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For Children | Laurel Graeber

At the New York Fringe Festival, two productions for a younger audience. Pumping and spilling and splashing.

‘Water Whirl’

Children’s Museum of Manhattan
212 West 83d Street
(212) 721-1223
Recommended ages: 6 and up
Through October

Like little ducks, children seem to take naturally to water. It’s one of their favorite mediums for chilling (in all senses of the word) and, more often than not, for spilling. At “Water Whirl” the Children’s Museum of Manhattan allows them to do both, as well as learn about water’s scientific properties. And, best of all, no parent needs to worry about mopping up puddles.

Entering the exhibition, which is outdoors in the museum’s 700-square-foot Sussman Environmental Center, is a little like walking into the lair of a mad scientist whose obsession is old-fashioned H₂O. Installed on three levels and featuring the work of three artists, it employs a number of odd devices to stimulate the flow of ideas as well as liquid.

The appropriately named “Aqua-Manic,” for instance, is what its creator, Tim Watkins, likes to call kinetic sculpture. A Rube Goldberg type of contraption, it includes levers, wheels and a scoop that looks like a giant red lollipop with the top half sliced off. As children work a pump, the scoop fills and eventually tips sideways, pouring the water out.

“If you pump hard enough, you can get the water to spray out a bit on the side and get your parents wet,” Mr. Watkins said. “Not that that was the intent,” he hastily added. (The museum

can provide damage control in the form of plastic smocks.) On the second level, children can modify “Aqua-Manic” with pieces of tubing, as if they were building with Legos, and create bubbles via a foot pump. All these activities illustrate physics, but make the subject fun.

“The Rain Cloud,” by Sal Romano, demonstrates the water cycle. It consists of a roof of copper piping that “rains” into a small pool; the water is then pumped up again. As Nerissa Bardfeld, the science coordinator, said, “This is the same water that the dinosaurs drank.”

On the third level, “Lavatory/Laboratory,” by Allan Wexler, looks unprepossessing: a row of 10 sinks. But each is a station for exploring a property of water or an invention it has inspired. Here, children can conduct supervised experiments on subjects like water pressure, filtration surface tension and molecular cohesion.

“Water Whirl,” which will close in late October (the date has yet to be determined) and will go up again next spring, is free with museum admission: \$5; the elderly, \$2.50; infants under 1, free. Museum hours: Tuesday through Sundays, 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. until Sept. 5, when the museum closes until Sept. 18; when it reopens the hours will be Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 A.M. to 5 P.M.