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Beware geeks bearing gifts

Victorian sci-fi meets the 21st Century in time travelling tech display

Erewhon, New Zealand playwright Arthur Meek's collaboration with Edinburgh's own Magnetic North, has its UK premiere at Summerhall from 1 August. The new multi-media play brings together technologies separated by a century in a very contemporary investigation of our relationship with artificial intelligence and machines.

Adapted from Victorian science fiction novel *Erewhon* by Samuel Butler, *Erewhon* premiered at Christchurch Arts Festival in 2017. This imaginative production shines new light on Samuel Butler's satirical novel about Victorian society. Published in 1872, Butler's fictional account tells the story of a young colonial British explorer who discovers a remote community living in New Zealand's Southern Alps. They're the descendants of a technologically-advanced culture that had to destroy all their machinery after it became artificially intelligent and malicious. What first appears to be a utopia - where happiness is paramount, and machinery and inventions are forbidden - soon turns out to be a society filled with hypocrisies and blind-spots just as severe as any other.

Celebrated for his one-man shows (*On the Conditions & Possibilities of Hillary Clinton Taking Me as Her Young Lover*), Meek uses two storytelling tools in *Erewhon*: an iPhone beaming to a large screen, and its 19th-century predecessor the magic lantern, which used glass plates to project still and moving images. Historically, magic lanterns were commonly used to engage mass audiences for lectures and concerts, including those put on by private companies encouraging mass migration to the colonies. Arthur Meek is one of only 28 active lanternists in the world, and has been trained by the American Magic Lantern Theater (Connecticut).

Lauded musician Eva Prowse accompanies Arthur Meek on stage. With her futuristic synth score, guitar, song, and violin, she's famous for her mysterious electro-folk-pop quirks. Prowse also performs with New Zealand supergroup Fly My Pretties.

Erewhon premiered at the Christchurch Arts Festival in 2017 and is a co-commission between Edinburgh's Magnetic North and CAF. Arthur Meek spent three months as writer-in-residence with Magnetic North in 2016 while working on *Erewhon*. During the residency, Arthur spent time at Rough Mix developing initial ideas, followed by writing time at Cove Park. The residency and commission was supported by Playmarket New Zealand, Playwrights' Studio Scotland and Creative New Zealand.

Writing in the wake of Charles Darwin's *On The Origin of Species*, Samuel Butler was the first to question the possibility and implications of technology evolving consciousness. In the midst of the Facebook fallout, and the demands of always 'being on', *Erewhon* shows that we should be curious

about the potential of technology, but also wary of modern-day peddlers using flashy images to sell the promise of the future.

"This marvellous production, directed with panache, looks ahead towards the allure of contemporary technologies, and in doing so suggests that a sanitised, self-centred colonial culture of nostalgia and erasure is as evident now as it was in the 1800s."

The Pantograph Punch

Arthur Meek, playwright, said:

"Eva and I will be donating all profits from this production to the invention of time travel. I know that we will achieve this lofty goal because we discovered this press release in a collection of magic lantern slides from 1873."

Nicholas Bone, Artistic Director, Magnetic North, said:

"I'm delighted that a project that began its life in Edinburgh two years ago is having its UK premiere at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. I've really enjoyed working with Arthur as he shapes his 21st century response to a 19th century book that is still extraordinarily relevant."

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

For more information, images or to arrange interviews, please contact James Coutts on 07510 011 294 or email james@magneticnorth.org.uk

LISTINGS

An antique magic lantern projector, an iPhone 6 and a live musical score shine a new light on Samuel Butler's classic sci-fi novel. A Victorian explorer discovers a colony of refugees; time-travellers from the 21st Century escaping their dependence on its technology. This delightful neo-historical head-scratcher playfully welds future, past and present into a glittering bracelet of time. A multimedia collaboration between Edinburgh's own Magnetic North, and Kiwi playwright and newly-qualified magic lantern showman Arthur Meek. Featuring an original musical score played live by New Zealand pop powerhouse Eva Prowse. Directed by Nicholas Bone and Geoff Pinfield. Summerhall (Cairns Lecture Theatre), Summerhall Place, Edinburgh, EH9 1PL. 1-26 August (not 6, 13, 20), 13:25 (60 minutes), £5-10 (£8).

MAGNETIC NORTH

Magnetic North is an award-winning theatre company based in Edinburgh, Scotland, formed in 1999 by theatre and opera director Nicholas Bone. Magnetic North produces and tours theatre and runs a programme of artist development and support. Recent productions include *Our Fathers*, *Pass the Spoon*, *A Walk at the Edge of the World* and *Sex and God*.

ARTHUR MEEK

Arthur is an award-winning New Zealand writer for stage and screen. His two published plays, *The Trees Beneath the Lake* and *On the Upside Down of the World* were both commissioned by the Auckland Theatre Company. His work has been performed in New Zealand, Australia, the UK and the US. His 'Powerpoint' play *On the Conditions and Possibilities of Hillary Clinton Taking Me as Her Young Lover* has been performed at La Mama, New York and Summerhall, Edinburgh where it earned a 5-star review from Fest Mag "some of the best writing in the fringe"

EVA PROWSE

Eva Prowse writes and performs retro-future indie, alt, folk, and synth pop by way of her lush and

pure vocals, synthesisers and samples, violins and guitars. Her latest album, *Humid Nights*, released in 2016, is a MIDI-pop album inspired by the awkwardness of life and music software, growing up in the 80s, 90s and today, drunken fights in hot countries, small towns and big cities, bad decisions and The Spice Girls. In NZ, she is probably best known for performing with Fly My Pretties.

