

# MOTO MANIA

## Earsplitting

By Rick Romancito

It's like a 1950s science fiction movie. Strange mechanical creatures rising from the mist, a metallic earsplitting cacophony, roaring flames, blue-white sparks, clanking steel and aluminum claws grasping the air — you stand frozen with an odd combination of fear and wonder.

Well, that's exactly what organizers want you to think when the "Motoman Project" lands Friday (March 21), 7-8 p.m., at the Taos Charter School Arroyo Seco Campus (aka the old Seco elementary school).

Warren Kelly, who teaches gifted and talented students at the Charter School (and who briefly worked with founders), is responsible for bringing the performance art group to Taos. Conceived by Joe Riche, Zach Smith and Eric Dewine, the project is described as a "machine-robot performance-based experiment dedicated to the expansion of creativity through the exploration of human imagination."

In other words, it makes a lot of noise, fire and looks really cool.

It's a collaboration of work by machine artists, kinetic sculptors and audio-video technicians, the combined talents of which create performances of "technical intrigue."

According to its Web site ([www.motomanproject.org](http://www.motomanproject.org)), "The Motoman Project" combines civilian technology and industrial salvage "as elements to function within our experiments. Excessively engineered mechanical creations such as remote

tele-operated machines, ear splitting sounds and experimental audio."

"I really don't think Taos has seen anything like this," Kelly said.

The teacher went on to address the bizarre nature of how audiences are supposed to react to the show. "They want you to feel edgy, and feel alive through these somewhat threatening pieces of technology," he said, "and I think all of us could agree that technology is somewhat threatening. And yet, we're so used to it and we often accept it to the point where we don't realize there's the 'Brave New World' and the '1984' aspect to technology, as well as the good aspects."

The reason Kelly brought the project to Seco is simple. He wants to get kids excited about science and technology, along with making them think about their implications. "If you were an eighth grader or seventh grader and you were interested in robotics and technology, computers, then this would be the culmination of all your middle school dreams," Kelly said. "I mean, these guys have the robots, but also they have the performance and showmanship of something that is a lot like everyday life. It's very frenetic, it's kind of almost chaotic and it has all the things, I think, a middle schooler would appreciate."

Asked if there an underlying artistic or philosophic theme to the project or if it's just a bunch of guys having fun with crazy-looking machines, Riche replied via e-mail:

"It's probably a little bit of both,"

he said. "We definitely have a blast building, testing, traveling and performing with the machines. We would not continue the project if we did not. At the same time keep in mind that this is a 'project,' something that will grow and evolve the more we experiment with new technologies and equipment. Right now it may seem that we are 'a bunch of guys having fun with crazy-looking machines' and we are aware of this but we are working to bring this type of art to a higher conceptual caliber. We have artistic and philosophic themes that the performances are based on but, at this time, the overall success of the performance is more based on getting the machines to function properly than conveying themes to the audience."

Riche said each machine has an average of more 100 hours fabrication time between three to five people. "Design time, who knows?" he said. "While we use surplus and salvaged parts as much as possible, some things need to be bought and those things are usually very expensive."

He said the coolest things for kids to see will be stuff like pulse jet engines and robots with flamethrowers. "We hope that they walk away from this performance with the idea of how amazing art can be," Riche said. "It does not have to be restricted to stone, bronze or paint. It can use the materials and concepts of our times. For Michaelangelo, marble was the contemporary material and