



Artisans de L'Imaginaire

30 ans du Cirque du Soleil



"The Vague Intuition"

PART THREE: 1992 - 1999





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"Behind each perilous leap there is a purpose, an intention, an individual, an emotion." - Franco Dragone

Franco Dragone was born in Cairano, Italy, and moved to La Louvière, Belgium at age seven. In the 1970s, he studied theatre at the Belgian Royal Conservatory of Mons. His earliest theatrical work was explicitly political, working as a director of theatre and film in the mode of the *commedia dell'arte* dramatist Dario Fo. The theatre works he helped create expressed social situations, interpreting true stories of the homeless, drug addicts and prison inmates, and casting the non-actors that shared their stories to perform in the shows. In the 1980s Dragone came to Montreal, Canada, where Guy Caron, director of the National Circus School, invited him to conduct workshops with the students and teachers there. Later, Dragone created, directed and produced a show for the end of the school year. Guy Laliberté, saw one of these performances in 1984, the same year he formed Cirque du Soleil and as previously mentioned sought out Guy Caron to join Cirque du Soleil. Caron, in turn, asked Dragone to join as a creator and the rest is history.



In 1992, Cirque du Soleil crosses the Pacific and makes a name for itself in the Land of the Rising Sun with *Fascination*, a collage of the best acts from *Le Cirque Réinventé* and *Nouvelle Expérience*. The show opens in Tokyo and then moves on to seven other cities, for a total of 118 performances in four months. Over 560,000 (569,883) people see the show. Meanwhile, in Europe, Cirque du Soleil joins forces with Switzerland's Circus Knie and stages a show in over 60 towns throughout the country. In North America, 1992 sees Cirque du Soleil make its Las Vegas debut when *Nouvelle Expérience* kicks off a year-long engagement under a big top at the Mirage Hotel. Already juggling several productions, Cirque adds a monument to its repertoire of shows: *Saltimbanco*. Premiering in Montreal, this latest production is a celebration of life. Designed as an antidote to the violence and despair of the 20th century, this phantasmagoric show offers an alternative view of the urban environment brimming with optimism and joy.

Although Cirque wouldn't know it at the time – couldn't know it, really – 1992's *Saltimbanco* would change the course of the company's history forever. Though Cirque found success with *Le Cirque Réinventé* (1987-1990) and compounded that success with *Nouvelle Expérience* (1990-1993), it would be *Saltimbanco*'s colorful explosion of artistry, depth and emotion that would catapult Cirque du Soleil into the realm of avant-garde masters, where it would remain for decades to come.



Developed under the direction and vision of Franco Dragone, and polished with the assistance of a coven of creative thinkers, Saltimbanco is considered one of the first Cirque du Soleil productions to focus entirely on a specific set of themes and ideas, presented to the audience without bias or without explanation; a method that would become the signature of Cirque du Soleil for years to come: "the vague intuition". Franco Dragone ushered in what fans refer to as the Cirque Renaissance, a period where artistic creation and expression held balance with the company's ambition to take over the world. These are the shows that are considered – hands down – the gold standards of Cirque du Soleil creations: shows that built upon what came before and expressed their themes not in the literal sense (that so many of Cirque du Soleil's later

productions would) but rather in the Dragone's signature esoteric avant-garde approach. An approach that was shepherded and cultivated by a coven of creators that remained relatively the same from production to production. And they would continue doing great things throughout the 1990s...

Having seen Cirque in action, and following Nouvelle Expérience's successful run, the president of Mirage Resorts in Las Vegas (Steve Wynn) makes an offer: why not bring Cirque du Soleil to a permanent installation in Las Vegas? Cirque responds to the challenge of staging a show outside the traditional big top and resolves, in its own words, to "plant a flower in the desert." On Christmas Day 1993, *Mystère* premieres at the Treasure Island hotel in Las Vegas, setting a new standard and changing the way live entertainment is presented in Las Vegas. *Mystère*'s message is universal because movement, music and humor are universal. *Mystère* is so richly diverse that it can be experienced over and over again, every performance revealing something new and extraordinary. Be obnoxious. Be stupid. Be sweet. Be nasty. Be masculine, feminine, and androgynous. Be amazing. By year's end Saltimbanco completes its 19-month North American Tour of a dozen cities and receives resounding ovations from 1.4 million (1,416,359) spectators.



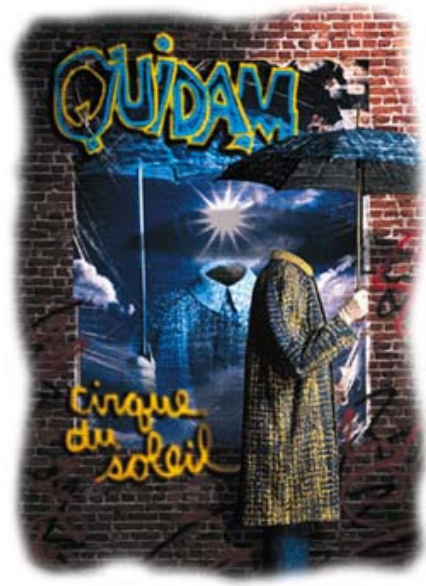
Cirque du Soleil celebrates its 10th anniversary in 1994 by staging *Alegría*. True to tradition, the two-year North American tour is launched in Montreal. Meanwhile, *Mystère* continues to create a sensation in Las Vegas (683,294 people see the show) and Saltimbanco embarks on a six-month run in Tokyo that attracts a great deal of attention (and spectators; 557,851 see Saltimbanco in Tokyo). In 1995, While *Alegría* pursues its triumphant North American tour, Cirque du Soleil responds to a

request from the Canadian government to create a show for the heads of state gathered at the G7 Summit in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

Also in 1995, Saltimbanco sets out to conquer Europe. Cirque's spectacular white big top with seating for 2,500 spectators makes its first stop in Amsterdam, followed by Munich, Berlin, Düsseldorf, and Vienna. Amsterdam becomes the site of Cirque's European Headquarters.

By 1996, Cirque du Soleil has three concurrent shows running: Saltimbanco, Mystère and Alegria. In April, Cirque launches its fourth - Quidam - in Montreal. But Quidam's launch ushers in a new sound – long-time composer René Dupéré leaves Cirque to pursue personal challenges and protégé Benoit Jutras steps in. He'll remain with Cirque du Soleil through the end of Dragone's era, establishing his indelible sound across the Cirque Cosmos. After finishing its hometown run, Quidam heads off on a three-year North American tour.

Meanwhile, Saltimbanco continues its European tour, with stops in London, Hamburg, Stuttgart, Antwerp, Zurich and Frankfurt, while Alegria sets out to tour Asia for a few months. Audiences flock to the Grand Chapiteaus in ever-greater numbers. As its repertoire grows, Cirque du Soleil decides that its artists must have a single home in which to gather, create, rehearse, and dream; therefore, "The Studio", Cirque's new International Headquarters in Montreal, is born. Construction of the Headquarters represented an investment of approximately 40 million dollars.



Quidam continues to capture the hearts of North American spectators throughout 1997, adding two new cities, Denver and Houston, to the tour. On the other side of the Atlantic: after five years of touring, the curtain falls on Saltimbanco at London's Royal Albert Hall, marking the end of a two-year European tour (February 1, 1997). Fresh from its Asian tour, Alegria takes on Europe. And Cirque du Soleil joins forces with Pomp Duck and Circumstance, an original dinner-theatre show. Due to expansion Cirque opens up four regional headquarters: the Americas, Asia-Pacific, Europe (Amsterdam), and Las Vegas. Cirque also sets new benchmarks with the birth of a multimedia division - Cirque du Soleil Images (replacing Télémajik) - and the announcement of two monumental projects: a feature-length film (Alegria) and a large-format (IMAX) film, which will feature performances by various Cirque du Soleil artists in natural and historic sites around the world.

While Alegria pursues its journey across Europe, Quidam finishes up its North American tour. All in all, over 2,500,000 North American spectators have applauded Quidam. And unable to quash its celebration of life, Cirque du Soleil restages Saltimbanco in Ottawa for a few weeks before sending it off on an Asia-Pacific tour scheduled to last three years. In response, Singapore becomes the site of Cirque du Soleil's Asia-Pacific headquarters. Furthermore, inspired by the success of Mystère, Steve Wynn, the president of Mirage Resorts, invites Cirque to Las Vegas to mount "O", Cirque's first aquatic show, in a specially constructed theatre at the Bellagio Resort.

Opening in October 1998, "O" sets a new benchmark for excellence in theatrical entertainment everywhere. And after almost 10 years of discussion, Cirque du Soleil finally teams with Disney to present La Nouba in Orlando. The agreement occurs after direct intervention from Michael Eisner, chairman and CEO of Disney, who concedes to Cirque's long-maintained insistence that it retain creative control. Moreover, a custom-made theatre is built for Cirque's unique requirements. The show opens in December to rave reviews.



While artists get used to their new home in Orlando, Saltimbanco sets up shop in Asia and the Pacific, beginning a three-year tour of the region in Sydney, Australia (January 1999). In March, Quidam embarks on a four-year European tour in Amsterdam. Cirque's plans become even more ambitious with the release of its first feature film: *Alegria*. In the film, the magical spellbinding universe of Cirque du Soleil becomes the backdrop for a tender love story between a street performer (Frac) and the lead singer of a travelling circus (Giulietta). Franco Dragone directs and it's the last project he works on for Cirque du Soleil.

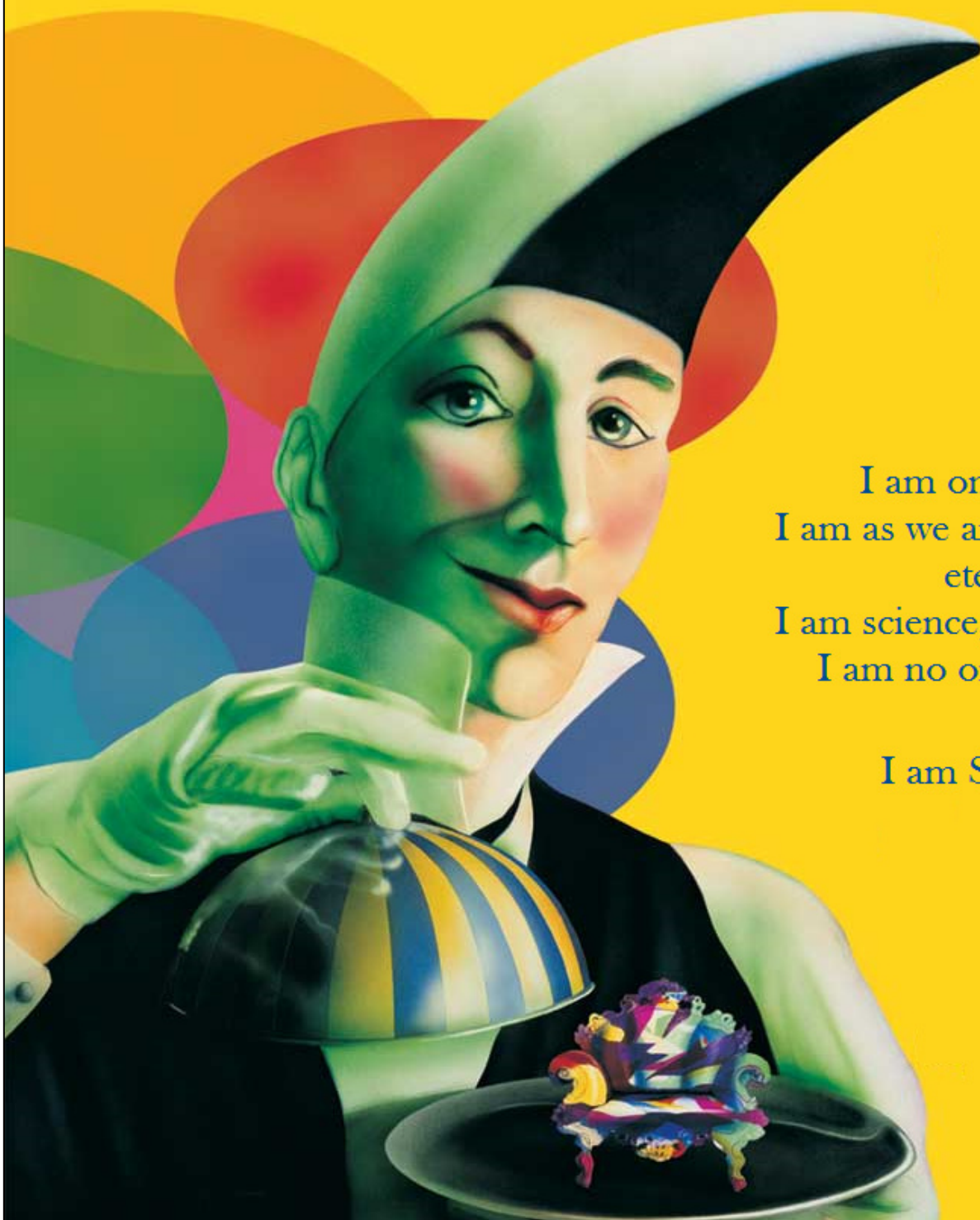
The end of an era is reached.

* * *

In this section we take a peek at the shows that are considered – hands down – the gold standards of Cirque du Soleil creations: *Saltimbanco*, *Mystère*, *Alegria*, *Quidam*, "O", *La Nouba*, and *Alegria Le Film*.

SALTIMBANCO™

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL™



I am one, I am many
I am as we are -
eternal, out of time
I am science, magic, chimeric
I am no one, I am legion

I am Saltimbanco

SALTIMBANCO

Do not be fooled. I am neither spirit nor magic spell, neither man nor woman. Without hearth or home, I am neither a god nor a demon, nor a song, nor a tale. I am no one, but many faces are legion. Unmask me... if you dare!

Imagine. It's the evening of April 23, 1992, and you're seated on a bleacher under a newly expanded Grand Chapiteau, staked on the quays of the Vieux Port de Montreal, and preparing to witness Saltimbanco perform for the public for the very first time. You have your popcorn. You have your soda. And you have your programme book, a thick booklet filled with information on the show you are about to witness. You've just read the above passage in it and wonder... what are we about to see? Who or what is Saltimbanco?

Although Cirque wouldn't know it at the time – couldn't know it, really – Saltimbanco would change the course of the company's history forever. Though success was found with its previous shows, it would be Saltimbanco's colorful explosion of artistry, depth and emotion that would catapult the Cirque into the realm of avant-garde masters, where it would remain for decades to come.

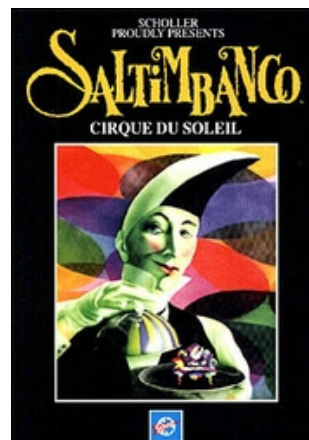
Developed under the direction and vision of Franco Dragone, and polished with the assistance of a coven of creative thinkers, Saltimbanco is considered one of the first Cirque productions to focus entirely on a specific set of themes and ideas, presented to the audience without bias or without explanation; a method that would become the signature of Cirque du Soleil for years to come: "the vague intuition".

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	April 23, 1992 (Tour 1) January 7, 1999 (Tour 2) July 31, 2007 (Arena)
Type:	Touring / Bigtop & Arena
Director:	Franco Dragone
Composer:	René Dupéré
Finale:	February 1, 1997 (Tour 1) December 3, 2006 (Tour 2) December 31, 2012 (Arena)

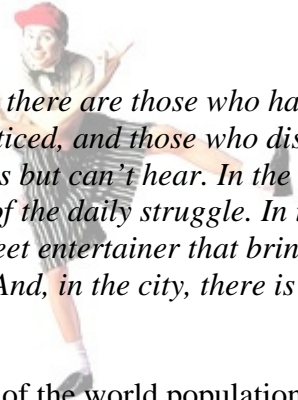
Creative Team

Guide	Composer
Guy Laliberté	René Dupéré
Director	Lighting Designer
Franco Dragone	Luc Lafortune
Creation	Sound Designer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Jonathan Deans
Choreographer	Costume Designer
Debra Brown	Dominique Lemieux
Set Designer	Makeup Designer
Michel Crête	Nathalie Gagné



/// THE ORIGINAL VISION

"In the city there are men, women and children. In the city there are those who have much and those who have nothing; those who get by, unnoticed, and those who disturb. In the city there are those who have eyes but can't see; ears but can't hear. In the city there are those who are not accounted for and the heroes of the daily struggle. In the city there is wildlife, from the beggar to the painter and the street entertainer that brings enchantment to our world on the road to disenchantment. And, in the city, there is Saltimbanco."



When Saltimbanco was created in 1991 it was estimated that 60% of the world population would live in cities by 2020. This idea – “urbanism” – is the premise upon which the show is based. Cities are public places, networks of inter-relationships, but they are also networks of paradoxes. And these paradoxes are precisely what the show’s characters, acts and costumes evoke in order to restore a human dimension to a city given over to conformity and sameness. Given the multi-cultural and rootless cosmopolitan nature of Cirque du Soleil, it’s not surprising that the creative team chose to examine the potential of increasing urbanization.

“The visions of urbanity that were around at the time were all variations on future dystopias, with echoes of the cold war, visions of the - planet in danger,” said Michel Crête, Saltimbanco’s set designer. “There weren’t many reasons given for hope in a better tomorrow.” But Cirque du Soleil wanted Saltimbanco to be a show about the future of the city in a more positive light. “We said: You’ve got to believe that you’re going to live in a better future and that you can be part of that future,” said Gilles Ste. Croix. “You’ve got to have hope.”

From these ideas Saltimbanco began to take shape, and Franco Dragone, the show’s Director, looked upon his own very positive experiences of what modern cosmopolitan life could be like. “Cirque was becoming more and more international,” he remembered. “And we all had to learn to speak one another’s languages: French, English, Russian, and Italian... all coming together to create something unique and beautiful. The show reflects that experience. The costumes, sets and lighting are all in primary colors. Taken alone, they would be flat. But they work together to reveal many shadings.”

Even the music took on this form. “The idea that I had was this,” composer René Dupéré recalls. “What would it sound like if I rode from one end of the city to another with the car window rolled down? I would hear everything from Jamaican to Classical music.” Therefore, urban life meant the democratization of music, that everything is available.

Dominique Lemieux, who designed the costumes for the show, thought Saltimbanco was all about humanity and individuals coming together. “Naked Man, Social Man, the seven deadly sins... it’s a baroque experience.” From Franco Dragone’s point of view, Saltimbanco was “baroque” in the sense described by a twentieth-century Italian poet named Giuseppe Ungaretti. “To Ungaretti,” says Dragone, “‘baroque’ meant a desire to confront the Void, and to fill it so much that you feel life will never end. I wanted to fill the stage because I was afraid of the Void, of the Nothingness.”

/// I AM ONE, I AM MANY...

Saltimbanco, from the Italian “*saltare in banco*”, which according to the French historian Etienne Pasquier (1529-1615) is an Italian word that, when studied from a French perspective, literally means “to jump on a bench” – the bench being a slightly elevated platform or, in other words, the stage - explores the urban experience in all its myriad forms: the people who live there, their idiosyncrasies and likenesses, families and groups, the hustle and bustle of the street and the towering heights of skyscrapers. Between whirlwind and lull, prowess and poetry, *Saltimbanco* takes spectators on an allegorical and acrobatic journey into the heart of the city. Decidedly baroque in its visual vocabulary, the show’s eclectic cast of characters draws spectators into a fanciful, dreamlike world, an imaginary city where diversity is a cause for hope.

The world we enter in Saltimbanco is one unlike any other – even in a Cirque-centric universe. At the start, the entire arena is covered in a large white sheet, which hangs there like a sentinel in waiting, hiding the joys and sorrows of the world. It parts to reveal a world rich in color and texture. The stage and its environs are reminiscent of a bright, fantastic forest – rich, bright blues and greens dominate in eye-popping colors. And the inhabitants of this world are straight out of an iridescent comic book. Saltimbanco’s is a world that exists in primary colors – red, yellow, blue, green – with little variation in the between the line hues. The colors in Saltimbanco are eye-popping, but the Baron warns us – “*Juzoom, Joozoom!*” – that this world of color isn’t all happiness and joy. Saltimbanco is an antidote to the violence and despair of the 20th Century, they say, and when the covering is removed, we are introduced to the proposed new vision of urbanity, one overflowing with optimism and happiness.

The cosmopolitan and allegorical characters of Saltimbanco – the very framework of the show – epitomize the diversity of groups that make up the city. At first glance they seem identical, but a closer look reveals their uniqueness and their individual identity. With them you travel to an imaginary city overflowing with hope and optimism. These are the Worms, at the very base of society; the nameless, faceless many who aspire to be better than they are, to transcend the low social strata. All similar in appearance yet different one from the other, they must with time adapt themselves to their environment. There are two classes of Worms within the framework of Saltimbanco, those referred to as the Urban Worms (the *Vers Masqués*), the faceless masses, those who follow the status quo, never to risk, to express, to gain; and the Multicolored Worms (*Vers Multicolores*), the simplest of all, who follow their most primal urges and concern themselves only with survival.

Thus, as the show evolves, they embody various types of social characters, hoping to one day accede to the rank of Baroque, a cast of visionaries, the antithesis – with a deeply perceptive sense of the world around them. The Baroques constitute the most important family in the world of Saltimbanco. The Baroques sleep under bridges and emerge to celebrate life. Defiant, rebellious, explosive, they are enlightened beings whose free spirits run wild. Armed with a deeply perceptive vision of the world, the Baroques, throughout the fable, reveal the countless contradictions of our civilization where imagination has not yet taken power and reflect upon the extreme personalities of urban dwelling - both in their beauty and wretchedness.

But there are other personages here too:

There is The Baron, our ageless, timeless guide throughout the world of Saltimbanco. . As an imposing figure in his black and white striped cape, long red gloves and top hat perched on a pile of serpentine hair, he beckons us with his gravelly voice, recounting fascinating tales of the past. What secrets lie beyond the Baron's sardonic grin? Before we can find out he has us locked in his hypnotic gaze! The Baron thinks he has power but really has no authority; at his most carefree, the Baron loves to party with the Baroques. And when he tears off his cape to reveal another side of his character - that of an erotic satyr on the prowl - he shows that he's only the king of fools!

The Sleeper/Dreamer, a playful, enigmatic character who falls asleep the moment he appears. Has he conjured Saltimbanco from the depths of his imagination, or is he dreaming within the show? The Dreamer lives between reality and illusion. He is like a clown, satirizing and poking fun at the world around him. Dressed in a striped blue costume and with his long curly tail, the Dreamer is always ready for a nap. But since he is responsible for looking after The Child, he rarely gets the chance to doze off completely.

The Ringmaster, in his yellow jumpsuit with his fanciful green vest and cape, struts proudly around the world of Saltimbanco. The Ringmaster likes to be the centre of attention and often steals the show. With his winning smile and natural charm, he usually gets away with it. The Ringmaster likes to believe he has great powers and he carries a scepter to prove it. But as everybody within the world of Saltimbanco knows, it is the Baron who holds ultimate control even if he is without true power.

The Cavaliers, who are the gentle protectors; they are calm and serene but could strike with great force if they needed to defend themselves or someone more vulnerable. The Cavaliers are elegantly dressed with the tips of their tall black and white hats pointing towards the future. With their lanterns, they light our path through the world of Saltimbanco. And La Belle, as the Singer, reflecting all human emotion. She is the ever-present town crier who expresses the soul of Saltimbanco. Her language is universal and her song reflects the atmosphere around her. Her vocals are emotions — serenity and excitement, hope and joy, disappointment and melancholy.

The acts flow one after the other as this mythic fable unfolds, but, again, not through any traditional sense of a story line. There is no lost child who carries through to catharsis; no sad hunchback who tells us his tales of lost love and desire. But instead, a kaleidoscope of characters, and images, that lead us to a perhaps brighter future. There is a certain simplicity to this show too. It is full of a child-like wonder and amazement. It is an exploration, and celebration, of imagination run wild, and perhaps less complicated and more playful than any of Cirque's other creations. That is not to say the dark side doesn't linger just beyond the horizon — Death makes an appearance at one point, and there are those who would steal the joy. But all in all, it is a playful, beautiful show, yet always aware of its own mortality.

Therefore, Saltimbanco is not linear; rather, it is a kaleidoscope, an adventure in which anything can happen, expressed through its own language, a soul of voice, body and music in nine acrobatic acts and interludes:

ADAGIO TRIO

The celebration that “Kumbalawe” brings is quickly replaced by Saltimbanco’s first act – the Adagio Trio. Adagio, as defined, is Italian meaning: “movement at a slow tempo or pace” and it’s within this definition that the trio performs. Dressed in hooded bodysuits, Mother, Father and Child – in Blue, Yellow and White respectively – present themselves in saltimbanque masques. Once removed, the trio becomes a living sculpture of gracefully intertwined limbs. Their dance is simple, harmonious, and sometimes daring. The parents hold their child up to the heavens. The child is their future – the future of humanity. The Mother, Father and Child, having performed their movements, part ways with their offspring and leave him (or her) alone and unsure, yet thrilled with the experience of life to come. The Child grows up before our eyes; he (or she) will now totter through the world of Saltimbanco as its clown personage, bringing us along on his journey of emotional discovery

CHINESE POLES

Multicolored creatures slither their way on stage – the Worms – and scamper up the four poles in the center of the stage; the skyscrapers of Saltimbanco. Originally used by the Chinese to scale its enemy’s barricades, here in the world of Saltimbanco they’re used for purposes more exotic: performance displays of strength and sense of focus. Like reptiles, the Worms climb, walk, crawl, cling, jump and slide and fly with astounding agility, strength and speed. With their hypnotic, serpentine dance, these masters defy gravity and breathe life into their surroundings. Inspired by the original Chinese discipline, this act features twenty artists from Cirque’s house troupe performing 25 feet in the air.

DOUBLE WIRE

Before the start of the next performance, our resident clown takes the stage for a bit of hilarity (ever get locked in a flooded bathroom?), but soon takes a back seat to the clamor of taiko drums, as they call upon the Double Tight Rope walker. As pretty and delicate as a music-box dancer, the wire-walker gracefully ascends to her perch high above the crowd. With a Chinese parasol in hand, she dances, twirls and somersaults weightlessly between two parallel tightropes and even rides a unicycle high up in the air (flipping from its seat). The two tightropes are four feet apart with a five-foot drop, which further increases the difficulty of the act, making it all the more astounding.

JUGGLING

The Sleeper experiences a dream sequence featuring a parade of characters as we transition from Tight-Rope to Juggling, but when the big top begins to sway to the beat of Cuban rhythms, the juggler takes center stage! This young artist is already a master of her art. Rather than juggling balls into the air, the pint-sized performer bounces first three, then seven balls off the floor in an astounding array of patterns and shapes. The result is an unforgettable rhythmic and dynamic performance.

BOLEDORAS

A man and a woman take centre stage and begin a rhythmic dance. The sound of their stamping feet grows gradually louder until their Latin beat resonates throughout the Big Top. In their hands, they spin bolas – simple percussive instruments consisting of a weight attached to the end of a rope. The weights hit the floor in an explosion of sound (WHACK-WHACK-WHACK) – first in unison, then in counterpoint to the performers’ dancing feet. Their stomping sets the tone as they rock the world and attempt to bring order to the chaos that surrounds them. Or, perhaps, are they the ones that have unleashed it?

RUSSIAN SWING

Following the Bolas, The Baron slows down the pace stepping onto the stage to perform a tap dance with percussion providing a tribal beat. As he dances and swings his white and black - striped cape he groans and screams, sounding as if he were alone in a vast cavern. When he completes his dance, the Baroque family begins the second half of Saltimbanco with a flourish. They are eccentric, eclectic, electric. They light up the world with their infectious energy and they celebrate life with their every movement. The stage is their giant playground. From the Russian swing (which makes its first appearance in a Cirque show with Saltimbanco), they are catapulted up to 30 feet in the air where they complete complicated aerial acrobatics before landing on their feet, on the shoulders of others or high atop human pyramids.

DUO TRAPEZE

Graceful. Harmonious. Breathtaking. High above the audience, two luminous figures appear swinging on a trapeze. They perform a breathtaking aerial ballet – a display of harmony, beauty and trust. When the first dives from her perch, her identical twin catches her gracefully with her feet (a discipline originated by the Steben sisters). Their movements are a celebration of oneness – they are two halves of a whole. At times the pair moves slowly, sensually, as though mermaids in a deep-sea realm. At other times, they are full of passion and fire as they light up the darkest corners of the Big Top.

HAND-BALANCING

In a slow, ritualistic dance, two identical male twins fuse together, forming a single being of remarkable strength and balance. With unfaltering concentration and breathtaking choreography, they push their bodies to the outer limits of human strength.

BUNGEEES

The passionate side now ensues as one of Cirque du Soleil’s most operatic songs “Il sogno di volare,” compliments the beautiful Bungee Ballet. Franco Dragone wrote the lyrics and, as the flyers take to the air, a string ensemble escorts a soaring melody line. These four breathtaking and seemingly weightless creatures float, tumble and fly through the air. An operatic aria resounds through the Big Top while their serene aerial dance conjures up images of fantastic white birds reaching toward the heavens. The performance is truly “ballet without gravity”.

/// SOARING, TEETERING, SLITHERING...

As with any Cirque du Soleil show, changes abound from the very moment it premieres and lasts until the final curtain has been called. Saltimbanco was and is no different. By the end of the first tour's run, a two-year fourteen city tour across North America (1992-1993), the show retained much of its original acrobatic line-up, but a few of the artist's costumes had evolved.

The most dramatic of these were reflected in the Bungee and Hand-to-Hand costumes: during the first year, the Bungee artists sported multi-colored outfits – one red, one green, one yellow, and one blue – rather than the sweeping white angelic creations seen by the time the show was filmed (in Atlanta, at the end of the North American Tour). And the Lorador Brothers (known professionally as the Alexis Brothers) wore distinctly white outfits rather than the leathery ensembles we came to know (and love) by tours end. But perhaps the most dramatic changes to Saltimbanco came after the show left North America for Europe (1995-1997) by way of Japan (1994): two of Saltimbanco's original acrobatic acts were replaced.

The first, the Boledora-Flamenco dancers, didn't make the jump across the pond; they were replaced with an energetic Contortion act featuring four of the Cirque's signature contortionists, the very same team from Nouvelle Expérience: Jinny Jacinto, Isabelle Chasé, Laurence Racine and Nadine Birnette. With new costumes, new choreography and rockin' new music, the Contortionists closed out the first half of Saltimbanco with a bang. The second number missing from the European Tour was the Vertical Rope, which is as it sounds: an act performed on a single vertical rope. Similar to Spanish Webs that would later appear in 1996's Quidam, this act featured a performance by Nicolai Tchelnokov, Galina Karableva, and Nicolai's son Anton (who most know moved on to perform "Aerial Net" in 2002's Varekai) in which contortion-like moves, spins and other feats were performed. It is unclear why the Vertical Rope act was removed from the show; however, it might have been simply for time or because of the addition of a Solo Trapeze performance, added because the creators wanted to ensure at least one trapeze act per performance due to the strenuous physical demands of the discipline.

Saltimbanco would go on to stop at eleven different European cities (two of them twice) for a total of thirteen stops – Amsterdam, Munich, Berlin, Dusseldorf, Vienna, London, Hamburg, Amsterdam, Stuttgart, Angers, Zurich, and Frankfurt – before giving what was advertised as its final bow, on February 1, 1997. The night came, the show went on, and Saltimbanco walked quietly into the shadows. Or so the world thought... With the success Cirque du Soleil found opening up the European market with Saltimbanco, and later with Alegría, by late 1998 the company decided to re-stage Saltimbanco under the Grand Chapiteau and experiment with opening up other brand-new territories: the Asia-Pacific region, namely Australia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

With the re-staging came some changes: The Lorador brothers had already been integrated into Mystère (which had also gone through some changes to help stage 1996's Quidam), therefore, the duo of Daniel and Jacek Gutzmit from Poland were thrust in the spotlight (though others went on to continue the tradition of this fine, strength-filled act as the tour continued); however, the contortion act did not survive the show's restaging.

In its place, for a time (1998-2001) was a Manipulation number performed by three women “swathed in richly colored velvet come to provoke our senses. At times, the three women move the wind, while the movement of the spheres and their perfect shapes bring subtle visions of the planets and infinity. And breathe as one, only to disperse, each flaunting her individuality. With the utmost dexterity, the women manipulate silk ribbons and perfect spheres in alternation. The complex and supple patterns created by the silk emphasize the women’s sensuality and evoke in us sensations of the wind, while the movement of the spheres and their perfect shapes bring subtle visions of the planets and infinity.”

There was also a solo Diabolo number (from 2002-2005), performed by a rather energetic fellow by the name of Mitchell Head. “Glowing in white, a mysterious and quirky character commands the stage with a playful yet dynamic presence. Seemingly intrigued by his apparatus, the diabolo, he is at the same time fighting and following it. The diabolo, or Chinese yo-yo, is a child’s game that becomes an art form in this act. With skilful precision, the diabolo is spun, thrown and twisted around his body, almost taking on a life of its own. The two beings dance an intimate and lively routine together revealing their unity and connection, building to a crescendo of dramatic choreography and skilful manipulation.”

With costumes updated, new acrobatic acts in place, and the music refreshed, Cirque du Soleil opened the new Saltimbanco for previews in Ottawa, Ontario on October 19, 1998 – and the crowds went wild. Over the next eight years, Saltimbanco would travel to an amazing forty-four (44) cities, fourteen (14) on an Asia-Pacific Tour (1999-2001; visiting Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Pacific Coastal Region of North America), twenty-two (22) on its Second European Tour (2002-2005; visiting cities in the Netherlands, Spain, Austria, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, France, Italy, and Germany) and eight (8) on Cirque’s first-ever Latin America Tour (2005-2006; visiting Mexico, Chile, and Brazil) to rousing successes.

But then, on November 22, 2005, Michael Bolingbroke, Senior Vice-President of Shows, made the following announcement, shocking the Cirque du Soleil community:

Hello everyone,

Announcing Saltimbanco’s retirement is not an easy thing to do. This Sunday we told the tour that the final performance of Cirque’s oldest show still running, one that began life in Montreal in the spring of 1992, will take place in Brazil in December 2006. Please allow me to share with you the reasons why we concluded that it was time for Saltimbanco to say goodbye after 15 years.

Our decision to retire Saltimbanco has nothing to do with its artistic merit. Long considered to be Cirque’s ideal ambassador to new markets, it once again proved worthy of that reputation last spring when it wowed over 200,000 spectators in Paris. Instead, our choice was first and foremost a business decision related to market development. Our research and field experience have shown that up to six touring shows can currently be presented at the same time before our markets are saturated. By retiring in December 2006, Saltimbanco leaves the way free for Cirque 2007 [Koozå].

The reason why we are announcing Saltimbanco's retirement over a year in advance is to ensure that we can properly plan for the redeployment of the maximum number of people possible working on or for the tour. A redeployment procedure has been developed to coordinate activities throughout Cirque, and a committee is already working on reassigning the talent and expertise currently serving Saltimbanco to our other projects and shows.

Curiously, this is not the first time that Saltimbanco's retirement has been announced. In February 1997, we marked the occasion of its last ever performance in London, at Royal Albert Hall... at least until it headed off again the next year for Australia, with a stopover in Ottawa along the way. That fact, however, should not lead anyone to believe that Saltimbanco is likely to start touring again after 2006. But it is certain to shine in the hearts of millions of delighted spectators forever.

Saltimbanco is a celebration of life. Conceived as an antidote to violence and despair, its message is just as relevant now as it ever was. We will miss it, and we will be sure to bid the show a proper goodbye when it leaves us for good at the end of 2006. For the time being, it will continue to work its magic in South America and do what it has always done best for nearly 15 years: introducing new fans to the world of Cirque du Soleil.

Bravo, Saltimbanco!

On Sunday, December 3, 2006, an end to a fantastic era came; Saltimbanco had its final curtain call under the Grand Chapiteau in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

/// I AM AS WE ARE – ETERNAL, OUT OF TIME?

During its 14-year run under the big top, Saltimbanco played to an audience of 9.5 million, for a total of more than 4,000 performances in some 75 cities on five continents and that should have been the end of Saltimbanco's amazing story. Cirque du Soleil made it abundantly clear in their announcement that closing the show would help pave the way for 2007's Koozå tour (it would place Saltimbanco's Grand Chapiteau in play), not to mention help fuel Cirque's other entertainment interests (by this time The Beatles LOVE had premiered, and ZED, ZAIA, and Criss Angel BELIEVE were in active development), but amidst the plethora of new and interesting endeavors for Cirque there was a change of heart. Thanks in large part to DELIRIUM (Cirque du Soleil's "In Concert" experiment, which began touring arenas throughout North America in January 2006), there came a great opportunity to extend Saltimbanco's run. And on August 11, 2006, Michael Bolingbroke, then SVP of Shows, brought news of Saltimbanco's future that would once again shock the community:

Today, Cirque has a unique opportunity to pursue Saltimbanco's amazing adventure.

As some of you will remember, we have already announced the retirement of the oldest of Cirque's shows twice, notably in 1997 and most recently in last November. Well, history seems bound to repeat itself. With a third life opening up for the show, it appears that Saltimbanco is not yet ready to bid audiences a final adieu!

In order to let Saltimbanco continue to open up new markets, we are preparing an arena tour. Presenting shows in arenas will give Cirque a presence in places where our usual big top performances are impracticable, in North America to begin with and then in Europe. The tour is slated to visit arenas in over 50 North American cities, introducing thousands of new spectators to the world of Cirque du Soleil.

On August 8, we presented the conditions specific to this type of tour to troupe members in São Paulo. We hope to be able to confirm the entire team's participation in the new tour by September 10. We will then be in a position to decide on a premiere date. Arena shows offer significant potential for Cirque. We can now set our sights on extending the life expectancy of our productions and offering artists brand new venues where they can showcase their skills.

Mr. Bolingbroke ended his announcement with, "we will keep you informed of any developments" and although it would be a few more weeks before any news regarding Saltimbanco's future would be heard, he was true to his word. On December 22, 2006 the word was finally given:

The go-ahead has been given! Saltimbanco will have a third life, beginning an arena tour in the summer of 2007. The show's new version – lasting 90 minutes excluding the interval - will open in London, Ontario, on July 31st, and will go on to visit arenas in over 40 cities in North America. These are cities that are unable to host our traditional big top shows. On its way, Saltimbanco will exceptionally be visiting Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec City and Toronto, where it will be staged in arenas by way of a farewell tour. This format of show also gives us possibilities to perform in countries where we have not been able to go thus far, in particular, countries in South America and Asia.

"I am very happy to confirm that new spectators will get a chance to discover this magical, colorful and adventure-filled universe," said Aldo Giampaolo, Saltimbanco's new Executive Producer. "We have here a fabulous opportunity to keep alive a show that has been a huge success since it started. Saltimbanco really is a hymn to life," Michael Bolingbroke added. For 24 months, visiting each city for [the] duration of one week, the 45 artists and 35 employees will bring the world of Saltimbanco, [our] urban universe brimming over with joy and optimism, to arenas seating between 4,000 and 5,000 spectators.

The remount gathered speed day by day from the moment the green light was given – the adventure of Saltimbanco would live on! But there was plenty of work to be done for the heads of Sound, Carpentry, Rigging and Lighting before the tour ever saw its first city. How would the show translate logistically? The greatest challenge for the production crew had to do with setting up and tearing down the set. For a show under the big top, these operations usually take nine days (for setup) and two and a half days (for tear-down). But for the Saltimbanco arena show, setup has to be done in nine hours and tear-down in only two hours. But they weren't the only issues to solve:

- Sound: They needed to replicate the surround sound effects heard in the big top in an arena setting. This required a completely new sound system and the sounds to be redesigned.
- Lighting: In the big top, there were 241 individual light fixtures. Cirque needed to simplify this for the arena setup. A first draft dictated a need for around 80 moving lights in order to replicate the same lighting effects seen under the Grand Chapiteau. And without tent masts those lights had to be hung in the arena off grids in the ceiling.
- Carpentry & Rigging: The entire stage, the rostrum and the acrobatic grid had to be completely rebuilt, not to mention coming up with new rigging techniques to span over 44 different venues – all in three months!

Besides making the stage and other set pieces easier to setup and tear down, they also needed to be lighter (to solve that Cirque re-made the stage out of aluminum instead of steel, which is much lighter), height also had to be taken into consideration and it all came down to seven inches. How much difference does seven inches make? Cirque explains:

It's not even a foot, but seven inches can make a big difference when you are talking about stage height in an arena! At Cirque, our stages in the big top are traditionally set at around 31 inches high, with adjustments made to accommodate for uneven sites. But in the big tops, our bleachers are angled so that everyone can clearly see the performance. When we are performing in arenas we seat a lot of people on the floor (what is normally the ice surface). These seats will be flat so we need to raise the stage so that everyone can see. And when deciding how high to raise our stage, we are able to get a better idea of the spectators perspective by using 3D imaging to simulate the spectator's view according to different stage heights. This can save us a lot of time before we begin construction.

Saltimbanco began its third life on July 31, 2007, which took it all across North America, Europe, Australia, Russia, the Baltics and even China and Africa. As a pioneer of the Arena model (as of this writing Alegría, Quidam, Dralion and Varekai have followed Saltimbanco into this touring format), the show continued to break records wherever it went:

- September 14, 2007, the show celebrated its 10 millionth spectator (Syracuse, New York) – a first for Cirque du Soleil.
- November 29, 2007, the show celebrated both its 100th arena performance and its 4,500th overall performance in Colorado Springs, Colorado.
- June 28, 2009, the show celebrated its 5,000th performance in Tampa, Florida.

But the conversion wasn't without its detractors. Arenas tend to be massive spaces filled with cavernous voids that a small stage and set could hardly begin to fill; therefore, much of the intimacy found under the Grand Chapiteau was lost. Seating and its arrangement continued to be a problem.

Because the stage is elevated for the benefit of those seated on the floor (in folding chairs no less), unless you're in the front row or on the of the isle ends, sightlines are virtually non-existent. (Would a small set of bleachers on the "floor" be such a bad suggestion?) And with the placement of seats far away from the stage (for those seated throughout the arena's built-in seating), spectators as a result become removed from the action, making the performance seem distant and small.

/// I AM LEGION

If Alegría is considered to be Cirque's signature show – the one that pulled together all of the various elements into one seamless, fantastic production – then Saltimbanco is the progenitor of what would become the essence of the modern Cirque du Soleil. By taking a giant leap from the literal-mindedness of Le Cirque Réinventé, and to some extent Nouvelle Expérience, it laid the groundwork for the true exploration of what these shows had already begun. It is much less literal than any of the shows that came before it, relying more on thematic structure and image than on a strict set of rules. To look at Saltimbanco, coming where it does in the evolution of Cirque's history, is to see the basis of what came after it. In our opinion, with Saltimbanco, the productions became less about pretty pictures that tied the acts together, and more about a total experience, in which the circus acts became an integral part. In other words, it became one complete theatrical experience. The acts come out of an impulse in the story-line; they blend together in one seamless totality of fantasy.

The characters, then – the Worms, the Baroques, the Baron – become not just plot devices or wonderful costume pieces that add to the visual excitement, but archetypes of personality and emotions. The Baroques are vividly different from the Worms, and the nature of their performance (most pointedly in the Russian Swing) is vastly different (compared to the Worms on the Chinese Poles). The music of the show is expertly integrated to underlie the thematic structure. Indeed, the signature song of the show – Kumbalawé – is one of the lightest, most lyrical pieces in Cirque's repertoire. Think of it in comparison to the bright colors, the high energy of the set and the design, and it is a simple, almost child-like tune, reminiscent of innocence and joy.

On December 31, 2012, Saltimbanco came home to Montreal to retire, not to expire, as Cirque du Soleil Creative Guide Gilles Ste-Croix wished to be made clear. "I don't like the idea that it dies," Ste-Croix said. "I think it retires. Maybe, you know, in 10 years – 15 years – some young artists will say: 'Hey, let's do Saltimbanco again!'" But for all intents and purposes, the show has seen its last spectator. Since 1992, Saltimbanco has visited 205 cities across 41 countries to a total of 14 million spectators. The only show (as of this writing) to have spanned five continents, it was performed in more than 150 cities that hadn't previously played host to a Cirque du Soleil show. Though the show had lost a little something in its conversion from Grand Chapiteau to Arena (the inclusion of "Artistic Bicycle" and "Hand-balancing on Canes" in place of "Double Wire" for instance) there is no denying its rightful place in the pantheon of amazing Cirque du Soleil spectacles.

* * *

Spirit and body, shadow and light, between earth and sky I tumble, spinning arabesques, kaleidoscope fantasy. I am noble and rogue, mortal and sorcerer, fire and water, power and grace. Sublime and grotesque, somber and afire, I entrance, mesmerize, fusing madness and wisdom, primordial chaos. ~~ I am celestial, and eerie, playful and mischievous, subtle and striking, magnificent, androgynous. Soaring, teetering, slithering, I am fluid, poetic, hypnotic. Dancing, whirling, flying, I am rebellious, defiant, and explosive. ~~ I am one, I am many, I am as we are - eternal, out of time. I am science and magic, chimeric, ethereal. I come from nowhere. I come from everywhere. ~~ But... I am creature of neither fantasy nor reality, neither incantation nor dream. I am neither man nor woman, god nor demon, song nor story.

I am no one, I am legion.

I AM SALTIMBANCO.



MYSTÈRE

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

Only when the questions become more important than the answers will the solution emerge.

MYSTÈRE

An Ancient Bird hops down the song-lines that furrow the brow of the desert, tapping his beak the path that only he can see clearly. Every click of the crooked bone raises a puff of dust, a few notes, and a few memories...

On a relatively cool Las Vegas winters eve in 1993, patrons, fans and the curious alike assembled on the Las Vegas Strip to take part in something new and extraordinary: the birth of a new creation from Cirque du Soleil.

While today such an event is considered less than phenomenal (there are now multiple Cirque du Soleil shows in Las Vegas for instance), on this cool December evening however, these spectators were witnessing something untried – the unveiling of a new concept. Rather than travel and be presented under the Grand Chapiteau (as all other previous Cirque du Soleil shows had done), this new creation would instead bow within a specially constructed theater built for its purpose alone inside one of the newest casino-hotels on the Las Vegas Strip – Steve Wynn’s Treasure Island.

It would turn out to be unlike anything that had ever been seen before from this Montréal-based circus troupe and it would usher in a brand new era for Cirque du Soleil, Las Vegas, and production arts as a whole.

Mystère.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	December 25, 1993
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Franco Dragone
Composer:	René Dupéré & Benoît Jutras
Location:	Treasure Island, Las Vegas

Creative Team

Guide	Composer
Guy Laliberté	René Dupéré
Director	Composer
Franco Dragone	Benoît Jutras
Creation	Lighting Designer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Luc Lafortune
Choreographer	Sound Designer
Debra Brown	Jonathan Deans
Set Designer	Costume Designer
Michel Crête	Dominique Lemieux
	Makeup Designer
	Nathalie Gagné



/// GENESIS

"With Mystère, we were out of the big top for the first time, and into the intimate surroundings of a theatre. We met the challenge by creating a different style of performance: this time, the show became a series of large, living frescoes." - Gilles Ste-Croix (Spectaculara)

What brought Cirque du Soleil to this place in time? And what were they about to give birth to? For Mystère, we look to the history of Cirque du Soleil to provide those answers, and in doing so revisit the innovative and imaginative Nouvelle Expérience. "At the end of the 1980s, we were presenting a show called Nouvelle Expérience, and were approached by Caesar's Palace organization to mount a show there, to be presented in a theater in 1991," said Gilles Ste-Croix in an interview for the Spectaculara section of Cirque du Soleil's website. "We put together the concept for a show with a mythological theme, which seemed appropriate," but it didn't go as planned.

According to Theatre Crafts' May 1994 issue: In January of 1991, Cirque founder Guy Laliberté traveled to Vegas with Patrick Berg, general manager of Sceno Plus Inc., a Montreal-based company specializing in the design, restoration, and renovation of theatres which Laliberté had chosen to design the space. In town to pitch their plans to the Caesar's Palace board of directors for a theatre (complete with Roman-style columns) that would house the Cirque du Soleil vision in Vegas, things were not going well. After a lengthy presentation to these "12 guys in grey suits," as Berge refers to them, the Cirque contingent was met with a less-than-enthusiastic response. "No one really wanted to say, 'Oh, it's a good concept,' or 'Oh, it's a bad concept,'" Berg says. Matters were complicated when the board expressed concern over such matters as show schedules and costumes. "It came to a point with Caesar's Palace where they were telling the circus that the girls are going to be dressed like this and the show had to look like that. So we all got up and walked out and slammed the door."

Whether or not the meeting ended so abruptly is open to debate, but after hearing a rumor that Cirque was talking to (and later rebuffed by) Caesar's Palace, then Mirage Resorts (now MGM International) Chairman Steve Wynn flew to Toronto to catch a performance of Cirque's Nouvelle Expérience. According to Berge, "Wynn was so impressed with what he saw that he approached Laliberté at intermission and said, 'I'll give you your building.' Wynn saw in Cirque a perfect complement to Treasure Island, a show that would appeal to its international guests, but more importantly, one that would appeal to Vegas' newest target audience: the family."

Therefore, in 1992, following a successful North American tour, "Nouvelle Expérience" rolled into Las Vegas and set up stakes in a special white-and-gold striped tent on the grounds of The Mirage. "We really took a gamble when we tried to play Cirque in Las Vegas," Sally Dewhurst, publicist for Mystère at the time said in an interview with Amusement Business (June 5, 1995). "Our situation was that we were behind the Mirage and people had to go through the casino to the tent, which wasn't conducive to convenience. Visitors didn't see its location or know the name, although the locals who did know about it loved it.

One of the incentives to having the show in a tent prior to *Mystère* coming was that people became aware of the name Cirque du Soleil. But Nouvelle Experience didn't have the attendance figures that we had hoped for."

While the show was less-than-well received – at first ("At that time, no one in Vegas knew us. We would call suppliers and they would say 'Cirque who?'" Gilles Ste-Croix remembered) – the yearlong experiment proved one thing: Las Vegas could handle a sophisticated production (remember, at the time cabaret-style Showgirl shows and headliners were the norm). "But the show was a success, and Steve then asked us to mount a show in a permanent theatre at Treasure Island by 1993, which was very fast. We ended up building on some of the ideas we originally presented to Caesar's. That's why there are traces of mythology in *Mystère*, like the *Odyssey*, or *Scylla* and *Charybdis*."

Scylla and *Charybdis* were mythical sea monsters noted by Homer; later Greek tradition sited them on opposite sides of the Strait of Messina between Sicily and the Italian mainland. *Scylla* was rationalized as a rock shoal (described as a six-headed sea monster) on the Italian side of the strait and *Charybdis* was a whirlpool off the coast of Sicily. They were regarded as a sea hazard located close enough to each other that they posed an inescapable threat to passing sailors; avoiding *Charybdis* meant passing too close to *Scylla* and vice versa.

"I guess you could say I was the pursuer," Wynn said in an interview for the show's press-kit. "I tracked them down in Toronto. I told them I was building a new hotel, Treasure Island, and I said I would build them the same theater they wanted at Caesar's. I asked them to shake hands on it since I had to catch a plane. I was standing at the bottom of the ramp. I said, 'This is how I do business. I won't know you any better in five years than I do now, so let's make a deal.' Guy Laliberte said, 'I don't believe this,' but he shook hands."

Once the deal was made Laliberté and Berge flew back to Vegas, this time to meet over the proposal for the performance space. "The first morning at 9:00," Berge recalled, "we're sitting in the conference room and Steve Wynn walks in with a plan in his mouth and two others in his hand and said, 'Okay, guys, you can go back home, I've designed your whole theatre.' That was the beginning of a three-year adventure." (Theatre Crafts, May 1994) To say the guys at Cirque du Soleil were shocked would be an understatement. But eventually Steve Wynn was convinced of the merits of their plan and offered up a compromise: the construction project would be managed by Wynn's in-house design firm, Atlandia Design, while the design would be handled by Sceno Plus.

"Vegas 2 was one step closer to reality; now all Cirque and Sceno Plus had to do was convince everyone else of the merits of their plan, a task that would not always be easy." (Theatre Crafts, May 1994)

/// THE MYSTÈRE THEATER...

Of course, it's difficult to fully comprehend the cosmic chorus that would eventually become Mystère without fully appreciating the space within which these sprites jump and play.

Researching the creation and implementation of theater and set designs for Cirque is no easy task, but in doing so one will find two prevalent names: Michel Crête and Scéno Plus. Michel Crête had been Cirque du Soleil's scenographer, or the one who "paints the scene" using the art of perspective representation, for many years up to that point and was hailed as a talented, one-of-a-kind individual. Monsignor Crête came to Cirque in 1986, putting his knowledge of creation and design to use as Costume Designer. In his tenure, he created the stunning and innovative (not to mention colorful) costuming for Le Cirque Réinventé (1987-1990) and Nouvelle Expérience (1990-1993). But "within a few years," says the Cirque du Soleil website, "he traded fabric for the media of wood, metals and plastics." The change resulted in many stunning sets for both Cirque's permanent and traveling shows.

In 1992, Michel Crête left the world of fabric behind and designed the sets for the mega-production known as Fascination (a combination of Le Cirque Réinventé and Nouvelle Expérience) that appeared as a special limited engagement in Japan. He went on to design the sets for Saltimbanco (1992), Mystère (1993), Alegría (1994), Quidam (1996), "O" and La Nouba (1998). Through it all, Michel has worked closely with Scéno Plus. Scéno Plus is an internationally renowned performing arts and entertainment design firm providing a complete range of integrated specialized services. "With an innovative and passionate approach to each project, we develop unique facilities meeting the highest expectations from performing artists, facility managers and the public," states their website. "Passion for theatres and the world of performing arts, along with a comprehensive understanding of all issues related to the management of our created spaces, has earned Scéno Plus numerous international awards and the recognition of the industry throughout the world." Their vision - TECHNOLOGY ART PASSION – has led them to create dozens of spaces around the globe.

The first fusion of this partnership between Cirque and Scéno Plus was the Treasure Island showroom, a beautiful 1541-seat theater within the 430 million expansion of the Mirage Casino-Hotel in Las Vegas. Rumored to cost approximately \$26 million (design and equipment), the theater comes complete with comfortable seats, a wonderful view for all, and an interesting story of compromise with its design. You'll find the 74,000 square-foot theater in the back of Treasure Island through a couple of sets of white and red wooden doors, but you won't mistake their purpose; for beyond the ornamented doors lays Mystère.

One of the first things people notice upon entering is its openness. The Treasure Island Theater lacks a divider, or curtain, between stage and audience that is usually found in most theaters. Thus the 120-foot by 70-foot stage is completely open to the audience, allowing the action to be thrust upon them. This was the goal from the initial meetings between the Mirage staff and Cirque/Scéno. The idea was to make the environment feel as if you were in an intimate setting not a Big Top. In fact, upon further study you'll find that there's also no Proscenium Arch, the technical name for that division. The lack of this arch is what gives Mystère its life, but it was one of the earliest and first battles the designers had to fight.

The fire marshal took an interest in the fact that the design lacked a "fire curtain" - a fire-retardant cloth made to help contain smoke, heat and flame in case of a fire. This absence meant that the theater would not adhere to the established fire codes, which the fire marshal could not understand. Patrick Berg, general manager of Scéno Plus Inc., hauled a model of the theatre to the fire marshal's office to explain it: "Half the show is on top of the audience and you can't put a fire curtain in the middle of a set," Berge told them and they acquiesced. The proscenium-less space also met with some resistance from Wynn and architect Joel Bergman of Atlandia; Bergman pointed out that if *Mystère* were to flop in six months, Mirage Resorts would have to shut the space down and transform it into a "normal theatre". The solution was to design the theatre and its catwalk system so it could be easily modified to add a full proscenium arch should the space be converted.

There were other problems to overcome as well. In the original plans, series of lifts were envisioned to raise and lower the performers at will. In order to incorporate the lifts they would have to be buried in the ground, but Las Vegas sits on a crust of what is called "caliche," soil particles that have been fused with lime. This fusion creates a substance that is as hard as (if not harder than) cement, which makes burrowing into it quite difficult and costly.

Since they couldn't dig down in the bedrock without elevating the costs of the theater prohibitively, the solution is actually one of the most ingenious and visible parts of the *Mystère* experience - the *Deux Machina*.

The stage floor sits on specially designed spiral-shaped lifts called "Spiralifts". The Spiralifts were designed by Gala Systems (a company that provides theater stage lift systems and over-stage machinery to theaters, auditoriums, concert halls and venues), a division of Montreal's Paco Corp. (an equipment and machinery manufacturing company), and employ a "coiled, flexible, flat steel spring that expands with the insertion of a thin, vertically-oriented spiral steel band." This allows for big savings in space while providing a rock-solid system for lifting and lowering stages. The use of the Spiralifts (affectionately termed "slinky-lifts") also meant that they wouldn't have to spend a lot of money digging through the tough, solid ground, which greatly pleased the Mirage developers. Each of the lifts can support 300 pounds per square foot and are controlled by a motion cue system designed by Mirage Resorts Entertainment Technologies Group. Props, equipment and performers can then be elevated to the stage level from the trap by means of four of these "slinky lifts" located at the heart of the stage; three are 10-feet by 36-feet, the other, on the thrust, is 36-feet by 36-feet.

I find once I'm in the theater I can't help but look at the set and ceiling. A simple thing the ceiling is, but here too Cirque/Scéno provided something beautiful and interesting. The ceiling is a cloth mural specially crafted by Sky Art of Colorado. The print on the cloth is just as fanciful as the production below it - a fantasy map of the world with ships at sea! And hidden up in that sea of ships is the O-Daiko drum, the heartbeat of *Mystère*! (The "heartbeat" is 6-feet/1.8 meters in diameter and 15-feet/4.6 meters in length. It weighs half a ton!). The set is also an interesting piece of mechanics, consisting of a hunk of metal as a backdrop that can be rotated by a simple flip of a switch. (You'll notice it more prominently as it moves during the transition from Korean Plank/FastTrack/Trampoline to Flying Trapeze. At times it is meant to represent the sky.)

The 10 musicians are housed on either side of the stage, with drums and percussion on the left and everyone else on the right. A sophisticated communications computer allows the musical director to speak with all the musicians and a monotone "click track" keeps everyone in sync. Underneath the stage is a 28-foot round turntable that can revolve up to 10 revolutions per minute, and of course those slinky-lifts.

Many challenges faced the design team for Cirque du Soleil's first theater, but everyone worked to resolve these issues no matter how heated the debates became.

The addition to The Mirage, Treasure Island, opened on October 26, 1993. Though the public had to wait another two months to have a seat in the theater, patrons were lined up on Christmas Eve to bear witness to a unique event in Cirque du Soleil's history. In 1994, Scéno Plus was awarded the Las Vegas Best Theater of the Year award for their ingenuity. Not bad for their first Cirque outing, wouldn't you say?

/// AN ESOTERIC NARRATIVE

"The Mystère set actually suggests Ulysses, and the mythical obstacles he had to overcome on his own journey. The two towers represent Scylla and Charybdis, two of the perils Ulysses faced. The true journey of life is never easy." - Michel Crete (Spectaculara)

The multi-million dollar production of Mystère tells a story – An amazing story of time, beauty and memory; a ballet without gravity and a theater performance without actors. "Mystère is a voyage to the very heart of life where past, present and future merge and all our emotions converge," Franco Dragone says within the pages of the show's program book. "Mystère is the enigma of time, the bearer of hopes and dreams, but also of tragedy. It is above all the remembrance of time past, memories of life unfolding, following its course and ultimately surviving against all odds."

- Mystère is the story of the universe - a rich voyage from the dawn of time to the end of the millennium. Mystère is also man's journey from infancy to adulthood - his desire to understand the universe, his search for answers and his ultimate discovery that life itself is a mystery.
- Mystère is a celebration of life. From the genesis of the first life forms to the rise of human civilizations, the driving force has always been the vital spark of life, throbbing, struggling, reproducing, and weaving through death and rebirth. From the infinitesimally microscopic to the infinitely vast, from the most majestic to the most terrifying, from the most fragile to the most powerful, all is the making of life.
- Mystère is a voyage to the very heart of life where past, present and future merge, and all our emotions converge. Mystère is the enigma of time, the bearer of hopes and dreams but also of tragedy. It is above all the remembrance of time past, memories of life unfolding, following its course and ultimately surviving against all odds.

And that includes beating the show's own development odds.

Although Steve Wynn compromised with Cirque du Soleil on the design and construction of the Mystère Theater (which proved to be a successful decision), and allowed Cirque to retain full creative control over the creation of the show that would play within that theater, doing so wasn't without reservations. The story goes that when the show was still in its conception stage, where nothing was yet final, Steve Wynn decided to take a gander at his gamble and watched a rehearsal. When the house lights returned, the expression on his face was that of controlled terror - he was not enthused. He thought the show was too operatic, and he wanted it changed.

"It was terrible," said Steve Wynn in a 1997 interview for Forbes magazine. "I almost wet my pants!" But Cirque's creative team argued loftily that their shows come together as performers interact with each other and the audience. ("With Mystère, Cirque knew they were doing something totally new in Las Vegas, and that meant breaking the rules, doing the unexpected," Luc Lafortune remembers. "While we were rehearsing the show, someone said the lighting was too heavy, that it made him think of a Wagner opera. Franco and I looked at each other and said: 'All right!' We knew we had to be on the right track.")

The creators - Franco Dragone (Director) and Gilles Ste-Croix (Creation) - jumped to the defense of the show, and thankfully, Steve Wynn allowed the two to continue uninhibited and in full control. ("Cirque would not dilute its brand of theater to turn Mystère into a standard Vegas show," Gilles Ste-Croix remembered.) That decision was a fateful one, because who could guess at this day and age, what Mystère would have been... or if it would have been at all! Their visions coalesced with the juices of creation. The result: a unique story - a blend of circus and theater; of dance and darkness; and, of life and death. Their vision consisted of a mountain and a bird -- a story so bold and yet so fragile, exploring the human condition in a sense that had not been done before.

That vision brought forth Mystère.

"Mystère, for me, is about life," says Franco Dragone (Spectaculara). "We knew we were building this temple in the desert, in Las Vegas. When you see the fragile beauty there, you can't help but ask yourself: how did life come to this planet? Mystère, in a way, is the story of this innocent being who is born into the universe, and then becomes a pilgrim, exploring its history. We're always influenced by the latest discussions and dialogues. And we were fascinated by chaos theory: the idea that, when a butterfly flaps its wings in Argentina, it causes a rainstorm in Europe. Everything is connected. Of course, the mystery is never fully resolved, but maybe that is what our pilgrim discovers."

To once again quote the show's program: "An Ancient Bird hops down the song-lines that furrow the brow of the desert, tapping his beak the path that only he can see clearly. Every click of the crooked bone raises a puff of dust, a few notes, and a few memories. A shiver ruffles his sun-worn feathers and the joy of remembrance fills him with surprise, as always..."

“A thousand years from now, the sun sets for the billionth time on the Nevada desert. The Ancient Bird bears witness, standing on a single gnarled leg. As the warmth of the day ebbs away, he turns his sand-scarred beak to the Ancient Mountain and croaks mischievously, "Do you remember, friend?" The wind sighs down the slopes, whispering a fond memory... when giants roamed a land where birds were still magical and humans believed in destiny. The bird's unblinking eye hardens at the memory of injustice. But the Mountain's warm breath whispers a comforting word. Remember... Remember the glow of the day when a hundred souls fused to deposit a generous gift on the desert floor; a gift that bloomed into a cactus flower, the beauty of which touched the world. Remember the radiance of the flower blossoming in the desert. Remember the mystery.”

The Mountain and the Ancient Bird tell us a story of humanity that is on the brink of a new Century. It is December 31st, 1999 and the universe is filled with the cries of three enormous babies (wait, three? Yes!). In thirteen brief seconds it will either be the dawn of a new millennium "fraught with the hopes and fears of humanity", or the beginning of the apocalypse doomsayers of the world have predicted. As the second hands everywhere slow to a solemn procession the whole world counts down with bated breath... all eyes turn skyward. All the sounds of the world, all the moments of history fuse into a few seconds. Time seems to grind to a halt. But the true Mystery is that it never moves forward, only in circles.

Thus the stage was set, but who would populate this new universe?

/// THE PERSONAGES OF MYSTÈRE

"We really felt as if we were building a new mythology, seen through the eyes of people today. So, in the costumes and characters, we tried to paint a picture of life in all its textures and colors, all its lyricism. Life is terrifically inter-connected... with rhythm and chaos revealing a mysterious harmony." - Dominique Lemieux (Spectaculara)

Weaving themselves into the tapestry of the universe is an eclectic array of otherworldly creatures, beings with more than just a part to play. Some are airy, vivacious and joyful while others creepy, chilling and menacing. And perhaps as we familiarize ourselves with these playful yet solemn creatures of the wilderness, we may have a better sense of what universal song they are endeavoring to sing:

Les Épouvantables (Les Bébés)

Two enormous babies on a quest for nourishment embark on an odyssey of discovery.

Deus ex machina

The machine that regulates the existence of everything, living or inate. Inevitably it tyrannizes and grinds down the independent.

Moha-Samedi

He is the man in pink, named after the first day of the new millennium. He is the narrator no one hears or listens to. He is the eternal puppeteer.

The Tribe

The primitive, tragic ghosts of modern humanity. They descend from the skies to provide the earthly beat of our journey. They welcome us, and they bid us farewell.

The Pets (Birds of Prey)

These birds of prey have forgotten how to fly. The ever-present and unpredictable Birds of Prey fly rapidly through the world of Mystère. They can be graceful and serene, but when hungry they will attack, devouring their prey with delight.



{ Les Épouvantables }



{ Deus ex machina }



{ Moha-Samedi }



{ The Tribe }



{ The Birds of Prey }

The Asticots (Double Faces)

Each one is a segment of the whole and would die if alone. Their double face hides the corruption of their state. They slither, climb and jump and show us magnificent things.



{The Asticots}

The Archangels (Les Lauquais)

They are terrestrial guardians, the servants, of the happiness and safety of others, even at the cost of their own lives – A tragic chorus. They also are known as "Les Lauquais", which means "Lackeys" defined as "Servants".



{Les Lauquais}

Gabriel

The finest of the Archangels, he is ready to sacrifice everything, including the love of the one he secretly adores.



{Gabriel}

Inti X & Y (Spermatoes & Spermatites)

Inti X: A comic chorus, a tribe of virus, ready to contaminate everybody. Inti Y: The male viruses, even less predictable than their mates. The Spermatoes and Spermatites are the seeds of life, moving about frantically to fulfill their destinies. With their energy, these bouncing characters are like viruses, contaminating the world of Mystère with infectious folly. The comic chorus, always present, always jolly, laughs in the face of the pain of humanity. Perhaps they possess the true wisdom?



{Inti X & Y}

La Belle

Through her fear of ugliness she seeks to avoid pain at all costs. Mystère de la beauté



{La Belle}

The Black Virgin (Black Widow)

A praying mantis that destroys the illusions and dreams of her victims. She is the antithesis of Belle's beauty and grace.

Vache à lait

He is the bearer of every illusion, but staying just beyond reach. He is the protector of youth and a symbol of fertility, and when he sounds his ancient horn, it heralds a rebirth, a new beginning!

The Firebird (Red Bird)

The Red Bird is a red jewel sailing through the sky on a stream of song, leaping ever higher in his futile attempt to take to the skies. Still convinced he can fly, he struggles against his fate.

The Green Lizards

Mischievous and skittish, these chameleons can completely disappear before your eyes! But when they skitter about in their reptilian dance, these lizard shows off its shiny green skin with flashes of scarlet.

Mephisto

A thwarted, twisted creature from the deepest of nightmares; Mephisto and his female counterpart Vénus are devilish and dark characters. In Mystère's voyage from the dawn of time, Mephisto and Vénus appear from the depths of the Earth. Together they cast a long dark shadow and expose the somber, more complex side of the journey of life. Mephisto and Venus appear in times of commotion and noise. Their presence wreaks havoc in any domain.

The Giants

A gentle frivolous race of futile feathers and long legs.

Stas (La Puce)

A mischievous imp, a thousand years old.

Escargot (Alice)

Born of spring rain. Carrier of souls of the ancestors and herald of the future.



{The Black Virgin}



{Vache ê Lait}



{The Firebird}



{The Green Lizards}



{Stas}



{Escargot}



{Brian Le Petit}

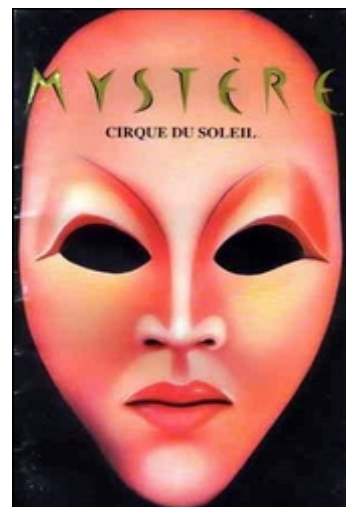


{Mephisto}

/// MYSTÈRE 1.0 (1993-1996)

"A BEAUTIFUL YOUNG MAN SAILS over the green earth, briefly alighting, then aloft again. Next a man and a woman materialize, Adam and Eve without the snake, in a stately, rapturous dance that hints at what passion was like before guilt. Finally, six animal-angels drop from the sky and soar back into it, gliding, pirouetting, and seeming to meditate in midair before they swoop back, swing down and holds hands, in a little aerodynamic miracle of celestial accord." (TIME, 1994)

The first version of Mystère - opening with "Manipulation" (a specially crafted act in which a trio manipulated various shapes and balls), then leading into Chinese Poles, Hand-to-Hand (performed by Yves Decoste and Mario Pontbriand), Bungees, Korean Plank / Trampoline / Fast-track and ending with Flying Trapeze - is quite a mystery (if you'll excuse the pun) to most of us. Why? As Gilles Ste-Croix said above, Mystère's first couple of years were fraught with big changes. Mystère started slowly in January 1994, with attendance at only about 60 percent, while the touring show (which was then Saltimbanco) was extremely successful, consistently selling out at 100 percent. The show required a lot of media coverage to bring Mystère to public attention. Indeed, not content to rest on its laurels, about 30 minutes of fresh material had been added to the show for the 1996 season, including new featured acts and a rousing new opening. Mystère no longer eased out of the gate, it roared out courtesy of a lavish new opening that pulled out all the stops and demonstrated the incredible lighting and pristine sound capabilities of the theater.



Mystere Visual {1993-1996}

During the 1995-1996 season the story of the human condition turned tragic as a storm blew across the desert. When the sand cleared away and the Ancient Bird could once again catch a glimpse, he found a change in the narration – and with it, a change in the production. Gone were the Flying Trapeze, Manipulation and original Hand-to-Hand act.

What caused this sudden change? Quidam.

In 1995, Cirque du Soleil began preparations for a follow-up touring show to their very successful tour of "Alegría" in the United States. "Quidam," taking its name from the Latin for "a nameless passer-by", featured many acts and performers previously seen in Mystère. For instance, Yves Décoste provided his talents for Quidam's Statue Act (with Marie-Laure Mesnage), and was replaced by Christophe Suszek and Bogdan Zajac, whose act – AROS – took top prize at the International Festival of Circus in Verona, Italy. Steven Ragatz and Patrick McGuire came on board with the Manipulation Act and were replaced by Mikhail (Mischa) Matorin – a long-maned, bare-chested man who manipulated a 50-pound aluminum cube while dangling high above the stage (the "Aerial Cube", or "Flying Cube", or just known as "the Cube Act") – from Alegría. The Flying Trapeze was replaced with an exciting new performance: The Aerial High-Bar, which was created by Pavel Brun and Andrei Lev. A version of the High-Bar had been and continues to be featured in Alegría.

Also new to the show were clowns James Keylon and Francine Côté (Alfredo & Adrenaline), who mined laughs via Cote's mockery of Keylon's mime skills set to a cool jazz backdrop. The dynamic duo was no stranger to Cirque du Soleil's stage. Adrenaline (Canadian Côté) performed with La Ratatouille in Cirque du Soleil's 1985 "Le Grand Tour" and in the 1990 European tour of "Le Cirque Réinventé". Alfredo (Keylon from the USA) performed with Adrenaline at Cirque's G7 Halifax special performance and on tour in 1992 with Cirque and Circus Knie. The saucy Cote used a chainsaw to destroy her partner's imaginary walls, and the act was the show's first to use limited English verbiage instead of untranslatable gibberish (a.k.a. "Cirquish"). They replaced Wayne Hronek's "mad professor" ("Benny Le Grand" act; according to the programme Mr. Le Grand had come into possession of certain documents relating to the internal affairs of Le Cirque, which was why Cirque thought it best to allow him to continue with the company, but he also occasionally took time off to "go home and cave ducks and grow plants in Vancouver." This time, though, he had hung up his clown shoes in retirement.



{Benny LeGrand}



{Alfredo et Adrenaline}

The following year even more changes would come.

/// MYSTÈRE 2.0 (1997-2011)

"We think audiences will find the spirit of Cirque du Soleil in every detail of Mystere," said Gilles Ste-Croix, Mystere's Director of Creation. "But remember, when you see Mystere, you are seeing a production in progress. Like life itself, Cirque du Soleil's Mystere is in a constant state of evolution." (1996 Press Kit)

Christophe Suszek and Bogdan Zajac ("Aros") would take their leave in 1997 making room for Marco & Paulo Lorador (the "Alexis Bros") as Hand-to-Hand artists (they joined Mystère after Saltimbanco ended its first European tour in 1997). Alfredo & Adrenaline would also take flight (their act seemed to ground the show somewhat, briefly dulling the otherworldly feel. Their second segment was a slow-building exercise in vintage slapstick that ended with a foamy fight that spilled out into the audience), allowing Cirque du Soleil veteran Brian Dewurst to bring his alter-ego "Brian Le Petit" to the stage. Le Petit turned out to be more like Benny LeGrand than Cirque would have liked (tongue firmly planted in cheek), running amok throughout the show. And even Yuri Maiorov, who performed a Flying Man in Silk act in Alegría (from 1995-1997) took to Mystère's skies for a brief time while Paul Bowler was being prepped to take over Aerial Cube for Mikhail Matorin. (Maiorov would later fly in the skies of La Nouba from the show's launch in 1998 through to his retirement in 2012. His act is currently performed by David Poirier, whom Yuri mentored and trained for the role.)



Mystere Visual {1997-2007}

And with the help of my friend Paul Roberts, we'll take you through the world of Mystère as most of us have experienced it...

PROLOGUE

Clowning around is prominent in every Cirque show, and Mystère is no different. Brian Le Petit has come to run amok and amok he runs, but he is not the only one: Moha-Samedi is also, but as his name suggests, no one listens to him. "Hey!" says his companion. "They don't understand you stupid." So, he sits up and clears his throat: "Ladies and Gentlemen welcome to Cirque du Soleil!" he says. "During the performance, smoke effects will be used. You, however, cannot smoke." but then, a cry from the rafters is heard - "Hey! We can see your lips moving!" It's Le Petit and he crushes the ego of the man and his puppet. Fortunately, that doesn't stop the show. For moments later, the puppet arises and speaks aloud, "He said your lips, not mine!" And then announces the coming of "MYSTERE!"

As can be heard from many of those who have lived Mystère, the show begins with a shot... or shall I say by the pound of a drum. The right side stage door opens and a gang of fat bug-like creatures run out banging flat drums while bouncing and screaming. The "Ouverture" begins with a howling from a primeval conch shell: a human fog horn surrounded by a mysterious mist. Vocalists, adorned in flowing white robes, sing a melody line in an imaginary language that celebrates the dawning of Mystère.

Just as the senses begin to overload, from up above four drums descend from the theatres ceiling. The suspended drummers, scantily-clothed and painted with fluorescent colors, pound away with body and hand rhythms reminiscent of an ancient tribal ritual. The drums call to those who inhabit these desert mountains... Green lizards, red birds, and many other creatures of the desert come out to play.

The band soon joins in with "Ramsani" that features a short passage of sustained electric guitar notes over a lush orchestration. Then silence; and onto a chime-laced lullaby signifying man's birth. That birth brings forth a baby, who now amuses himself onstage with a big red ball! He giggles as he bounces it around the stage, but his oversize nature is not a laughing matter. For when the ball comes loose landing on an unsuspecting spectator – be warned - prepare to take on more than the roundness of the red monster. Prepare to become the parent of a very large baby!

AERIAL CUBE

The first act takes place as a chiseled Herculean of a man twirls a huge aluminum cube in the palm of his hand. He rises out of the machine with cube in hand; arms over his head. The lights flash and he begins to dance with the cube. And what he can do with this cube is amazing - Taking this enormous metal cube in his hands, the man juggles it, flips it and otherwise amazes the audience with the feats he's able to accomplish with only his two hands keeping the cube and the audience separated. And when it glows in the after light of the theater, you can't fight back the chills any longer. After his bouts of strength with the cube, the artist takes to soaring through the theater to amaze us once again.

CHINESE POLES

Chinese arts meet Cirque du Soleil. "Égypte," sets up this act, featuring one of the most mysterious entrances of characters ever seen. With a snake charmer-like theme, the artists who are about to perform the Chinese Poles act come slithering from all parts of the theatre, which includes climbing down the walls. They appear to be looking at the audience through ghostly masks that unexpectedly turn out to be on the backs of their heads. Two accompanying songs switch back and forth between René Dupéré's "Rondo" and Benoît Jutras' "Double Face," following the performer's steady pace as one by one they begin their climb up the four Chinese poles in the center of the stage. Now the 20 men and women of this troupe jump, swing and fall their way into your hearts as they perform death-defying acts of gravity defiance and show why strength and balance is a must!

HAND-TO-HAND

Two muscular men exhibit incredible feats of strength with the chilling song "Ulyssee". Mimicking their moves, the slow-paced theme features meditative harmony vocals, laced with violin and woodwinds. These brothers match their fusion of skin and hand right before your eyes while their bodies rotate helplessly on a dome below them, adding a new wave of skill and concentration to their perfect union. And not only can one lift the other, but what Paulo can do while laying on his stomach is just raw power: with Marco hand-balanced on his feet, Paulo strains to lift him back up again! A troupe of alien-looking life forms guides the strong men through a sparkling mist during the subtle and spacey sounds of "Dôme," the act's pinnacle.

BUNGEE

The theatre fills with insect chirps and bird calls to announce the coming of nature's aerial beings. The acoustic guitarist plucks the next song's chord pattern ("Kalimando") while towering rain sticks bestow the sounds of a rain forest. Above, golden bird-like creatures soar through the air attached to bungee cords. Their costumes - designed by the talented Dominique Lemieux - feature metallic streamers that reflect a spectrum of lights. A mystifying aerial ballet ensues. Continuing with the bungee act, the drummer (and the performers) pick up the pace triggering the energetic song, "Kunya Sobé."

FAST-TRACK / KOREAN PLANK / TRAMPOLINE

A pseudo three-ring circus event takes place next. It starts out with the Korean Plank - also known as the teeterboard - then evolves into a near-miss trampoline (which is 'U' shaped) routine; followed by an acrobatic fast track spectacle. The combined songs of "En Ville/Frisco" accompany these highly energetic and dangerous performances, which take the spotlight interchangeably throughout the number - one moment a performer is being launched into the air via the teeterboard while another is bouncing back and forth on the trampoline - you're not sure where to look next!

HIGH BAR

The energy level remains high as the band performs a short and rocking song titled, "Gambade" that ends with sudden silence. The time has arrived for the dark side of Mystère, as ominous clanging and industrial noises beckon the Mephisto Stilt Demon to rise from the depths. The act features gymnasts flying and catching each other with extreme precision; the music matches the intricate moves with an assortment of crescendos, diminuendos, and staccatos. Then it ends with a thunderous crash, and one of Mystère's trademarks is about to begin.

TAÏKO

Whenever I ask someone what they remember most about Mystère, the answer is usually-"The drums." Mystères' one-time percussionist, Pierre Dubé, traveled to Japan to learn the fine art of Taïko drumming technique from Kodo, a Taïko performing group from Sado Island. The result is a thunderous polyrhythmic delight that features a solo on a drum the size of a VW mini-bus. The climax of the solo is a hushed drum roll that requires complete concentration while his wrists pulsate with incredible nimble action. He then pounds like thunder and the troupe rejoins the ritual. The Taïko drum was first used in Saltimbanco only to be elevated to fine art here. Consequently, the vibrations from the drums resonate throughout the Treasure Island Casino-Hotel and sometimes... set off the alarms in the shops!

EPILOGUE

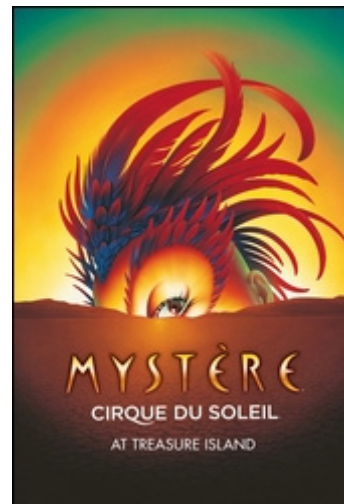
With Nouvelle Experience we are treated to a rebirth of our sales-man clown. In «O», a balloon touches down and the wind blows its way across the stage, forever closing off the world of the aquatic to us. For La Nouba, a marriage ceremony is performed... but for Mystère the four-beat, triumphant finish summons the entrance of a giant human-faced Escargot, and the band joins the Taïko troupe with the ending song fittingly titled, "Finale." With an upbeat, hand-clapping, celebratory number, the entire cast circles the stage. You can see pride in their faces as they reveal their true identities. I, however, find it difficult to celebrate, as "Finale" in any language signals: The End.

/// MYSTÈRE 3.0 (2012+)

"I'm astonished at the change," says Gilles Ste-Croix. "I can have an idea, and when it's evaluated, I can't believe how expensive it is. Every idea we had for Mystère seemed to cost more than \$100,000. And I'd say, 'We built a show for that much in '84!' But we spend the money because we want to keep the show of the highest quality. It is the point of the arrow of what we do."

Although the show had remained virtually static for fifteen years, there had been various rumors about changing Mystère up (prior to 2012):

Back in mid-2002, a stir was created amongst fans when the future of Mystère in Las Vegas was put into question, largely caused by a quote attributed to Guy Laliberté – Cirque du Soleil's founder – appearing in the French-Canadian press (La Presse). He was credited with suggesting that Mystère would fold at the end of 2003 and be transplanted to one of several world cities under consideration. Both Tokyo and London had been mentioned (as had Hong Kong), but the decision had not been made at the time of Le Presse's article. The basis for Mystère ending lay within its original contract with the Treasure Island Hotel/Casino. In 1993, Cirque du Soleil and Mirage Resorts (now MGM International) signed a 10-year agreement to stage Mystère and by 2002 the contract was coming due.



Without an extension the show would indeed fold at the end of the year; however, there was never anything to worry about even after MGM International sold Treasure Island to real estate investor Phil Ruffin in 2009. The new owner loved the show and Mystère received a six-year extension (which has since been extended further), keeping the show in Las Vegas for the foreseeable future.

At the time other possible reasons for closing Mystère in Las Vegas and moving it to Tokyo were the announced opening of Zumanity at New York-New York Hotel/Casino in 2003, and KÀ at the MGM Grand in 2004. The rumor proved interesting though, as eventually Cirque du Soleil did set up a resident show in Tokyo – ZED. Furthermore, at the time of the renewal it was suggested that artistic changes were one of the conditions of extension. Rumors abounded that the energetic High Bar act, first seen in Alegría, would be replaced with a Flying Trapeze act and that the Aerial Cube, performed by Paul Bowler, would be replaced by the Flying Man, performed by Alexandyr Dobrynin from Alegría.

Although nothing more than idle gossip at the time, changes did eventually come to Mystère following the closure of Cirque du Soleil's ZED in Tokyo. At the beginning of 2012 Mystère welcomed the following changes:

- High Bar was replaced with Flying Trapeze - Human dreams take flight, borne by the hopes of a new millennium. The pendulum movement of the trapeze flyers emphasize that time continues but never stops passing. The benefits outweigh the risks, for the adventure is the reward. The performers in the Trapeze act have been performing together as a group, and an extended family, for the past several years. Comprised of members of circus families from across Latin America, with one obligatory American, Mystère boasts one of the most fast-paced Trapeze acts ever devised. Completing more than a dozen tricks in little more than six minutes, the Catchers have a particularly difficult job as they spend the majority of the performance upside down with little break in between.
- The choreography of the Chinese Poles act was re-done.
- And the show added (not replaced) a flying silks act - Descending gracefully from the heavens, her effortless beauty is part mortal, part Goddess; connecting the earth and sky. This solo Tissu act was created by aerial artist Ginger Ana Griep-Ruiz. In addition to her breathtaking flips, spins and displays of flexibility high above the stage, Ginger also devised a system to give the appearance that the fabric never ends, allowing her to do continuous tricks without having to stop to reposition herself on the material.

Today Mystère (3.0) is better than ever!

* * *

“Nobody can say what it’s about,” says Gilles Ste-Croix. “It’s about the passage of a human being through his life, through the stages of consciousness, with a rebirth at the end. We try to keep it loose, so you can’t interpret it too closely or literally – it’s a mystery, like the title. We are not philosophers, we’re entertainers. And we don’t think the audience is dumb – they can interpret for themselves. [...] When the show is over people don’t move. Then they say, ‘what was that?’ That’s the best comment I can think of for Cirque du Soleil.”

It’s also the best compliment we can think of.

You may call it art. You may call it theatre.

We call it Mystère.

ALEGRÍA

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL™



If you have no voice: Scream.

If you have no legs: Run.

If you have no hope: Invent.

What if anything were possible?

ALEGRÍA

What if everything were permissible? And if it was the king's fool who made sense? And if the Big Top became a magical world where the elderly became young and where the kings were clowns! And if you were king for a night! And if that's what Alegría was, what would you make of it all?

Like a bolt out of life, Alegría thunders forth with an insatiable need to tell its story - the desire for a better world. In developing Alegría, Cirque du Soleil saw around them a society in flux and in constant upheaval. They saw a world of contrasts – power and powerlessness, cruelty and kindness. They saw the paradox of globalization, where a constantly shrinking world left individuals more isolated than ever before. They saw the irony of progress as though the sum of evil and hardship in the world remained forever constant. But through this uncertainty Cirque believed was the glow of the human spirit - unconquerable; resolute in its strength. Thus Alegría sets a stage where old age and youth collide, where a rallying cry-out for change takes shape to shake the foundations of society and force those who control unjustly to see the error in their ways so that together we may build a better tomorrow.

Spanish for "joy", "elation", "happiness", and "jubilation", Alegría is an impassioned celebration of life in its most primitive form, an evocation of a time when fantasy and magic were integral parts of everyday life - a time when a person's world was his family, his village, and beyond was the great unknown. Many characters exist in the world of Alegría: court jesters, minstrels, beggars, old aristocrats and children. They are joined by clowns who alone have been able to resist the political upheavals and social transformations of the day. They are witnesses to the passing of centuries and serve as the social commentators for what we are about to witness. Together, they weave a tapestry of life that has been described time and again as Cirque du Soleil's signature show.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	April 21, 1994 (Tour 1) May 20, 1999 (Resident) January 10, 2001 (Tour 2) May 27, 2009 (Arena)
Type:	Touring / Bigtop & Arena
Director:	Franco Dragone
Composer:	René Dupéré
Finale:	February 1, 1999 (Tour 1) October 2, 2000 (Resident) April 6, 2009 (Tour 2) December 29, 2013 (Arena)

Creative Team

Guide **Composer**
Guy Laliberté René Dupéré
Director **Lighting Designer**
Franco Dragone Luc Lafortune
Creation **Sound Designer**
Gilles Ste-Croix Jonathan Deans
Choreographer **Costume Designer**
Debra Brown Dominique Lemieux
Set Designer **Makeup Designer**
Michel Crête Nathalie Gagné

/// THE TRUTH OF ILLUSION

"Why not settle in under the big top, sheltered from the whims of the weather? Come in, you're invited to the celebration of the palace court. You'll see how thumbing your nose at things morose can become quite exhilarating indeed." (Programme Book)

The appeal of the circus is universal. A circus show has the power to touch us, to enchant and amaze us. Ever since Cirque du Soleil's beginnings, they've had this single goal: to astonish us, and leave us breathless. And ever since they re-invented the circus in 1987, Cirque du Soleil was doing just that: showing us that magic is pure and fantasy real, that dreams and reality do collide in the most bizarre and inspiring ways. Alegría builds on this by showing us that all dreams are permitted, we are the King, the poet and the Clown. The stage they've set for us is a royal court where imagination reigns, where all the emotions of the soul are expressed, but where joy wins out at the end of our tale...

Alegría is the vision of such an amazing and highly-celebrated creative team: Guided by Founding President Guy Laliberté and led by director Franco Dragone, Alegría was created by the coven of Gilles Ste-Croix (Creative Director), Dominique Lemieux (costumes), Michel Crête (set design), Debra Brown (choreography), the late Guy Desrochers (sound design), Luc Lafortune (lighting), René Dupéré (composer) and Pierre Parisien (Artistic Director).

"Alegría harks back to the travelling family circuses that criss-crossed Europe not so long ago," said Alegría's Director, Franco Dragone in an interview for "Truth of Illusion", a documentary on the creation of the show. "It's characters, costumes, and performances evoke a time when fantasy was more real and magic was a part of everyday life; a time when each Fool had a King; a time when a person's world was a family, his village, and beyond was the great unknown. Today the universe has shrunk, but the individual's isolation has grown. We do not choose to turn back the clock, we cannot change the world. But we can rediscover a magical belief in human tenderness. Perhaps we need to rediscover that true ambition is not to reach for the stars but to stretch a hand to wipe the tear from our neighbor's cheek."

"Alegría was a very personal show for me," Dragone continues. "I was going through some painful experiences at the time, and wanted to express that pain." Some of that pain came during the creation of *Mystère* at Treasure Island, Las Vegas. He found adapting technical demands to the artistic potential of the theater created many problems. "We were [just] getting to understand the big top [and] pow!, [we're] doing a show in a theater!" And while all of that was happening, the wheels of creation were already churning on the next touring show, informing its basic theme. "It would be sad, heavy, really hard. There would be less color this time," said Dragone. "But [where I come from] Alegría means that, even when you're in pain, life goes on. It's impossible to have only joy. It's impossible to have only tears. Joy's always with tears and tears are always with joy. But this show has touched me very much."

"Alegría, for me, was inspired by history," admits Gilles Ste-Croix, the show's Director of Creation. "The Berlin Wall was falling, the old order was changing. We were asking ourselves: what new power structures will replace the old ones? So Franco created two poles of order: the young vs. the old, the rich vs. the poor..."

"I hate power, any kind of power," Dragone re-affirms. "It's why I try never, never to abuse with my power. Sometime people think and been casting people out is thing that I scream a little bit too much. Alegría was an exorcism, and there was joy at the end of it."

The set was built to express the idea of a changing world. *"Alegría came out of a process of questioning the whole notion of power and its abuses," Michel Crête muses. "How can anyone presume to have power over another human being? It's terrible! So, for me, the dome on the set is a sign of imposing power. We replaced the circles from previous shows with squares, which are more solid, unforgiving. The centre of the tent itself became more important. The characters live within a much more oppressive structure."*

Thus, the Big Top was transformed into the King's court. An enormous dome overhung the stage, which was surrounded by diamond-shaped paving stones to protect the occupants of the palace as if they were in a fortified castle. Four huge masts supported the dome, bringing to mind the heavy chains of a drawbridge. Two spiral staircases encircled the ring leading downwards, symbolizing the unknown (and enabling the personae to sneak in and out.) A raised platform decorated with stylistic columns and balustrades served as the minstrels' balcony. There they set up their musical instruments and looked haughtily down on the activities of the world below. Yes, Alegría's set was an imposing monument, an undefined monolithic structure suggesting an institution of great power and influence. A huge structure, heavy in its connotations yet light in its execution.

The lighting is designed to reflect a nostalgic atmosphere, like that of a 17th-century ballroom. The autumnal tones create the luminous obscurity of the show. *"If you look at the Nostalgic Old Birds you really get a feeling of death and decay, which made me think of Autumn," remembered Luc Lafortune, Lighting Designer. "So I went in that direction with the lighting: the texture of heavy leaves, dark greens, reds, browns. And it works! When the Angels, who are the opposite of all that, come on, the whole place just bursts because of the contrasts."* The beams of light shine through and onto a mesh cyclorama, creating dazzling lighting effects. On the floor, one can discern the head of a salamander, which lives in all four elements.

The lavish costumes for the characters representing the Old Order —Fleur, the Old Birds and the Singers — are made from richly-colored fabrics which are painstakingly hand-detailed with lace, feathers and sequins. They evoke the flamboyant costumes worn by the aristocracy at Versailles and other European palaces of the period. *"Alegría is the scream of destiny. The Jester and the Old Birds represent a bygone, pompous era. Their only remaining wealth is their faded nobility. The rich fabrics and colors of the court of Versailles are the expression of this tarnished splendor. Their opposite is the White Angel, representing youth, innocence, and eternity," said Dominique Lemieux, Costume Designer.*

More than 90 costumes and numerous headpieces, masks, shoes and garments were created in the initial production. Designer Dominique Lemieux led a team of more than 80 people to construct the intricate and baroque costumes for Alegría. Each costume went through at least 10 drafts before the final draft. The costumes for the New Order — the gold-clad Bronx, Nymphs and Angels — reflect the same rich tones, with less decoration, but more luminous for these young creatures.

The materials are lighter and emphasize the agile bodies of these characters who will take control of the future. "We're looking for alternative ways of expression that have normally been expressed through athleticism and tumbling, height and flight and dynamics," Debra Brown reminds us. "And what else is there that can come out of that apparatus in collaboration with the artists and the dance and the movements and the music."

The lively and emotional musical score by René Dupéré moves between jazz, pop, tango and klezmer. "I started from a single idea that came from Gilles Ste-Croix and Franco: the idea that the fools have lost their King," Dupéré recalls in "20 Years Under the Sun". "For me, the fool and the king can be two parts of the same individual, mirroring one another. It gave a sort of half-ethnic, half-middle-ages feel to parts of the music." "Alegría has a kind of European flavor," Dupéré continues. *"So I wanted to go back to our Felliniesque origins. I was a street performer. I played in the streets and there was something very lively, something very emotional. I wanted to go back to the emotion in the music with accordion, a kind of raunchy street voice, and violin and those basic instruments. I also wanted to go back to the music I'm particularly fond of: Rota, Morricone, Vivaldi, Mancini... the Italians!"*

The music of Alegría evokes the passion and intensity of travelling minstrels by using acoustic and percussion instruments including accordion, saxophone, keyboard and guitar. The vocals render the gravelly and genuine voice of the street. But in counterpoint the synthesizer arrangements also reflect the change that is imminent. The music to Alegría is the most successful in Cirque du Soleil's history. The soundtrack has reached platinum level twice in Canada and was on Billboard Magazine's hit parade for 55 weeks in the "World Music" category. The title song, Alegría, was nominated for a Grammy Award in 1996 in the "Best Instrumental Arrangement with Accompanying Vocal(s)" category.

According to Guy Desrochers, sound designer for Alegría, bringing singers and live musicians to the big top before the age of in-ear monitors posed a special challenge. "A tent is made of vinyl, and vinyl reflects sound... because, for all intents and purposes, you're outside, and weather has a huge effect on sound, for instance when the humidity changes. With Alegría, we had to preserve the integrity of acoustic instruments like violins and accordions in that environment. And we had to ensure the singers heard themselves, so monitors had to be pointed to the middle of the tent. The audience gets mixed up in that, and it makes it even harder to point and place the speakers properly."

They're all obsessed. They're all possessed. The spell which has been cast is irreversible. At last, they've all gone mad. Mad! They've all gone mad, at last... And so it goes. Faster and faster yet, higher and higher still, beyond their wildest dreams and so we go, beyond the point of no return for the sky is no longer the limit. Time is running out in the space of their dreams, however. It seems like a light year ago when they first came to life. But the old order is trying to keep the curtains drawn, to keep out tomorrow; you'd wish time could come to a halt. You wonder if the vision might be an illusion after all. A blinding darkness for a cast of shooting stars, scanned and telescoped to find their perfect orbit... No. No to this hell on Earth. No to the fears and tears. No to the sadness of many years. A new day is dawning. The future is rushing in. Alegría! Alegría!

Their time is now. And now, the time is right. It is the vigil of the longest night, when the builders of dreams, magicians, engineers, fools and kings are humbled seers, welding their flying machines for the coming of the new dawn... Your time has come. And should we ask who you are, would you remember who you were? Now that you know the mysteries of many lives ago, you may go joyfully to rest for there is music now and a dream to share... there's music now and Alegría in the air!

/// THE FOOL AND HIS KING

The King and the Nobles gathered round to listen. The Fool cleared his throat and began to explain. "It's really perfectly clear: if I were a King," said the Fool, "I would need a Fool. And if the Fool were King, then the Fool King's Fool would truly be a paragon of folly. Folly so foolish as to be wise. Since if the Fool were King, then the King would be Fool and the one would be the other and the two would be one, like the tail and the head, together, to lead the world, because who is boss depends on whether you walk North pointing South or vice versa all relative to which way you look. You see?" And the Nobles and the King could not see so the Fool took a deep breath with just a hint of a smirk and started all over again... "You see, it's really perfectly clear..."

Step up to the front. Tap your toe to the beat. Let the music move your limbs. That's right... a step to the right, a step to the left, two steps to the back. It's not progress, but who cares. Now look around. There she is. Your partner. Let the music move you towards her. She's playing the game. Play along. Mirror her moves, mirror her moods. Find her eyes with your eyes. Sink into the music, let it carry you. Away. Away and within. Far and deep. Hmmm! It's so good. You link arms without a thought about who you should be. You let it go. And the music plucks your heart.

A crash of cymbals and the pounding of drums announce a procession... the musicians march into view, creating mayhem wherever they go. They are dressed in white and are followed by a overly rounded man dressed in red: Fleur. In the absence of a king, the Old Birds have only a fool to turn to: Fleur. Fleur is our guide through the world of Alegría, but he is unpredictable, and a dangerous madman who believes he is king. Carrying a magical stick (lit at its tip) ready to show the cruelty and loneliness of the world to us. Fleur struts about like an ill-mannered man before appearing on stage. And then, as he looks out at the spectators who have come to see his play, he takes a deep breath and yells out with all his might: "ALEGRÍA!"

"Mirko" fills the air as characters of all shapes, sizes and colors fill the stage. A trio of clowns waddles out and sits upon a suitcase, only to be frightened away by a big bolt of white light. Enigmatic characters in white fill and then leave the stage. The two singers, White and Black, come to us and fill the world with melodies. The Nymphs join the chorus, strutting about in birdlike fashion. We're introduced to Tamir and little Tamir; followed by the Fire Man. And then the most aristocratic characters of them all: the Old Birds. The nostalgic Old Birds observe the goings-on as though they were still young and beautiful and the future was still theirs. They admire their reflections in mirror less frames, but are only empty shells, shadows of their former selves. They are the old aristocracy, still convinced of their power and beauty. But they are twisted, deformed and ugly. And thus Alegría begins!

SYNCHRO TRAPEZE

The Old Birds are the mainstays of Alegría; they've lived in the palace for as long as it has existed. Courtiers without a court, they are a reminder of the unchanging guard and as such they infect the show, as they do the world, like a plague. These bird-like characters have grown old and forgotten, and yet they think of themselves as fresh, new and beautiful. We find one sitting in front of a mirror, admiring itself, as they always seem to do, when something spectacular happens: a young woman appears in the reflection. And then a man. And the two walk through the mirror and into the realm where voice - above all - is repressed. But their voice will not be silenced. For the moment they step into this world a great and thunderous voice fills the air, singing out against sorrow and the madness of man in "Vai Vedrai".

Vai vai banbinno vai vedrai vai... "Go child, go and you will see," the White singer hails, as the two young performers ascend into the heavens. As they do so, the sorrowful voice of the singer touches us. *Oh mio fanciullo vedrai, vai vedrai che un sorriso. Nasconde spesso un gran dolore. Vai vedrai follia del uomo...* "Oh my child you will see, you will see sorrow. It often hides a great pain. And Madness, you will see the madness of man..."

Youthful and carefree, this duo swings from the heavens above. Their symmetrical dance in the air captures the energy in each breath of life. Perched on their individual trapezes, two graceful aerialists perform an awe-inspiring display of harmony and beauty. In this breathtaking routine, the daring duo defies the law of gravity with incredible mid-air twists and maneuvers, building to a crescendo of aerial feats. Their performance is a slow realization of the struggles and indignities present in today's society. They react to this raw emotion, tossing themselves from the safety of their bars - only to catch themselves with their feet. Then get up to do it over and over again, signaling to us we can break free...

FAST TRACK

The Syncro Trapeze artists give way to a group of energetic, swift moving acrobats spun in silver and gold ("The Bronx"). The Bronx are young and tough. They are the next generation, ready to topple the old order and take power from the weak Old Birds. Individually and as a gang, their acrobatic prowess on the Fast Track is a measure of their power. They are strong, but also sensual and graceful. They are both an imposing force and a celebration of youth. This ethereal group of performers soars in the air executing lively gymnastic and tumbling displays in unison and in counterpoint, reaching astounding heights and speeds on an elongated overlapping trampoline that magically appears from within the stage. Like medieval warriors penetrating the depths of a mythical forest, the tumblers not only demonstrate their undeniable acrobatic prowess and strength, but also their grace. Joining The White Singer for the first time is her alter ego, The Black Singer. The Singer in White is a symbol of all that was good in the old order. She is the storyteller who echoes in song everything she sees around her. The Singer in Black is the Singer in White's alter ego. There is a wickedness about her. In her elegant black dress, she hides many secrets in her dark heart. Their harmony on this beautiful theme is spine tingling. But, just as the listener is lulled into a trance, "Irna" returns with more power to complete the Fast Track act's climax.

SHOULDER-POLE WIRE

Alegria's clowns perform "Bird on a Wire" before fluttering away for the Shoulder-Pole Wire act. Enlightened with "Kalendero", the number is performed by a team of two artists in two separate groups: Group 1 consisting of Shi Yanping and Liu Lu, while Group 2 consists of Kang Kui and Zheng Li Sha. Both performers take the stage with one holding the pole on her shoulder while the other flipped in the air on its thin wire line above. Tamir appears when he is needed, only to disappear once he has fulfilled his mission, stands by in case help is needed. His wide grin and sparkling eyes are windows into a generous soul.

STRONG MAN

Guarding the Nymphs, nubile young women with wings, is the Strong Man. He is ever present in the world of Alegría and is a man you never want to meet. Reminiscent of the Strong Man acts of traditional circus culture, Alegria's gentle giant bends bars of steel, juggles 34 kilo weights and even lifts 340 kilos with his bare teeth. In spite of his obvious strength, two less timorous birds fly onto his "perch" and playfully challenge his fortitude. At first, he plays a little tug of war with the Old Birds over a steel bar. But then, he summons all his strength and bends the bar around his shoulders and head. After that amazing show of strength, he is presented with a cage and inside, all the Old Birds stand. He must lift them all! But then, as he prepares to lift the Old Birds, Tamir and Little Tamir join in the fun and with his back to them all, he lifts them off the ground! An amazing show of strength!

HOOPS

Fleur calls to the Old Birds, who rush the stage. One by one they come out, each holding a metallic hoop. Seeing it as more of a toy than anything else, they try and manipulate it around their waists, but it falls to the ground. Too lazy to pick them up, the Old Birds leave the hoops. Fleur smiles again when a young girl appears. In her yellow form-fitting costume with delicate brocade accents, her head topped with tight yellow curls; she is a graceful performer as well as a stunning beauty. She is youth personified. Combining the grace and agility of a gymnast with the flexibility of a contortionist and the dexterity of a juggler, the enchanting elfin-like performer weaves her way through a myriad of ever-spinning hoops. She's all a-glow in the limelight!

SNOWSTORM

The Snowstorm is a unique clown act that has more sorrow in it than laughter. Performed to the song "Nocturne", the clown with the white tuft of hair shows us all his sorrows. He appears with a tattered suitcase, chugging along the train tracks left on the floor. When he arrives at his destination, he opens the suitcase, pulls out a dress coat and hat, and hangs them up. He then begins to brush off the coat when it mysteriously comes alive! The two cling to one another in comfort, but there's malice afoot as the mysterious friend slips a letter into the clown's pocket. A train whistle interrupts them and the Clown takes off. When he arrives at his intended destination (his hat smoking), the clown finds the letter in his pocket. As he reads it, his smiles turn to frowns. He is so saddened by the contents of the letter he tears it up and throws it into the sky. Snow begins to fall alongside the pieces of the letter.

The clown is alone in the world. Sad, the clown begins to walk away but is confronted by a blast of wind. The wind blows harder yet; the snow blinding us all.

FIRE-KNIFE DANCE

Fire is an essential part in any society. Here, Cirque uses fire to show turmoil and upheaval in the world. Performed by a wonderful artist from the Pacific Islands, the entire stage bathes in the glow of his flame. He takes the fire sticks from the gold and silver dressed Fast Track artists and lights it with his hands. With a Polynesian flair, the fire blurs in rings of light stopping only long enough for him to wash the fire over his skin. After twirling one such stick, he is brought another and the adventure begins all over again. Tribal and magical - this authentic ritual dance is performed with the pulsing rhythm of Congo drums by an artist weaving his baton-like fire knives around his entire body, from his feet to his palms to his mouth, in a seductively dangerous dance. In the end, a clown appears and uncovers a single candle, which he had hidden under his clothes. Mocking the previous performance, he moves the candle from side to side, up and down, and around his arms. And in a finale to rival all finales, the clown wets his fingers and snuffs out the candle light, burning himself. Intermission is upon us

AERIAL CUBE

The second act of Alegría opens with a flurry of activity. The White Singer, in all her beauty, is drawn to the men in the audience. After teasing a couple, she selects one and takes him up on stage. The two dance until the Strong Man - the protector of Alegría - roars onstage and takes the man back to his seat. Then a clown on horseback rides by carrying a letter in his hands. He tries to deliver it to the Singer in White but everyone grabs for it. The letter passes from the Clown to Fleur to Tamir to the Strong Man back to the Clown before he rides off. A man bolts into the forefront, signaling the end of the clownish antics. The stage once again tints orange as this new performance sets to take hold: a virtuoso who can turn a simple cube into an object of beauty. Mind over matter, light over darkness, the cube man in a seemingly effortless manner dominates his instrument. Shunning open shows of strength in favor of the more subtle artistry evoked by sensual masculine movement, the performer manipulates the cube while suspended in the air or, in a stunning flurry of light, on the ground. Strong yet tender, natural and surreal the cube man evokes a higher authority in search of life's force.

RUSSIAN BARS

The White Angels are the graceful guardians of Alegría. Agile, confident and daring, the angels are the youth of tomorrow who have alighted in the palace from the heavens. Their bearing is regal, their arms – like wings – are always poised elegantly at their sides. Dressed all in white, with breastplates of woven gold and their noses painted red, the Angels support one another as they take turns tumbling through the air on the Russian Bars. Amazing acrobatic flyers are thrust into the air from a single, double or triple bar that is perched on the sturdy shoulders of powerful catchers. The sure-footed flyers perform multiple synchronized somersaults and mid-air twists at an unbelievable pace. The Russian Bars requires a high level of concentration and mutual trust between the performers. Each flexible bar measures two to six inches in width.

CONTORTION

One of the most celebrated performances in Cirque du Soleil's *Alegría* are these small, delicate bird-like creatures - two contortionists who bring this refined Mongolian circus art to the stage. Perched on a seemingly weightless table which rotates slowly as they perform, the duo executes both impressive and imaginative feats of flexibility and balance. The fluid movements are masterful, as they manipulate into extraordinary sculpted forms. Sometimes they move in "mirror image" to each other, sometimes together, and sometimes supporting each other one on top of the other.

FLYING LEV (HIGH BAR)

Human dreams taking flight, borne by the hopes of a new millennium. This High Bar apparatus was especially designed by Andrei Lev and Choreographed by Pavel Brun just for *Alegría*. (A duel-version of this apparatus appeared in *Mystère* beginning in 1995). The pendulum movement of the cradle emphasizes that time continues and never stops passing. The benefits outweigh the risks, for the adventure is the reward. Three high bars set more than 40 feet above the stage form the aerial playground for daring acrobats to fly to and from the arms of mighty catchers, suspended by their knees on a cradle swing. The astounding act, performed by Russian acrobats culminates in a death-defying plunge into the net.

"Querer" and Little Tamir fill the set-up time for the act, as Little Tamir and a bird fly through the air. But, a couple of minutes thereafter, "Icare" fills the big-top and eight men climb up one by one to their perch atop the big-top. One by one, they flip and turn around the apparatus before letting go and placing their future in the hands (literally) of the catchers.

EPILOGUE

Almost as soon as it started, *Alegría* - the cry for help; of contrasting worlds: those who have power suppressing those who do not - comes to a close. Change has begun; the Human Spirit lives on. The White Singer fills the stage with the show's signature song:

Alegría, come un lampo di vita
Alegría, come un pazzo gridar
Alegría, del delituso grido.
Bella ruggente pene, seren.
Come un assalto di gioia, Alegría!

I see a spark of life shining, Alegría
I hear a young minstrel sing, Alegría
A Beautiful roaring scream of joy and sorrow,
so extreme. There is a love in me raging,
Alegría! A joyous, magical feeling!

The Old Birds are once again on stage with their glassless mirrors. The artists step back through and the Old Birds dance about. Performers fill the stage and bow. As the performers retreat, the Strong Man steps forward and roars a beautiful roaring scream and the lights dim.

Alegría comes to a close.

/// ON TO ASIA & EUROPE

We have no illusions. The children of the streets will not see Alegría. Laughter is still a luxury they cannot afford. Tonight, our cries of joy will become screams of rage because millions of young hearts will again freeze in the gutters of our goodwill. May Alegría become a rallying cry for those of us who still have a voice. (Europe Tour Programme Book)

Cirque du Soleil celebrates its 10 year anniversary in staging Alegría, and true to tradition, the two-year North American tour is launched in Montreal. Meanwhile, Mystère continues to create a sensation in Las Vegas. And Saltimbanco? Saltimbanco embarks on a six-month run in Tokyo that attracts a great deal of attention (and spectators; 557,851). It's clear from these numbers that Cirque du Soleil has quite an audience in Asia. So by 1996, while Saltimbanco continues to conquer Europe, Mystère runs strong in Las Vegas (getting revamped in the process), and a fourth show is launched in Montreal (Quidam), Alegría finishes up its triumphant 13-city North American Tour and prepares for a three-city tour of the Pacific region, specifically Tokyo and Fukuoka, Japan and Hong Kong.

Alegría would change in the process.

Both Aerial Cube and Shoulder-Pole Wire acts went missing from the line-up. While Shoulder-Pole would never be seen again, Mikhail Matorin (the act's creator) would take his performance to Mystère (as part of that show's revamp). In its stead, Cirque presented "Flying Man in Silk" by Russian artist Yuri Maiorov (who also performed Russian Bars and FastTrack at the time). Described as "Strong yet tender, powerful yet light, natural yet surreal - the Flying Man shuns open shows of strength in favor of the more subtle artistry evoked by sensual masculine movement and the rich flow of silk..." - Yuri would go on to perform his act through both Japanese cities and Hong Kong in 1996, transfer to Mystère for a time in 1997, then become part of La Nouba's creation in 1998 (He most recently retired from La Nouba, passing on the act to a much younger man.)

Additionally, in 2003-2004, Ebon Grayman who had been performing the character of Fleur at the time (and had also been a member of the Bronx FastTrack team before that), created and performed his own Flying Man in Silk act as an act-in-reserve. Although no longer performed (since Ebon has moved on from Cirque), his act was not only full of strength, but unending grace. (You can see him practice this act on the Alegría DVD Behind-the-Scenes Feature, but I'm getting ahead of myself here...)

Tight Wire was another addition to the show. It made its first appearance during the Japanese Tour (1996) and continued through to Hong Kong that same year. "Reminiscent of a young girl thoughtfully playing out her game of hopscotch, the artist is a study in nimble, dexterity and relaxed grace. Balanced on a wire measuring less than two centimeters in diameter, no one breaks her concentration or disturbs the lively pace of her intricate footwork for she is in a world which only she commands." The act was performed by Molly Saudek, a young artist from the United States, and was not employed when Alegría went to Europe (1997-1998).

When Alegría returned to Japan/Hong Kong in 2004-2005 (as Alegría 2), those extra elements were once again added. One of those was a "Slack Wire" act performed by Yang Huang, a young artist from China. When Alegría moved on to Europe for the second time (2006-2007), Slack Wire did not continue.

The final new act to be introduced to Alegría during this period is Samuel Tétréault's Hand-Balancing number, which the programme book described thusly: "Like the stately spires of a medieval cathedral, this elegant equilibrist reaches to evermore lofty heights seeking not only the challenge of the rarefied air but some illusive deity. Whether on the ground or precariously perched, the performer is dexterous on one hand or two. His style is simple and pure, as unwavering as the tower which protects the throne."

One Alegría reached the shores of Europe in early 1997, Saudek's Tight Wire and Maiorov's Flying Silks would be replaced, and Aerial Cube would make its triumphant return under native Australian Paul Bowler, who learned the art directly from the act's creator. (While Paul was busy on tour, Mikhail took up residence at Mystère.) Paul, of course, would continue on until the end of the European Tour. Tétréault's Hand-Balancing act would also. But even more drastic changes were coming to Alegría. On April 29, 1998, Cirque du Soleil and Mirage Resorts announced that Alegría would find a permanent home at the Beau Rivage.

/// THE BEAU RIVAGE ENGAGEMENT

"Come to a place where genuine Southern hospitality and charm go hand in hand with meticulous service..."

Situated on the salty-shores of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, Steve Wynn's Beau Rivage sported 1,780 "elegantly appointed" guest rooms and 66 luxurious suites, which come with either a spectacular view of the Gulf of Mexico or of the Bay. And under the 32-story tower was a 78,000 square-foot casino, twelve restaurants, a full spa, a salon, a shopping promenade, a marina, a pool, and a sandy white beach - all for your pleasure. The final price for all this luxury? \$800 million. And that isn't a lot considering the Bellagio cost double that amount.

With the Beau Rivage's opening on March 16, 1999, came another collaborative effort between Wynn's Mirage Resorts and Cirque du Soleil - the fourth such venture. Nouvelle Experience began the partnership in 1992 when it was presented in the white and gold Big Top on the grounds of The Mirage. Mystère solidified that partnership in 1993 (at Treasure Island), which "O" extended in 1998 (at Bellagio). And after much discussion, Cirque du Soleil and Steve Wynn settled on Alegría to set up stakes at the Beau Rivage. But not just under the Big Top, oh no... within was a 1,552 seat theater reflecting the "warm welcome inspired by the climate of southern France."

For those who bore its splendor, the design of the venue was simple and elegant, featuring a wonderful splash of color. And, unlike the "O" theater the Alegría Theater was ornamented with an elegant display of the show's name - right above the door. Inside, the ceiling was a vibrant shade of blue, representing the skies of the village Alegría played upon. Here, Sky Art also provided designs for a 15,000 square-foot mural "reminiscent of Claude Monet's water paintings."

Below the skies were the theater seats, bright yellow, creating an allegory of the beaches where the Beau Rivage was founded. And then there were the walls, adorned in oranges and reds, bringing meaning to the rising and setting sun.

Besides the wonderfully adorned space, the Beau Rivage Theater incorporated a no-proscenium arch design quite similar to its Mystère counterpart. Like the Treasure Island Theater, the Beau Rivage Theater also had no obstructive poles, providing a limitless viewpoint to all spectators. The set and stage retained its familiar squarish form, complete with the Fast Track built into the floor. Overhead an enormous dome that for designer Michel Crête signifies "a sign of imposing power," which reflects the theme of the show - an allegory about power; who has it and who does not.

For the Beau Rivage engagement the show would go under the knife, cutting several segments previously seen on tour (such as the Aerial Cube and Strong Man), updating the Fast Track to something a little more reminiscent of the choreography seen in "Alegría: Le Film", and re-ordering the flow of the acts slightly to accommodate the missing acts. What audiences got was a highly truncated version of the show (at 90-minutes) that ran through seven still-amazing acts: Syncho Trapeze, Hoops (by Elena Lev), Fire/Knife Dance (by Isaac Samuela), Russian Bars, Fast Track, Contortion (by Chimed Ulziibayar and Tseveendorj Nomin), and Aerial High Bar, clinching the show.

Audiences in Mississippi didn't "get" the show, or Cirque du Soleil for that matter, as patrons in Las Vegas had undoubtedly had - much to the chagrin of both Cirque and Mirage Resorts. And thanks to Saltimbanco's re-staging and tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1999, and a return to Japan (as Saltimbanco 2000), Alegría's time on the Gulf Coast was as short as its truncated running time; it was going back on tour under the Grand Chapiteau!

/// BACK ON TOUR

A low wall surrounding a field flowing with waves of wheat, shimmering with shocks of sunlight, stands silent sentinel to a man, old and infirm, dancing, crazed and crooked, with arms akimbo. Beating time with a tired twig, he serenades the serene sky: mother of my mother, father and friend feast on this wonderful wheat, generous gift of my God. The Old Man's cracked cackle careens over the wall and wails into the nearby vale where a goat grazes. The butt of the beast bolts up to listen to the lament of the drunken devout. With a moist mouth and a goat's gaze the beast bellows a bleat of enamored emotion. The Old Man and the Ram rhapsodize a crazy cantata. (Programme Book)

Alegría packed up its troubles on October 2, 2000 and prepared to conquer new markets, beginning with Australia. The re-staging would forever change the show, though, making it darker, heavier, and more powerful.

Although some acts missing during the Beau Rivage engagement would be re-integrated into the line-up (such as the Strong Man), others would be retired forever: Elena Lev, who'd been with Alegría since the very beginning, would retire from Cirque (for a while - she'd later return for the show's filming, to replace Hand-Balancing in Quidam for a time, and even star in Wintuk and Zaia, before those shows closed.)

Elena Lev's Hoops Act was replaced by a Manipulation number: *"The enchanting performer combines rhythmic gymnastics, flexible contortion, deft juggling and graceful ballet into one act. Using silver hoops and beautiful silk ribbons, she dances and leaps across the stage as the music plays on."*

Aerial Cube, which was not presented at Beau Rivage, would be represented on tour now as "Flying Man": *"Combining the elasticity of the bungee with the power of the gymnastic rings, the artist soars through the air while performing acrobatic feats. His awe-inspiring performance is a combination of incredible skill, agility and strength. His sculpted physique is imposing, yet he is tender and graceful."* And Hand-Balancing would return as an act-in-reserve, performed by young Ukrainian Denys Tolstov: *"Using his incredible strength and his great abilities in ballet and contortion movements, he executes slow figures on canes of different heights. The tallest cane is at 1m 90 from the stage."*

And later, when Alegría returned to Japan/Hong Kong in 2004-2005 (as "Alegría 2"), extra elements was once again added into the show: A "Slack Wire" act performed by Yang Huang, a young artist from China. And once again "Aerial Cube".

When Alegría moved on to Europe for the second time (2006-2007), "Slack Wire" did not continue. (But occasionally an Aerial Cube act was seen in rotation.) Another act-in-rotation was kept in reserve too: a juggling number by Victor Moiseev, a young artist from the Russian Bars number, who just wanted to have a solo act of his own. Attaining a high level by creating original movements and tricks with the balls, he succeeded to manage his own place in the show.

And the song played on...

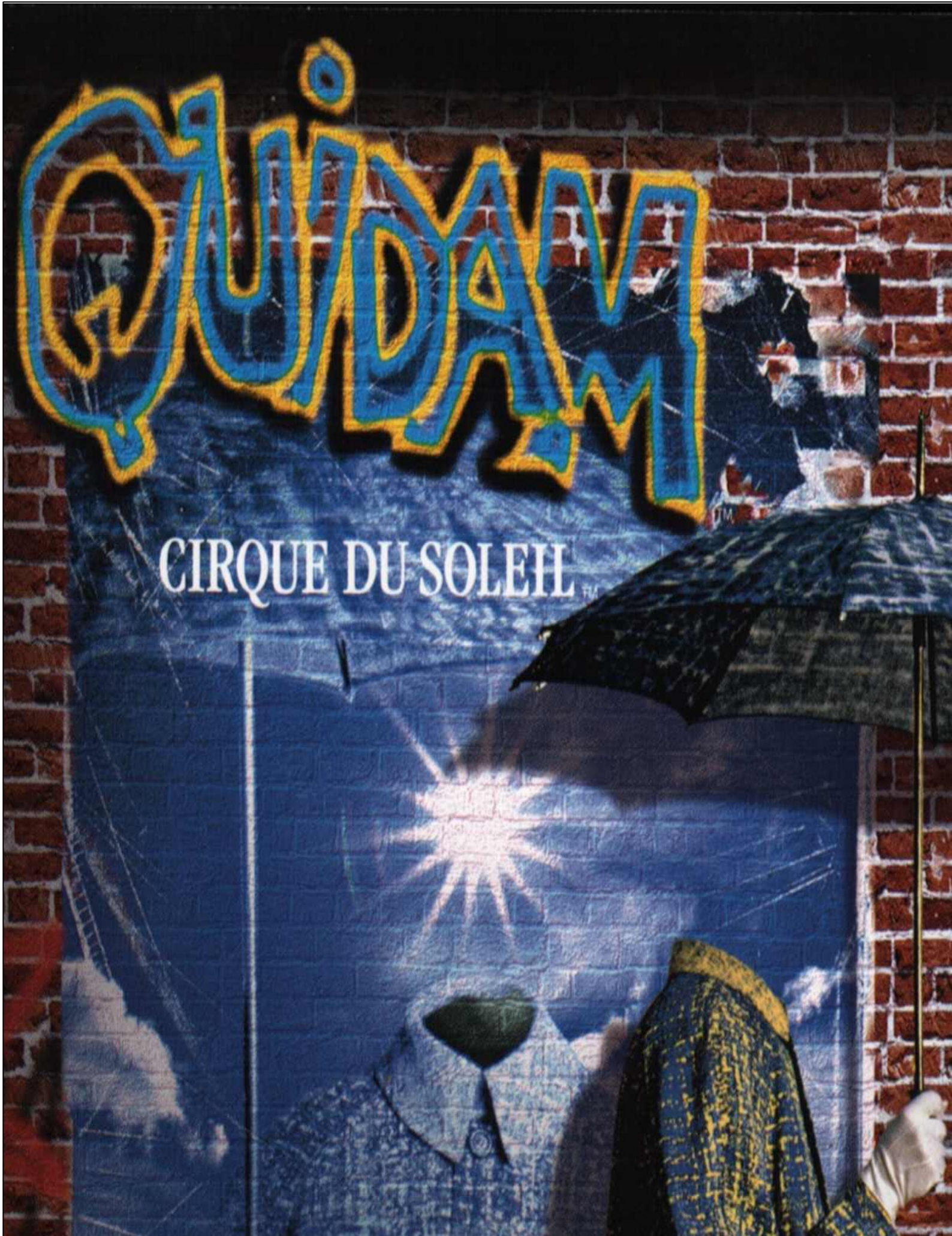
* * *

Fifteen years after its birth, Alegría was given a fourth life. Once again thanks to Saltimbanco, the show would be reborn as an arena construct (in 2009), setting out across North America and Europe with one-week engagements at a time. And, yes, ushering in even more changes - new acts such as the Cyr Wheel and Hand-Balancing (which was integrated into the main course of the show rather than set in reserve), and some simplifications too - but the song still played... until December 29, 2013. It's hard to believe that Alegría's journey is now over, that we'll never get to see this amazing, fantastic, and classic expression of Cirque du Soleil's prowess under the Grand Chapiteau ever again. Or will we? Only our friends at Cirque du Soleil know for certain. Who knows what may happen in five... or ten years down the road. If a set of young acrobats may want to resurrect Saltimbanco one day... we can only hope Alegría may follow. In the mean time we'll miss you, and thanks!

Thank you. Thank you to the Makers of Rules. To the Breakers of Backs. To the sincere Autocrats. To the false Democrats. To the Builders of Walls. To the Painters of Lines. Thank You. Thank you again. To those who Tattoo Numbers. To those who point fingers. To those who count their greed. To those who split by color. To those who smile their lies. Thank you. Thank you so very much. Please, step into the Spotlight. Let us take your picture. To immortalize you. To thank you. Let us engrave your faces into our album of infamy. So that we may never forget. So that we may never accept. Viva L'Alegría!

QUIDAM

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL™





Quidam...

*A nameless passerby, a solitary figure
lingering on a street corner,
a person rushing past, a
person who lives lost amidst the crowd
in an all-too-anonymous society.*

Quidam: "It could be anyone, anybody," the show's programme observes. "Someone coming, going, living in our anonymous society. A member of the crowd, one of the silent majority. One who cries out, sings and dreams within us all." This is the *quidam* that Cirque du Soleil is celebrating. In this world, the one who cries out is Zoë, a young girl who fumes because she believes she's seen everything there is to see, experienced all there is to experience. For her, the world has lost all meaning. Her anger, sharp and unforgiving, shatters her little world and soon she finds herself in the universe of Quidam. Here, she is not alone, for she is joined by a joyful companion (Karl/Fritz/Target) and a more mysterious personage (John) who will attempt to seduce her with the marvelous, the unsettling, and the terrifying.

Directed by Franco Dragone, this production is more thoroughly scripted than Cirque's previous shows, integrating performance and theatricality to a greater extent than ever

before, drawing on the emotional relationships between the performers within the troupe. "This show highlights our frailties and our anguish in the face of the new millennium that lies before us. It also underlines differences, conveying positive feelings and resentment and confronting our dreams with our nightmares. Like preceding creations, it conveys emotion, but it is also more raw, more intense, more dramatic, and more personal too," Franco Dragone said. The creative team pulled out all the stops to create this unique show that combines artistic performance and new technology. A show fit for the new millennium, they thought, in which people would find their proper place and adapt to a new world.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	April 23, 1996 (Big Top) December 11, 2010 (Arena)
Type:	Touring / Bigtop & Arena
Director:	Franco Dragone
Composer:	Benoît Jutras
Finale:	November 21, 2010 (Big Top) Currently Touring (Arena)

Creative Team

Guide	Composer
Guy Laliberté	Benoît Jutras
Director	Lighting Designer
Franco Dragone	Luc Lafortune
Creation	Sound Designer
Gilles Ste-Croix	François Bergeron
Choreographer	Costume Designer
Debra Brown	Dominique Lemieux
Set Designer	Makeup Designer
Michel Crête	Nathalie Gagné

/// FULL CIRCLE

"By the time we got to making Quidam, we were ready to take a risk to move away from the fantastical characters we'd been dealing with until then. We became interested in the faceless mass. You may know 100 people well, but the rest of the 6 billion people on the planet are quidams: they're anonymous to you. And yet, my experience with Cirque made me realize you can recognize individuals in that mass. Because Cirque du Soleil is so international, Sydney and Russia have become more than places to me: they have become places where people I know are from. The world has become more human." - Franco Dragone (Spectaculara)

For the most part, the creative team behind Quidam is the same that brought us Cirque du Soleil's main productions. Dominique Lemieux created the costumes, Michel Crête designed the set, Debra Brown did the choreography and François Bergeron was the Sound Designer. The team would not be complete without Luc Lafortune and his lighting magic. There are also a few new names in the credits this year: Andrew Watson, Artistic Director, and Benoît Jutras, who composed the music.

The Music

"The little girl who plays Zoé in Quidam has a real challenge, because she has to go from singing very tremulously and uncertainly to singing with a strong, full voice." - Benoît Jutras (Spectaculara)

Created by Benoît Jutras, the music of Quidam is of remarkable dramatic intensity. Drawing on influences that range from classical music to the most eclectic and contemporary sounds, Jutras's music accompanies, envelopes and accentuates the magic of the show. And for the very first time at Cirque du Soleil, the voices of a man and a child add texture and unique color to the music. The man in question is Mathieu Lavoie, and the child is none other than the composer's daughter, Audrey Brisson-Jutras. Eleven years old and a singer and musician in her own right, Audrey accompanied the troupe during its long travels throughout North America. "When it came time to cast the role of Zoé, we ended up choosing my daughter," Jutras reminisces. "It was tough, because I had been touring for years, and now, here she was going on tour for the next four years. At the premiere, I was there as both father and composer, so it was doubly nerve-wracking."

The Costumes

At the start of the creative process, costume designer Dominique Lemieux explored the many worlds of everyday life. The fabrics and textures used in Quidam reflect the variegated hues of a megalopolis inhabited by street people. Working in close cooperation, the costume designer and the director have created characters and costumes that reflect the performer personalities. Guided by the need to present each performer as a unique individual, Dominique designed approximately 250 costumes (500 costume items, 30 hats, 20 real-hair wigs and 200-300 hand-painted shoes) that let the personality of each of the performers come through.

Each artist has between two to seven costumes apiece and each costume is specifically designed for that artist (with at least two spares of every costume). For example, the costumes of the Banquine troupe are the same design, but in different colors. At first, they are more colorful, representing characters in real life, but later the colors become muted, representing life after war or tragedy.

"Quidam is an exploration of the everyday. Robert Doisneau was a wonderful source of inspiration for how the characters move and express their being. The surrealists Magritte and Delvaux were a guide in choosing the color scheme for the show, and also inspired how feeling and emotion are represented in it. In Quidam, a young girl experiences loneliness, anonymity, and alienation. She's dressed in orange, the color of action. But she's surrounded by grey everywhere, and red, the color of love, anger, and death." - Dominique Lemieux (Spectaculara)

Eighty percent of the fabrics used in the show's costumes are custom dyed. These fabrics are usually white and are hand-dyed and printed in custom colors shop. Basic costume and lining materials include leather, jute, linen, crepe, wool, velvet, Lycra, and 42 varieties of silk and 30 varieties of cotton from England, France, Italy and California. Around the world, fabrics have been woven and knitted to the specifications of Cirque's Costume Workshop. They were then processed by dyers using a number of dyeing, printing, airbrush, and tie-dyeing techniques.

Personae

"When I designed the make-up for Quidam, I was inspired by Dominique Lemieux's sketches, but also by the artists' faces. I worked directly on their faces, trying to help get the emotion we wanted out of them. For each character, we did a phenomenal number of tests, and ended up with boxes and boxes of photos." - Nathalie Gagne (Spectaculara)

- The Family (Mom, Dad & Zoë) --- Zoë is an average little girl. She is bored, yet curious, and she longs for the fun and excitement she believes lies just beyond her reach. She is lost amidst a world where she finds no meaning. She is frustrated and disillusioned and is swept up into the universe of Quidam. Zoë's Mother conveys an air of absence and alienation. Inside her lie fear, frustration and desire but she will soon rediscover the intense feeling of being alive through pain and courage, play and love. Lost behind his newspaper, ensconced in his den, Zoë's Father is completely, though unwittingly, self-absorbed. His white shoes are the only indication of a hidden personality.
- John --- With his tragically spare hairdo and comically svelte frame, John is a different kind of ringmaster. Part game-show host and part substitute teacher with his own renegade lesson plan, John is our eerie yet charming guide through the world of Quidam.
- Karl/Fritz/Target (Le Cible) --- The Target is a living, human bulls-eye, fired at by everyone. Perhaps it is his gentle nature and kindness which leave him so vulnerable. Ironically, he remains light-hearted and happy. With an infinite smile and moving with grace, he chooses to live in empty space, present and absent at the same time, a companion to the lost girl for a little while.

- Quidam --- The Quidam may have stepped out of a surrealist painting or been conjured up out of Zoë's imagination. He is anonymous-he is everyone, and, at the same time, he is no one.
- Les Égarés --- Les Égarés are lost individuals who gather together in the streets and abandoned buildings of Quidam. They sublimate their suffering, transforming it into something magical and inspiring.
- Boum Boum --- Boom-Boom, a bald guy with gloves for hands, is aggressive and physically fit. He brings forth the rumble of thunder and the flash of lightening with just the clash of his hands, showing us some of the more unpleasant sides of Quidam though protecting us at the same time. His ear piercing roars of disgust will grab your attention. And yet, he is lifeless, as though his body lives on only because his soul refuses to leave it.
- The Aviator --- The Aviator has skeletal wings, but doesn't look quite ready to take off. Perhaps he doesn't know he has wings. Perhaps he knows, but can't fly. Perhaps he has tried and failed. Or perhaps he simply wants to escape this world and its problems.
- Les Chiennes Blanches --- Les Chiennes Blanches are the silent chorus, the nameless and the faceless. They are the dehumanized, mechanical crowd, simultaneously leading and following.
- Les Clowns --- Meet the Maclomas, an outrageous trio of screwball clowns, a living comic strip. This French trio (a team for more than 20 years) is baroque, eccentric and Fellini-esque in its approach. Their art is rooted in taunts and grotesque provocations, a taste for the absurd, and unpredictable (and irresistible) scenarios. Their performance is a riotous celebration of fearsome, subversive imagery and imagination. Merciless and terrifying, these clowning iconoclasts take cruelty to new extremes, while bringing to Quidam purity, poetry and tenderness.

The Set & Stage

Quidam's set design is stunning. Evoking a monolithic structure like a train station or an airport concourse where people constantly come and go, the minimalist set was created within five months by a team of expert technicians from Cirque's workshops. In every city, some 40 hours of work by about 50 technicians are required to erect the sets under the blue-and-yellow Big Top. One of the production's most spectacular features is an overhead conveyor known as the *téléphérique*. Its five rails, made entirely out of aluminum, are constructed in seven 19-foot sections for a total length of 120 feet, almost the entire interior surface span of the Big Top. The idea for the conveyor came from Set Designer Michel Crête, who was looking for a new way of bringing artists on stage or into their aerial positions without cables obstructing the audience's view. Each rail supports two trolleys which travel the length of the system: one brings the acrobatic equipment, performers and props from a backstage platform dubbed "the garage" and the other raises or lowers them to the appropriate height once they arrive at their designated points, which could be over the stage or above the heads of the audience.

"For all of our shows up to this one, we had to work around the acrobats coming into the middle of the set and getting rigged up, and then climbing, trying to make it look organic and natural. We wanted to avoid that this time, so we designed a system of tracks on which they could make their entrance. That led to the idea of making the set itself a train station, which was just right. A train station's anonymous, and cold, and it's a kind of crossroads, too. It's a place of decision." - Michele Crête (Spectaculara)

The 387 square-foot stage (known as a *trompe-l'œil* floor), built from perforated aluminum panels that have been custom drilled, folded, structured and covered with a rubber-like flooring from Mondo, is illuminated from above and below and appears at times metallic while others incandescent. Changes in the lighting – contrasts in hues, angles and light beams – can instantly transform the mood of a scene from comedy to tragedy.

Though the phrase originates in the Baroque period, when it refers to perspectival illusionism, *trompe-l'œil* dates much further back. It was (and is) often employed in murals. Instances from Greek and Roman times are known, for instance in Pompeii. A typical *trompe-l'œil* mural might depict a window, door, or hallway, intended to suggest a larger room. *Trompe-l'œil*, in the form of "forced perspective," has long been used in stage-theater set design, so as to create the illusion of a much deeper space than the actual stage (think: matte painting). In fact, the term is French for "deceive the eye" so it makes sense.

The 21 metric ton revolving stage reflects an ever-changing, unpredictable world. The 34-foot diameter turntable can turn in two directions, in different speeds and can support up to 50 people. There are more than 200,000 perforations, which allows light to surpass from below.

/// THE EXPERIENCE

"With Quidam, we started out wanting to do something very down-to-earth, and ended up with something surrealistic. Every night, the spectator comes in to watch people dream."
- Gilles Ste-Croix

Quidam offers audiences a variety of acts where high-caliber acrobatic performance goes hand-in-hand with the magnificent beauty of aerial, high-flying, balancing and manipulation acts. In store for spectators are the German wheel, Banquine, Spanish webs, Diabolo and Aerial Contortion in Silk. Also on the program: a hell-raising trio of crazy clowns who take cruelty to the limits while lending a touch of purity, poetry and tenderness to the show.

PROLOGUE

In typical Cirque du Soleil fashion, the show begins while the audience is still gathering. Our guide for the evening, "John," greets the audience as they come through the door, playing with their hair, stealing their tickets, eating their popcorn, and generally causing a nuisance. He is followed by a troupe of characters dressed head-to-toe in white, hooded suits. Of course this group picks an unwilling volunteer from the audience, takes him backstage and brings him out dressed as one of them. John harasses him a little and sends him back to his seat.

As the house lights go dim, John takes the stage and plays snippets of songs on an old transistor radio - snippets of songs from previous Cirque productions, at which he sneers and turns up his nose. He reads us our instructions for the evening - no smoking, no pictures, and the like - and then leads us through this incredible story for the next two hours. The show opens on the young girl at home with her parents seated in typical family pose. The father reads the paper, the mother stares vacantly into space, Zoë tries to entertain herself and engage her parents.

A knock at the door brings a character straight from a Magritte painting - a headless man, Quidam, carrying an umbrella, who drops his hat in the center of this family scene. Interest piqued, Zoë picks up the discarded hat and places it to her ear, listening for the fantastical, the ethereal. Compelled then to place the hat upon her head, she does so. Thunder rolls, lightning flashes, and the family are carried away in one of the most amazing feats to occur under the Big Top. In blissful ignorance, the parents are carried off still in their chairs, seemingly unaware of what is taking place around them. At the same time, our young heroine's guides to this fantastical world are introduced - John, who we have already met, and Fritz, an always-smiling, impish character. These two cohorts carry the young girl through adventure after adventure...

GERMAN WHEEL

Although it is a very popular gymnastic exercise in Germany, Quidam makes the German wheel look like a game. The wheel, two meters in circumference, consists of two metal hoops joined at six points. The Wheel rolls into place in what was the living room, and Chris Lashua (the original artist) nonchalantly carries it through a series of rolls, twists, turns and spins that defy explanation. It flips from side to side, and returns to a straight vertical. It rolls across the stage at dizzying speeds. He guides this huge apparatus through varying tricks in a display of athleticism unlike anything seen before - some even with his hands held calmly behind his back. Fascinated, spectators observing this strange pair wonder whether wheel or acrobat is in control. Are they adversaries or allies? The mystery remains unsolved.

DIABOLOS

As the show progress, the Quidam's world becomes more fantastical, more chaotic, and more beautiful. After the German Wheel rolls off, the troupe returns to the stage running, leaping, dancing across it with the young girl, Zoë, taking in all she can. Her parents appear, still in oblivion, her father with his head pushed through the newspaper lost in the confusion. Performers traverse the stage in a chorus of Zoë look-alikes, teasing her and John alike, while the remainder of the troupe comes on with varying sizes of drums - from small, tinny snare drums to the large, thundering taiko drums, now an essential part of any Cirque production. Through this group come the four young girls (Qing Liu, Xiaojing Liu, Yu Wang and Meng Xie) carrying their Diabolos, or "Chinese yo-yo", who perform a quartet of juggling by tossing them across the revolving stage, forming pyramids and seemingly impossible uses of the ropes and spinning tops. In one of the most beautiful uses of the stage, at the end of the act, the four girls spin their tops up ropes hanging from the ceiling of the tent, from which drop in synchronization streamers of white and blue. The audience holds its breath as the four performers attempt to outdo each other in dexterity and ingenuity. This act won the Gold Medal at the 1995 *Festival du cirque de demain* in Paris.

AERIAL CONTORTION

As the Diabolo girls run off, again our troupe of performers comes through as we watch the Father traverse the tent suspended from the giant track, seemingly walking on air. As our eyes gaze toward the top of the tent, a cocoon of red silk comes from behind the orchestra at the front, and the amazingly beautiful Isabelle Vaudelle performs the Aerial Contortion in Silk. Not only is it an athletically astonishing act, but in context it was so hauntingly beautiful, performed to "Let Me Fall" from the soundtrack, but sung in Cirquish language. Moving with grace and delicacy, Isabelle Vaudelle becomes one with the columns of red fabric that supports and cradles her. To haunting music, contortionist and cloth intertwine, separate and embrace again. The translucent fabric occasionally hugs the body of the performer, creating a stunning effect that touches the artist in each of us. This act, which requires strength, flexibility and agility, won Isabelle the silver medal at the XXIIIe Festival du cirque de demain in Paris, where she represented Cirque du Soleil.

SKIPPING ROPES

Do you remember when a sure sign of spring was the sound of children jumping rope? Drawing its inspiration from dance, acrobatics and the art of manipulation, Cirque du Soleil has transformed this familiar child's game into a unique circus act. As a trio of Mother look-alikes, all dressed in red, come to carry Isabelle off after her performance, they are followed by the remainder of the troupe who begin a languid Skipping Ropes section - at first a simple display of athletic prowess, led by two soloists - then morphing into an eclectic, energetic display of skill and timing as the entire troupe performs together. The video shows a nice shot from the ceiling of the tent in an almost Busby Burkle display of symmetry.

AERIAL HOOPS

Three aerial hoops whirl above the stage. Each on her own hoop or all three on the same, Geneviève Bessette, Martyne Dubé and Émilie Grenon-Emiroglou pivot and twirl through the air. The hoops, suspended from the overhead track, whirl in a blur as the trio of performers manipulate and climb over them. With intense synchronization and precision the performers twirl the hoops and stop them on cue, using the air and the stage to propel them around. You will never forget this breathtaking aerial ballet.

MANIPULATION

More than mere jugglers, Jean Besnard, Patrick McGuire and Steven Ragatz manipulate a ball and wave-shaped metal forms with utmost dexterity. The ball will hypnotize you as it endlessly appears and disappears right before your eyes. Although this act looks easy, it requires superhuman precision and concentration. Michael Moschen, well known for his original manipulation acts, developed this act especially for Cirque du Soleil.

ELEVATED HANDBALANCING

A suspended platform swings back and forth under the spotlights. The audience, immediately captivated, is irresistibly drawn to the gracious silhouette of a young hand-balancer. Perched on the platform, Olga Pikhienko moves through a series of precarious balancing positions of ever-increasing difficulty. This is one of the most typical "circus" acts in Quidam, but was also one of the most virtuoso performances.

SPANISH WEBS

After her leaving the stage, our guide John returns in his hilarious display of marksmanship with a set of darts. He wears a target on his head and tosses darts in the air to land on the target. Of course he misses, to our great amusement, and leaves the stage in a howl of agony as the overhead track brings a series of ropes onto the stage, each with a performer attached, high over our heads. And thus begins the incredible Spanish Web act, with acrobats climbing up and down the ropes, tying them around their bodies and flying through the air. In the live performance, the climax of this act was the character of Fritz, constantly wanting to be involved and meeting everything with a smile, climbing the ropes as the porter on the ground begins to spin the rope. Fritz flies off, attached to the main rope only by his ankle, flying and laughing hilariously over heads.

Additionally, the character of the Father was a principal soloist in the Spanish Webs act, portrayed by Daniel Touchette. He was the one who originally tied the rope in many loops around his body, ultimately letting it roll him precariously down to the ground. As a part of the story, this act began the transformation of the Father character into a more open, carefree person.

VIS VERSA / STATUE

After the Spanish Webs have left the stage, our friend John returns and performs a fun juggling act with a ball and a hat stand to the incomparable singer Yma Sumac's "Gopher." It is a light-hearted moment of frivolity and fun in this crazy mixed-up world of Quidam.

A recurring element of Quidam is the nameless, faceless, ubiquitous characters dressed from head to toe in white medical-looking suits. These characters come in and out of the show, as they had participated with John at the very beginning, in various ways. After John leaves the stage they come rolling out in a group, form a clump in the middle and out of their midst come the next two performers to do the Statue or Vis Versa act. Reminiscent of similar acts in other Cirque shows, this duo balancing act is a Cirque trademark, particularly beautiful in Quidam as a counterpoint to some of the more frantic performances.

Never losing contact, two strong, flexible performers move almost imperceptibly, assuming positions impossible without an impeccable sense of balance. The audience is captivated by the sensuality of the performance by Marie-Laure Mesnage and Yves Décoste. Like martial artists enthusiasts, these two performers call on their sensitivity and powers of concentration in their quest for perfect harmony. Their act is testimony to the natural beauty of the human body.

CLOUD SWING

Trapeze and Spanish web techniques combine in the explosive and dangerous cloud swing – another act unique to Quidam. Spectators thrill as Swiss performer Petra Sprecher calmly carries off spectacular acrobatics, dives and contortions at a hellish pace. The trapeze artist electrifies the audience, won over by her strength and virtuosity. It is a much more 'violent' performance than that of the Vis-Versa, and plays an important counterpoint to the slower elements of the show. At one extended point of the swing, she seemingly falls off the trapeze, attached only by a small guide-wire to her leg. But from the audience's perspective it looks like she's falling off completely. She regains her balance and continues flawlessly.

BANQUINE

The final act of Quidam is the Banquine, an incredible balancing and acrobatic act involving the whole troupe. They toss each other madly about the stage forming towers of four people high, and in daring jumps from one group to the other, landing on only the joined hands of the porter. This performance was also used in Cirque's IMAX Journey of Man film. It is, perhaps, the signature act of Quidam and features performances completely unlike anything else. Banquine is an Italian acrobatic tradition whose origins go back to the Middle Ages.'

EPILOGUE

Banquine of course leads to the resolution of the show, with Zoë uniting with her joyful parents. The Quidam appears again and takes back his hat, proving that the magical world is really the world we live in and that all these fantastic experiences are part of it as well.

/// THE CONTINUING ADVENTURES...

Quidam has, over the years, evolved as Cirque du Soleil itself evolved. The show's make-up became more elaborate, singers came and went, and, of course, a couple acrobatic numbers and clown teams pivoted in and out.

Let's take the clowns for instance. While many of us equate Quidam with the Les Maclomas clown team (no doubt because they're the trio featured on the show's DVD recording), they weren't the original clowns in the show. For the first North American Tour (1996-1998), we had Kotini Jr (Yellow) and Alosha (Red). The Red Clown was a crotchety, mean old clown who didn't care whose feelings got hurt. He tormented Zoë in the beginning of the tale but by the end, befriended her. He walked with a limp and was downright gloomy. The Yellow Clown, in contrast, was likeable enough but not too bright. The two were crude and sometimes unwanted, but found a way into the narrative never-the-less.

Les Macloma were introduced during the European Tour and stuck around through the Second North American Tour (2002) and into the Japanese Tour (2003) before retiring. The clowns, Red, White and Yellow, were a sight to see and their antics, no less... anitc! From floating around the stage in hot-air balloons made from boxes to playing musical notes on balloons!

After their retirement the Les Macloma were replaced by Les Don Quijotes, a trio who built upon the Les Macloma legacy by performing their characters and numbers. Les Don Quijotes didn't last nearly as long however, and were replaced by the Toto & Voki duo. Toto and Voki changed up Quidam's clown routines by bringing back one of David Shiner's best acts - the "Film Scene" (as seen in "Nouvelle Experience") - and introducing what would become a crowd-favorite in "The Car", which featured the participation of a female audience member.

Neither clown continued with the show's arena conversion. The current clown brings a more contemporary vision of clowning. With subversive, crazy audience participation numbers, he tells his own story, bringing to Quidam the joyful, burlesque, and liberated language of clown. "This colorful, brash, and crazy world reminds us that the circus is forever a universal spectacle." Or so says Cirque du Soleil.

Of course, the clowns wouldn't be the only performers to come and go, and coming with the changes a new Quidam. John Gilkey ("John") left Quidam after the end of the original North American Tour, to be replaced by Mark Ward – who has gone on to play the character of "John" for far longer than the original creator! (Consequently, John Gilkey returned to Quidam to take part in the show's filming in 1999, returning to his titular character. Mark Ward, who had been performing "John", was shuffled to the character of "Quidam" during the filming instead.)

Another trio to leave the show was the Manipulation artists.

The Manipulation act was originally created by Michael Moschen for Cirque du Soleil's resident show *Mystère* at Treasure Island Las Vegas; however, during Quidam's creation, the act was removed from *Mystère* and sent out on tour. Manipulation was only seen during the first North American Tour (1996-1998) and has not been seen in a Cirque production since. Their performance was not replaced; rather, a juggling act was retained *en reserve* in case another main act could not perform.

There were special occasions when acrobatic numbers not normally associated with Quidam, or were associated with other Cirque shows, came in on a temporary basis. Elena Lev's Hoops Act was brought to Quidam due to a performance shuffle brought about by the conception of *Varekai*, for instance.

Olga Pikhienko, who originated and performed the Hand-balancing act, was leaving to perform in *Varekai*. This left a space in the Quidam roster to be filled. And thus Elena Lev, who had left *Alegría* during its Asia/Pacific run (2001-2002), joined Quidam during its second North American Tour (2002) bringing her famous Hoops act with her. Lev's number in Quidam was virtually the same as performed in *Alegría*, with a couple of exceptions: first, Elena wore Olga's costuming themed for Quidam, and second, performed her act to the more up-tempo hand-balancing song already in the show. At the end of the Second North American Tour (Dec 2002), Elena Lev left Quidam and the hand-balancing discipline was returned with a rotating roster of different performers through the years.

* * *

Yes, Quidam has undergone many changes in its eighteen-year history – performers have come and gone, acts have been replaced time and again, clowns have left and come back and left again – but perhaps the show's biggest shakeup came on November 21, 2010 – the day it ceased to be a touring show under the big top. Like Saltimbanco, Alegría and Dralion before it, Quidam would close on that date and be converted into an Arena-only traveling production, hitting up secondary and tertiary markets across North America and Europe. In doing so, like its predecessor converts, Quidam would lose more than a little of its luster, some said it lost its soul. Which is an interesting comment to ponder; especially so when Quidam originally surprised spectators and attracted considerable criticism when it first launched. That's right! Cirque du Soleil answered these charges by saying Quidam was not an "Alegría Plus" or "Super Saltimbanco", but an animal all to its own. Perhaps the show is best summed up in the words of the title song from the Soundtrack - "There's nothing left, there's nothing right, there's nothing wrong. I'm one, I'm two, I'm all yet none of you. The truth, the lies, the tear, the laughter, the hand and the empty touch. Here I am, alone, waiting for the curtain call."



CIRQUE DU SOLEIL.



*Welcome to a place where all the world is
water and the stage is all the world.
Welcome to the turbulent waters of your
imagination, the calm of happy memories.
Welcome to this uncharted realm.*

Welcome to «O».

What immediately comes to mind when you hear someone exclaim "Oh!?" Do you wait for some kind of follow-up; a signal that the person who expressed it will expound upon something he or she just discovered? Or do you let yourself drip into a world without limits - a theatrical encounter with the possibilities and symbols of water: calm and nurturing, playful and sustaining, unpredictable and merciless?

Most will be the former - unknowing, unseeing... but for you, a fan of Cirque du Soleil, you then are the latter and your thoughts will have become submerged in Cirque du Soleil's aquatic production of "O", at the Bellagio. For you the mere utterance of the show's title conjurers up a barrage of chaotic images, spectacular performances, and heart-wrenching melodies. You've leapt into a world without limits, dove into a tribute to the magic of the theater - from the simplest street performance to the most lavish of operas - and plunged into the wonder, terror, and joy of "O" where anything is possible!

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	October 19, 1998
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Franco Dragone
Composer:	Benoît Jutras
Location:	Bellagio, Las Vegas

Creative Team

Guide	Composer
Guy Laliberté	Benoît Jutras
Director	Lighting Designer
Franco Dragone	Luc Lafortune
Creation	Sound Designer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Jonathan Deans
Choreographer	Sound Designer
Debra Brown	François Bergeron
Set Designer	Costume Designer
Michel Crête	Dominique Lemieux
	Makeup Designer
	Nathalie Gagné



/// AN INTR'O'DUCTION

"When we started to work on "O", we were really encouraged to dream large-scale. Steve Wynn wanted a show on a stage the size of a football field, on which guests at the Bellagio could windsurf, too! Of course, eventually, we had to work within the realm of the possible, and make decisions. But the show is still a big experience." - Gilles Ste-Croix (Spectaculara)

Our story of "O" has somewhat a familiar beginning. At first glance, "O" is nothing more than another Cirque du Soleil production inside a fancy theater built to specifications for a hotel project on the Las Vegas strip. When you take a second glance, "O" becomes much, much more. Every aspect surrounding the creation is finely tuned; detailed to exactness. It seems almost inconceivable that within this \$1.6 billion dollar hotel resides a production never before attempted - never before imagined even - until Cirque tried.

In 1993, Cirque du Soleil planted what they called a "flower in the desert" with *Mystère*, which began with the failure of discussions with Caesar's Palace two years prior, Steve Wynn's journey to Toronto to catch a live Cirque performance, and the staging of "Nouvelle Expérience" on the grounds of the Mirage for a year. With *Mystère* firmly entrenched in the hearts and minds of Las Vegas patrons, it would be only a matter of time before the sands once again became fertile and another flower could be planted in the desert. Cirque du Soleil found its lush, productive sands during the development of the Bellagio, approaching Steve Wynn about doing a production at his newest hotel, but not in the manner in which you would think.

The idea for "O" began to take shape when Dragone and Guy LaLiberte met with Stephen Wynn, the casino owner, to discuss the creation of a new show to fill the theater he planned to build at his dream palace, the Bellagio. Another Cirque show, "Mystere," was already ensconced at Treasure Island, Wynn's hotel and casino just down the Strip, and the new show was to be bigger, more thrilling, more inventive, and more expensive. "He asked us, 'Do you have any crazy ideas that might make another show for me?'" LaLiberte recalled. "The original concept was related to both water and fire. That's what we threw at him." Wynn's initial reaction was positive, LaLiberte added; Wynn wanted to build the biggest water show ever, with an artificial lake the size of three football fields beneath a cover of some kind. "But slowly we got back to the concept of working with water within a theater," he said; the fire idea was eventually set aside as too dangerous for an indoor venue. ("Wynn's original idea was to have boats floating in a pool as big as a football field," remembers Michel Crete, Cirque's principal scenic designer. "We had to scale the idea back when we realized that our goal wasn't to dominate the seas, but to play in the water."), but in the end Steve Wynn decided on having his like and elegant fountains, and Cirque, well, they went on to create the most remarkable theater show seen up to that time.



But for what the Cirque creators had in mind, the demands on the theater would be enormous. It proved to be harder than they ever imagined. The stage needed to be liquid at times, for divers and swimmers, and solid at times for dancers and gymnasts and clowns; the space had to accommodate high dives and huge scenery backdrops; the téléphérique needed to move gymnasts and props not only up and down and upstage and downstage, but also in curved and circular patterns. The result was a \$70 million theater (the production itself cost another \$20 million) with 1,800 seats...

/// THE 'O' THEATER, AT BELLAGIO

"The pool represents a source, a pond-like sanctuary protected by a garden, an intimate place where the sunlight shines through the forest leaves, creating translucent, stained-glass colors. It speaks to me of the coexistence of nature and man, of the elements and the technology used to bring them together." - Michel Crete (Spectaculara)

"O", a phonetic play on the French word for water - "eau", is a baroque world filled with disturbing images, impressive acrobatics and amazing technical intent. The theater built for the show, Cirque's first (and at present only) aquatic show, is also a revolutionary conceptual space. Designed and created by Cirque du Soleil, Sceno Plus and Atlandia Design over a 2 1/2 year period (February 1996 to July 1998), the 1800 seat theater reflects the style of a 14th century European opera house with tiered, balcony seating. Reportedly costing \$70 million US, it sports a number of innovative theatrical constructs making the 1800-seat space the first of its kind. What makes the theater so special? It is 12 stories high, 42 meters wide, houses a 5.5 million liter (1.5 million gallons) pool for its stage, a 12 meter wide mirror, 27 meter high curtain of 18.5 meter Plexiglas and an 18 meter high diving dower all in a 155,300 square-feet of space!

You'll find the Bellagio Theater tucked away in a seemingly normal looking hallway on the casino floor, but nothing can prepare you for what you'll see inside - a marvel of innovation masked by exquisite beauty and detail.

Take for example the Cupola, or rounded ceiling vault. At some point your eyes will dart the 12-stories skyward and you'll find a breathtaking ceiling washed in turquoise, indigo and blue. But take another glance... underneath that beauty lies an innovate framework of galvanized metal mesh with a trellis (or frame of latticework) that allows for an infinite array of lighting effects to be used. Cirque uses this space to place scores of different colored lights to not only light the theater but also the stage below. The translucent look is achieved with two layers of galvanized metal mesh lit from behind with GAM 725 (turquoise), GAM 890 (deep indigo) and Lee 161 (steel blue) gels. The Cupola also comes with a space used for overhead performances, which is utilized during the beginning of the show. A custom flying winch by Fisher Technical makes the performance possible.

While the ceiling itself is a wonder to behold, how many of you have sat with mouths agape as the curtain is drawn back into the depths of the theater for the show's explosive beginning? If so, you're not alone. The curtain impresses many who have seen the show. So, how does it work? That amazing feat is done by another winch by Fisher that draws back at a speed of 15-feet per second! At that velocity one would imagine the curtain would flutter noticeably.

But believe it or not, Cirque keeps the curtain from fluttering with a series of weights that hold it in place timed to release with the curtain's upward motion. This keeps the curtain taught throughout the entire drawback sequence. The curtain itself is nylon, approximately 50 feet high by 100 feet wide, and light in weight. To the casual observer's eye, however, it looks like luxurious velvet because "it's lit exquisitely." Two ropes from the winch attach to the curtain (which is really two pieces) at the center. When the signal is given the winch starts pulling, the hooks at the top of the stage release, and the curtain (and audience) is swept away. The curtain is pulled up smoothly onto a large roller. The custom-built winch that pulls the curtain resides high in the grid rigging over the stage.

Weighing around 500 pounds and about 5 1/2 feet in height, its 8-foot winding drum (with high sides to take up the curtain) acts as a big sewing spool, powered by a 20-horsepower SEW EuroDrive induction motor mounted vertically. Once activated by a technician holding a joystick touch screen, it takes just 6 seconds for the curtain to be whisked away completely. This curtain is pulled up to reveal yet another curtain that floats on top of the pool and is pulled aside to reveal the water. The winch used is a Fisher 20-horsepower F200 model that draws back at a speed of 14-feet per second. It moves away to reveal another innovation of the theater, the pool itself. (Consequently, the curtain at the end of the show is guided back into place by a system of wires and traveling guides.)

The stage consists of a 150-foot by 100-foot pool reaching a depth of 25 feet. While the pool itself is an interesting marvel, haven't you ever wondered how the pool becomes a stage? Below that liquid surface lies a series of hydraulic lifts built specifically by Handling Specialty of Grimsby, Ontario.

There are seven of these lifts, consisting of four primaries and three auxiliaries, each with a 1-million pound capacity holding up the 53x90 foot main stage surface. Each platform these lifts support measures 1,000sq feet and can quietly travel (thanks to special sonic probes) from a depth of 17-feet 3-inches below water level to 18-inches above, moving separately or together at a rate between 5 and 25 feet per minute. Each lift is powered by three hydraulic rams, each with a 100,000 pound weight capacity, and use in its hydraulics a bio-degradable vegetable oil. The rubber floor of the lifts is custom-designed and fitted with a resilient rubber-like material (fiberglass combined with sports matting with PVC) in a series of 4-foot by 8-foot panels. Each panel contains 5,000 plus holes to allow water to pass as the stage is raised or lowered. But the speed of their disappearance and sudden reappearance can fool you into thinking that the lifts and the stage are quite light. In fact, the combined weight of the system is a hefty 460,000 pounds!

10 months of research went into the creation of the surface. But the lifts are only part of the innovation. Many of the problems with the show's development came because of the water itself. Ask yourself a couple of questions: How would the noise of the splashes be contained? How could the temperatures between the water and the air be comfortable for both the performers and the patrons? How could the smell of chlorine be contained? How could a stage of water be lit without reflection? How would the performers hear the music to make their cues? How to keep costumes from disintegrating from the pool's chemicals? And how would they breathe?

The solutions are novel in their own right.

The undesirable noise of waves splashing against the sides of the pool is absorbed by a series of different sized pebbles scattered around the ring (or gutter) of the pool. These rocks, used in conjunction with special matting from 3M called Nomad, help absorb the waves, and thereby the noise. Another problem is masking activity. An aquatic masking system that makes the pool form and bubble is created by more than one mile (6000 feet) of perforated hose, mounted on the bottom of the pool. The perforations allow bubbles to form, which serve to mask any underwater activity. A team of 14 divers works every show. Not only do they help out the acrobats to make their mark, but they're also there in case of an emergency. You'll only see them once - and that's a scripted point in the show!

The 87-degree Fahrenheit water is counter-balanced with a special HVAC (Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning) system developed by Cirque and Sceno Plus in conjunction with Dupras & Ledoux of Montreal pumps 55-degree Fahrenheit air directly under each seat. This mixture of air keeps the humidity down while resulting in a more comfortable seating area temperature of 72 degrees. Using Bromide in the water averts the chlorine smell.

"We went through a lengthy testing process for all of the costumes in "O". The first time we tested our costumes in the Olympic pool here in Montreal, they exploded! We understood right away why bathing suits are sewn together differently. We built a little pool five feet deep in the Montreal studio, and every cutter had a little bucket in which they soaked their material, to see how it would react. When the synchronized swimmers started testing the costumes at the Bellagio, we noticed that all the glowing beads were disappearing, and we didn't know where! One day, someone opened the pool filter ... and found 3,000 beads!" - Yves Fournier (Director, Costume Department)

Lighting the pool required experimentation with different lighting angles and techniques, since water is highly reflective and filters light differently than air. In the end the design team used 1,815 lighting instruments in the show - including spotlights, cans (standard theatrical lights) and scrollers (lights with multiple colors) - using more than four million total watts of light in their design. Testing designs took more than two years but installing the system would take even more thought - 288 of those would be underwater lights - how to mix electricity and water safely? How about in a specially created tunnel! The tunnel consists of eleven four-inch thick windows of Plexiglas, able to withstand both water pressure and heat from the lights, which allows for the safe installation of electric cables under the water. All in all, 222,956 feet of cable were used in the lighting installation, a length of almost 42 miles.

As for sound, in addition to speakers throughout the theater, twenty-four underwater speakers are used. These speakers, provided by Clark Synthesis, are bolted to custom mounts and have a total capacity of 12,000 watts. They supply increased frequency response and increased energy transfer by acting as a soundboard. Two of the mounted speakers can be moved closer to the cast by the in-water crew, so the swimmers can still hear cues and music when aquatic masking is activated. The musicians are housed on either side of the stage in booths, which allows for acoustic isolation for better sound, and has the additional benefit of protecting the instruments from the humidity of the pool.

Consequently, the pool is drained annually for maintenance and when it's done it drains into the Bellagio Lake raising the water level one inch. It takes twelve hours to fill the pool again. Interestingly enough, though, the pool is below the water table and tries to float when there is no water in it; therefore, a slab of concrete 12 feet thick holds the pool down!

There are many other technical advances of Cirque du Soleil's theater at the Bellagio that remain secret behind Cirque's closed doors. And perhaps that's the way it should be. Giving away too much takes away from the marvel of the show, does it not? But as we move on in our understanding of this aquatic habitat, permit me one more fact about the theater: for their collaboration, Cirque du Soleil and Scéno Plus were awarded New York's prestigious Eddy Entertainment Design Award in 1998, the Canadian Institute for Technology's Award of Technical Merit in 1999, and the Las Vegas Best Theater of the Year Award for their ingenuity.

/// THE CHARACTERS OF 'O'

"The challenge of mixing water, land, acrobats, swimmers and divers on a stage-and finding a place where everyone could move dramatically-was mostly technical. But "O" gave rather than took energy. The level of collaboration was absolutely invigorating." - Debra Brown (Spectaculara)

Now that we understand the space and stage in which our story takes place, let us take a moment now to view the many faces you'll find strutting across its watery stage. At first glance each of these characters appears to be on their own journey, and perhaps, in their own time as our play progresses; yet together they provide a wonderful insight into this strange odyssey.

- **Eugen (La Vieux)** – He is our guide and the guardian of the theater. Eugen is strong, yet vulnerable. He knows all and provokes us to see the dark side of "O". His ghostly orchestrations take us on a timeless journey through different worlds as he makes his own transformation from dark to white. His is the cyclonical part of life where everything becomes new again.
- **Guifà (Philemon)** – He is the young Sicilian boy we see at the very beginning of the show, and throughout its creation. He is a curious fellow and it's that curiosity and a quest for adventure that transports him (and us) to a magical realm where all his hopes, fears and dreams come true. He is a willing prisoner in this kaleidoscopic domain-the witness who is everywhere and every man.
- **Aurora** – Graceful, fragile and inaccessible, she represents the quest: she stands for fantasy and desire. Guifà catches sight of her in the prologue, pursues her whenever he sees her, and finds her again in the epilogue.
- **Les Comètes** – The comets are noble and sexy, tinged with madness as they soar through the air and fall from the heavens. Dressed in red, they belong to the theater, universe, and cosmos. They are everywhere and yet they are nowhere.

- **Le Travesti (The Transvestite)** – He wears the clothes of a wicked woman; coos, hisses and murmurs. His primal cries resound throughout the theater.
- **The Organ Grinder** – He is a strong man and organ player. A gentle giant is he, always ready to lend a hand. He follows Guifà wherever he may go.
- **Petite Dancer** – She dances to the music of the Barbary organ, and has always danced.
- **Le Voleur (The Thief)** – He is a masked character with many faces. Sometimes a clown, sometimes a body guard; he plays with fire.
- **L'Allumé** – The human torch is a pyromaniac who enjoys pleasing the crowd. He's just passing through, popping up out of nowhere, not worried that he is on fire.
- **The Zebras** – They are playful and bright; constantly realigning themselves to maintain balance in a stormy universe. When together, they smooch; separated, they seek one another. They are for eternity existing in the kaleidoscope world of "O".
- **Les Mariés (The Bride)** – Lost and abandoned, the bride is searching for something -- a key to her existence.

/// REFLECTIONS

"For me, "O" represents life and all the mysteries of the universe. But it also represents the theatre, which is a marvelous machine mankind has created to understand himself and his universe. Theatre allows us to explore the mystery, and "O" is our attempt both to praise theatre and to push it beyond its limits." - Franco Dragone (Spectaculara)

"O" is the brainchild of Franco Dragone and Gilles Ste-Croix, the backbone of every Cirque du Soleil show from its earliest beginnings. It is their guidance and determination that we have "O" and the beautiful theater it plays in. Sitting within the theater is also a treat in itself. The redness of the seats contrasts with the beautiful colors of blue, green and white plastered on the ceiling above you. Its silk-like fabric never wavers against the blown air of the theater, and that contrasts with the bright red fabric of the shows curtain, draped across the entire stage. And it is the stage that grabs our eyes immediately, and to our first introduction of the characters that will play out their hopes and dreams before us. The first person we see is Guifà, a young Sicilian boy. His curiosity about what lies ahead and his never-ending quest for adventure become the center point of the journey we, as spectators, are about to undertake. There's something about the red curtain that draws us to it, and him. It covers the entire stage, shutting us out from a wondrous world we know nothing about. But as curious as Guifà is, we are as well.

*O, the world's the stage they say
Upon which mortals strut and play
Until the final hour of day
Until the curtain calls
O.*

PROLOGUE

Look! Out from the red curtain that has been draped over the stage comes a white hand -- a ghoulish hand. There! There! Did you see? "What does it want..." you wonder. But it's not a what, but a who. The hand beckons to Guifà to come closer to it. His curiosity once again begat the best of him, and he gets a bit too close. The hand grabs the unsuspecting man and drags him behind the curtain. And just as we begin to worry about the man, another jumps out at us. He is malformed, hunched over and dressed as a gentleman - we shall call him Eugen. This man takes a moment to look us all over, and then, he calls for the young man to make his re-appearance.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," Guifà cautiously lets out. "Welcome to the Cirque du Soleil Theater." He begins to advise us of the rules of the theater, going on about smoking, emergency exiting, and other such rules. And as he finishes, returning the parchment of paper the before mentioned rules were printed on to the malformed man Guifà begins to levitate. Stricken with fear, he suddenly realizes that he is about to enter an unforeseen world: a realm where dreams are experienced, a realm where anything is possible. Higher now he has risen above the theater stage and soon, he begins to retreat backward taking with him the red curtain that has kept us from the world behind it. Guifà, his curiosity getting the best of him, is about to enter the world Eugen has prepared for him. He is about to enter the world of "O", taking us with him. And doth the winds blow...

Words can hardly express the feeling one finds as the red curtain quickly disappears into the opening world of "O". It made the hair on my arms stand on end. It is such a powerful image that, to each person, means something different. Nevertheless, the world that Franco Dragone and Gilles Ste-Croix have created for us has opened its doors to our wanting eyes. We are now committed to experience everything Guifà experiences. We are now locked in the dream world with him. And in his hopes, fears and dreams that will be acted out on stage, we will be experiencing our own.

*O, to sing with all my heart
Caress you with my soul, my art
Embrace you as my counterpart
Until you turn away
O.*

Turn away we shall not. After the amazing opening curtain, the senses are overloaded with a horde of different acts. They range from the classic circus performance to interesting one-of-a-kind creations, made special for this production. The acts include:

NAGE (SYNCHRONIZED SWIMMING)

Just as water is essential to all life, the swimmers' graceful presence during the acts and transitional segues, is central to "O". At the heart of the production, the swimmers provide the necessary link between the elements of fire, earth, air and water. Choreographed by Debra Brown and Olympic gold-medallist Sylvie Fréchette, the synchronized swimming team is made up of 17 world-class swimmers.

DUO TRAPEZE

Two aerialists perform their dance in the air, sharing a single trapeze designed to co-exist with the water and machinery of the Bellagio Theatre. This visually stunning mirror image reflects the special bond shared by the twins performing the act. Their breathtaking maneuvers and feet-to-feet catches emulate the beauty of harmony and complete trust.

LA BARGE (BANQUINE)

With amazing strength and fearlessness, this team of talented acrobats performs atop a floating raft in the Barge act. The core group is comprised of eight world champion women with a background of sport acrobatics. Their act combines inventive gymnastic performances with the traditional circus act of banquine and the balletic prowess of adagio. Blending these skills with water completes this lively act, which also includes synchronized swimmers and Olympic divers.

BATEAU

Charting the course of life and the pursuit of dreams, this steel frame ship floating above the water provides the platform for this truly unique display of acrobatic timing and strength. At the foundation of the Bateau (French for "boat") is the traditional circus discipline of the aerial cradle act incorporated with gymnastics parallel bars for the very first time. While the Comets anchor the bateau, it begins to swing back and forth under the power of the acrobats. And together, the flyers and catchers create an amazing display of timing, strength and agility.

FEU (FIRE)

The rage of fire and the purification of water are blended into one - and then displayed throughout the "O" Theatre in this brilliantly visual act. Incorporating ancient folklore and martial arts, this act invokes rituals from around the world including Hawaii, Samoa, New Zealand and Australia. The fire act was conceptualized and transformed by artists with different backgrounds, from performance companies to street theatre. Incorporated in the act is the amazing fire stunt of Ray Wold.

RUSSIAN SWING

Pleasure, envy, passion and temptation are everywhere during the honeymoon celebration. Drawing its inspiration from the many wedding chapels of Las Vegas, the church bell atop the largest swing beckons all to join the party... of life, love and death. The cast includes expert divers using three sets of Russian swings. The swinging movement creates a different trajectory of flight, presenting a unique challenge even for the most seasoned diver. Moving from ground level to the highest point at 32 feet creates a momentary weightlessness at zero gravity, followed by tremendous acceleration down to the water.

CADRE

Struggling to maintain balance in a stormy universe - the zebras constantly realign themselves, hanging on until the very end. Resembling a playground jungle gym, this giant aerial frame was created by Cirque du Soleil specialists to facilitate choreography and gymnastics in an aerial space between the sky and the water. Performed by the same group as the Bateau act, the entire number takes place suspended in mid-air.

HIGH DIVE

A group of four world-class high divers leap from 60 feet above the ground into a small exposed section of the pool. The dive team is made up of cliff and exhibition divers.

WASHINGTON TRAPEZE

The Washington Trapeze is unique because unlike the traditional rope-hung trapeze, it is built on a fixed metal frame and swings in a long pendulum motion. The difficulty of this act is heightened as the trapeze is attached to a revolving carousel, which descends from the grid at four feet per second. This segment fuses slack wire and tightrope elements with the high technology of the "O" Theatre

CONTORTION

Hailing all the way from Mongolia, these four girls have been performing since the age of eight. Their graceful body language and lithe movements underline the balletic perfection of the female form. Their arrival from above and their aquatic surroundings add a new dimension to this long-held circus tradition.

CERCEAUX (HOOPS)

This act fuses dizzying aerial choreography with powerful gymnastic routines. Water is incorporated as both an atmospheric and a choreographic element. This traditional circus act is reinvented with the addition of water and its relationship to the sky.

EPILOGUE

*O, the circle, O the cycle
O la vie, an ode to the
O water of life
Please carry me
O.*

We see Eugen, our grotesque theater guide, who serenades a beautiful young woman from his piano. As he plays the theme to this realm, "O", he and his love slowly disappear beneath the waters of the stage - his stage. This gesture by Eugen and the movement of the music that accompanies his disappearance is so powerful that it draws the most stern of people to tears.

Eugen has changed so much from the beginning of the show, literally from dark to light (you can see this in his costuming - a black suit in the beginning to a completely white gown seen at the end).

All is still again but the music plays on...

Then, a basket falls from the sky. As this basket floats down the river of "O", we soon realize that it's not just a basket, but part of a hot-air balloon that has fallen. And as this balloon floats away, behind it are the artists -- sitting, waiting, and watching. Moments later, the wind picks up again and with it, pulls a red fabric from the basket. Slowly, but surely, the red fabric fills the stage - forever locking the mysterious and wondrous world of water from us.

*To the scores of silent alchemists
Who wreak their joy in darkness and the light
Bringing magic to life
We bow most humbly
O.*

* * *

"The show is about femininity," says Dominique Lemieux, the show's costume designer. "'O' is about drama, theatre. It deals with love, marriage, birth, death, and rebirth. 'O' is the cycles of life represented through a theatrical experience. 'O' is about splendor, about encountering splendor."

The fantastic story of "O" centers around an unsuspecting theatre-goer named Giufa - our unwitting guide through this magical realm. When Giufa is chosen to give the show's opening speech, the curtain is suddenly swept away carrying him high up into the air. As his laughter echoes through the theatre, the stage dissolves to reveal an aquatic universe teeming with amphibious creatures and larger than life characters. The incredible adventure has begun.

On the other side of the proscenium, Giufa is no longer a mere onlooker, but a witness, a conspirator, an actor in a world that changes constantly before his eyes. While Giufa guides us through "O", each spectator undertakes his or her own odyssey. "O" frees us to lose ourselves in a world without limits - where dreams are not only encouraged, but where they come true.

Become lost in "O" again...

LA NOUBA™

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



La NouBA

The evening of May 8, 1999 is a date I shall never forget. From Section 205, Row LL, Seat 17 I was about to be indoctrinated into the world of Cirque du Soleil for the very first time. To tell you the truth I had my reservations about seeing the show. Its cost was astronomical to me back then, and I wasn't into the theater like many of my friends were at the time. I was afraid I would be bored out of my skull. But I was told Cirque du Soleil would be worth the price of admission... not to worry. And boy they were right! From the very first moment the show began I was completely mesmerized. It was of little consequence that my head throbbed with a pounding headache. And it was of little significance that we were as far away from the stage as one could get.

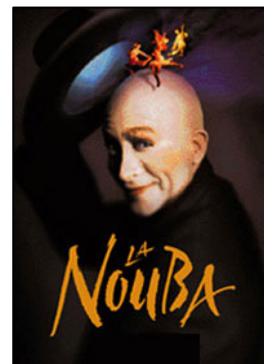
All that became relevant in those 90 minutes was the artistry and pageantry of the performers that danced upon the stage before, and the skills of the musicians who played above me. For it was truly once upon a time... a door opened before me and two worlds collided. Dreams clashed with reality. The mundane mixed with the marvelous. It was no longer possible for me to tell where one world began and the other ended. I had truly entered the realm of La Nouba and the dominion of Cirque du Soleil. It glowed with spellbinding intensity; a vibrant kaleidoscope of artistry and daring; a splash of iridescent genius. I now knew the color of imagination. What I didn't know at the time was how hard Cirque's creative team worked to give birth to the show.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	December 23, 1998 January 28, 1999 (Gala)
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Franco Dragone
Composer:	Benoît Jutras
Location:	Disney World, Orlando

Creative Team

Guide	Composer
Guy Laliberté	Benoît Jutras
Director	Lighting Designer
Franco Dragone	Luc LaFortune
Creation	Sound Designer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Jonathan Deans
Choreographer	Sound Designer
Debra Brown	François Bergeron
Set Designer	Costume Designer
Michel Crête	Dominique Lemieux
	Makeup Designer
	Nathalie Gagné



/// ONCE UPON A TIME...

"Once upon a time... A door opened and two worlds collided. Dreams clashed with reality. The mundane mixed with the marvelous. It was no longer possible to tell where one world began and the other ended. This new place was called La Nouba."

"La Nouba was the fruit of 10 years of negotiation, and the fulfillment of long-standing ambition on the part of Disney to include Cirque du Soleil in its roster," writes Tony Babinski in his book *20 Years Under the Sun*.

Truth told Disney wasn't the only entertainment conglomerate interested in Cirque du Soleil in its early days. Once Le Cirque Réinventé became a hit out in Santa Monica it quickly became the talk of Hollywood. Laliberté was courted by Columbia Pictures to make a movie about Cirque du Soleil and its characters. Dawn Steel, Columbia's president at the time, threw a party to announce the deal, but Laliberté, well... "They were seating all the stars, and I was basically put aside," he says. "They just wanted to lock up our story and our brand name and walk around like they owned Cirque du Soleil. I walked right out of the party, called my lawyer and told him to get me out of the deal."

Disney honcho Michael Eisner and Casino mogul Steve Wynn came calling too... but Guy had already learned his lesson. And in 10 years time so did Mr. Eisner. Disney head Michael Eisner remembers that negotiations with Cirque were long and complex, because Cirque insisted on retaining creative independence. His solution was to let Cirque have it. "I've been dealing with the movie business for a long time," says Eisner in the documentary "Run Before You Fly", "and when you have a Spielberg or a Lucas or others of that level, you let them have creative control. With Cirque du Soleil and Guy Laliberté, you create a financial box, and you let them do it!"

And so after years and years of negotiations, on July 12, 1996 Cirque du Soleil announced that it had reached a long-term agreement with the Walt Disney Company for a new circus-style theatrical show to be housed within a 70,000 square-foot free-standing theater (to seat up to 1,650 patrons), which would be constructed at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida. "A brand-new production with an international cast of more than 70 performers will take to the stage the magic of Cirque du Soleil. The length of the agreement between parties is extended on a 12-year period and the first Walt Disney World performance will premiere in November 1998," the post announced but little in the way of the show's vision was known. Faced with being in the midst of a fairy tale world *once upon a time*, what would you do? You come up with your own fairy tale of course!

"After working on previous Cirque shows I turned around one day and realized that life had gone by," Franco Dragone reminisces, "and I hadn't seen my children grow up. I wanted to re-connect with youth, to show my 19-year-old son that I was still hip. The idea became to see how Cirque could live in a modern, urban environment. I was also very aware that we were setting up a show in Disney's territory, so to speak. I wanted La Nouba to integrate that fact: we were going back to the world of childhood and fairy tales." Every member of the creative team remembers coming to La Nouba feeling depleted after working straight through a challenging string of previous shows. Mystere, Alegria, Quidam, and "O" had all been overlapping productions.

Somehow, Cirque had also found time to put together a film production inspired by Alegria in the same period. The group's fatigue when they came to La Nouba was compounded by the fact that there was very little time to put the show together. Their collective response was to plumb the energy of youth, long the motor of Cirque du Soleil's inventive power. La Nouba "was made under exhaustion," admits Laliberte in Babinski's book. "What helped us get through it," he continues, "was to make the show a tribute to all the teenagers in the world, which injected a lot of energy into it."

"With La Nouba we really [went for] an urban, young energy. So we turned to hip-hop," says Debra Brown. She turned to Clarence Ford, a prolific dancer, choreographer, teacher and film director from Toronto, and invited him to take part in the studio workshops and contribute some of his choreographies for La Nouba. "[He] gave us some essential hip-hop training. If it weren't for him we would have had to find a completely different way of moving." Benoit Jutras (Composer) and Luc Lafortune (Lighting Designer) drew from the same pool of inspiration: "We wanted a very urban show, but it had to be a modern kind of urban, not like something out of Fritz Lang's 'Metropolis'. That's why you see '.com', 'shift', 'delete', barcodes and [so forth] on the walls... for the high-tech element." As for the music? It rocks!

Dominique Lemieux (Costume Designer), on the other hand, drew her inspiration from the world of fairy tales: "The idea of La Nouba for [me] was really like returning to childhood, to that time when you huddle together and try to live out your future on a smaller scale, in your imagination. You ask yourself what will I be, a worker, a ballerina? We tried to have fun, scare ourselves, like we were kids, too, and to touch human tragedy with our fingertips. It meant adopting a different method from the start. For the first time, I started to draw on black pages with white crayons. The characters are born from the dark, from dreams and fairy tales, to reflect the human condition today."

The story of La Nouba contains two types of families or groups: the urban people and the circus people. The circus characters are denoted by bright, neon colors and the urbanites by dark, gray and muted tones. Costume Designer Dominique Lemieux created 30 different costume concepts, blending historical and traditional circus attire with original contemporary styles. Lemieux drew at least 10 different designs for each costume concept. Many of the performers in La Nouba undergo a metamorphosis indicated by a dramatic costume change. Some principal characters have several costume layers, which are revealed as the story unfolds. An example of this transformation can be seen in the urban costumes. To personify the city dwellers, Lemieux chose textured natural fabrics such as hemp. The urban characters begin in dark, muted blues, reds and greens and end up in white, billowing, and fairy-like outfits.

"Normally, the artists are willing to go beyond what they would normally do," Lemieux muses. "In La Nouba, we had created these transvestite characters for the Russians to play, to give the show a cabaret feel. And they really, really resisted doing it! But, in the end, they agreed: and they do a wonderful job!" The costumes for La Nouba were created in a record eight-week period from October 24 to December 23, 1998 at the costume workshop located in the Cirque du Soleil Theater.

And speaking of the theater...

/// A KALEIDOSCOPE OF IMAGINATION

"For me, the dark attic in La Nouba is terribly important. Because, in the dark, anything can happen. You can have flying bats and terrors of all kinds in the dark. In the attic of our imaginations, all these characters exist." - Gilles Ste-Croix (Spectaculara)

The La Nouba performance space is a collaboration of four entities: Cirque du Soleil, Scéno Plus, Walt Disney Imagineering and the Rockwell Group. All four worked together to design and construct what would be Cirque du Soleil's first (and currently only, but that will change shortly with the construction of the Tokyo 2008 project) freestanding theater built exclusively for their needs. Armed with a budget between \$20 and \$30 Million (USD), Scéno Plus designed the approx. 75,000 square-foot (7,000 square-meter) drum-shaped theater that is a wonderful testament to both structure and beauty and a shining example of ingenuity and design.

On the outside, the Cirque Theater is like a "castle" standing prominently on the shores of its kingdom, in this case on the shores of Village Lake in Downtown Disney's West Side. The structure, accented in white Teflon-coated canvas fabric, stands approximately 160 feet tall from the concrete sidewalk to the tops of its spires. Atop the theater rests the namesake of the company in big blue lettering and even higher still, the castle is topped with four fluttering flags featuring the famous sun logo of Cirque du Soleil. And while the outside is something to marvel, the interior is no less so.

On the inside of this concrete-canvas behemoth, on the second floor, rests its performance space. Like many of Cirque's theaters, the first thing you'll notice upon entering is the set and out-in-the-round stage. The set, which has been referred to as an "Elizabethan-style" stage due to its symmetrical style, is said to be reminiscent of a well-traveled path or trail. While that may be true, many see the insane nature of an asylum, and certainly that too is true. That asylum-esque nature is created with a 60×200 foot trellis construct made of PVC panels and scrim, which allow for wonderful projection and shadow play conjuring up uncanny images of Orwellian reminiscence. The wonderful backdrop is overshadowed by mountainous outcroppings, jetting up from the floor on either side. These rocks stand approximately 60-feet tall and are constructed of hard steel, but padded using wood and bleached velour (a velvet-type material.)

Even the showroom seats are abound with detail; modeled after old-fashioned auditorium chairs, these seats are steel and wood constructed and covered in red velvet. They were built by American Seating of Grand Rapids, Michigan especially for La Nouba. But look up from your red-colored seats and see the seven cloud-like "Fabulous Figures" that decorate the ceiling of the showroom; their whimsical dance about the tops of the theater forever captured. These "figures" are manufactured out of copper tubing and wrapped in mesh and measure approximately 30-feet in length. You may not know, though, that these fanciful leapers were designed by Michel Crête, the set designer.

You may spot the musicians next, resting upon two platforms housed in the 75-foot towers rising on either side of the stage. Separated but not disconnected from the performance, these musicians play the various notes of La Nouba's live music.

They do so by staying connected via a complex audio system that allows each musician to speak with the bandleader, their other band mates and take direction if something were to happen. Usually the tick of a metronome is heard throughout their setup to keep everyone on the same beat and time. The platforms themselves are nothing more than steel planks welded together (among other various pieces) and contain an external elevator (which performers rise and lower from during the show).

The stage has many technological achievements also.

The retractable Power Track, as it is called, is 60 feet in length and fully automated, which means computers control the retraction (at 2-feet-per-second) of this enormously powerful trampoline. But don't let that quick retraction fool you into thinking the floor is light; it's not, it weighs over 10,000 pounds! The Power Track was specially designed by Cirque du Soleil (and Paco Corp.) to allow the performers to jump higher and faster than ever. The PowerTrack is the next evolution of the FastTrack as seen in *Alegría*. Ironically the PowerTrack became so popular that it was installed in *Alegría*, taking the old FastTrack's place.

The stage comes alive during the performance by a set of elevators commonly referred to as lifts. There are five in all, resting just below the stage surface. The ascent and descent of these lifts are controlled by numerous motors (45 in all!) that must be in complete working order for the lifts to even function. The five lifts themselves rise to a maximum height of 16-feet; the center stage lift is also capable of descending 16-feet below the stage for a 32-foot range of motion! And they each have a 3,000 pound weight capacity. The stage itself is protected by an impact-resilient material called "Mondo Sport Floor" applied over wood in order to avoid injuries to the acrobats and dancers.

Two télépheriques (or tracks) installed along the back wall of the stage are 78-feet (24-meters) above the ground and are capable of moving props, scenery and acrobatic equipment during the show at 4-feet-per-second. These tracks provide an easy system for moving objects in and out of view of the spectators. You'll find various strange props, lights and chairs gliding by throughout the various acts including "The Grand Monument," a 40×30 foot structure of aluminum and painted scrim.

The set is fully automated as well. The 25×60-foot Trapeze Net (designed by Doug Kiddell of Cirque du Soleil), for example, is protracted and retracted by eight motors, including two 40-horsepower tensioning winches with up to 5,000 pounds of force. Not one soul comes out to set up or tear down the trapeze net. Additional set pieces are operated using a motorized counterweight system, such as: the trampolines (which descend from the ceiling), the flying doors (of which there are 9), the petite fenêtré volante (or New York Window,) two pedestal platforms and the four trapeze grips.

The JR Clancy Company of Syracuse, New York installed the 44-line set rigging system and 35 of the winches used for these props. The lifts were designed and installed by Showmotion of Connecticut in partnership with Disney Ride and Show Engineering. Westsun Scenic Edge, Inc. of Winnipeg actually designed and installed the computer control system, which makes the space come alive using a Windows NT based program called Dynatrac.

With fixed tiered seating in a 180-degree semicircle around the stage, the auditorium has neither a proscenium arch nor an architectural ceiling, which makes it similar to many of Cirque's other theatrical ventures. To some, the first glimpse provides the image of a traditional big top; to others, it is Cirque du Soleil's greatest achievement. Regardless of how you see it, it is a one-of-a-kind structure for Cirque du Soleil in that it's Cirque's first stand-alone theater complex, but also a self-contained Cirque world. What do I mean? For the first time, a show space, ticket booths and Boutique (which Scéno Plus also designed) are housed directly in the same complex.

Michel Crête, Set Designer, sums it all up thusly: "La Nouba is a show that occupies two spaces at once: the world of the modern urban centre, and the world of childhood dreams and visions. In La Nouba, these worlds are not mutually exclusive: they blend endlessly, one into the other. Railroad tracks lead to fairy tales, factories become castle ramparts, and magic continually explodes into the mundane. The set of La Nouba is like a factory, or a childhood attic filled with dreams and nightmares. You never know for sure whether you're in the world of fantasy or reality. Ordinary objects very quickly become fantastical, like the upside-down bicycle. That's why doors, windows, are so important: you're always in-between. It's deliberately open, deliberately layered. How you see it depends very much on you as a spectator."

On December 23, 1998, just a few short weeks after the Las Vegas premiere of «O» (Cirque du Soleil's second resident show) the lights dimmed, the audience hushed and a shock of electric excitement filled the air in the La Nouba Theater for the very first time. It was the culmination of a tremendous amount of hard work, blood, sweat and tears, and a vigorous production schedule that saw the birth of three shows in the span of seven months, but it would forever leave a lasting mark on Cirque du Soleil's legacy. *Now it's time to confront the mundane and monochromatic, the ordinary and every-day. And in a dull, grey urban world, set the spark of childhood dreams and imagination aflame. Enter La Nouba.*

/// SIT BACK, RELAX AND ENJOY...

"Ladies and Gentlemen - welcome to Cirque du Soleil. During this performance smoke effects will be used, but these are harmless to your health. The use of video equipment, and especially flash cameras, is strictly prohibited because of the danger it presents to our acrobats. In case of an emergency, please stay calm and proceed to the nearest exit - here, here, here, and here. The ushers will direct you. And now, sit back, relax and enjoy... La Nouba!" (La Nouba's Opening Narration)

The lights dim down and the audience becomes still now; a shock of electric excitement filled the air as any previous vociferations come to a sharp end. And then the unforgettable sound of a lone trumpet fills the theater, as the Festival of Characters enter, one by one, and introduce themselves to us. The Trumpeter, himself a prince in this fairy tale, brings with him a wonderful medley of personae and a signature melody that warms the heart. We're introduced to L'Oiseau, the colorful green bird; Les Danseurs, a man and woman in love; the Flying Man, who will soar into our hearts on a band of red silk; the Balancer, colorfully dressed from head to toe, complete with a cat's tail; an Acrobat in Red, forever tumbling, he stokes the party; Le Promeneur, shuffling about with an ever present smile; and the Titan, a menacing, threatening man. They vanish as quickly as they come, and once again the theater falls lifeless, and dark.

The quiet is disturbed, not by the harrowed scream of a demented creature or of a maiden in distress, but of the chime of a doorbell. Ding dong. Ding dong. The door creaks open, a column of light shines through, outlining the form of a lady, a rather round and lifeless creature, whose job it is to clean and sweep the floors around her. She is the cleaning lady, representing the everyday man or woman, no doubt. But as she goes about her duties, oblivious of the world she has entered, the creatures of this fantastical realm are beginning to stir. The Green Bird tiptoes behind her; sensing a movement, she turns but there's nothing to be found. But then... startles at a man riding a bicycle upside down across her field of vision. And before her eyes (and ours) more and more weird and wonderful apparitions begin to materialize: two sleepwalking fools canter by; a small train pulls in to station, and the cries of a hungry, estranged wolf mix with the howls and sirens of warning to announce the coming clash of dream and nightmare.

Unable to hold back any longer, the insane world of La Nouba pours forth and spills upon the stage before us. Startled, we all peer at the newcomers as they stream steadily from the opened door. Caught up now as she is in their world, we march forward to their militaristic tune. Fantasy and reality are merging before our eyes and we are lost to make heads or tails of either.

La Nouba is an unforgettable journey through this universe - at once threatening and exhilarating, frightening and familiar. La Nouba is the story of all stories, the site of all mysteries, where dreams and nightmares sleep side by side. La Nouba is memory, individual and universal. It beckons to us, challenges us to uncover passions we thought we'd lost long ago. Here, anything is possible.

As mentioned before, La Nouba contains two types of families or groups and throughout the ride the magic and fantasy of the colorful Cirques (circus people) clash with the monochromatic world of the Urbains (urbanites). But as in fables, it is not so much this contrast as the interplay between these two groups which sparks our curiosity and feeds our imagination. From this encounter is born fear and ecstasy. From this encounter is born La Nouba:

ROUE ALLEMANDE (GERMAN WHEEL)

What started as a popular gymnastics exercise in Germany has become a crowd-pleasing act for Cirque du Soleil. Six-and-a-half feet in diameter, the wheel consists of two metal hoops joined at six points. Identical twin brothers turn and spin the wheels while performing gravity-defying somersaults and acrobatics. Though both were featured in Cirque du Soleil's Nouvelle Expérience, this is the first time they performed together as a duo.

FUNAMBULE (HIGH WIRE)

The Funambule act takes place on a 90-foot, half-inch wide steel wire. With remarkable balance and precision, a high wire walker ascends to a height of 34 feet above the stage as his partner descends from the theater's eighth level to the fifth on a diagonal wire. The performers' breathtaking maneuvers include head balancing, and death defying somersaults. Using two different types of bicycles, one of the high wire walkers executes a wheelie and later crosses the wire while carrying another artist on his shoulder. This amazing team is comprised of three acrobats who are life-long students of the discipline.

DIABOLOS

The diabolo, or Chinese yo-yo, is a children's game first introduced into the realm of the arts in Cirque du Soleil's Quidam. This entrancing act features four young Chinese performers. Holding two sticks linked by a string, they slide, juggle and toss a musical wooden spool while performing flips in the air. Demonstrating increasingly difficult maneuvers, the artists attempt to outdo each other in dexterity and ingenuity.

VÉLOS (CYCLES)

This act gets rolling with a BMX wizard whose difficult maneuvers never fail to mesmerize the public. His technical twists, gymnastic turns and spins on one wheel are highlighted in incredible tricks such as G-turns, boomerangs and mega-spins, all accompanied by lots of footwork. The second half of the act features yet another artist whose feats are equally astonishing. His hard-to-believe stunts include riding over obstacles without ever putting his feet down, jumping off high platforms, hopping up and down steps and into the audience on one wheel, and even jumping over an artist and a guest before literally plunging into the bowels of the stage.

CADRE AÉRIEN (AERIAL CRADLE)

The aerial cradle looks like a door and is a perfect example of equal-opportunity strength and agility. This amazing athletic display features elements of traditional circus aerial cradle with a unique and special difference – the male and female artists take turns supporting one another 34 feet above the stage.

BALLET AIR ET SOIE (AERIAL BALLET IN SILK)

In a stunning display of grace and strength, the artists become one with the ribbon of red fabric that cradles them. This breathtaking aerial dance requires immense agility and flexibility, and allows the performers a wide latitude of acrobatic and artistic expression.

EQUILIBRE SUR CHAISES (BALANCING ON CHAIRS)

Vasily Dementchoukov's famous chair act was a hit in Cirque du Soleil's Nouvelle Expérience in 1992. For 11 years now, he has defied gravity and the laws of physics while balancing precariously on a stack of eight chairs, atop a table, 25 feet in the air – all the while carrying a spinning birthday cake lit with candles. For La Nouba, Vasily's act is performed on a rising platform increasing his maximum height to 41 feet above the stage.

GRAND VOLANTS (FLYING TRAPEZE)

Four pendulum-like swings, on two different levels, carry a team of perfectly synchronized aerialists 53 feet above the stage. This innovative bi-level rigging enables the trapezists to create a visually arresting exhibition of rhythm and athleticism. Timing is key when all four trapezes are swinging in tandem and the aerialists switch places – barely inches away from colliding.

POWER TRACK / TRAMPOLINE

This act in La Nouba takes ordinary trampoline and power track performance to a new level. The stage is set on fire in this high-energy acrobatic display of phenomenal timing and spatial awareness. Artists jump, flip and otherwise dance upon the trampolines while their comrades take turns walking up the walls on a representation of a high-rise building, complete with windows. The color melds with the surrounding performance... and that pounding in your ears? That's your heart, as a trio shares the same trampoline and misses each other by just a hair.

EPILOGUE

During the run of the program, the cleaning lady makes an appearance to woo a frog that has jumped on stage. Led to believe it's a prince in disguise, she captures the bouncing creature and kisses it. She leaves with her head full of dreams. But we see her agony is not without reward. The frog was a prince indeed! The green carpet is rolled out to them as the two reappear to share with us their consummation into holy matrimony. A flash of folly is thrown at them and the two turn and return into the confines of the open door. Sergeï and Balthazar, our two clowns, closely follow our happy couple as they "mow" the green carpet back into submission. Reality and fantasy once again go their separate ways and the party known as La Nouba comes to a close...

/// THE COLOR OF IMAGINATION

Alas, La Nouba, like the rest of Cirque du Soleil, is constantly evolving – from new performers and upgraded equipment – no one show is ever the same as another. And La Nouba has not been immune to change. Vasily Dementchoukov perched atop his stack of chairs for the very last time in 2003, retiring from Cirque du Soleil (and performance in general) after many long and prosperous years. In his stead, Carlos Rodriguez Diaz (Rokardy) - a Cuban-born gymnast who turned heads while participating in several international circus festivals - joined the production and completely transformed his solo act. Rokardy completely transformed his solo act for La Nouba, which was integrated in the show on January 24, 2003.

The artist stacks furniture he has found in the imaginary attic of La Nouba in order to light a chandelier, which mysteriously rises just beyond his reach every time he tries to get to the last candle. Rokardy defies gravity and the laws of physics as he balances precariously on a stack of six chairs, two books, and a baby carriage atop a table elevated 16 feet in the air. When he finally manages to reach the chandelier, Rokardy, who is now 34 feet in the air, surprises by hand-balancing atop his stack, before lighting the last candle. He would stay with La Nouba for six years, leaving only to perform a variation of his act in Viva Elvis in Las Vegas (2009-2012).

His leaving brought even bigger changes to La Nouba: For the start of the 2010 season, both Balancing on Chairs and German Wheel performances were retired. They were subsequently replaced with an opening Skipping Rope routine (a presentation from Quidam, whereby the Urbains perform rigid rhythms in monochromatic tones, giving way to vibrant dance and acrobatics in a steady stream of solo, duo and group jumps and formations), and with the addition of Anthony Gatto, juggler extraordinaire.

He's the only juggler in the world to have been awarded the Golden Clown of Monte Carlo, a highly prestigious performance award, and he holds or shares a few juggling records, such as: the most rings juggled and caught (at least twice) and the most clubs juggled. Besides rings and clubs, Anthony is also a whiz at balls, juggling up to nine! Here he juggles all three from hand-to-hand, from arc-to-arc and into home-built props and other receptacles. Quite simply, he's earned the title of being the best in the world.

Of course Anthony Gatto needed a more permanent home for him and his budding family than Koozâ could provide (it's hard to tour with a new baby), and the Bilodeau brothers? They just needed a change of pace. Bruce and Stacey had been performing with Cirque du Soleil since the tour of Nouvelle Experience (then went on to Fascination and Mystere before landing at La Nouba).

Alas, regardless of whether you remember La Nouba with Vasily Dementchoukov's famous chair act, balancing on chairs with Rokardy, or have seen it more recently with jumping Urbaines and juggling Gatto it's still one heck of a show!

Some other milestones...

- December 23, 1998 - First Public Performance
- January 28, 1999 - Opening Night (Media Gala Premiere)
- February 28, 2000 - 500th Performance (6:00pm)
- February 2, 2001 - 1000th Performance (6:00pm)
- March 14, 2003 - 2000th Performance (6:00pm)
- April 23, 2005 - 3000th Performance (9:00pm)
- May 13, 2006 - 3,500th Performance (6:00pm)
- August 10, 2006 - 5 Millionth Guest
- June 12, 2007 - 4,000th Performance (6:00pm)
- June 19, 2008 - 4,500th Performance (6:00pm)
- July 10, 2009 - 5,000th Performance (9:00pm)
- July 29, 2010 - 5,500th Performance (9:00pm)
- August 13, 2011 - 6,000th Performance (6:00pm)
- September 12, 2013 - 7,000th Performance (6:00pm)

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

ALEGRIA



ALEGRÍA

LE FILM

What if everything were permissible? And if it was the king's fool who made sense? And if the Big Top became a magical world where the elderly became young and where the kings were clowns! And if you were king for a night! And if that's what Alegría was, what would you make of it all? And what if they made it into a movie?

On June 9, 1997, Cirque du Soleil announced that work would soon begin on "Alegría", a film inspired by Cirque du Soleil's internationally acclaimed show of the same name. The initial announcement was made at the Cannes Film Festival by Overseas Filmgroup, which would handle international distribution of the film. Pre-production was already in progress in Montreal by the time the announcement was made, and production would soon get under way in Amsterdam (with Principal Photography to begin on July 14th in Amsterdam and continue in Berlin later in the summer.)

In "Alegría" the film, the magical, spellbinding universe of Cirque becomes the backdrop for a tender love story between a street performer (Frac) and the lead singer of a travelling circus (Giulietta). Incorporating actual Alegría acts, the film would be directed by Franco Dragone, Cirque du Soleil's resident director since 1985. Written by Rudy Barichello and Franco Dragone (who won a 1992 Drama Logue Theatre award for directing Cirque du Soleil's Saltimbanco), "Alegría" would be produced by Stéphane Reichel ("Crash", "Black Robe", "Quest for Fire") and Rudy Barichello. Hélène Dufresne of Cirque du Soleil Images would executive produce.

Though originally scheduled to open in the spring of 1998, the film ultimately made its debut at the Palm Springs International Film Festival on January 10, 1999, and with it, bring an end to an era of unprecedented success with Dragone at the reigns of Cirque du Soleil's creativity.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	December 25, 1993
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Franco Dragone
Composer:	René Dupéré & Benoît Jutras
Location:	Treasure Island, Las Vegas



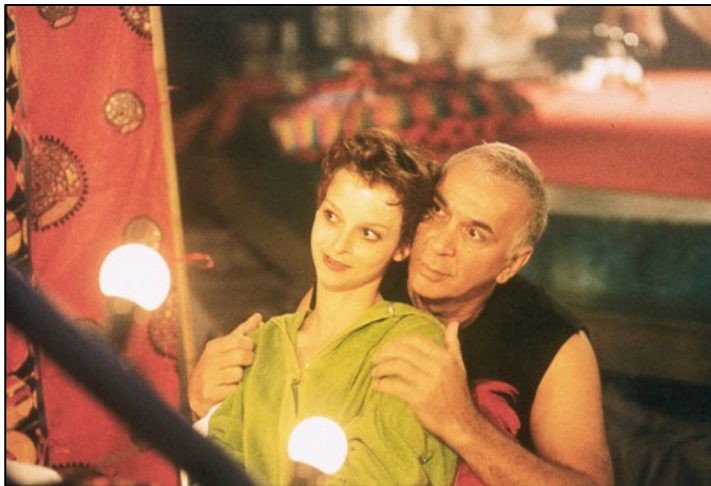
/// A BOLT OUT OF LIFE

So, what is *Alegria Le Film* about?

FRAC (René Bazinet) is a street mime who has lost all love for his art and his life; his melancholy covers him as thickly as the white clown makeup that disguises his true appearance. When an approaching train whistles in the distance, he decides to end it all by reclining on the railroad tracks and closing his eyes. But his plans are disrupted when his devoted 11-year-old friend, MOMO (Clipper Miano), insists on joining him. Jolted back to his senses, Frac pulls Momo to safety, saving both of their lives.



The train that nearly killed them carries a traveling circus. When the caravan stops following the near-accident, Frac catches sight of GIULIETTA (Julie Cox), the troupe's beautiful lead singer and performer. Watching her from the shadows, Frac falls instantly and rapturously in love.



But to pursue his love, Frac must first overcome the opposition of Giulietta's father and leader of the circus, FLEUR (Frank Langella). Fleur disapproves of the love-stricken mime, fearing that Giulietta will suffer in the harsh urban world of the streets. Frac is meanwhile distracted by the troubles facing Momo, who is trying to escape MARCELLO (Heathcote Williams), a Fagin-like taskmaster who enslaves young children and forces them to sell flowers on the streets.

When Giulietta abandons the circus to be with Frac, the circus collapses—Fleur is unable to face the audience without her, and the artists perform alone in the deserted streets. In the meantime, with the lovers' help, the children succeed in rebelling against Marcello. Surrounded by throngs of liberated children, transfigured in brilliant white new clothes, Giulietta returns to the circus. Fleur comes to understand that the mission of the circus is to console a suffering world, to invite the audience, like the performer, to step forward across an imaginary line separating darkness from the light. The show, like life, must go on.

/// A FANTASMAGORICAL VISION

"Alegria", which takes its title from a Spanish word meaning elation, joy, and jubilation, is the first feature film inspired by Cirque du Soleil. "Alegria", the film, is inspired by Cirque du Soleil's tenth anniversary production of the same name, but it is far more than a mere documentation of the live event.

Instead, the cinematic medium is employed to expand and transform the original, fantasmagorical vision; audiences who thrilled to the stage version will find this "Alegria" a delightfully new and different

experience. The original is finally only a stepping-off point for the film, which moves Cirque du Soleil's dreamlike imagery out of the Big Top and into the real world, and, more importantly, introduces a narrative love story enacted by a distinguished international cast.



Dragone wanted to create a parable of the ongoing plight of the 250 million children around the world who are forced to work under terrible conditions, a theme made concrete in the child-character Momo, who helps lead a fantastic rebellion against the evil flower vendor, Marcello. "I don't only want to shoot a film. I want to touch people," he says.

"Alegria" is a rallying cry for people who are losing their confidence and feeling increasingly alone in the world. We're trying to tell a fable with heart and courage," says Rudy Barichello, Producer and Co-Writer.



The combination of imagery, emotion and social purpose made it relatively easy to attract talent and financing. As producer Stephane Reichel comments, "the project reminds me of why I fell in love with this industry in the first place."

Executive Producer Hélène Dufresne and Producer Rudy Barichello assembled the financing for the Canada/France/Holland co-production between Montreal's Lampo Di Vita Films Inc.; Paris-based Mainstream, and Amsterdam's Egmond (Film/Television BV), produced with the participation of Canada Television and Cable Production Fund/ Telefilm Canada/Equity Investment Program.

Dragone and Barichello specifically wrote the part of the disillusioned mime, Frac, for René Bazinet, an internationally renowned mime and clown who toured for four years with Cirque du Soleil's Saltimbanco. "The role was tailor-made for me," smiles Bazinet, who makes his feature film debut in a lead role.

"I was a street actor in Paris for nine years." The role is, in many ways, an homage to one of Bazinet's favorite films, Marcel Carmé's legendary "Les Enfants du Paradis" ("Children of Paradise," 1945), which Bazinet has seen 19 times. In Carmé's film, the great French mime Jean-Louis Barrault plays a Parisian pantomime who falls in love with an elusive woman, a theme poetically echoed in "Alegria".

When Dragone first saw English actress Julie Cox at a London audition, he knew instantly he had found his Giulietta. "Julie has a vulnerability and a transcendent beauty," says Dragone, who likens Cox to Julietta Masina, the legendary actress/wife of Federico Fellini.

Cox was immediately taken by the script. "It was the first script I'd read for a long time that had a unique voice and was so creatively satisfying. The character, Giulietta, has led a protected life growing up in the circus. Her closest friends are her family. It is only when she meets Frac that her curiosity about the outside world is fueled." Cox notes that "Alegria" is really two, overlapping stories. "One is a story between two people who fall in love, and the other is the story of Frac's world and the children."



In the role of Giulietta's father, Fleur, Frank Langella creates a multileveled characterization in a multi-layered story. Since Langella is equally comfortable working on stage or on screen, the fusion of live performance and cinema in "Alegria" made for an especially interesting assignment. According to Langella, the character of Fleur also straddles two worlds. "He's a man with two sides, the one he presents onstage to the world—a fool who winks at the audience—and the other, the worried father concerned for his daughter."

After meeting with Langella in New York, Dragone remarked, "Frank is Fleur. He has a kind of serenity I haven't found in anyone else." British actor/playwright/author Heathcote Williams leapt at the chance to play the villainous Marcello. "He's a contrapuntal character," says Williams, "representing the lowest common denominator in consumer capitalism. He represents what's wrong with the world in microcosm—each one of the seven deadly sins. You get seven for the price of one," he laughs. The casting of nine-year-old Clipper Miano as the street urchin, Momo, Frac's sidekick, was the culmination of an extensive search in Europe and North America. Miano had recently co-starred in the film "Smilla's Sense of Snow," and proved a natural for a key role in "Alegria".

Beyond the principal cast, 50 Cirque du Soleil artists reprise their roles from the stage version of Alegria. Among these are three outstanding clowns, all originally from Russia—Yuri, Dima, and Sergei, the only deaf-and-proud-of-it performer in Cirque. (Actress Julie Cox learned sign language to communicate with him for scenes in the film.)

"Alegria" was shot in Amsterdam (where Cirque du Soleil's European head office is based) and Berlin (where the stage version of *Alegría* was playing under the Big Top) between July 10 and September 6, 1997. Production Designer Ben van Os was eager for the film to have a visual style distinct from the stage version, while retaining an ethereal, fairy-tale quality. In Amsterdam, he found two existing locations in which to build his fantastic environments: the 100-year-old former Western Gas Factory building, and the 1928 Olympic Stadium.



The gas factory's main space was a gigantic steel cylinder, 55 meters wide and 20 meters high. Here, van Os created Marcello's flower factory, an environment both sinister and enchanting. Using five kilometers of rope, the designer framed Marcello's central raised podium in the manner of a giant spider's web, from which the villain oversees his young workers. Ten thousand flowers, half fresh and half artificial, planted in straw and sand and suspended from the ceiling in over 1,200 hanging bottles, filled the air with color and perfume. The children's beds were also surrealistically suspended from the rafters, like gravity-defying pup tents.

Over 24,000 kilos of colorful, recycled garments were utilized for the scene in which Frac, Giulietta and Momo rescue the children from Marcello's factory and buy them new clothes. In another building at the gas factory, van Os constructed a 60-foot wide ramp angled at 30 degrees against the wall, and smothered it with a veritable avalanche of clothing, in which the children happily romped, exchanging their drab factory garb for new Sunday whites.

To create the "Cauldron," the urban center populated by lost souls, where Frac makes his home, van Os constructed an entire street, utilizing the exterior walls of the Olympic Stadium. The set included a restaurant called the Café Opera, as well as a red light district. The original concept called for a highly realistic set, but, as Costume Designer Dominique Lemieux notes, the design evolved into a "twisted realism," blending fantastic costumes and wide-angled photography.

Lemieux, who has worked with Dragone on every Cirque du Soleil production since 1990, created more than 2,000 costumes for "Alegria". In order to differentiate different groups in the crowd scenes, she employed a deliberate system of color-coding. "For example, normal people are dressed in blue, the merchants in voluminous outfits in earth colors, and the prostitutes in pastels—soft colors versus hard."

The habitués of the Café Opera, representing the dark heart of the Cauldron, were differentiated from the street denizens by color as well as fabric; instead of the cottons and transparent silks worn by the Merchants and prostitutes, the Café patrons were dressed by Lemieux in heavy velvets and dark tones—blacks, dark greens, and violets.

Lemieux had more challenges when the production moved from Amsterdam to Berlin and she was faced with dressing at least 2,500 of the 3,000 extras employed. "Thank goodness I'd already designed 50 costumes for the original production," Lemieux laughs. In particular, the scene in which 1,000 clamoring children dressed entirely in white fill the tent in tribute to Giulietta's return to the circus, created occasionally overwhelming logistics of movement and crowd control. The production shot for three weeks in Berlin, photographing around the regular stage performances, which closed for one week to allow Dragone to create a world of total movie magic on the original theatrical sets.



The bold stage costumes emerge as impressive on screen as they were under the Big Top, in predominant colors of white, gold, silver, and bronze. To differentiate Giulietta's character, Lemieux chose red. "Because she's full of vitality, red—which I didn't use in the stage version—is a very good color for her." Fleur's master-of-ceremonies costume echoes his daughter's predominant, emotional hue. For Frac, Lemieux created a classic mime icon, whose costumes, like that of most of the

characters, are loose-fitted and fluid, allowing a maximum of expressive movement. Additionally, all costume colors had to be carefully selected to compensate for variable light levels—more than half the film was shot at night.

Giulietta's most elegant costume is without question the "Overture" ensemble, its brilliant red-feather raised collar reflecting a bird motif that recurs throughout the film, from the commedia-inspired "Old Bird" characters of the Cirque to a passel of cooing doves which join René Bazinet as he reclines in a tree shot on location in Amsterdam's museum square. To express a sense of freedom, more than a dozen homing pigeons were released for the scene—and promptly headed home to a village on the Holland-Belgium border, some 200 kilometers away. Even a waddling gaggle of geese put in an appearance, during an early scene in the "Cauldron."

In Berlin, the overall production design was enhanced by a wealth of evocative historical locations. The Fairy Tale Fountain, an Italian fantasy built in the early 1900s as an homage to the Brothers Grimm, provided an extraordinary backdrop for the sylph-like performer Elena Lev to twirl sparking silver hoops while ankle deep in cascading water. Cirque performers mirrored the stepped fountain's imaginative statuary, posing in the arches while filmed through a romantic mist. The landmark, St. Elisabeth Church, built in the 1830s and heavily damaged by World War II bombing, was utilized as a dramatic backdrop for a fantastic "flying" sequence featuring artist Misha Matorin. Vintage 1920s railway cars were located in Bavaria and provided by a German train company to create a nostalgic, dream-like circus caravan.

Another unusual location, dream-like in its own way, was an open-air museum and industrial monument at Rudersdorf, forty kilometers east of Berlin. The limestone quarries at Rudersdorf, mined since the 1870s, have the appearance of a Mayan ruin rising from a jungle.

A key member of the team was cinematographer Pierre Mignot, entrusted with creating the essential visual links between the stage version and the film. He watched the stage version 15 times in preparation for the film. "Franco is telling a fairy tale, and I've lit it as if for the theatre," Mignot says. Although many of the stage numbers had to be re-staged and re-choreographed for the camera, Mignot maintained visual continuity by employing the same colored gels that were used on stage, and also took the unusual step of allowing lighting instruments to be seen directly in frame, much as the tent audience would see them. In keeping with the desired sense of "twisted realism," Mignot often shot the actors in close-up with a wide-angled lens that created distortions reminiscent of the highly theatrical opening scenes of the film *Cabaret*."

/// A BEAUTIFUL ROARING SCREAM – THE MOVIE

Happy, and sad, both at the same time.... That is just part of the mystical world of *Alegria: Le Film*. It is a magical journey through emotion -- which keeps stepping across the lines between sorrow and joy, anger and fear, dark and light, reality and imagination. It is filled with images and songs, contrasts and likenesses each intended to have meaning. There is little, if any filler, in *Alegria*. Every bit has meaning. It is a story with a message -- a true fable.

The film begins with the lovely song "Let Love Be" as performers float out of a starry sky to the world below. The song sheds light on the tale we are about to witness. The story plays out while each main character straddles some "line" of emotional struggle. Frac, the mime (played beautifully by Rene Bazinet) is overcome by despair. He obviously was once very dedicated to his art, but his love for it is gone. All he has are boxes of memories that no longer bring happiness. He destroys everything and is headed out of town following the railroad. He sees an oncoming train and decides to end his life. Blinded by his own sorrow, he doesn't realize he has someone who needs him.

Momo, a bright but angry child, looks up to Frac. Enslaved and forced to peddle flowers by the evil Marcello, Momo lives his childhood through Frac. You can see the hate in Momo's eyes. But since Momo is a child, he doesn't understand what Frac is going through. He seems to think that since Frac is an adult, Frac should know what is going on. Momo tries to follow Frac and lays himself on the tracks beside him. The mime is shocked to his senses and pushes Momo off the tracks. But soon, Frac is to be blinded by a different emotion.



Giulietta, the star of her fathers' circus, sees what is going on from the train as it screeches to a halt. While the performers get off the train, a strange seer warns of an omen. As Giulietta finds a torn picture of Frac, they meet. A star shoots across the sky as the two smile at each other and fall instantly in love. The shooting star is seen throughout the film and symbolizes this gift of love. There is a sense that these two have always known each other, but before they can speak, the performers and the realization that he has to find Momo frighten Frac off.

Giulietta has lived a good life growing up in the circus. She has a large circus family that adores her and is loved by her audience as well. Sheltered under her fathers' wings, she never thought of wanting, or needing more, until she met Frac. Fleur, her father, seems to know this. Fleur is a wise man. Watchful of his daughter, he tries to protect her by telling her what she saw was "just children playing games", but he knows that is not the case. Fleur senses what has happened As Giulietta is about to be pulled between the gravity of the world she knows and the world she now desires, Fleur is torn between fear and anger. He thinks he is protecting his daughter, but in reality he is protecting himself.

As the story moves along, we see the dark images of the ghetto where Frac and Momo exist. There is the Cafe Opera, where Frac's friend, Old Taps, represents the man that is stuck in life and will not try to change it. We see the many children with broken spirits, forced to work in Marcellos' dungeon. The images are, in a sense, timeless. It doesn't matter what model car you see in the film--you could just as easily be in Dickens' England. The story, narrated by an elderly Momo as he unwraps his tale to a troupe of young cirque performers, is true to what he says in the beginning--it is feelings and impressions. Momo is mad at Frac for being in love. The child wants love, but only feels hate. Frac's new love and hope have brought nothing new to Momo. He is still alone.

In contrast to the ghetto, the circus is full of color and beauty. Frac comes to the circus with flowers in search of his love. He doesn't know it, but he has help. The clowns also saw what happened that night at the train. The clowns know. They know true love must be, even if Fleur doesn't believe it. The clowns "kidnap" the confused mime and sneak him into the circus. Frac eventually stumbles onto the stage where Giulietta is singing. Their eyes drown in each other, and Frac asks her her name. But as is to be expected, Fleur has Frac tossed from the circus. Frac tries to ask the deaf clown the singers' name. The clown isn't going to make it that easy and seals his lips with a smile.

Fleur knows Frac will be back and tries to discourage his daughter. As we see the torn picture Giulietta stares at, one can tell she doesn't need the whole picture to know the whole man.

As Momo wanders the streets alone, wondering how he will survive, we again are presented with dark images of what lays ahead for him begging and worse. The song "Love Leaves Someone Behind" leaves its message with the audience. Momo decides he will try to rescue the other children, but despite an apparent success, the children will not leave Marcello's dungeon. The world has already discarded them once and there is nowhere for them to go--no one that cares about their situation. But one lonely little girl joins Momo to go look for Frac, who is still searching for his love.

Again with the help of the clowns and a little liquor, Frac ends up on stage with Giulietta, this time in the guise of an Old Bird. Amidst the action on the fast track their eyes again fall upon one another and ones' heart melts as the two interact. At first, Fleur seems subdued-almost as if he has accepted their love. But again, before the lovers can kiss, Fleur steps in and makes a mockery of their love to the audience. He has allowed his fear and anger to turn him into nothing more than the fool he plays on stage. The only thing he manages is to help Momo understand what Frac is feeling and to help his daughter make the decision to leave. Unable to follow his own "The Show Must Go On" speech, the circus falls apart and everyone is alone. "Child in his Eyes" plays as the performers scatter into the ghetto, contrasted with fairytale images of the performers at a fountain.

Frac cannot help himself despite his shattered hopes. He finds himself living beneath the gaze of the singers' image on a billboard. Our omnipotent clown again steps in and helps Frac regain his "vision". He is taken to Marcellos' factory where Momo and Giulietta are being held. He is no longer blind to what Momo and the children have lived through. He seems ashamed for thinking only of his own despair. He is willing to fight for the children, but is no match for Marcello's thugs. But he has shown the children something greater - He cares. The children stand on their own in his defense and free themselves. Again, joy seems short-lived as news comes to the now freed Giulietta of the fate of the circus. Frac and Giulietta know what must be done to ensure that love leaves no one behind. So, she takes the children back to the circus with her. Frac, meanwhile, knows where unwanted performers go. In a quiet good-bye, Frac leaves his hat with Old Taps, as if to let Taps know there is a way out.

As the children pile into the bleachers, Fleur appears pleased but confused - there is no circus for them to see. Then Frac appears on stage. Fleur's face is apprehensive as Giulietta joins her love. Then the performers step out of the dark and into the light. Fleur's face lights as he realizes this man he tried to lock out of his life, has given his life back to him. Finally, after asking the singer her name, Frac and Giulietta kiss. The children scream out in joy, Momo smiles and Fleur says good-bye to the fool he once was. The magical song "Alegria" brings up the finale of the film, as all are one. The story ends touchingly, with the performers being launched back into the starry sky.

An old Momo reminds the young performers of the moral of the tale at the end of Alegria. He echoes Fleur in encouraging them to invest every emotion into what they love--their show. He tells them to live with humanity because whatever they do, it can change someone's life.

But this story has even deeper meaning. Some say they don't like the film because it is not the live performance, or is too metaphorical. It is and is supposed to be. It is all intertwined, all connected--but that's what Alegria is--Alegria is life. Without knowing sorrow, one cannot know joy. Without the dark, one cannot experience the light. We all have these things in common, and the road to happiness is not always easy. It is choosing the right path when it lies before us, and knowing that in our darkest hour, something as simple as a smile can change our life forever.