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James troupe brings magical kingdom to life

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Magic happens when you least expect it, on a rainy day. What promises to be rather an ordinary, boring afternoon indoors becomes an adventure, when suddenly, without knowing how, you enter a world of colorful fantasy.

That's what happens to the children who are the heroes of "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," Randy

REVIEW James' endearing treatment of the famous book by C.S. Lewis, which Randy James Dance Works presented at the George Street Playhouse over the weekend.

Feeling their way through the fur coats at the back of an old wardrobe, the kids are startled to feel a chill and to hear the crunch of snow underfoot in the darkness. Mysteriously they have entered the magical realm of Narnia, a land held in thrall by the White Witch, who keeps Narnia in a perpetual state of winter. Aided by two friendly beavers, the children go to join Aslan, the brave lion who is the Lord of Narnia, and do battle to defeat the evil witch and bring about the return of spring.

James has done an outstanding job in adapting this tale for the stage. He has zeroed in on the most dramatically fruitful elements of the plot — for example, the relationship between the youngest of the children, Lucy,



PHOTOS BY MICHAEL SYPNIEWSKI

At left, Saul Maya as Mr. Tumnus the Faun hoists Lucy (Missy Pfohl Smith) in the Randy James Dance Works production of "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe" at the George Street Playhouse. At right, Maugrim the Wolf (Ricky Santiago) crouches before the evil White Witch (Elizabeth Spatz).

and her friend Mr. Tumnus, a friendly Faun — and has transformed them into the kind of rough-and-tumble modern dance that kids are sure to love.

James has added his own fanciful details. A magical blindfold supplied by Mr. Tumnus enables Lucy to see the woodland nymphs, whose presence is only hinted at in Lewis' narrative. Skittering backward onto the stage in a sinuous floor pattern, the

nymphs perform a curved and rippling dance that suggests the movement of water.

The imperious White Witch offers invisible (but no less delicious) pieces of Turkish Delight as a bribe to Lucy's treacherous little brother, Edmund, the Witch's cupped hands folding and unfolding in gestures that suggest a now-you-see-it, now-you-don't game of three-card Monte. Edmund himself is a brash and rather

geeky little boy, sticking his neck out and wiggling in anticipation of sweet rewards.

The modest but effective production by John Evans drapes the space in long swathes of gossamer material that catch the light and reflect colors. These drapes are a luscious purple in the opening garden scene, where the children play tag; then the material becomes frosty white in Narnia. Kim Lennox has designed charming costumes, outfitting the White Witch in a gown that drips with sharp-pointed icicles and dressing Aslan in a swirling orange-and-black print. The piece is set to selections from the music of Mozart.

The dancers in the cast appeared to enjoy themselves throughout the show, and their energy never flagged. Particularly notable were Missy Pfohl Smith, intrepid and unquenchable as Lucy; Saul Maya as the loose-limbed Faun, Mr. Tumnus; Jay Jernigan as a rascally Edmund, and Elizabeth Spatz, whose face seemed to grow longer, and whose expression soured with malice as the White Witch, who appears in a puff of smoke and gets tossed in the end.

Certain details could still be made clearer. The scene when the children meet the beavers, for example, leans too heavily toward abstraction as the beavers describe the witch's spell in pantomime. But James, a dancemaker whose spirit seems to revel in good-natured, choreographic hijinks, has a winner in this delightful children's fable.