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The Pigeoning

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by: **Sonia Roberts**

Pigeons, and The End of The World: A rollicking adventure full of remarkable puppetry and live music

When you enter the theater at HERE, there is an office safety manual at every seat. An easel displays a sign welcoming employees to the “Annual Safety in the Office Training Conference.” An old television is brought out and a series of hilarious 80s home-video style safety training videos (brilliantly crafted with purposeful poor cinematography and acting) play, stressing important facts such as “Corners are not your friend. We should get rid of corners.” The audience is instantly immersed in the world of Robin Frohardt’s *The Pigeoning*, a darkly comedic, character-driven story about Frank, an office worker obsessed with cleanliness, order, and following rules.

Overwhelmed by pigeons in the park (the “flying rats” of New York City) that repeatedly stress him out by causing him to drop his sandwich, obsessive-compulsive Frank becomes convinced that they are plotting against him and must take action to figure out their true intentions. Director/Creator Frohardt’s adventurous tale combines impressive puppetry and soaring live music to examine what safety and control mean when confronted by unforeseen chaos.

The Pigeoning’s puppetry is exquisite and detailed; not only is Frank stylistically crafted to match the story’s absurd humor and 1980s time period, but even the most seemingly minute elements are brought to life – flies buzzing over a trashcan, stingrays resourcefully made out of flexible pizza boxes that let them swim, Frank himself wearing a pigeon puppet on his hand in his quest to outsmart his antagonists. The skilled puppeteers (Daniel Burnam, Nick Lehane, Lille Jayne, Andy Manjuck,

and Rowan Magee) move with such agility that they vanish, and our eyes remain glued to Frohardt and Jesse “Roadkill” Wilson’s puppets, props, and set that cleverly transition throughout the play. Styrofoam coffee cups pile up on Frank’s desk, the window blinds strategically fall on his head, a miniature Dracula costume is used as a threat attempt, a pile of trash turns into a monster in a particularly inspired nightmare scene, and his safety manual binder becomes a shield from the elements of a natural disaster.

Composer Freddi Price’s score beautifully accompanies Frank’s journey and especially helps shape the play’s more heartfelt moment and, to our joy, much of it is played live. The only dialogue is the comical pre-recorded voice of the safety training instructor (Erica Livingston), perfectly timed to match Frank’s discoveries as he frantically consults the manual on his quest to uncover the truth. Heather Sparling’s lighting design is clean and effortless, with surprise effects that emphasize the story’s darker elements.

Part of HERE’s Resident Artist and Dream Music Puppetry Program, *The Pigeoning* is an absolute must-see show that is family-friendly and full of the deliciously dry humor that is reminiscent of *Wallace & Gromit* with a added layer of depth that investigates human nature’s tendency to cling to what is safe, regulated, and known.

*Photos: Richard Termine

THE PIGEONING

Created by Robin Frohardt

A HERE Resident Artist & Dream Music Puppetry Program Production

December 3-22 at HERE (145 Sixth Avenue, just below Spring St.)

Tickets available at [Here.org](https://www.here.org)