

STAGE

Flying fettered

By **BRUCE INGRAM**
ASSISTANT EDITOR

Every circus tells a story, don't it?

Don't it?

Actually they don't, and maybe for good reason.

REVIEW

The third incarnation of Evanston's Flying Griffin Circus goes for an ambitious blend of story-telling and circus arts in "Gulliver's Circus" only to have the narrative become a stumbling block. It's a great show except for the show.

It's only natural that Flying Griffin would attempt to pull off this daring theatrical feat. The Actors Gymnasium, home base for the troupe, has close ties to Chicago's Lookingglass Theatre. Co-founder Lawrence E. DiStasi, who displays an impressive variety of skills as an acrobatic clown in "Gulliver's Circus," is also a founding member of Lookingglass.

Theater and circus arts should complement each other. It's not a bad idea. In practice, though, it's apparently a more difficult balance to strike than DiStasi's hand stand on strength-act partner Jason Tucker's head.

"Gulliver's Circus" gets off to a slow start with Rick Kubes as Jonathan Swift's Gulliver, dazed and confused after his travels and trying to figure out whether or not he's actually big or small. This leads to an awkward series of scenes drawn from the land of the Lilliputians, the Brobdingnagians, the Houyhnhnms and the Yahoos as Kubes, book in hand, joins a troupe of wandering circus

performers in need of a story to tell. Or so they think.

In fact the traditional circus acts work quite well on their own thanks to imaginative variations worked out by Jeff Award-winning Flying Griffin choreographer and company member Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi.

Tumbling, stilt-walking, trapeze swinging, unicycle riding, juggling, slapstick clowning, trapeze, acrobatics and aerial ballet are all the more exciting and entertaining because of the up close and intimate setting in the Actors Gymnasium. Don't miss 16-year-old circus prodigy Almas Meirmanov of Kazakhstan, who recently won a silver medal for his hand-balancing at the international circus competitions in Monte Carlo.

Kids will find the troupe's spirited performance of the basics entertaining. Older audience members will be impressed by more sophisticated fare like Hernandez-DiStasi's coordination of six women dreamily twirling in cascades of white silk.

Kubes, a former member of the Jellyeye Drum Theatre, takes Flying Griffin to its greatest heights when he's freed from the Gulliver role and allowed to lead the troupe in percussion routines brilliantly orchestrated with tumbling and juggling.

That's the sort of theater that will help this troupe keep the circus arts thriving.

"Gulliver's Circus" continues in an open run at 7:30 p.m. Fridays, 4 and 7:30 p.m. Saturdays and 2:30 p.m. Sundays in the Actors Gymnasium in the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes St., Evanston. Call 328-2795.



Bill Burlingame

Air Griffin: Lawrence E. DiStasi perches precariously on Jason Tucker in The Flying Griffin Circus.