

OPUNTIA

353

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Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on www.efanzines.com and www.fanac.org. My e-mail address is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

BEAKERHEAD 2016

photos by Dale Speirs

Beakerhead is a week-long festival in Calgary that has come out of nowhere to become the largest and most successful street festival in the city. Streets actually, as it is now spread throughout the central city. It emphasizes the fusion between art and technology. In addition to dozens of free events and art installations, there are also numerous high-price ticket goings-on in restaurants and art galleries. The festival began in 2013 but I didn't first attend until last year. Many photos from 2015 in OPUNTIA #322.

This year, I began Thursday afternoon, picking off the daytime sites along the Bow River from Inglewood and Fort Calgary, then walking west into the downtown and out the other side to Hillhurst. Lots of installation art pieces, including this 9 Avenue SE building in Inglewood at the start of my walk.



Cthulhu was here. The rear view of the building.



At right, in Fort Calgary, was Saturnian, a space whale. You could go inside and meditate to the sound of whale songs.

Heavy-metal flowers in the Fort Calgary sandbox.



Seen on the Bow River Promenade at East Village.

Every stressed-out executive should have one of these.

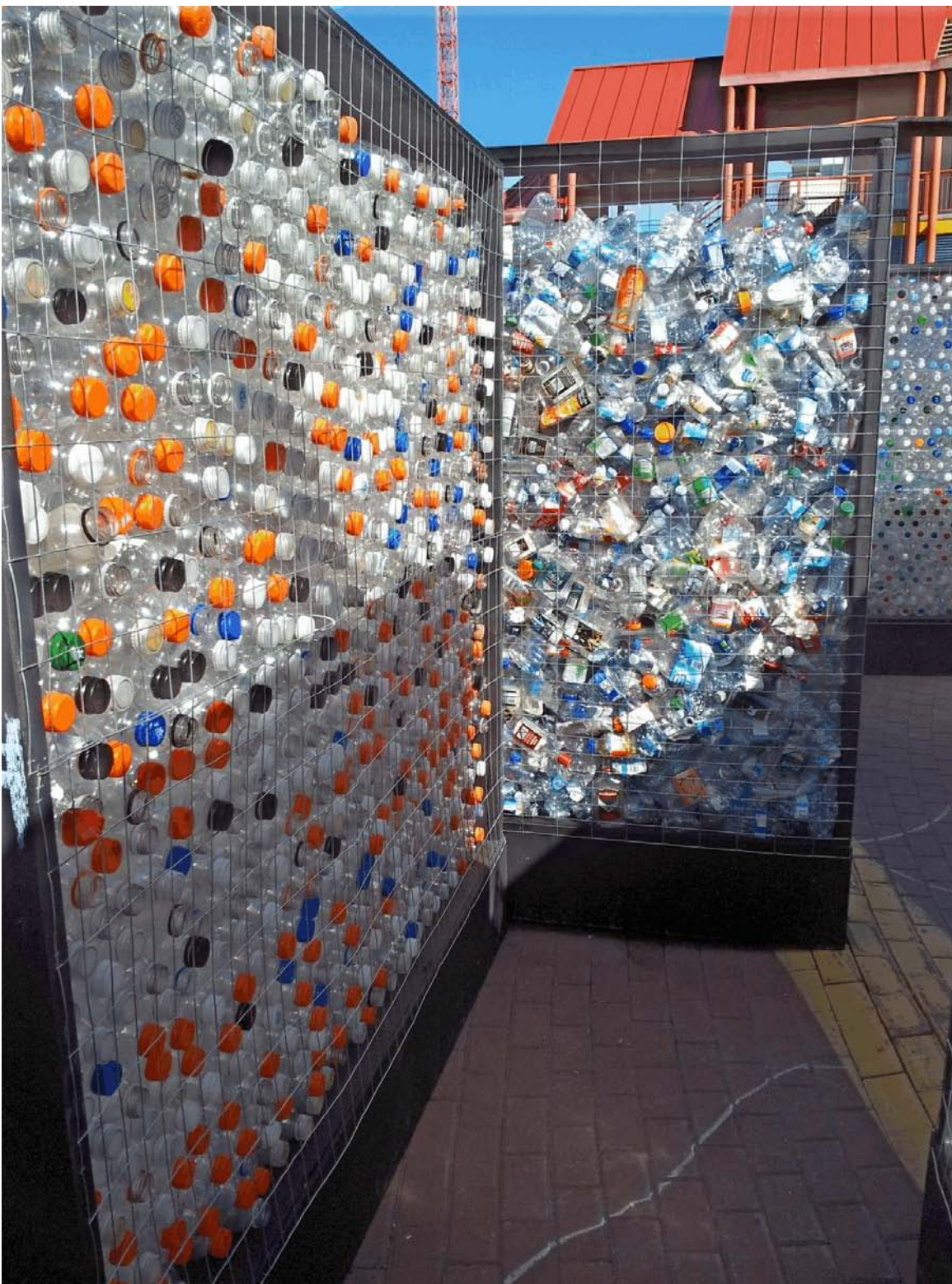




The capsule was adjacent to this walk-in drum-and-bass machine, and for good reason. The public were invited to play the machine and vibrate their intestines into a soggy mess.

Left: Notice the chalk line on the ground, to prevent any public panic if they couldn't find their way out again.

Below: Going past the downtown core and then crossing over the river to Memorial Drive NW, there was a Pegasus built from construction scaffolding.



A cute idea on Kensington Road NW, a couple of blocks from Pegasus. As pedestrians approached this apparent pile of garbage, a motion detector triggered it and it suddenly rose straight up and opened its eyes. The kids loved it.



Doubling back to Stephen Avenue Mall in the downtown core, I saw this shark car.



Left: And for Junior Space Cadets ...

Below left: A little something for steampunks.

Directly below: There are always engineering students about with fighting robots.



Corporate executives have finally found a good use for interns.



Friday evening just before sunset, I started my tour on 4 Street SW in the Mission district. Hanging from a skyscraper was a giant barometer, adjusted by an actor on the swing stage dressed as a mouse. Pedestrians down below answered questions which were then used to adjust the gauge. It made no sense, but then again, these were Arts students.



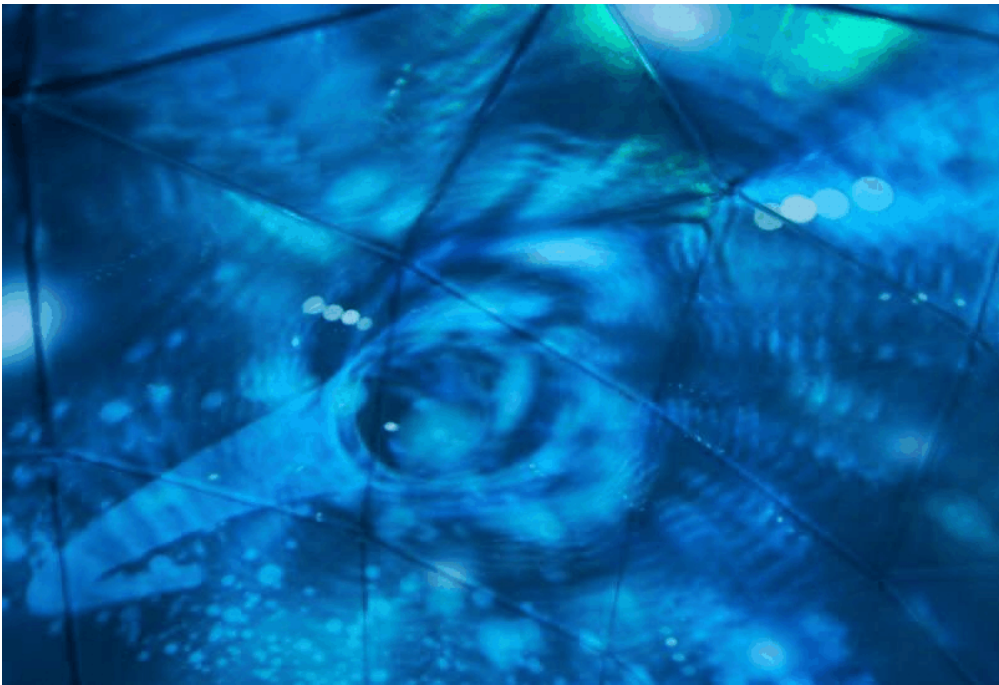
Further north on 4 Street SW is Central Memorial Park, home of the popular illuminated bunnies during Beakerhead. A great favourite with families.



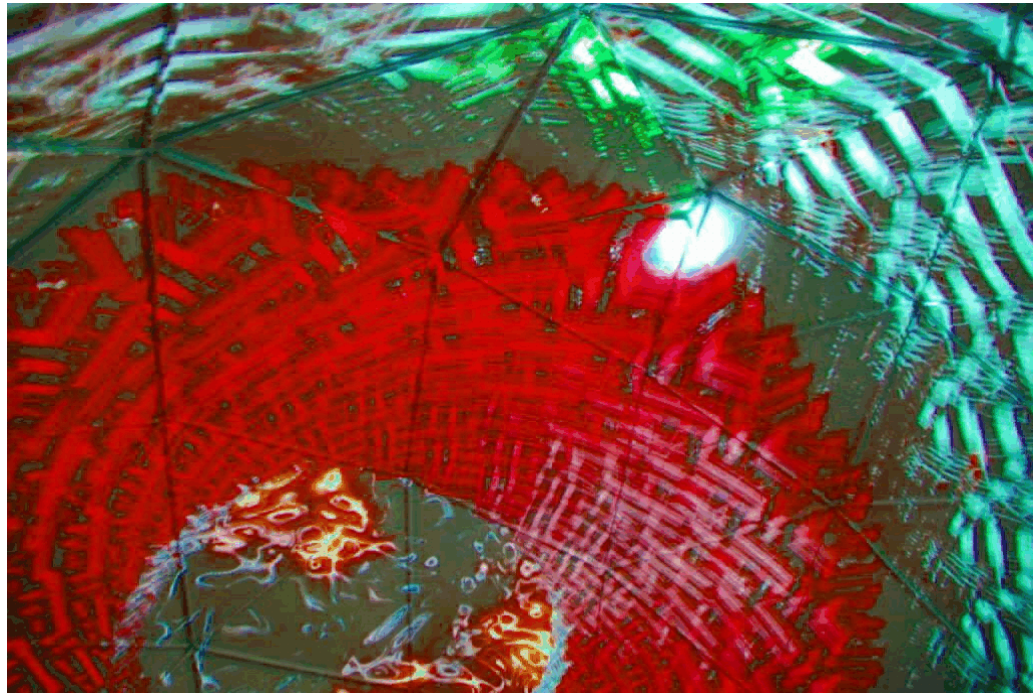
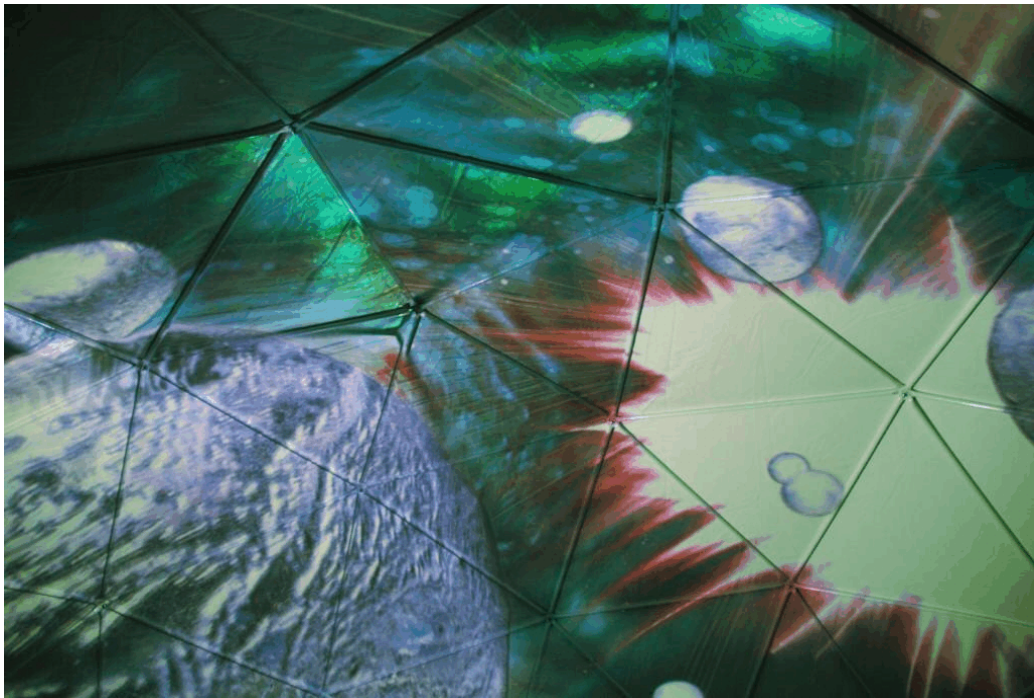
There were inflatable carrots with which the kids could attempt to feed the bunnies.



Doubling back and then wending my way west on 17 Avenue SW in the Beltline, I came to Tomkins Park, which had a light show inside a portable planetarium tent.



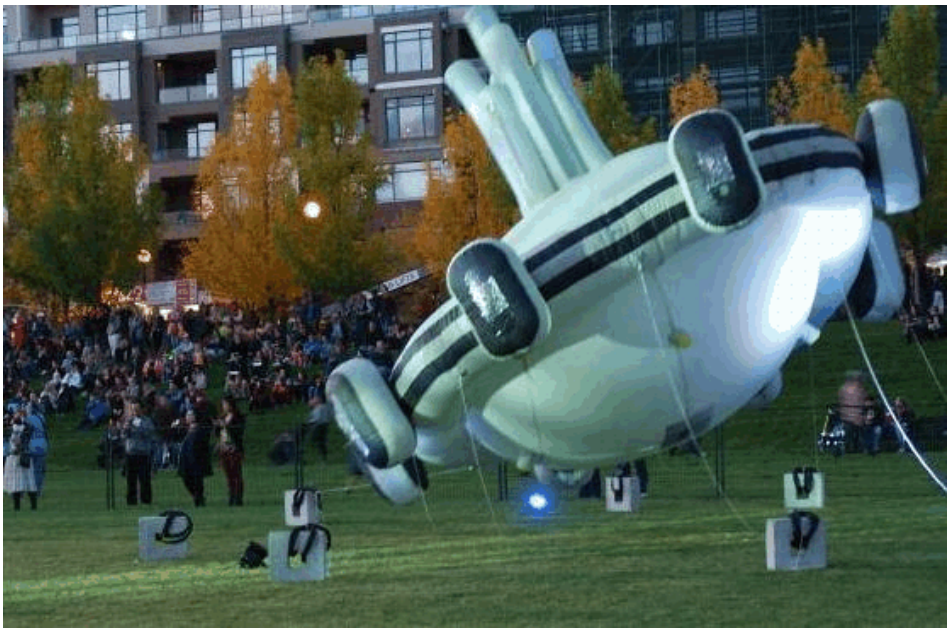
The usual sort of thing: wormholes, asteroids, and supernovas.



Saturday night was the second-biggest party in Calgary after the Stampede rodeo. Beakernight moved this year to the Bridgeland district, on the north bank of the Bow River directly across from Fort Calgary. About 100,000 people attended. Even on a quiet Sunday morning, parking is scarce to non-existent in Bridgeland, so we took the bus or train. I was on the LRT en route to Bridgeland station when I saw this young lad in costume entertaining the passengers. With his mother's permission, I took this photo.



I arrived just before sunset, so you will notice the change in lighting of these photos. On walking into the Beakernight area, which covered about ten blocks, I saw this DJ setting up. I came back later after dark, but couldn't get a decent shot of the light SFX, so you'll have to take my word for it that it was a good show.



Looking southwest across Beakernight, with the downtown core on the far side of the river.



A free hoist up on a megacrane. The lineup was two blocks long all night.





These are the same metal flowers shown on page 3, moved across the river from Fort Calgary to Bridgeland for Beakernight.

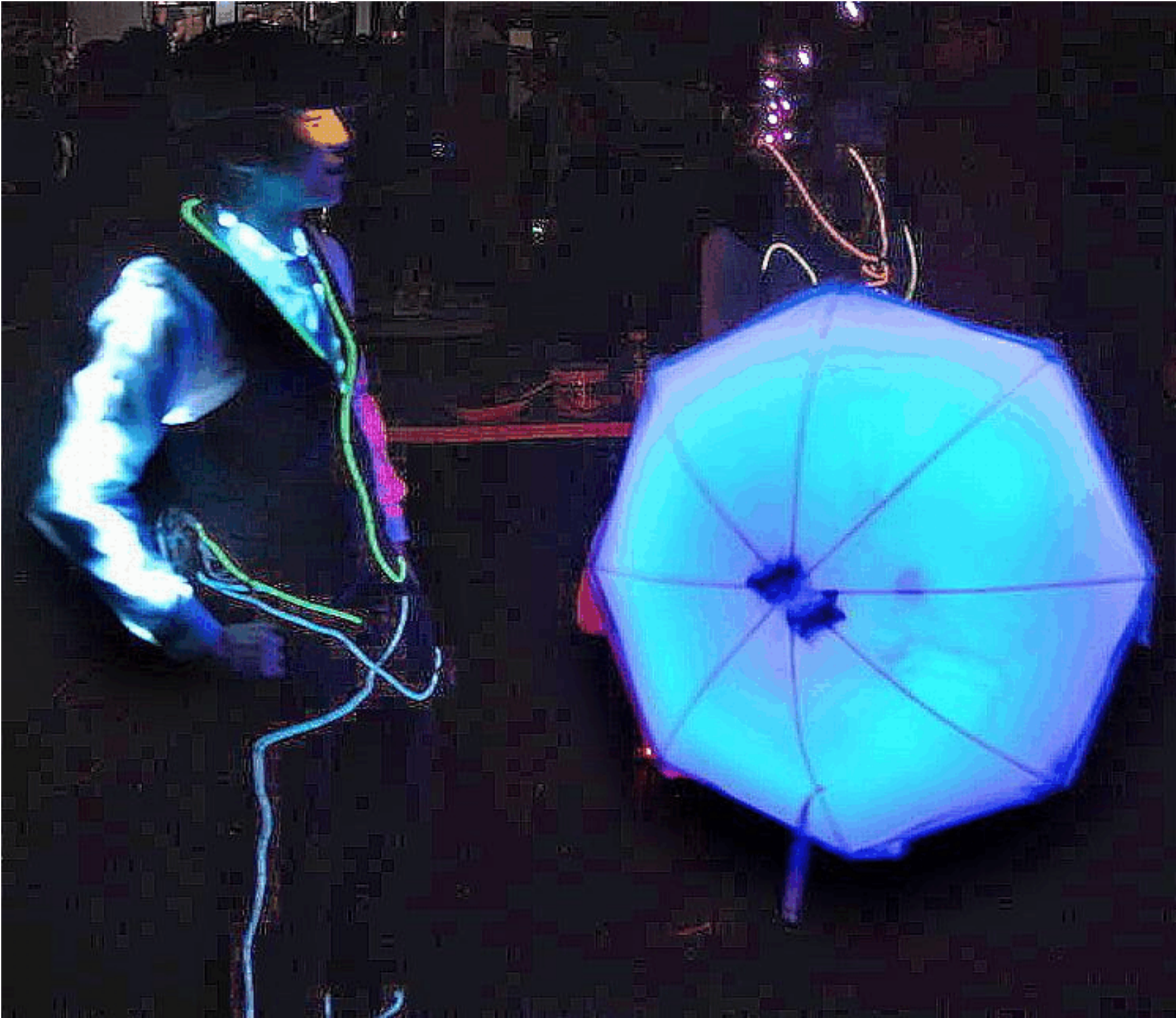


You can't really tell but these are steampunks lit up in more ways than one.

Very difficult to photograph moving objects in the dark.

I tried a flash but it just blanked out the lights.

And so to home and bed.



RADIO FICTION: PART 6

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 5 appeared in OPUNTIA's #301, 302, 310, 319, and 330.]

Television was an integral part of the lives of the Baby Boomer generation, just as the Millennials grew up with computers and smartphones. So it was that the generation of the 1930s and 1940s grew up with broadcast radio. Old-time radio (OTR), as that era is now referred to, has made a comeback because thousands of free mp3s of OTR shows are now available from www.archive.org.

Many people listen to them while commuting or traveling since the vast majority of OTR shows were a half-hour long, just right for the length of a bus ride. You can find comedy, mystery, romance, western, science fiction, and general fiction shows in endless numbers. Search by keyword or just make random picks. There is a huge amount of material that certainly beats listening to the monotonous drone of someone reading out loud an audio book.

Laugh And The World Laughs At You.

MY FAVORITE HUSBAND was an OTR series that ran from 1948 to 1951 and starred Lucille Ball as Liz Cooper. The episodes were written by Bob Carroll Jr and Madelyn Pugh. In the first season, the characters' surname was Cugat because the series was based on the novel MR AND MRS CUGAT, by Isabel Scott Rorick. The name was changed after a few episodes when network executives decided it was too ethnic. The show was a predecessor of I LOVE LUCY and was easily converted to television. Liz's husband George was a Vice President at a bank. His boss Rudolph Atterbury, played by Gale Gordon, was a second father to them, albeit one with an explosive temper. He later became Mr Mooney on Lucy's television show. Rudolph's wife Iris was more like an older sister to Liz. They called each other by their first names, whereas George always said "Mr Atterbury", even in social situations at home.

"The Quiz Show" was an early episode from 1948 when Liz and George were still Cugats. It opens with their dishwasher breaking down but George refusing to buy a new one for the reason that their maid Katie could just as easily wash dishes by hand. Liz has a friend named Cory who frequently appears on radio quiz shows, and decides to try and get on one that awards prizes such as dishwashers. Says Liz, *"I've heard some of those shows won by morons, and I'm as smart as they are."*

Cory obliges and books Liz and George on HIS AND HERS, a husband-and-wife quiz programme. George doesn't want to appear on it because he thinks it undignified for a banker, but his boss considers it great publicity for the bank. Liz is worried she won't be able to handle the questions, so Cory smooth-talks the show's secretary into giving him the answers.

This was in the era when radio was desperately trying to retain listeners as television began reaching a mass market audience. One method was game shows that gave away big prizes. The corruption of such shows was a public joke, so the fact that Cory got the answers for Liz would have been accepted by the listening audience as standard practice. Unfortunately for her, the show's producer decided to change the questions at the last minute, and she makes a perfect mess of it. In the final all-or-none round, she inadvertently stumbles on the correct answer and gets her dishwasher.

Radio, movies, and television of the 1940s to 1960s assumed as a matter of course that the husband was the master of the house. The wife had to beg for money for a new dress, and sitcoms often used scripts where she was trying to go around her husband for money. George, despite being a banker, was too cheap to buy a new dishwasher, but that was accepted as his right and never doubted. In the series, Liz was introduced to strangers as Mrs George Cooper (or Cugat), which was the standard practice in North America until the 1960s.

Moving on to another radio fiction piece from MY FAVORITE HUSBAND, the episode "Liz's Radio Script" aired in 1950. Liz dragoons George into going to a dinner at the Atterburys to meet Margaret Baldwin, a famous writer. She turns out to be a college classmate of George's. She has kept her good looks well enough to make Liz jealous.

It turns out that Baldwin is in town to judge a script-writing contest. Liz enters the contest to spite George. She uses the pen name Elizabeth Shakespeare so that Baldwin won't know she wrote it. It didn't matter anyway, since there were only two other entries. All three will be aired and the winner selected from them.

The Coopers, supported by the Atterburys, arrive at the radio station to put on Liz's play. Unfortunately she forgot the script at home, and there isn't time to drive back, get it, and make carbon copies for the actors. She borrows a typewriter, feeds in paper and carbons, and rewrites the script from memory at top speed.

George and the Atterburys are the other performers, but because Liz typed the replacement script so fast, it is loaded with hilarious typographical errors, which the performers are reading cold. “*I got another liver*” (instead of lover) is one example. Rudolph Atterbury narrates the play in the style of THE WHISTLER, plagued by out-of-order sound effects. The script suddenly stops because Liz didn’t have time to type up the ending, so Rudolph does Hamlet’s soliloquy to fill the time. (The greatest sin in radio is dead air.)

The second half of the episode is hilarious as the characters stumble through Liz’s script. As comedian Jonathan Winters once remarked, “*It may not be any good, but it’ll be live!*”

One Life To Live.

John Cheever’s story “The Enormous Radio”, was first published in the 1947-05-17 issue of THE NEW YORKER, and later made into a 1956 episode of the CBS RADIO MYSTERY WORKSHOP. It is set in the days when a radio came in a large custom-finished cabinet that sat in the living room, and people gathered around it and listened to their favourite shows. The story concerns a young couple, Jim and Irene, with two children, living in a 12th-floor apartment building in Manhattan.

Their old radio breaks down beyond economical repair, so Jim buys a new one. Irene, being a stay-at-home mother, as women were in those days, turns the dial and soon realizes that she is not just finding radio shows but also eavesdropping on her neighbours. The radio can pick up conversations in the other apartments.

Irene becomes drawn into their lives as if she was listening to soap operas, but there are no commercials and what she is hearing is real. That also drags her down into mental depression and marital discord. She obsesses over what her neighbours are doing, and her relations with Jim are affected. Jim finally gets the radio repaired and she is trapped in her own family life.

OTR is dead today but countless people live their lives submerged in the world of television shows and movies, or trashy celebrities who are famous for being famous but haven’t actually done anything useful. Human nature doesn’t change; we all want to escape the mundane daily life.

One Life To Murder.

“Death On The Air” by Ngaio Marsh (1934 December, GRAND MAGAZINE) opens on Christmas morning in a manor house. A maid discovers the body of her master, Septimus Tonks, slumped beside his radio set. There are burn marks on his right hand, the thumb and two fingers, so electrocution is suspected. Yet the butler had turned off the radio after the body was discovered and had not been electrocuted.

CID are summoned from Scotland Yard. An examination of the radio reveals two small holes drilled into the cabinet, one behind the volume knob and the other behind the tuning knob. The plastic knobs had been replaced with metal knobs, then put back by the murderer after the crime. The metal knobs were then hidden in the room but not very well, for the police soon found them.

After that, the modus operandi became obvious. The murderer had run two wires from an electrical outlet behind the radio into the knobs. The victim touched the knobs to start up the radio and zzzzpt! The murderer then restored the radio knobs and had hoped to pass off the death as a heart attack or stroke, had it not been for the burn marks on the fingers.

Tonks was one of those men about whom the real mystery is why he wasn’t bumped off years ago by some public-minded citizen. He was abusive to his grown children, who were financially dependent on him and despised their father. He was alcoholic and a mean drunk. The police interrogate all the suspects, both family and staff, and throw suspicion around like road salt.

In the denouement, the murderer is identified as an outsider supposedly above suspicion, the family doctor, who had attended the body. Unfortunately this was done on the last page of the story, when the doctor confessed, the cause being his adulterous affair with Tonks’s wife. He carried out the elaborate murder and then committed suicide with a poison capsule. A deus ex machina ending, and a complete cheat.

CALLING ALL CARS was on the air from 1933 to 1939 and was one of the earliest police procedurals based on true crimes. The 1937 episode “The Phantom Radio”, written by William N. Robson, began with the murder of a man as he entered his house. The culprit escaped and the hunt was on. When the police interviewed the daughter and son-in-law of the victim, they saw her turn off the radio in the house. A day later, the penny dropped and the detective

went back for further investigation. If the murder happened as the victim came home, then why was the radio playing? The son-in-law was equally puzzled because his wife had told him the radio wasn't working, yet it suddenly was.

The police take fingerprints off the radio, some of which were from a known felon who had no business being there. He is eventually tracked down and arrested. Despite being built up as a tough hombre, he collapses after about thirty seconds of interrogation and confesses to the murder while robbing the house.

The real mystery was the radio. The murderer explained that when burgling a house, he liked to turn the radio on so the neighbours would think the occupants were at home. He used to be a radio technician so he fixed it himself. It must have been nothing more than a loose wire because it would be unbelievable that a burglar would carry spare vacuum tubes with him when on a job. Since the story was based on a true case, it proves again that truth can be stranger than fiction.

“A Murderous Revision” was a 1951 episode of the OTR mystery series *SUSPENSE*, written by S. Lee Pogostin. It was later re-made as a 1957 episode in the same series as “Murder On Mike”. It is about Chris, a radio scriptwriter for a mystery show who has just been told by his producer Ken that his contract won't be renewed. The two have been constantly feuding for two years over story changes and editing, and Chris is angry to the point of mental instability.

Chris sets up a hidden recording system in his office, with which to record a final show, live and improv, which will culminate in the shooting death of Ken. He telephones Lois, daughter of Ken, who is an aspiring scriptwriter having trouble selling to radio. He lures her into his office on the pretext of helping her plot a new script. The storyline he recites to her is what he plans to do to her father, but with different names and circumstances so as not to alarm her. He then calls her father into the office, produces a loaded handgun, and announces his intentions. There is a struggle for the gun. It goes off, and after a moment of suspense we learn that Chris was the one who got the fatal bullet. The mp3 is very crisp and clear, and the acting moves right along.

This Just In.

“Ghost Hunt” is a 1949 episode of *SUSPENSE* written by Herbert Russell Wakefield. It is about Smiley Smith, a radio show host who agrees to spend a

night in a haunted house atop a cliff overlooking the ocean. Four people have died in the past decade who jumped off the cliff for no apparent reason. He takes along with him a psychical phenomenon investigator named Dr Reed, and carries a wire recorder to get it all down for his listeners the next day. In an essential piece of foreshadowing, Reed tells Smith that he was gassed in the previous war and has occasional lung trouble.

Smith stays on the ground floor while Reed explores upstairs, and babbles constantly into the wire recorder, if only because radio has trained him that the worst sin possible is dead air (pardon the pun). Smith works himself into a frenzy just imagining what might be. He hears Reed fall and rushes upstairs to find the man on the floor with blood on his face. Smith loses it completely, imagines the four suicides are with him as ghosts, drops the wire recorder, and rushes outside to get away, jumping off the cliff to become #5.

The next morning, Reed is found barely alive by visitors and rushed to hospital. He explains that he had a lung hemorrhage as a result of his war injuries and passed out. He knows nothing about what happened to Smith, so the wire recorder is played back to get the story. This was one show that wouldn't go out on the air.

The episode is quite well done except for the uneven sound levels, which are not the fault of nth-generation copying but in the original recording. Some actors and sound effects are faint, then suddenly a voice or sound effect blasts out at full volume. The acting and script were good though, making it plausible how Smith worked himself up into an insane state of mind purely because of fear. As a radio show host, it is natural for him to babble incessantly, and his nervousness at being in a haunted house sped up the flow of inane chatter.

What Hath Tesla Wrought.

Not really radio fiction but I'll add it in here as the next closest thing. “The Positive Negative Man”, a 1967 episode of *THE AVENGERS* (the British television series, not the American superheroes in coloured spandex) written by Tony Williamson. Someone is going about killing scientists and technicians who had been involved in a failed attempt at broadcast power called Project 19. All the files have been destroyed, so the Ministry sets John Steed and Emma Peel onto the case.

The killer is a man wearing insulated clothing and boots who touches victims and electrocutes them. His gang have carried on successfully with the project. They developed a dashboard-mounted miniature satellite dish that sends out a beam of radio waves that short-circuits motor vehicle wiring, thereby disabling them, and, at sufficient power and close range, can kill a human.

All sorts of derring-do, with Mrs Peel being captured, strapped to an insulated table, and wrapped in tinfoil charged with enough electricity to kill Steed when he comes to rescue her. He has, however, remembered his shop class lessons about electricity and put on a pair of rubber galoshes to prevent grounding. Just after rescuing Peel, the bad guys return to find out why their elaborate plan to kill her didn't work, there is the usual punch-up, and all ends well for Steed, Peel, the Ministry, God, Queen, and Country.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to opuntia57@hotmail.com]

FROM: Milt Stevens
Simi Valley, California

2016-09-11

OPUNTIA #346: The blonde cosplayer you photographed is quite attractive. I learned something about the cosplayers while I was at MidAmericon. There was a posted flyer with the heading "Cosplay is not Consent". I had seen that phrase before and thought it meant that costumes were not an invitation to sexual advance. That would go without saying. However, that didn't seem to be what they meant. Some of the cosplayers seem to feel you don't have the right to photograph them without paying. In a public place, I think you do have the right to photograph them if you want to push the matter. I don't think I want to encourage that sort of commercialism at SF cons.

["Cosplay is not consent" is publicized whenever the comic and anime cons roll into Calgary, but only in terms of sexual harassment. In Canada, the law is very clear that anyone in a public place such as a sidewalk, ballroom, or hotel

corridor can be photographed. I usually ask permission, mainly because I can then get a posed photograph, rather than a blurred snapshot. And, of course, any kind of parade or procession can be photographed. I would never pay money for what would only be an incidental photo in my zine.]

OPUNTIA #350: [Re: fictional murder of WWC Chairman] Speaking of planning fictional murders at cons, we did something like that at LA Con II in 1984. Bill Warren and Alan Rothstein had written an amateur mystery titled "Fandom Is A Way Of Death". All the events which were depicted were supposed to happen at that Worldcon. I was one of the victims. It's a little creepy to know two guys are currently planning your demise.

Copies of the mystery were sold without the final page which would reveal all. The final page would be handed out at a panel during the con where all the suspects and victims would be gathered together. Aside from myself, other victims included Craig Miller (the other co-chair), Bruce Pelz, and Bob Silverberg. We were all gathered in the room. Bill Warren began, "The killer is ..." and the lights went out. That wasn't part of the original plan, but everybody agreed it was a brilliant piece of improvisation.

Of course the killer was someone none of us suspected. I hate the way mystery writers keep getting away with that one. One of the murders is a ringer that doesn't have anything to do with the other three. The motive for the other three is something that would only work in fandom.