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Wonderful surprises enliven Randy James' 'Lion'

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DANCE WRITER

It wasn't just the kids who were on the edges of their seats last weekend viewing the Randy James Dance Works' world premiere production of "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe" at the George Street Playhouse in New Brunswick. The adults in the audience were just as captivated as the kids. After all, when you see magic happening before your eyes, you don't want to miss anything.

DANCE REVIEW

With "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe," James has created an absolute masterpiece, a modern dance interpretation of the C.S. Lewis classic that charms and delights on every level.

The work is about a quartet of children who make their way through an old wardrobe into the magical land of Narnia. There, they find themselves in the midst of an eventual battle between the evil White Witch, who keeps Narnia in a constant state of winter (without Christmas), and Aslan, the lion king of Narnia.

There is breathtaking inventiveness at every turn, from James' choreography to the bright costumes by Kim Lennox and striking set and effective lighting design created by John Evans. James' decision to piece together several works by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart also worked well.

Surprise after surprise hits the stage to delight the observer. And there is a great satisfaction in realizing that the only thing to be expected is the unexpected. This is not a fairy tale told in the manner of a traditional Disney spectacle ("The Lion King" notwithstanding) with cute and fuzzy animals.

Narnian characters Mr. and Mrs. Beaver actually look more like fish, thanks to what looks like a fin running down the back of their hooded costumes. And the lion king, sans tail, ruled in an orange and gold unitard decorated with black swirls that matched the black swirls sprouting from his head like curly, African locks.

James' highly physical movement vocabulary always filled with dancers racing, spinning and leaping into and out of each other's arms, was employed particularly well here, whether it was in a ram-

bunctious game of tag among the children, or the final battle in which Lucy and the other children help to defeat the evil witch.

There were some choreographic surprises too, showing new sides to James as a choreographer, like a beautifully delicate passage for nymphs trying to put Lucy under a spell. "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe" also provided a stunning showcase for the dancers of Randy James Dance Works including a wonderfully spirited Missy Pfohl Smith as Lucy.

Other outstanding performances by the troupe included Saul Maya as the surprisingly sly Mr. Tumnus; Elizabeth Spatz's perfectly icy White Witch; and Yukihiro Kawaishi, the essence of dynamicism as Aslan, the lion.