



Erin Boberg is the happening assistant curator of performing arts at PICA

Blow your mind

Take, for instance, 29-year-old musician and performer Khaela Maricich, who recently moved to Portland from Olympia, Wash. She is, in her words, "dating a girl right now"—her first. Her performance for the festival will not, however, be an ode to the new-found wonders of Sapphic love (nor to the hardships of coming out). She taps into a more universal quandary by exploring issues of identity and mental health in relation to corporate culture.

Maricich is perhaps best known in the region as the one-woman band The Blow. She says a typical Blow show is of a pop tune nature, with the youthful, unadorned Maricich singing karaoke-style to prerecorded tunes by herself and collaborators. Her breathy, conspiratorial voice has been described as "postcoital," like a lover murmuring stories in the wee hours.

For the festival, she will present both a large-scale performance as well as a Blow concert at the after-hours TBA club, Machineworks. The main stage performance, *The Touch Me Feeling*, is a multimedia presentation in which Maricich acts as a presenter for a company called Remôsch. She will lead a demonstration of Remôsch's new mental health care system for keeping on track in an ever-distracting world.

Maricich won't say if Remôsch is real or fabricated. Her stage presentation will involve a live Web conference with Remôsch "employees"—or are they actors? The demonstration includes the key component of the Remôsch system: karaoke dance routines.

That's right. Acting out your own little superstar fantasies can keep you sane, accord-

ing to Remôsch. Or something like that.

Maricich says the Remôsch philosophy is that "when people start to have mental problems, it goes along with them falling out of the rhythms of the way they usually behave."

Maricich continues: "The way that a person usually behaves is like a net—a system for making all the choices like: 'Who am I?' 'What do I do?' 'How do I talk?'"

"How do I move?" "How do I dress?"

Maricich says the net is formed depending upon the people whom one is surrounded by in childhood and throughout life. When someone starts to go crazy, the net begins to fray. Speech patterns change and become garbled.

"It's like if you have a route you walk in your life and you accidentally wander off that route," she says.

The daily karaoke song and dance is designed to "keep you in the rhythm so you don't have to wander off."

It is of note that Maricich is in residency at Wieden+Kennedy, which also houses PICA. Her studio locale gives her a bird's-eye view of corporate culture—albeit a creative and unusual corporate setting. She says *The Touch Me Feeling* "has a lot to do with studying people and how people manage to live in the world." Presumably Wieden+Kennedy employees are some of her objects of observation.

California dreamin'

Boberg says we can expect to see more work in contemporary performance that, like Maricich's, explores identity in relation to business and corporate culture.

"There has been a shift to looking at the larger systems," says the 32-year-old of the move away from queer-content-only performances. She mentions choreographer John Jasperse, whose dance company is featured in the TBA Festival. Jasperse, who is gay and lives in New York City, has created a dance titled *California* that deals neither with his sexual identity nor his hometown, per se.

Instead, Jasperse's piece reaches into the broader realm of politics in what Boberg calls "a very abstract and sophisticated way." She says *California* "is sort of about the elections in California, the dot com bust and how things can seem utopic or fantastic—like the Gold Rush, or San Francisco as a gay mecca—and then how things pop and go away."

All of this content is not necessarily immediately apparent. And one need not work to decipher a hidden meaning behind the choreography. The dance is compelling enough simply for its craft.

Boberg says, "If Jasperse didn't mention California, you would probably...just say, 'Wow, this is an amazing abstract study about people's relationship to space and the set and...to each other.'"

Help is on the way?

Portland artist David Eckard will also be exploring politics and big ideas for the TBA Festival. Just don't expect his pontifications to make sense.

Eckard's sculptural-based performance, *Podi-*

um, will take place over the course of 10 days during which Eckard will "work" eight-hour shifts. His job? To push around a wheeled contraption of his own making that he will periodically assemble into a mini podium, complete with bullhorn. Clad in a generic uniform, Eckard will then transform himself from manual laborer into personage of importance: He will climb up on the podium and orate.

Eckard says his monologue will contain familiar "speechisms" without any particular political stance or content. He says his speech will be "personal but cloaked in public mannerisms."

For example, listeners may hear him say: "My pilgrimage ends at the first step because I unable to build on your common ground."

Huh?

The familiar oration style minus the familiar oration content will invite audiences to take a look at "how they knit together their own meaning out of something," says Eckard.

He expects that seeing someone up on a

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