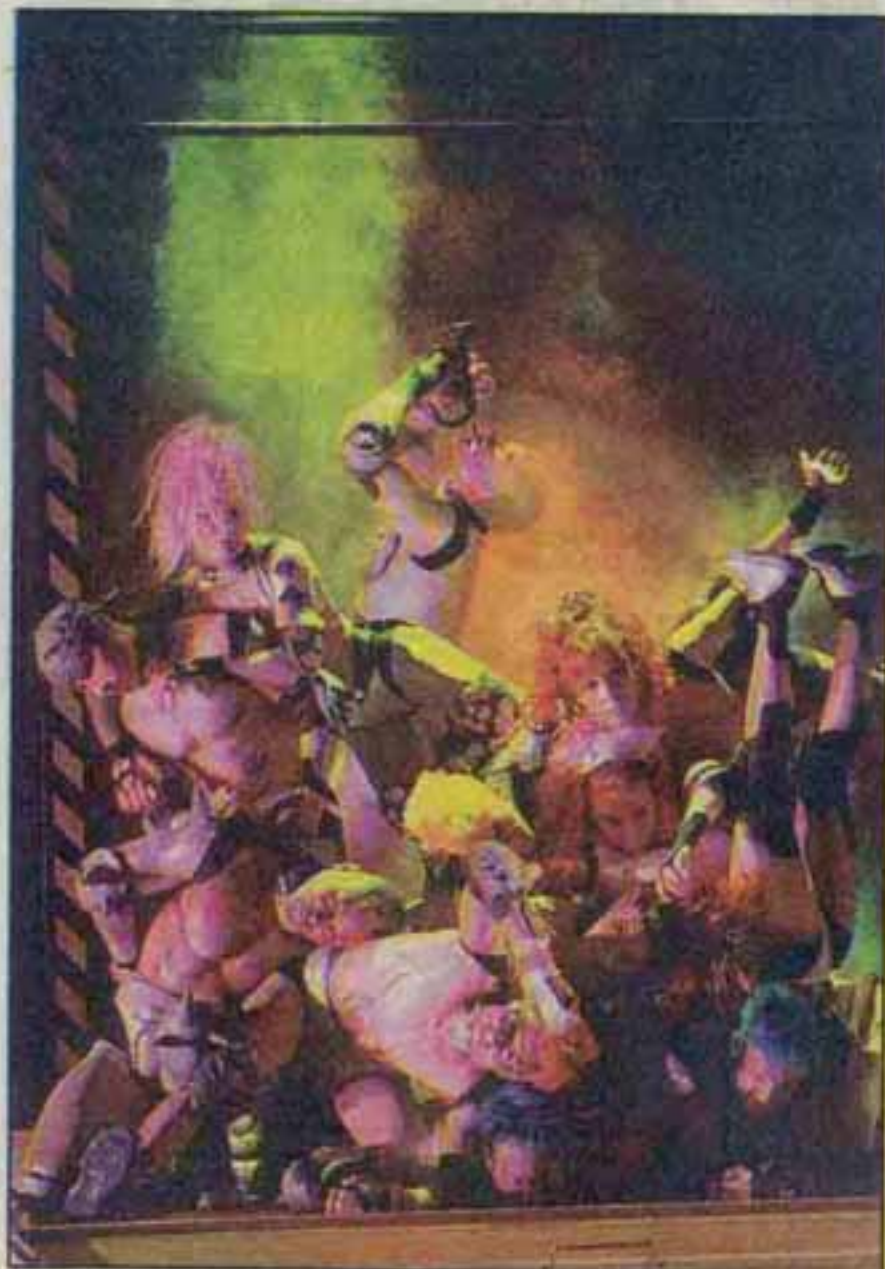


ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

High-Flying Dummies Are a Smash



Newsday Photo / Bruce Gilbert

Antigravity's "Crash Test Dummies" engage in mechanical mayhem at the New Victory Theater in Manhattan through June 3.

DANCE REVIEW

ANTIGRAVITY'S CRASH TEST DUMMIES. Directed and choreographed by Christopher Harrison. Music by Sxip Shirey and Paul Weir. Set by Jonah Logan. Costumes by Shelly Bomb. Lighting by Herrick Goldman. New Victory Theater, 209 W. 42nd St., Manhattan, through June 3. Seen Friday.

By Sylviane Gold

THE TITLE IS "Crash Test Dummies." The program has credits for "Rubber Latex Costume Elements," "Sports Equipment" and "Rigging Apparatus." And the stage set, a riot of school-bus yellow, stop-sign red and black diagonal stripes, is plastered with warnings that say "DANGER" and "CAUTION." Not to mention "High Voltage" and "High Pressure."

So there's no excuse for expecting anything but mechanical mayhem from the new Antigravity show that arrived at the New Victory Theater on Friday. And Christopher Harrison and the 19 members of this circus / dance group follow through on that promise, with a misbehaving vacuum cleaner, exploding crates and a giant wrecking ball that swings in from the wings whenever a quick finish is required.

In their padded (that rubber latex!) bodysuits of metallic grays and beige skin tones, they look like Transformer toys come to life — especially when they're mounted on "rocket shoes" that allow them to bounce around like Spaldens. Wrestling with pile-ups of cardboard cartons or unstable ladders, they do seem to be at the mercy of the "New Products" they are testing for their ornery boss, played with vicious glee by Colt Sandberg.

But between the silent-comedy sketches and the manic athletics — accentuated by perfectly timed emanations from the raucous band composed entirely of Sxip Shirey and Paul Weir — "Antigravity's Crash Test Dummies" offers lyrical flights, literally, and a sweetly good-natured denouement when the very last product to be tested turns out to be an angelic boy.

Some of the flights, of course, are not so lyrical: Bodies flail in the air as they take pratfalls from the top of the proscenium; they throw themselves at the wall and hit it with a bang. But there's magic afoot as aerialists swing on draping, looping columns of white fabric. As tumblers crisscross the stage barely touching down before they're aloft again. And as Amy Gordon, a comic actress of great gifts, gets stuck overhead and an emergency crew with airport light sticks and fluorescent ribbons tries to bring her down.

Gordon, who is credited in the program as "Comedy Captain," is reason enough to see the show. She plays a newly constructed dummy who's still a bit unsteady on her legs. The obliging janitor played by Jonah Logan gives her a pair of skates in the vignette that opens the show, and Gordon spends the remainder of the time rolling in and out of the action with a look of perplexed envy on her face.

When, finally, she and Logan get a new product to test, it is the happiest of happy endings. The children at the preview I attended exploded with joy as giant beach balls floated through the audience in celebration. The adults were all smiling too. ■

Sylviane Gold is a regular contributor to Newsday.