

Attack Theatre gives 'Games' winning edge

By Jane Vranish
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dance review

Attack Theatre has always preferred to put a square peg in a round hole. Leaders of Pittsburgh's alternative performance art scene along with Squonk Opera, Attack founders Michele de la Reza and Peter Kope have danced along an Oz-ian path, where reality and fantasy might merge as comfortably in a living room as in the vaulted space of a theater.

This time they tackled a large black and gold brick room in the former Dykema Rubber Band Co. on Gold Way off Baum Boulevard in Oakland with a particularly fitting, Pittsburgh-friendly production, "Games of Steel."

Think athletics in dance. Think metal-edged music. Think steel rings and beams and things. Think Mad Max meets urban "Survivor."

Set designer Abigail Hart Gray and Red Star Ironworks sculptor Peter Lambert headed a small army that neatly suited up in the Attack mode to construct a futuristic environment with an elevated ramp and platform for the band and a "steel" curtain across the back.

It was to be the setting for the "Games," led by Kope in the Mel Gibson role, spiked blond hair and all, as the host for contestants de la Reza, Jil Stifel and Jeff Davis. He stiffly emerged in concert with what seemed like his Band of Tin People — Dave Eggar (wood and steel cello, keyboards, vocals), Dina Fanai (vocals), Tom Pirozzi (electric bass) and Matt Zebroski (drums) — and a terrific one at that.

They set up a number of games, most built on Archimedes' principles of simple inventions — the ring toss, a lever, a bal-

Attack Theatre's 'Games of Steel'

■ **Where:** The former Dykema Rubber Band Co. at 428 Gold Way, just off Baum Boulevard between North Craig and Melwood, Oakland.

■ **When:** Tonight 8 p.m., Thurs.-Sat. 8 p.m.; Sun. 6 p.m.

■ **Tickets:** \$10-\$15; 412-394-3353.

ancing act on a seesaw — ostensibly not to figure out the winner, but who could lose the least. During the process, Kope played favorites, changed the rules and cheated, all with his eyes on climbing a ladder of success. He became more human, and his Band would subsequently revolt, with Kope the ultimate loser.

Like most reality shows nowadays, "Games of Steel" incorporated game theory and its underlying social commentary, although with more complexity and artful interplay than one normally finds on television.

The choreographic strength lay in a series of duets, where the contestants forged alliance and dalliances. Stifel and Davis, the latest addition to the company, showed new promise here, following the seamless example set by de la Reza and Kope. And the contestants indulged in a wonderful



Steve Mellion/Post-Gazette

Attack Theatre's Jeff Davis and Peter Kope (foreground from left) and Jil Stifel and Michele de la Reza (background from left) let the games begin at the former Dykema Rubber Band Co. in Oakland.

helter-skelter trio based on racing motifs.

Still, hard edges were most prominent, especially with these props, and the dancers were still being scrupulous in handling them. And a very dry, humorous undercurrent had yet to surface. Yet on the whole, Attack Theatre had welded together elements of a plot with a more cohesive touch.

The band was first-rate, although it was hard to decipher the words in Fanai's penetrating solos. Eggar, who can work miracles

on the traditional cello, got to exercise on a specially designed steel cello and increase his non-Bachian sound repertoire.

By the time it reached the end, Attack Theatre had scored an uncontested touchdown with "Games of Steel," a spirited play on all things Pittsburgh that touches the winner in all of us.

Dance critic Jane Vranish can be reached at jvranish@post-gazette.com.