

It trips, but the light's fantastic

By Allan Ulrich

BY DESCRIBING ITSELF as "a multi-dimensional theater/dance company," Delta Carnival is obviously trying to cover all artistic bases at once.

That may help to explain the failure of its current offering, "Ruins," which continues at the Synergic Theater, 545 Haight St., Friday and Saturday and Dec. 12-13. It simply cannot stand the heavy philosophical burden with which its creators have loaded it. Its defeat, however, is one of matter rather than means, and those means promise something for the future.

What Suzanne White Manning and David H. Manning have created is an intelligent and compulsively watchable light show. It involves rear projections, the participation of live actors in a basically two-dimensional format and a creative manipulation of shadows.

One misses something essentially theatrical by losing physical contact with the three performers who remain behind a screen for most of the presentation. A spoken text provides little nourishment. And the dance fan will find very little of that commodity worth pursuing in this affair.

On Saturday evening, the eye found it all rather intriguing. Although the company only arrived here last year, Delta Carnival was devised by Suzanne Manning in 1974 in North Carolina. Her method seems as refined as it is malleable.

She can project images with swirls and eddies and amoeba-like creatures coupling and growing. She can show us an actor building a pyramid out of real photographic slides. She can make the screen explode in a riot of color. She can alter sizes and perspectives of figures. She can suddenly transform the scene framing two characters, and



Live actors blend with projections in Delta Carnival's 'Ruins'

provide a welcome measure of humor. She can shoot foreign objects into the line of vision with droll results. And she can multiply the shadow image and create an aura of mindless beauty.

But it's that narration which is troublesome. The four-part "Ruins" has been developed, the program informs us, "from the concept of the discovery of the ancient mythological city of San Francisco." But the dialogue by David Manning succeeds neither as cosmic statement nor sly satire.

It tries, nevertheless. There is a quizzical running text, recited by an

offstage couple, which drivels on about the lady's former boyfriend. And we know it's important because the light show stops every time they discourse.

Some episodes hold much potential. A slide show of the supposed artifacts of our ancient civilization turns up some interesting comments on their conjectured functions. The Golden Gate Bridge, as a former religious symbol, for example. Yet the humor seems strained and contrived.

And the images flow by without much internal coherence. A couple waltzing to Strauss leads into a se-

quence involving a Chinese peasant overpowering an American soldier. That is followed by a man playing a grand piano, and it segues into a figure representing a gold miner brandishing an axe. And before we know it, a premonitory hand writes, "It's not the world itself, but the thought behind it that counts." That sequence only takes 10 minutes. And there are 70 more to fill.

The dancers, Michael Kenna, Barbara Chrest and Sandy Lynch, go through paces with evident commitment. The accompanying soundtrack is a mishmash of the classics, electronic, folk, jazz and pop music.

Those who mix their media tread a rocky path. The results will only turn out as good as the individual elements. Magical syntheses exist only in the mind of the creator. When Delta Carnival learns to infuse sensation with sense, it may come up with a dynamite show.