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Financial Center Turns Space Odyssey

By Barry Owens

There were maps on a table inside the Winter Garden one night last month, pointing the way to the escalators throughout the World Financial Center. And in the atriums, ushers on the upper floors steered the curious to railings where the view was best. Soon, it was promised, dancers would appear who would alternately strut on, slink up, slide down or otherwise ride the escalators in ways never intended by the manufacturer.



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A dancer's daring, head-first ride in Tower One, part of 'escalator' a site-specific dance performance last month at the Financial Center.

Apparently, no one told all of this to the gentleman in the brown fedora. Shortly after the performance began, he found himself riding up one of the escalators in One World Financial Center just as a young female dancer was coming down. The performer was riding atop the rubber railings with her rear end high in the air. The man's double- and triple-takes drew chuckles from the crowd far above.

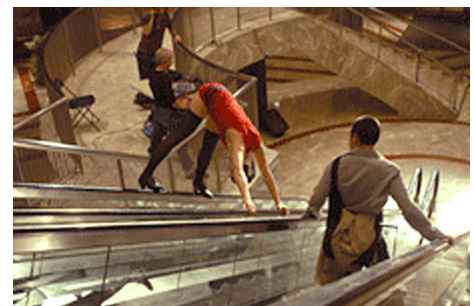
The reactions of an unwitting public to the spectacle was only a small part of the charm of "escalator," an hourlong, site-specific dance performance last month

that led the audience on a journey from One World Financial Center to the Winter Garden. Along the way, the performers danced on escalators and stairs, scaled walls, and leaped on tables, and on one another.

The performance, created by choreographer and visual artist Andrea Haenggi, managed, through movement, light and sound, to bring the mostly empty spaces to strange, new life.

"This is a big, elegant space, and I felt like it should really have its own language," said Haenggi, who lotted out some of the work on architectural drawings.

"I tried to approach it like a film," she added.



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A dancer rides the escalator rails.

Haenggi danced through the spaces along with her company, AMDat, accompanied by a live musical score that featured beeping and sweeping synthesizers, drums, a bagpipe, a droning electric guitar, and a female vocalist who offered only spooky wails.



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Dancers in the Winter Garden.

"I ordinarily wouldn't like this kind of music, or this kind of dance," said Jan Cox, a Staten Island resident who was one of hundreds who lined railings for the performance. "But here, I like it."

Drawn by the unlikely sound of a bagpipe, a young man with a pencil-thin mustache who was rushing into the World Financial Center from the Liberty Street pedestrian bridge took a detour to a railing to see what was happening. He smiled and shook his head.

"That's different," he said as he dashed off in the direction of the Winter Garden.

A double line of dancers, running backwards, followed not far behind him.