

REVIEW: Science Fiction Circus (The Actors Gymnasium)

Posted on March 21, 2010 by Scotty Zacher

Cute kids, talented teens and a few pros create marvelous science-fiction circus



The Actors Gymnasium presents

Science Fiction: An Experiment in Circus

Conceived, written and directed by Larry DiStasi
At Noyes Cultural Arts Center, Evanston
Through April 18 ([more info](#))

reviewed by Leah A. Zeldes

Five professional performers, eleven up-and-coming members of The Actors Gymnasium Teen Ensemble and five pint-sized prodigies bring the high-flying *Science Fiction: An Experiment in Circus* to life in a whirl of color and sound.

Robots, aliens, monsters and an impressive lineup of circus acts come together in this show, conceived and directed by The Actors Gymnasium Artistic Director of Programming Larry DiStasi, a founder of Lookingglass Theatre. We start off with a quartet of mini mad scientists and their unfortunate subject (**Griffin DiStasi, Jude Sims, Sadie Sims, Asher White and Julia White**), and then segue into a black-lit, fluorescent team of talented, silk-rope-swinging aerialists (Jill Heyser and Kacin Menendez with Teen Ensemble member **Meaghan Falvey**).

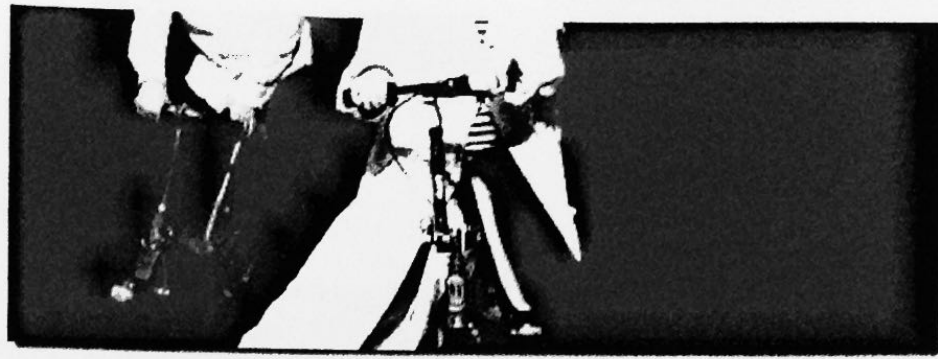
A unicycle dance featuring all 11 members of the Teen Ensemble: Falvey, **Gabby Aiden, Lucy Brennan, Sarah Buonaiuto, Lander Ellis, Emily Fishkin, Eleanor Goerss, Jackie Jarvis, Rachel Karn, Leah Orleans and Alison Tye** — comes next, followed by Matt Roben as a monster Slinky twisting and contorting around the stage.

Karn, Tye and Nicole Pellegrino next perform an extraordinary and graceful contortionist sequence. Other noteworthy acts include a dance of "Stilts Creatures" by Heyser, Menendez and Pellegrino with Buonaiuto, Ellis and Falvey, a robot strong man act by Menendez and Will Howard, and a whirling Spanish web rope routine by Buonaiuto, Ellis, Fishkin and Orleans.

Another highlight is a vigorous drumming act choreographed by Jarrett Dapier featuring Pellegrino, Falvey and the five children, all delightfully clad as aliens in Spock ears and armor constructed from kitchen gear and designed by Larry DiStasi. Throughout, the costumes, a group effort, compliment the action beautifully, from blacklit neon leotards for aerialists to shiny lame robot outfits.

During interludes between the circus acts, a live band featuring Ellis, Goerss and Roben, sometimes supplemented by Griffin DiStasi, Fishkin and the Whites, plays original music by Greg Hirte, including an eerie trio on oboe, violin and musical saw. The circus acts themselves are performed in perfect time to a riveting soundtrack of found music put together by Larry DiStasi with aid of other cast members that ranges from part of "The Symphony of Science" to Daft Punk's "Robot Rock" to Basshunter's "I Can Walk on Water."





The science-fiction theme creates a cohesive and humorous narrative to hold things together. In all, *Science Fiction* comprises a notable 30 acts and intervening scenes. On opening night, there were a few missteps but everyone gamely kept on going. Having recently seen the world-class Cirque du Soleil, I don't need a time machine to say that these young performers are well on their way, and you can see them now for a fraction of the price they'll command in days to come.

Rating: ★★★½

