

Art Beat

Austin's Rude Mechs create art for a roomful of people with 'Not Every Mountain'

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Bret Brookshire

The Rude Mechanicals will perform *Not Every Mountain* this weekend at the B. Iden Payne Theatre as part of Fusebox Festival and presented with Texas Performing Arts.

Weaving through a sea of props, photographs and costumes, the Rude Mechanicals settle in at their rehearsal space in East Austin to discuss their upcoming show, *Not Every Mountain*.

The piece, which the theater group will perform at this year's Fusebox Festival, combines the ethereal with ... cardboard.

<https://www.kut.org/life-arts/2026-04-16/austin-tx-rude-mechanicals-not-every-mountain-fusebox-festival>

“These cardboard shapes, they push out from underneath the audience, and they collide like tectonic plates,” says Thomas Graves, a performer and the set designer for *Not Every Mountain*. “And little mountains start to rise up.”

The performance is done in the round, with the audience on the sides of the stage. “Builders” move the 3D shapes into a mountain while a reader recites a script written by Kirk Lynn. At one end of the stage, composer Peter Stopschinski performs the live score, carefully timing the haunting sounds — Schumann’s *Resonances* or the Earth’s heartbeat — to the reactions of the audience.

This is the third time the Rude Mechanicals have reprised, edited and re-worked *Not Every Mountain*. And the audiences at each of the group’s four Fusebox performances this weekend will experience a different iteration.

'Lack of ego'

Since 1996, the Rude Mechanicals, or Rude Mechs as they call themselves, have been an award-winning model for “genre averse” theater. They produce their work collaboratively, and decision-making is done by consensus. There are at least six COPADs, or co-producing artistic directors — a rare occurrence in the art world.

“We talk sometimes about feeling like a cycling team, that different people can take the lead at different times, and different people can sort of draft off of other people's energy,” Lynn says.

One of the Rude Mechs’ newest COPADs is Alexandra Bassiakou Shaw, an assistant professor in the Department of Theater and Dance at UT Austin.

“I was astounded by the lack of ego amongst the Rude Mechanicals. After a performance, all the COPADs would come down to the audience and say, like, how do we fix it? What does it need? What do you hate?” she says. “It was such a collaborative experience with the audience as well.”

The Rude Mechs have been steadily producing, teaching and workshopping new works — such as *Stop Hitting Yourself*, *The Cold Record*, *Requiem for (Nikola) Tesla*, and *Method Gun* — at venues and festivals around the world. They have been lauded for their work as an ensemble and won numerous awards. Perhaps their most distinctive contribution to Austin has been the company’s residency in UT’s Department of Theater and Dance, where multiple Rude Mechs are faculty members.

Some fans call the dozens of plays they’ve produced “experimental,” with an esoteric quality that may be hard to understand.



“I think the term experimental theater scares people off,” says Shawn Sides, one of the COPADs and the director of *Not Every Mountain*. “But really, it's just about getting in a room and experimenting.”

Audience feedback

The Rude Mechs have committed themselves to making original, challenging work — art for a roomful of people.

The stage manager for *Not Every Mountain*, Madge Darlington, says it's important for people to get into a room together “breathing the same air and hearing the same things, and experiencing the same thing.”

Lynn says the group is interested in how the audience feels when they come together.

“What resonates with them in terms of the relationship of the mountain to their own life, to creation and destruction in their own life. What feelings did they have?” he says. “And there's also some really basic things like, which parts did you like? Which parts were boring?”

He says every once in a while they'll get an email after a show saying the performance was awful. The group always responds with an apology and offers a refund.

“And almost without exception,” he says, “they're like, ‘Oh no, no, no, no. I like coming to your shows. And I like that I get to share these opinions with you. Like, I can't wait to see the next iteration.’”

Rude Mechs: *Not Every Mountain* runs Friday, April 17, through Sunday, April 19, at B. Iden Payne Theatre. Get tickets through Texas Performing Arts [here](#).

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