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DANCE REVIEW

Making Sense of an Imaginary Destination

By **JENNIFER DUNNING**

Something is terribly wrong at St. Lulu's school for proper young ladies. The teacher is going mad. Strange men wander in and out. And students are disappearing.

That is the story the playwright Mac Wellman and the choreographer Annie-B Parson tell in "Girl Gone," a musical theater piece performed on Wednesday night at the Kitchen. Mr. Wellman builds his story through the steady accretion of surrealistic detail revealed in loops of nonsensical dialogue that makes irrational but gripping sense. Music and dance are woven seamlessly through the piece, merging styliza-

tion and folk qualities to suggest the kind of rigidity and hyperreality that often go with madness.

Three young women known as "the evil sisters" are playing a game they call "going away," to an imaginary country called Vadoo that becomes all too real. A writer with a sneaky sympathy for his characters, Mr. Wellman has clearly traveled through Vadoo himself at some point. This is the country of anarchic childhood emotions, particularly those of adolescent girls. "Girl Gone" resembles a post-modernist re-envisioning of Christina Rossetti's fevered "Goblin Market."

Ten dancers and actors play 14 quick-shifting characters who

emerge with impressive clarity under Paul Lazar's direction, in a cast led by Cynthia Hopkins, Molly Hickok and Stacy Dawson as the sisters and Kourtney Rutherford, Tymberly Canale and Rebecca Wisocky.

Ms. Hopkins's score and Claudia Stephens's costumes have a rich peculiarity, and Joanne Howard's set creates distinct worlds with just a few benches and scrimms, lighted imaginatively by David Moodey. The cast also includes Josh Broder, Anna Kohler, Tim Cummings and Daniel Zippi. Produced originally by Ms. Parson's Big Dance Theater and the Bat Theater Company, "Girl Gone" closes tonight. It deserves a longer run.