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Dance: 'The Atomic Thief,' Theater Piece by Alice Farley

By JACK ANDERSON

On weekends, certain New York movie theaters often show late-night horror films. Whereas some of them are classics of the genre, others, instead of being scary, are tacky or even dramatically incoherent.

Alice Farley's "The Atomic Thief in the Circus of Crime," Saturday's late-night show at the Theater for the New City, might be termed a choreographic equivalent of such movies. It got under way in the lobby when roaming dancers in gas masks pointed guns at the waiting audience: During intermission, monsters prowled about, and dancers in frog masks played games with jacks and snakes.

The two-act work itself began with a circus parade for assorted monsters and a woman on stilts, after which came a succession of theatrical images. Thus, a damsel with hair almost as long as Rapunzel's in the fairy tale danced with a shining sphere, and a dancer in a shimmery costume did a sedate shimmy.

Usually, the images were grotesque. They included a game of chance in a sand pit, an invasion by a monster and a trial during which a child was interrogated by frogs and confronted by jug-

glers. The finale included apocalyptic explosions and a solo for a witch, who gave birth to the shining sphere.

Few scenes made sense, and Miss Farley surely never intended any of them to make much literal sense. But what was most bothersome was the lack of cumulative power these images had. One was never caught up in their magic or in the way that image succeeded image.

It was also hard to tell whether Miss Farley intended to present images solely for their own sakes or whether she regarded them as symbolic expressions of some theme. The weapons and explosions suggested a preoccupation with violence and, presumably, Miss Farley, like most sensible people, was against it. But one could never really tell. It was as if Miss Farley were unable to view her creation with sufficient detachment to determine whether images that had deep personal meanings for her would have equal meaning for strangers.

The program note called individual episodes "The Crime of Time," "The Crime of the Curve," "The Crime of Chance" and assorted other crimes. But the only real crime this work committed was to be boring.



"THE ATOMIC THIEF IN THE CIRCUS OF CRIME"—Alice Farley performs in the premiere of her work tonight and Thursday through next Sunday evenings at Theater for the New City.

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