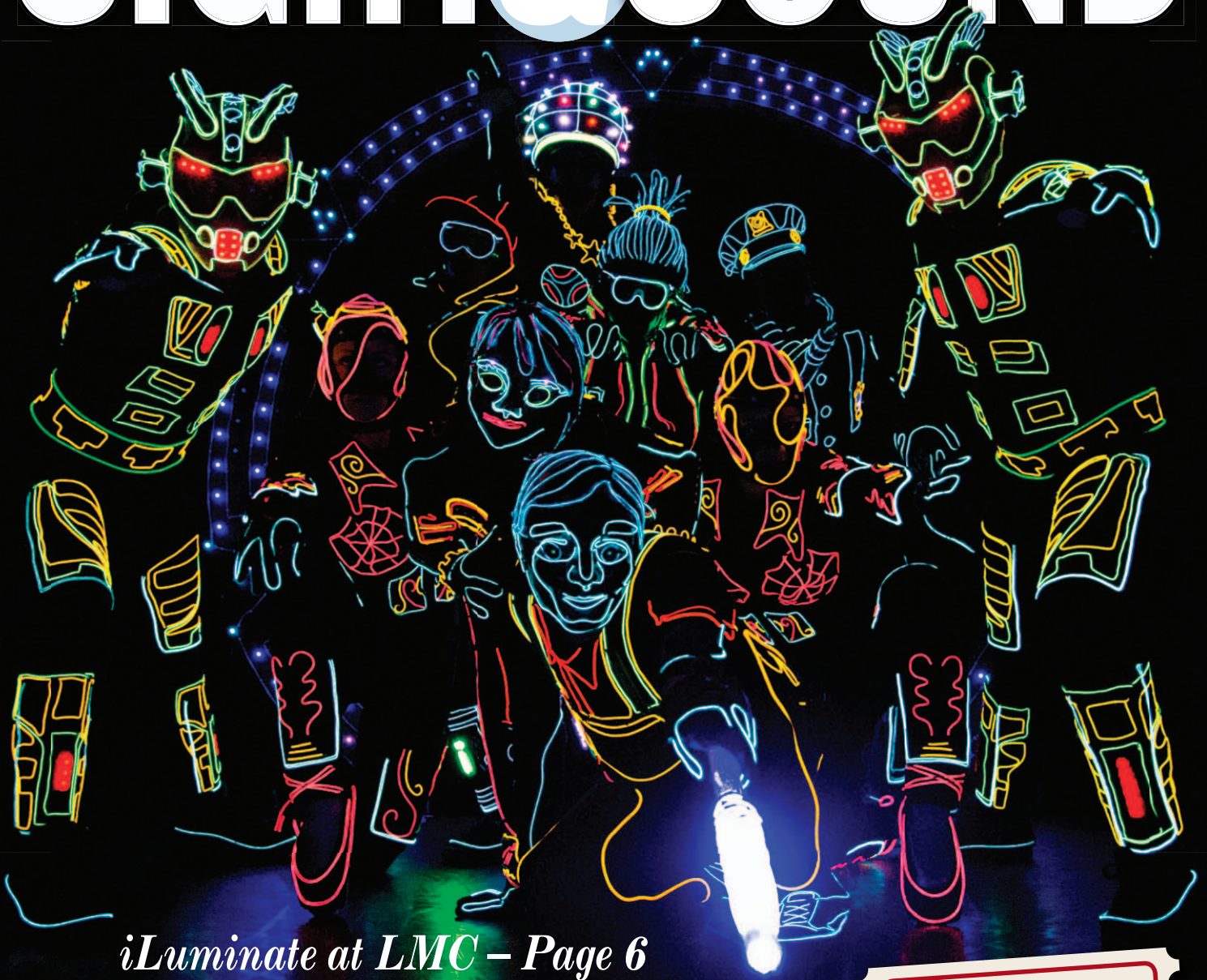


SIGHT & SOUND



iLuminate at LMC – Page 6

Lit up when the light

iLuminate combines dancing and technology for glow.

By JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO
Sight & Sound Editor

BENTON HARBOR — Miral Kotb's light-bulb moment happened at the 2009 Apple developers conference.

The software engineer with a penchant for dance was listening to a talk about changes in wireless technology when she had an idea that would merge her passions for technology and movement.

"They were talking about how Wi-Fi was getting smaller and smaller, and you could basically put chips anywhere, like kids' toys," Kotb says. "And that's when I thought, 'What if you could connect to dancers on stage?' I just thought dance and technology could be this great fusion of ideas. Then I came up with this idea that the dancers could wear light suits that I could control wirelessly, and it developed into a more robust system very quickly."

The result is iLuminate, the glow-in-the-dark hip-hop adventure, which makes a tour stop Saturday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

Conceived, produced and directed by Kotb, the show employs about a dozen actor-dancers encased in black suits wired with digitally controlled lights.

Surrounded by total darkness, the outlines of their bodies and faces, as well as objects on stage, appear to have been sculpted from glow sticks.

Moving to a score by Christopher Tignor and Justin Keitt, the show combines elements of hip-hop, jazz and classical dance styles, but it's the technology that takes it to another level.

When some lights are switched off, dancers being carried appear to float and fly; robots playfully toss each other's heads; and as a large snake appears to swallow a character, she actually disappears.

"The lighting cues and the dancing must be in perfect synchronicity or the show just doesn't even work," says Kotb, who also



KOTB

IF YOU GO

What: "Dare to be Different," a presentation by iLuminate creator Miral Kotb

When: 2 p.m. Saturday

Where: Hanson Theatre, Lake Michigan College Mendel Center, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

How much: Free, but this is a ticketed event

Contact: 927-1221
or lmcmainstage.org

What: iLuminate

When: 8 p.m. Saturday

Where: Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

How much: \$26-\$45

Contact: 927-1221
or lmcmainstage.org

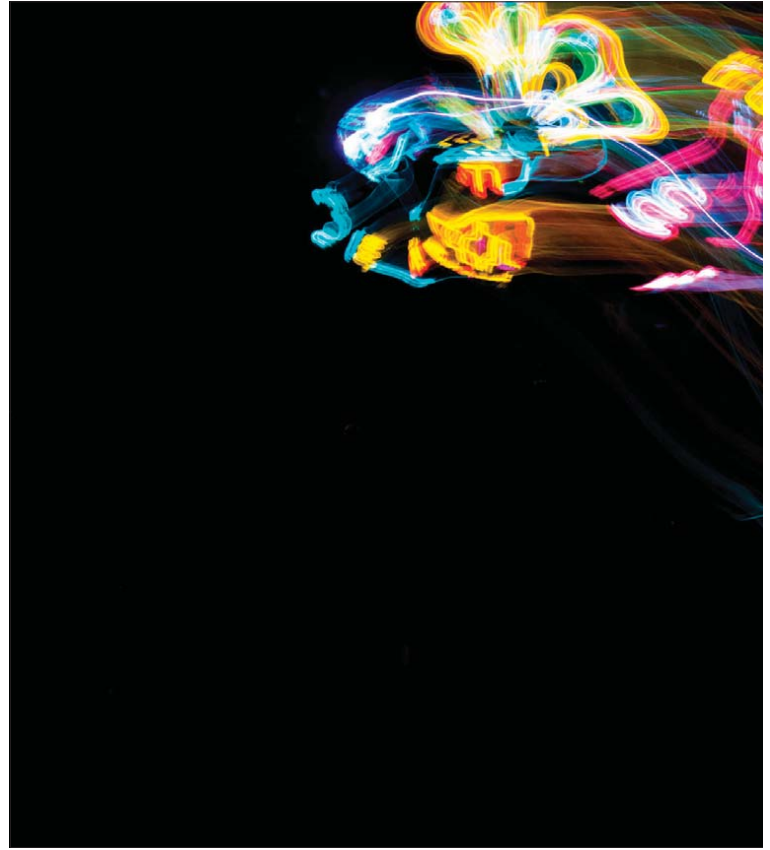
Artist info: iluminate.com

will give a free talk Saturday at LMC prior to the performance. "It really is a marriage of dance and technology to see how technicians and lighting designers and wardrobe team and software developers work with the dancers, choreographers and creative directors."

Kotb, who grew up in the Houston suburb of Clear Lake, Texas, started dancing when she was 5 years old. When her parents noticed she also had a curiosity for technology they put her in a computer programming class.

"I immediately started writing my own games using Basic," Kotb says. "I loved dance and I loved technology, but I always kept it separate."

While studying dance at Barnard College, Kotb received a bachelor's degree in computer science from Columbia University. After graduation, she was hired by Bloomberg L.P. as a senior software engineer, where she developed mobile apps for



ABOVE, RIGHT AND ON THE COVER: On Saturday, Creator/Producer/Director Miral Kotb brings her *iLuminate* to the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

six years before that Apple conference and starting iLuminate.

"I learned quite a bit at Bloomberg and met many talented coders," Kotb says. "A lot of what I learned, I was able to apply to the technology that drives the iLuminate system. After a lot of experimentation, this is what I came up with."

Her iLuminate Productions had just been formed when TV producers from

"America's Got Talent" came calling for the 2011 season. iLuminate went all the way to the finals, finishing third overall.

"That was really what put us on the map," Kotb says. "It was so stressful, but so exciting. The first time we performed, the crowd was so loud and the judges were very genuine in their comments, which I really appreciated. They really meant what they said, and they had really good feedback for

ots go out

in-the-dark, hip-hop show



Photos provided / iLuminate

ow-in-the-dark hip-hop adventure iLuminate to the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage

us. It really pushed us to always be different and always try something new. I was so grateful that people appreciated that it was about technology as much as dance.”

After shows at Six Flags and an Off-Broadway run, the company is now on a global tour that will take the show across the U.S., Europe, South America and Asia, although Kotb no longer dances in the company.

“Last year, I was in the show, but I retired my light suit,” she says, laughing. “We have younger, more energetic and fantastic dancers. I’m going to be doing other things, and my background in dance will always help create shows, but now I like to dance for fun. I hope that never goes away. When I’m 80, I hope I’m still dancing.”

Kotb and her team are constantly looking for ways to improve the show.

“We’re always pushing the technology, the illusions and the dancing,” she says. “The newest part is that we’ve partnered with Pixar to add some animation to the show. You’ll see some animated vignettes that help drive the story.”

That story, told through dance and technology with no dialogue, centers on a boy and his magic paint brush.

“He’s kind of a misunderstood artist and not really accepted by people,” Kotb says. “But he has a really good friend who tries to get him out of his shell, and when he does he shows people what he’s really ca-

pable of with these incredible creatures and robots and fairies.”

Trouble arises when a jealous bully steals the paint brush and turns the beautiful creations into monsters, and it’s up to the boy to set things right.

“So it turns into this good vs. evil type of story all told in this world people have never seen,” Kotb says. “It’s a simple story, but it’s fun. At the end of the day, we just want people to enjoy themselves, smile and be mesmerized.”

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