

ALEXIS SOLOSKI | THEATER REVIEW

# The Joys a Grumpy Trash Bag Can Bring

A mime troupe's show is like the Muppets, but influenced by French surrealism.

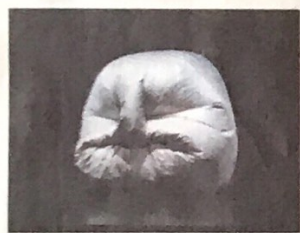
AT THE END of "you & me," the new show from the Swiss mime troupe Mummenschanz, you will applaud. That applause may feel a little strange: Are you doing it for the human performers, or for the creatures they have conjured out of skeins of plastic and lumps of foam, or for the passion and drive that have kept this generous, sui generis company producing giddy symbolism for more than 40 years? And is it weird that a mime show is kicking off a mild ontological crisis?

Also, the piece begins with a pair of seven-foot-tall hands engaged in a friendly pas de deux, so ordinary clapping seems inadequate.

Mummenschanz has been delighting children and their taller companions since 1972. (I'd planned to take one of my own children, but both were busy on the birthday party circuit and sent regrets, so I was delighted solo.) The group has to be seen — and sometimes touched — to be believed. But if you imagine the Muppets heavily influenced by French surrealism and a few psychotropics, you will have some idea. If you want to picture a quieter and drier "Symphonie Fantastique," that works, too.

Mellow and breathlessly inventive, "you & me," created by one of the troupe's founders, Floriana Frassetto, in collaboration with Tina Kronis and Richard Alger, is a collection of classic, often amphibious rou-

**you & me**  
Through July 22 at the Gerald W. Lynch Theater, Manhattan; 866-811-4111, mummenschanz.com. Running time: 1 hour 20 minutes



times, and a few new ones. Like other Mummenschanz shows, it is wordless and mostly silent. At a matinee performance I attended, several children were happy to volunteer sound effects and dramaturgical advice. "Big hugs!" one small boy kept suggesting whenever two creatures neared one another. Occasionally the creatures obliged. Even the armless ones.

The lighting, uncredited, is crepuscular, outlining the strange forms that slither, shiver and creep in from the wings. A couple are recognizable, like a chipper inchworm (or maybe a sea slug or an animate snap pea?) and a pair of swans. A lot aren't. Many are adorable. That inchworm was a winner — go get that leaf! — and late in the show I felt for a grumpy trash bag.

Sometimes it's easy to see how the human performers — black-clad and masked

— manipulate these materials; sometimes the postindustrial creatures seem to move without any human help at all. In my favorite vignettes, their precision and athleticism (obvious in other sections) concealed beneath cloth and foam. "That's silly!" kids shouted. And "Good job!" And "Do it again!"

Even at 80 minutes, the show perhaps goes too long. I started to hear a flurry of kids asking "Can we go?" across the aisle. The performance climaxes, then slinks on, crests again and continues. Two of the final sketches were humanoid ones; these, for me, were the least involving. Besides, I think we can all agree that silent beat-boxing is just odd. Still, a bit toward the end did emphasize the company's debt to commedia dell'arte. Here is the anti-selfie lazzo you didn't know you needed.

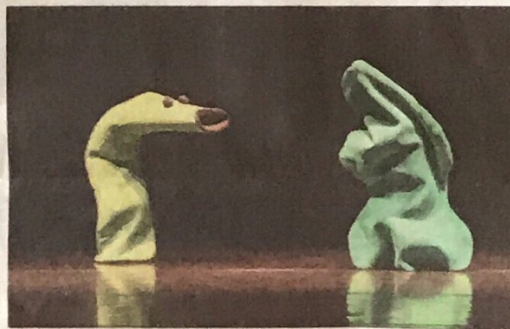
The Swiss mime troupe Mummenschanz sometimes makes it easy to see how human performers manipulate materials; sometimes creatures seem to move with no help at all.

At its best, the show is a tribute to the ludic impulse that many of us carelessly abandoned back on the elementary school playground, the ability to make a branch or a puddle or a chunk of chalked up pavement into some new thing, some new world. It also speaks to a uniquely human need to endow pretty much everything with human qualities — animals, iPads, flotsam.

Scoff if you want to, but I'll swear that my friend the trash bag was pretty annoyed. Give him — her? it? them? — a hand.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICHARD TEAMING FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES



## Tweet About Nicki Minaj Spirals Straight to Chaos

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from afar but still tilts toward the powerful. As social media has knocked down barriers between stars and their faithful (or their critics), direct communication among the über-famous and practically anonymous has become the norm. But while mutual praise can cause both sides to feel warm and tingly, more charged interactions can leave those who have earned a star's ire, like Ms. Thompson, reeling as eager followers take up the celebrity's cause.

"Her fans mimic her behavior," Ms. Thompson said of Ms. Minaj, who responded to her critique after some of the rapper's 21 million followers brought the initial tweet to the attention of their queen.

Ms. Minaj has been particularly present online lately, rallying her troops in the run-up to her new album, as early songs from the project have failed to stick commercially. (Of her two songs as a lead artist currently on the Billboard Hot 100, neither is higher than No. 81.) Ms. Minaj and her team declined to comment for this article.

In response to Ms. Thompson, Ms. Minaj started obliquely, posting a list on Twitter of her own songs that she considered mature. But in a tweet the next day, Ms. Thompson



will lose A LOT. I want a career in writing and who will hire me after this? But this DM is DISGUSTING."

Ms. Civil said in an interview that she and her staff believed Ms. Thompson's tweets were referring to their internal chat to her, and did not know at the time that Ms. Minaj had sent Ms. Thompson a direct message. Hours later, Ms. Thompson received an email from the site's chief operating officer, Christian Emiliano, informing her that her internship position had been terminated.

Mr. Emiliano wrote that Ms. Thompson had been asked to be "respectful to any of the clients" with whom the site's leadership "are working with or are building a relationship." The email also stated that Ms. Thompson had violated a nondisclosure agreement "by talking about an in-house and contained incident." (Ms. Thompson denies violating her N.D.A.)

Ms. Civil said Ms. Minaj did not order Ms. Thompson's firing. Ms. Civil added that she contacted Ms. Thompson to smooth things over, and condemned the "cyberbullying" that resulted. "It's a very sad situation when fans take it upon themselves to say these things," she said.