

Randy James Dance Works presents 'Wardrobe'

By ANNE LEVIN
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DANCE REVIEW

NEW BRUNSWICK — It isn't easy to come up with a dance production that entertains children and adults alike. But with "The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe," presented this past weekend at George Street Playhouse, choreographer Randy James has succeeded at doing that and more.

This intelligently conceived, full-length work, now in its second year, is an illustration of the power of simplicity. Except for the fanciful costumes by Kim Lennox, this is a no-frills production. John Evans' setting is spare and his lighting is uncomplicated. But it works.

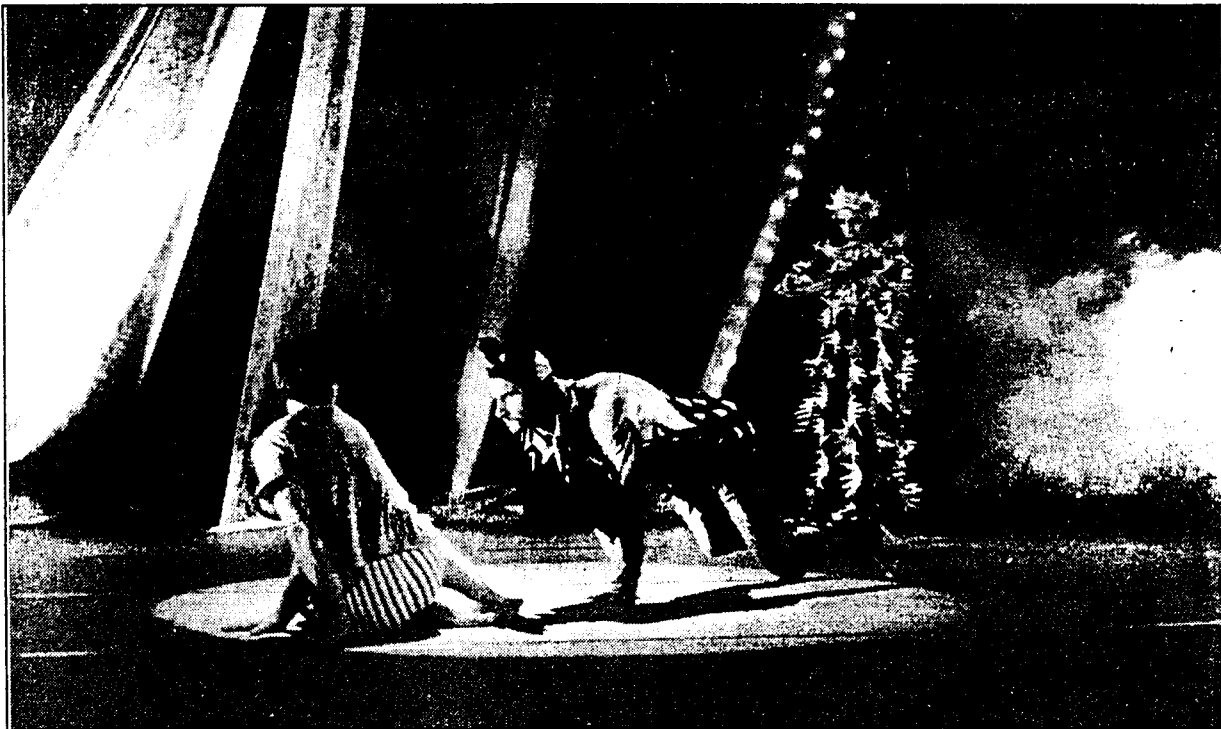
It is the strength of James' choreography, set to various selections by Mozart, that conveys C.S. Lewis' imaginative story so succinctly. Children in the audience on Saturday afternoon seemed entranced, even in some of the pure dance sections

that this adult writer found a bit tedious.

BUT THE tiresome moments were few. Most of the choreography James has put together is imaginative and, in its best moments, unpredictable. My favorite was a dreamy dance for five nymphs trying to put the lead character, Lucy, under their spell. This lyrical, delicate section shows a different side of James, who tends more toward highly physical, "loud" choreography.

The opening segment of "The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe" draws the audience in immediately. To the most familiar strains of Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik," a group of garden statues come alive and dance in the moonlight. It is a magical moment that sets the tone for the story to follow.

The C.S. Lewis novel tells the tale of four children who step through an old wardrobe and discover a kingdom called Narnia. They get caught up in a battle between the evil witch, who makes sure it is always winter in Narnia, and the king of Narnia, a lion called Asian. All is



"The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe" features, from left, David Boyd, Jon Zimmerman and Elizabeth Spatz.

well by the end of the story. The spell is broken, the seasons return, and the children return safely home.

James might have used actual children to play Lucy, Susan, Peter and Edmund, but that would have changed the whole premise. This is challenging, adult choreography that only the most experienced, adept contemporary dancers can handle. The fact that Missy Pfohl-

Smith, Sandra Tillett, Michou Szabo and Jay Jernigan were so believable as children is testament to their dramatic talents and to James' knowledge of how children move and react.

PFOHL-SMITH was particularly affecting as the youngest, most ingenuous child Lucy. Wide-eyed and filled with wonder, she never stooped to the kind of cutesy man-

nerisms that would have turned her portrayal too saccharine. Special mention is also due to Saul Maya, slick and slithery as Mr. Tumnus.

"The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe" is an enlightening alternative to holiday productions geared to children. What it lacks in slick special effects and lavish sets it makes up for in interesting choreography that challenges audiences as it gets the story across.