

Dance, image and sound project Carnival fantasies

Multi-media presentation
dips into wide-ranging
images for material

By Cathy Curtis, Dance critic

"Someone came up after one of our performances and said, 'How did you know what I was dreaming about last night?'" remembers David Manning. As company director of Delta Carnival, he relishes the wide-ranging fantasies his multimedia images evoke.

Together with his wife, Suzanne, artistic director of the company, he has been charming Bay Area audiences for the past three years with a blend of dance, projected images and sound. This weekend at Julia Morgan Center, the company presents "Ruins," an exploration of images of San Francisco viewed as a mythological city.

The company's first piece featuring live animation-like images using rear-projected lights and shadows was created in 1974, when the Mannings were based in North Carolina. "This is the second work we've done of the same length and scope," says Manning. "We're interested in the impact shadows can have in creating a childlike view. We take a sophisticated adult mind, adult knowledge—and prove that you can still have this level of perception.

"Ruins" takes a look at the lost continent of Atlantis. "As if," says Manning, "it were not a distant mythological location but a real place where people live and work. Then you see that it is really not Atlantis but

San Francisco. If you relate to the city in the same way you relate to a mythological place, what kind of images does that create?"

But the creators of the "Ruins" are not concerned that viewers necessarily share their concept of the piece. "We work very hard to avoid specifying a literal realm. In that way, we're like the theater companies that are working in a non-literal, non-verbal dimension. We're looking for an impact, a perception. It's the same thing a painter does when he has a sense of what something looks like and feels like and then manifests that sense. It's a moving painting!"

"To really do it right, we should spend \$250,000. The means what we have to use is not at the same stage as our ideas," admits Manning, a short, forthright man with long wispy blond hair. "Yet even now we operate at a level logistically equivalent to what Nikolais works with. It takes us 20 hours to make the tapes and props. Set-up for rehearsals takes two hours and has to be torn down immediately afterward to turn the space into a dance studio, which brings in income to support the space." Over 175 light cues create the imaginary world of "Ruins." The five performers double as technicians, "working like fiends," as Ms. Manning puts it.

"We're happy to see the work done in a more accessible location with a bigger stage, thanks to a grant from Samuel H. Scripps," says Manning. "Julia Morgan Center houses all kinds of performances, and we like that. In a dance studio, there are certain expectations and certain kinds of crowds. Our work integrates a kinesthetic, aural and visual approach. It deals directly with life as a changing, evolving organism. We find we can work as easily with a painter or a filmmaker or an engineer as with a dancer because the common motivation is the same."

Praising the dancer, whose ideas help make each Delta Carnival production a collaboration, Manning explains that the goal of the company is not to create a specific style but to evolve a creative vision over a period of time. "Even if there are no people on the screen—just water in motion, say," elaborates Ms. Manning, "I consider the whole thing a dance because it is movement for a purpose."

"Theater," explains her husband, "means creating a universe. It must remain functional and intact."

"And mysterious," adds Ms. Manning.

Performances will be held Friday through Sunday at Julia Morgan Center, 2640 College Avenue. Curtain time in 8:30 p.m., and tickets are priced at \$5.