artists Mummenschanz were the soft shuffling of stockinged feet.

Mummenschanz tours the world, and it's pleasing to see Burlington nestled among Rome, Paris and Berlin.

Review

The name is German for a play involving mummors — mimes, in other words. The troupe's shugline is "musicians of silence," but that's like saying "photographers for the blind." Mummenschanzers are actors without lines, and they excel at the art of innuendo.

The troupe was born in 1972, offering an alternative to classical white-faced mimes but keeping their narrative pantomime and adding jazz dance.

And, of course, there is no music, no dialogue; nothing but interpretation.

The show was a series of sketches filled with fantastical creatures and occasional human forms writhing and contorting inside bizarre costumes or in



Performers of Mummenschanz act out a skit Sunday at Memorial Auditorium in Burlington.

Josh Newell/
The Hawk Eye

black tights with weird appliances attached to their heads.

First up was a huge grey glove emerging stage left to greet people in the audience. At one point, The Hand flopped down in the lap of Burlington's Dawn Hazell.

"I was surprised," she said. "I've never been sat on by a hand before."

Next up was a bulky has-sock that came to life and rolled around while trying to mount a low platform. It looked like the Blob in golden velvet.

Then came a giant green clam with a bright red tongue, miming a human eating something pretty but tasting foul.

The Mummenschanzers were masters of anthropomorphization — giving human qualities to inanimate objects or non-

sentient creatures.

The Slinky Worm — no other way to describe this creature — was a yellow, sinuous, spring-like tube topped with a large pink beachball, looking like a flower from some distant world. Slinky Worm played toss with the crowd using its head. It eventually lost interest and explored its tubular self, much to the audience's delight.

The Toilet Paper People were two humanoids with heads constructed of rolls of toilet paper, which they unwound as they decorated themselves. The "man" was made of blue paper, the "woman" pink.

The blue Toilet Paper man "cried" when Pinkie rejected him, pulling wads of blue "tears"

from his "eyes" before making a bouquet for Pinkie.

One sketch can only be described as "Picasso meets Frida Kahlo." Two huge misshapen heads painted like Kahlo self-portraits flanked a being whose square head was adorned by a Picassoesque face. When the face rearranged itself like a Rubik's Cube, the two Kahlos fell down in astonishment.

Several sketches had an underlying erotic innuendo, others involved confrontation. The skits were highly symbolic, but the Fighting Clay Heads were creatures escaped from some dark Freudian dream. As one became more beautiful, the other got uglier.

It was like a Rorschach test come to life.

Fortunately, the scary stuff was offset by children giggling from the shadows.

Blockhead, a woman in black with a faceless cube for a cranium, cruised the crowd and oddly chose Hazell's daughter, Daisy, 6, to give her a face with strips of masking tape.

"It was fun," Daisy said. "I could hear her breathe."

With the exception of the many laughs and oohs and aahs, the Auditorium was quiet, even when about a third of the crowd vanished because no one announced it was intermission.

Bold move, Civic Music and well done.