

## Art & Life

### 'Science Fiction: An Experiment in Circus'

The new Actors Gymnasium show, "Science Fiction: An Experiment in Circus," may be the first performance ever to pose the question, "What's so scary about a Slinky?"

#### A Show Review

By Brian Murphy

Director Larry DiStasi is less concerned with scaring the audience with a giant, glowing Slinky than he is with wowing it with the spectacle that can be created with a black light, loads of creative ingenuity and two or more interlocking performers with immense flexibility and body control.

"Science Fiction" is an amalgamation of the different physical arts taught at the Actors Gymnasium, such as acrobatics, aerial routines, circus stunts, contortion and commedia dell'arte.

The result, a mash-up combining kiddy Monty Pythonesque skits and Cirque du Soleil spectacle, is a funny and kinetic show the whole family can enjoy.

The evening is framed by a series of sketches involving grade-school actors in lab coats performing surgery with household items, inventing time machines and launching rockets. These spunky performers, crackling with energy, are quick with the quips.

An athletic ensemble of teenage girls dazzle the eyes with tandem contortionist routines, high-flying silk dances, unicycleriding, stilt-walking and floor gymnastics. The dances, choreographed by Nicole Pellegrino and the cast, are set to an excellent song selection of techno and trip-hop.

One sensational sequence features Jill Heyser and Nicole Pellegrino, suspended 15-20 feet up in air, balancing on opposite

ends of a lyra (which is shaped like a hula hoop), expertly shifting their weight and positions to support one another's mid-air movements, all to the sound of Thomas Dolby's excellent and appropriate '80s ditty, "She Blinded Me With Science."

Kacin Menendez and Will Howard present a rhythmic blend of strength and flexibility (not to mention lots of trust) in a risky number that finds the hulking Mr. Howard tossing the petite Ms. Menendez through the air. Ms. Menendez also flexes her vocal chords in a ballad; after all, every science fiction circus performance needs a love story. Were Ms. Menendez only to sing just a little louder, the folks in the back will be able to become just as enraptured with her lovely singing voice as are those up front.

Seasoned clown performer Matt Roben entertains throughout the night with magic



tricks, sword-swallowing and comedy, while 10-year-old Asher White delivers precision drumming on just about any surface he can find.

Rounding out the talented ensemble are Gabrielle Aiden, Lucy Brennan, Sarah Buonaiuto, Lander Ellis, Meaghan Falvey, Emily Fishkin, Eleanor Goerss, Jackie Jarvis, Rachel Karn, Leah Rose Orleans, Alison Tye, Griffin DiStasi, Jude Sims, Sadie Sims and Julia White.

Adding to the extravaganza are lighting designer Charles W. Jolls' stylistic illuminations on painted hair and faces, and the sprawling, extensive stage on which the cast has plenty of room to maneuver — and they use all they can get.

"Science Fiction: An Experiment in Circus" is recommended especially for preteens.

The show runs through April 18 at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes St.

For tickets call 847-328-2795 or visit [www.actorsgymnasium.com](http://www.actorsgymnasium.com).



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*Photos courtesy of Actors Gymnasium.*

