

REINVENTING TESLA

Harmonic Laboratory plugs into a collaborative, multi-media effort based on great 20th-century futurist

BY RACHAEL CARNES

For Harmonic Laboratory, the concept of “collaboration” keeps getting redefined.

“It’s been a topic of conversation for six years,” says the group’s inter-media, music and programming expert Jon Bellona who — along with choreographer and lighting designer Brad Garner, animator and digital artist John Park and composer and conductor Jeremy Schropp — will bring a full-length work, *Tesla: Sound, Light, Color*, to audiences across the region.

Asked about the inspiration for *Tesla*, Park recalls a dinner party where these four close friends and creative colleagues got to dreaming big.

“We’re close socially and we were bonding, and we started to imagine our next project,” Park says. “We started to ask ourselves about physics, as it relates so easily to all our art forms. And if we were to focus on physics, who, we wondered, was the most provocative figure, the biggest question mark?”

They settled on Nikola Tesla (1856-1943), an inventor, engineer, physicist and futurist whose contributions to technology might be more familiar to most of us than the man himself.

“He invented radio, fluorescent bulbs,” Bellona says.

In a time when most of the world was still lit by candles, Tesla tinkered to produce the alternating current. He pioneered radio as well as radar, X-rays and hydroelectric power.

The list of Tesla’s accomplishments is seemingly endless, yet this affable geek also had a penchant for forgetting to write down his ideas — or remembering to take them to the patent office. Throughout his lifetime, others received the majority of the credit for Tesla’s work.

Harmonic Lab has cut its teeth on multidisciplinary projects since 2011, but this adventure — which also calls upon the energies of inimitable University of Oregon physics instructor Stan Micklavzina, who will provide live science demos during the show — has tested the creators in new and unexpected ways.

“The scale is beyond anything we’ve ever done,” Schropp says.



PHOTO COURTESY HARMONIC LAB

A \$75,000 Creative Heights grant from the Oregon Community Foundation allows the artists to develop and refine their original work, while digging deeper into the design process than they’ve ever had the opportunity to do before.

“It’s taken us down layers, with communication and questions,” Garner says.

The piece’s complexity is as enigmatic as Tesla himself — involving dancers, electronics, digital projection and live music played by the Delgani String Quartet.

Tesla is technically complex, and yet — with performances in Eugene, Portland and Bend — it has to be collapsible and adaptable to different staging demands.

“With this financial support, we’re able to take creative risk,” Park says.

Schropp adds: “We want to bring this style of collaboration out of our isolated community. This is cool, groundbreaking work — it deserves to be shown.”

Tesla: Sound, Light, Color premieres Jan. 10 at the Hult Center, with performances at Portland’s Newmark Theatre Jan. 13 and Bend’s Tower Theatre Jan. 15; more information at harmoniclab.org.

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