



Artisans de L'Imaginaire

30 ans du Cirque du Soleil



"L'explosion du Cirque"

PART FIVE: 2004 - 2009





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While Cirque du Soleil celebrated its birthday throughout 2004, the year brought forth a couple of very interesting changes to the company's operational structure: Guy Laliberté stepped down as company President. An internal memo obtained to all employees dated February 25, 2004 outlined this change, and more:

First, the appointment of Daniel Lamarre as the new President and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of the company, allowing Laliberté to virtually step back from the day-to-day operational responsibilities and focus more on the creative side of projects, which he said was the most dear to him. "This change comes at a time when Cirque is facing new business and organizational realities," Laliberté said. With many new ventures on the drawing board, Laliberté will be busy. Laliberté will retain the title of Founder, CEO and "Guide".

The new role will be supported by five senior vice-presidents, including two recently created – Senior Vice-President of Shows, and Senior Vice-President of New Ventures). This change also merits a change to Cirque du Soleil's Executive Board, which shall now consist of seven members – Guy Laliberté, Marc Gagnon, Michael Bolingbroke, Robert Blain, Eric Fournier and a position to be determined.

The second profound statement in the memo is an announcement of the upcoming departure of Lyn Heward, President and COO of the Creative Content Division. Her slated departure is 2005; however, Heward is remaining on-board as an advisor until her replacement arrives. She will remain an Executive Board member until that time. "This year, Cirque is celebrating its 20th anniversary. When I look back on our accomplishments, I am proud of what I see. When I look ahead, I am confident that the future will take us still further. I wish Daniel the best of luck in his new role and I am counting on him and his team to support me as we pursue this incredible adventure."

Lyn Heward's loss would be felt in a number of profound ways, and though Daniel Lamarre proved to be more than competent at stewarding this rather large creative ship, other forces would weigh heavily on him and his charges.

Following Corteo's success in the spring of 2005, Cirque du Soleil exploded out of the big top with ever-increasing lines of content. Two shows premiered during the same year (2006) – Delirium, the great arena experiment; and The Beatles LOVE, the new "musical revue" - the first time since "O" and La Nouba's double-debut in 1998 that this happened.

In 2007, the same occurred: Koozå, a new touring show debuted in April of that year, and with Wintuk, a new "seasonal" concept for the Madison Square Garden venue in New York City. The following year (2008), three shows debuted at once – all resident productions: ZAIA in Macau,

China; ZED in Tokyo, Japan; and Criss Angel BELIEVE at the Luxor, Las Vegas. And more of the same in 2009: OVO, a touring show, premiered in the spring; Banana Shpeel, another "venue" concept, premiered in the summer; and VIVA ELVIS, a resident show along the lines of THE BEATLES LOVE, for Aria, Las Vegas, started in the fall.

With so many shows premiering and many more concepts still on the drawing board – a second show for Macau and resident shows for Dubai, London, Miami and more – it seemed that Cirque knew no boundaries...

Taking the stage in January 2006 is DELIRIUM, an all-new concept by Cirque du Soleil. Created and directed by Michel Lemieux & Victor Pilon, the show featured remixed music and Cirque's signature acrobatic style when melded created a musical experience unmatched. DELIRIUM would begin touring arenas throughout the United States before hopping the pond to Europe. Later in the year, LOVE, a creation celebrating the musical legacy of The Beatles opens at The Mirage Casino-Hotel in Las Vegas. The show becomes Cirque's fifth resident show in Las Vegas and the first official collaboration with the BEATLES since their last public performance on January 30, 1969. LOVE features a first for Cirque du Soleil - no live music - using original Beatles tracks mixed and re-arranged by Sir George Martin and his son Giles Martin.

During this time, after touring in North America, Europe, Asia and Australia, Cirque du Soleil has set out to make a name for itself in South America by presenting its show Saltimbanco in Chile, Argentina and Brazil. Saltimbanco, after conquering South America, ends its almost 15 years on tour under the grand chapiteau in Rio de Janeiro. And where projects are concerned, Cirque du Soleil entered into an exclusive agreement with CKX Inc. — through its subsidiary Elvis Presley Enterprises — for the creation, development, production and promotion of Elvis Presley projects, featuring touring and resident shows, as well as multimedia interactive "Elvis experiences," throughout the world. The first of these projects is slated to debut in 2009 at the MGM City Center in Las Vegas, Nevada.

DELIRIUM concludes its two-year tour in the United States in 2007 and begins wowing audiences in some never-before-visited cities across Europe. The premiere of Koozå in April launches Cirque du Soleil's 13th touring production (18th overall) since 1984. Directed by David Shiner, Koozå returns Cirque du Soleil to its acrobatic roots. Saltimbanco is re-staged in the arena format and begins touring the United States and Canada by summer. And in November, Wintuk, Cirque du Soleil's first "seasonal" show (as it runs for a few short weeks in the winter) premieres at Madison Square Garden's WAMU Theater.

In media, Cirque du Soleil releases three documentary DVDs: "The Mystery of Mystère", "FLOW: A Tribute to the Artists of «O»" and "A Thrilling Ride through Koozå", which take us behind the scenes of these fascinating shows. Cirque presented a Pre-Game Show at Super Bowl XLI, the American football game to decide the National Football League (NFL) champion for the 2006 season at Dolphin Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida. This performance was produced by David Saltz. And Cirque du Soleil has also launched a fiction/non-fiction book entitled The Spark, which invites readers to discover the power of creativity and imagination and apply it in their own lives. Written by John Bacon and based on an original idea by Lyn Heward, the book is distributed in several countries.

In business, Cirque du Soleil announced that it is partnering with Nakheel (the world's top private property developer) with a view to creating the first resident show on The Palm Jumeirah in Dubai, in 2011.

The following year, Istithmar World Capital, the investment arm of Dubai World, and Nakheel acquired a 20% stake in Cirque du Soleil. And, on September 25th, Cirque du Soleil's contortionists, Natasha Patterson (10), Julie Bergez (14), and Dasha Sovik (15) who perform in Koozå, set a new Guinness World Record for the Highest Circus Act ever performed at the top of Toronto's CN Tower, the World's Tallest Freestanding Tower. This feat was performed in the Glass Floor observation deck, 342 meters (1,122 feet) above the ground and as high up on Toronto's CN Tower.

Three new resident shows, including the first resident shows outside the United States, are launched throughout the year: ZAIA, a production for the Sands Corp. resort and casino "The Venetian" at the Cotai-Strip in Macao, China; and ZED, a production for the Tokyo Disney resort in Tokyo, Japan. Also launched was "Criss Angel – beLIEve" at the Luxor Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas; the first production to involve a celebrity and star in his own right.

Cirque du Soleil's tribute to The Beatles "A Day In The Life" and Carol Woods & Timmy Mitchums (from "Across the Universe") performance of "Let It Be" garners attention at the 50th Annual Grammy Awards in Los Angeles, California. In the same year, Cirque du Soleil performed the day-parade, called "Awakening of the Serpent", for the "Water" Expo 2008 in public at the city of Zaragoza in Spain, Europe. Cirque du Soleil also created a special show for this anniversary, which was performed 5 times on three days at the Colisée Pepsi in Québec City.

To celebrate Cirque du Soleil's 25th anniversary in 2009, a new touring show featuring insects, Brazilian music and vibes premieres in Montreal. Directed by Debra Colker, OVO is a headlong rush into a colorful ecosystem teeming with life, where insects work, eat, crawl, flutter, play, fight and look for love in a non-stop riot of energy and movement. The publication of a book on Cirque costumes and the launch of a double CD containing a music compilation, are among other commemorative activities of this anniversary. Alegría, which has wowed millions under the grand chapiteau across North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, and Central and South America, begins life anew in arenas.

Like Saltimbanco before it, Alegría embarks on a two-year North American Arena tour in early 2009. And by September, Guy Laliberté becomes the first Canadian private space explorer. His mission was dedicated to raising awareness on water issues facing humankind on planet earth. Under the theme Moving Stars and Earth for Water, this first Poetic Social Mission in space aimed at touching people through an artistic approach: a special 120-minute webcast program featuring various artistic performances unfolding in 14 cities on five continents, including the International Space Station.

But it would be during this period of the company's history that Cirque du Soleil would have its first real tastes of failure, for many of the shows that joined the Cirque pantheon during this era didn't last more than three-to-four years. In fact, of the ten productions that Cirque debuted during this period only four survive to this day: THE BEATLES LOVE, Koozå, Criss Angel

BELIEVE, and OVO. That's a 60% closure/failure rate! Delirium closed in 2010 after running into trouble finding available sites to host its unique stage set-up.

Wintuk, while moderately successful, did not get renewed past its original four-year contract. ZED closed at the end of 2011 following the Fukushima nuclear disaster brought on by an earthquake and tsunami. ZAIA closed in early 2012 following a down-turn in the global economy (and lack-luster ticket sales during its run). BANANA SHPEEL was so badly received by audiences that three re-tooling efforts weren't enough to save the "new twist" on Vaudeville. And VIVA ELVIS, which held a lot of promise at launch time, was unable to find an audience and was closed at the end of the summer 2012.

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In this section we will cover – from inception to conception – *Corteo, The Beatles LOVE, Delirium, Koozå, Wintuk, ZAIA, ZED, Criss Angel BELIEVE, OVO, Banana Shpeel and VIVA ELVIS.*

Where would Cirque go from here?



Corteo

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL.

CREATED AND DIRECTED BY DANIELE FINZI PASCA

Situated at a strange level between heaven and earth...

Corteo

Three years passed between the premiere of Dralion (in 1999) and its successor Varekai (in 2002) and most harbored hope that Cirque would not wait another three years before launching another touring show. But with the announcements of what would ultimately become Zumanity and KÀ in Las Vegas, a new touring show in 2004 seemed out of the question. Even so, it would not take the company long to hint a show could premiere under the big top in 2005. Speculation ran rampantly as soon as the calendar ticked the new-year: who would direct it? What would its theme be? What kind of acts would be presented? Who would compose the music?

On July 11, 2004, not long after fans convened in Vancouver for CirqueCon 2004 – the first ever convention-like gathering for Cirque du Soleil fans – news that Daniele Finzi Pasca, a Cirque Eloize contributor, had been tapped to direct the new touring show and that René Dupéré had signed on to score the show (although he later bowed out). Cirque du Soleil announced CORTEO in front of Québécois journalists on April 5, 2005, and for the very first time took place in the auspicious environment of the Grand Chapiteau (previous press conferences were done at the Studio in conditions of secrecy). It was apparent Cirque was in for a different vision.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	April 21, 2005
Type:	Resident / Bigtop
Director:	Daniele Finzi Pasca
Composer:	Philippe Leduc & Others
Status:	Currently Touring

Creative Team

Guide	Lighting Designer
Guy Laliberté	Martin Labrecque
Director	Sound Designer
Daniele Finzi Pasca	Jonathan Deans
Creation	Makeup Designer
Line Tremblay	Nathalie Gagné
Acro Equipment	Costumes
Danny Zen	Dominique Lemieux
Composer	Acting Designer
Philippe Leduc	Hugo Gargiulo
Composer	Acting Designer
Maria Bonzanigo	Antonio Vergamini
Set Designer	Dramaturgical Analyst
Jean Rabasse	Dolores Heredia



/// TEATRO DELLA CAREZZA

"To dance well, to move well, one must think well. So we will be working with certain muscles... specifically, the mind and the spirit!"

How better to illustrate the approach of Daniele Finzi Pasca, director of Corteo? For Daniele, Corteo represents a kind of full circle, a bringing together of all the threads of his professional career. As a young man growing up in Switzerland he was a competitive gymnast. He went on to work in the circus and eventually established a reputation in theatre as a writer and director.

Daniele was born into a family of photographers. "Then my mother became a painter," he says. "I grew up surrounded by images and imagery, memories of made-up moments snatched from time and frozen forever. In my shows I simply put these images into motion."

Daniele has had a life-long fascination with clowns and clowning which took root at the famed Circus Nock, where he performed in an acrobatic clown number. Perhaps the most formative event in his life was a trip he took to India, where he worked as a volunteer looking after terminally ill patients. Upon his return to Switzerland, he founded a company called Sunil's Clowns, which changed its name to Teatro Sunil in 1986. ("Sunil" is the name of a young man he met in India when he was working with Mother Theresa.) His concept: apply the approach of clowning to theatre work. Along the way he developed the concept of "teatro della carezza" (theater of the caress).

"Why, and for whom, do we dance?" In answering this question, Daniele touches on the story's very essence. When they're on stage, the artists tell their story. To reach this level of acting, relationships must be created with and among the artists. It's not only important to know how to move on stage, but also to know how to do so in harmony with others. Being conscious of others is a feature that's an integral part of the tradition he has presented in courses and workshops for companies and organizations all over the world, including Canada's National Circus School and Cirque du Soleil.

In the director's words: "The show will explore the world of dreams; a dimension somewhere between Heaven and Earth. Proportions will live in a different, strange dimension: great and small, tragic and ridiculous, the magic of perfection and the charm of imperfection. (...) The mysticism of this show will transcend through the voice, its beauty through movement, its craziness through rhythm, its sensuality through touch, its mystery through gazes, its passion through dance."

Corteo is inspired by the death and funeral of a clown, and draws on a clown figure from a past long before the existence of circus—a time when clowns were not the stereotypes we know now, but far more complex characters. Daniele says the show is "situated at a strange level between heaven and earth, where gods and humans can interact through the medium of circus."

The show's environment takes its inspiration from many architectural sources, especially Chartres cathedral and its labyrinth, which symbolizes the journey of life for Daniele Finzi Pasca. "The labyrinth is a great voyage: To find yourself, you have to lose yourself," he explains.

/// A FUNERAL PROCESSION?

Corteo, which means “cortege” in Italian, combines the craft of the actor with the prowess of the acrobat to plunge the audience into a world of playfulness and spontaneity situated in a mysterious area between Heaven and Earth. Corteo is a grand procession, a festive parade imagined by a clown. Juxtaposing the large with the small, the ridiculous with the tragic and the magic of perfection with the charm of imperfection, the show highlights the strength and fragility of the clown, as well as his wisdom and kindness, to illustrate the portion of humanity that is within each of us. The clown is Everyman, a cunning idiot, a colorful loser who shines a light on all that is difficult and beautiful in life.

Corteo, a timeless revel in which illusion teases reality, evokes the full spectrum of emotion and experience: love, friendship, pain, joy, wisdom, beauty, life and even death. The cast brings together over 50 artists from 14 different countries: Armenia, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Italy, Kenya, Romania, Russia, Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States. Corteo explores the circus arts in a way that is brand new to Cirque du Soleil. Once again, the very limits of acrobatics are challenged as Daniele Finzi Pasca lends his unique touch to Cirque’s spectacular performances. Corteo redefines the springboard, the Korean frame and the tight-wire, and presents acts that are as original as they are innovative.

The set and décor of Corteo plunge the audience into a lyrical world, a strange area between heaven and earth. Set Designer Jean Rabasse has divided the Grand Chapiteau and its rotating stage in two, with each half of the audience facing the other half, so they see not only the performance, but also have a performer’s-eye-view of the audience. Thus the stage becomes a 41-foot track upon which performers run from one side to the other, rather than being out in the round. This is a first for Cirque du Soleil. In the center of the circular stage is a labyrinth which exactly reproduces the proportions and size of the classic design on the floor of the aisle in Chartres cathedral. The labyrinth incorporates an eight-inch Moebius strip painted at its center as a symbol of infinity and continuity.

Shrouding the set and stage are two enormous baroque-style “Roll Drop” curtains (58 feet wide and almost 40 feet high), and the four sideways -opening Italian-style curtains, which are among the most striking scenic elements in the show. The inspiration for the show’s curtains was an 1885 painting by the Parisian artist Adolphe Willette. They were sewn in Canada and sent to France to be painted. It took more than two weeks to paint each of the central curtains in watercolors. The central curtains are attached to huge supports which contain winding motors to roll them.

The curtains also hide what is known as the “Patience”, a massive arched technical structure made of steel that dominates the interior of the Grand Chapiteau. It is one of the most complex set elements in the show and is used to transport various scenic elements and pieces of acrobatic equipment on and off stage from above. The Patience has two rails that traverse the Grand Chapiteau. Each rail is fitted with four platform-like carts to carry the scenic and acrobatic elements. The eight carts have a lifting capacity of 1,000 lbs and a top speed of four feet per second. The Patience is 41 feet above the stage at its highest point. It is entirely self-supporting and could be set up anywhere.

All of which is in support of Corteo's talented cast.

To create over 260 costumes for Corteo, Costume Designer Dominique Lemieux set out to accentuate the natural beauty of the artists. She used more than 900 different fabrics, concentrating on natural fibers such as silks, linens, cottons and lace in a subtle color palette that includes blues, pinks, fuchsia and gold with appliquéd spangles and jewels. Many of the fabrics were dyed and airbrushed to give them a patina of age. There are 40 angels in Corteo and 4 types of angels: Arc Angels, Little Angels, Grand Angels and Auguste Angels – in addition to the main characters:

- The Dead Clown -- The Dead Clown is the central character of the story, the one whom this fantastic funeral is honoring ... but could it all be a dream? A former member of the troupe surrounding him, he dons his costume to perform onstage one last time.
- The Loyal Whistler -- The origins of the Loyal Whistler lie in the classic role of "Mr. Loyal", the ringmaster of traditional circuses. The Loyal Whistler evokes images of a former military man, one who has retrained in the circus arts but never quite lost his former ways. When he starts to whistle, his boundless artistic passion comes to the fore.
- The White Clown -- For the White Clown, appearances are what matters most. Like the Loyal Whistler, he is an authority figure ... at least, he'd like to be. Of all the colorful characters, he admires only the stars and scorns the others. It is the White Clown who opens the door to the magic of the circus for the Dead Clown.
- The Clown Trio -- The Clowness is an actress, a veritable grande dame of the stage, who somehow found herself a part of this nutty troupe. Her professionalism and her strength of character allow her to bear the foolishness of her partners, whom she never fails to charm. A diminutive clown who's in love with the Clowness, the Little Clown is always ready to play tricks on his associates. Impish and lively, he is both an endearing companion and a force to be reckoned with. Although only an amateur opera singer, the Giant Clown imagines himself to be a great artist of worldwide renown. Without doubt, it is with him that the Dead Clown is closest, almost like brothers.

/// RITORNARE

The show opens with a somber scene; a bell tolls and the lights come up on a grand hall where three large chandeliers hang from the ceiling. We see a clown (Mauro Mozzani) on his death bed. An angel hovers over the clown as his friends and cohorts walk across the stage forming a grand funeral cortège (the show's namesake) en route to pay their last respects. The Clown dies and the premise of the show is basically his journey through a sort of purgatory where moments from his life, real or imagined, flash before his eyes (and ours as well). Corteo is the Dead Clown's journey to heaven, his dream for a final show, his quest for redemption and a celebration of life.

CHANDELIERS

The sobriety of the opening scene soon gives way to whimsy as four beautiful ladies, the Dead Clown's former lovers, ascend on the three chandeliers to perform a gorgeous aerial act. Combining skills from the disciplines of trapeze and aerial hoop, the women perform to the sounds of a lilting Italian waltz sung by Corteo's main vocalist, a sandy-voiced tenor. The "Lustres" are giant chandeliers that float in mid-air above the stage. They are decorated with some 4,000 sparkling "jewels" and garlands of reflective acrylic spheres.

TRAMPO BEDS

Like a gaggle of young kids playing in their grandparents' room, six artists jump on two 600-pound beds that move on rotating platforms. The next scene is a flashback to the Clown's childhood; two large beds are wheeled out and a group of performers dressed as children begin bouncing up and down and playfully throwing pillows at each other. The beds are actually trampolines and the performers spring up, perform flips, balance on the bed frames and eventually bound from one bed to the other all to the sounds of an upbeat swing song. At the end of the scene angels appear overhead to escort the dead clown toward heaven, his bed rises and he is fitted with a pair of angel wings. The audience laughs at his awkward first attempts to fly.

ROUE CYR

A group of performers roll across the stage, each performing in an apparatus called the Roue Cyr (Cyr Wheel), a simple metal hoop about 6 feet in diameter. The artists roll and manipulate their wheels so they spin like quarters on their edges. A beautiful duet is sung over a soaring string arrangement accompanies this graceful act and lends an air of nostalgia. A comedy act where The Small Clown plays a trainer of two mischievous horses follows. These "pantomime horses", each inhabited by two artists, give the Small Clown a hard time. By turns, the Little Horse and the Little Mare will try to break free from their trainer's grip. This eventually gives way to a somber funeral procession where the cast marches slowly from one side of the stage while singing a lament. The funeral cortège then takes a festive turn and breaks into a party before the show's ringmaster The Loyal Whistler puts everybody back in line.

TIGHTWIRE

As the procession vanishes the partially lowered scrim curtains rises to reveal a tightwire. Surrounded by angels six-meters above the ground, a young woman dances across a tight-wire en pointe, a unicycle, multiple hoops, and her bare feet. Then, she challenges gravity by climbing a 40-degree diagonal tight-wire to disappear into the heavens some 40-feet in the air. The nature of tightwire acts means they don't lend themselves well to artistic presentation and for the most part the act in Corteo is no exception. The saving grace for the presentation is the sensuous Latin ballad that accompanies the act. Guitarists sit on the centre turntable of the stage and play while the male singer passionately sings the gorgeous Spanish song while clapping rhythmically to the music.

Immediately following is a vignette featuring the Giant Clown. To the sound of bagpipes, a patch of green light appears, suggesting a golf course scene. The Giant walks on stage, intent on giving it his best shot!

JUGGLING

The next number features a team of highly skilled jugglers; the Teslenkos (siblings Anatoly, Dmitry, Elina and Victor) performing an astounding variety of intricate juggling routines. Using hoops and clubs, they flip and balance on each other while maintaining an unbelievable number of objects airborne.

Two vignettes follow. The first features a performer as a marionette puppet rigged to a fascinating contraption of pulleys and counterweights. Like a live puppet, the artist marionette suddenly appears in an innovative, rigging apparatus to play with the Dead Clown in a setting which evokes a beach scene from his childhood. The second is a tender and poetic moment between the Dead Clown and his Little Clowness that bespells the audience with child-like delight.

KOREAN PLANK (PLANCHE)

The first half of Corteo ends with a bang as the cast takes to both sides of the stage forming two opposing factions singing, chanting and clapping in time to the catchy melody. Drummer/percussionist Kit Chatham stands on the edge of the outer turntable and pounds out the pulsating rhythm that accompanies the Teeterboard (Korean Plank) act. The act is performed by two young men (alternating between Stéphane Beauregard, Jérémie Robert and Petar Stoyanov) who propel each other ever higher and perform increasingly daring flips before landing back on the plank. This act is simply astounding not only for the high skill level but also the inventive staging. The atmosphere is intense, like a street fight, and each of the two factions on stage chant and cheer their champion. The first act closes with the two combatants reconciling and the entire cast breaking out into a rendition of the catchy Teeterboard theme as the scrim curtain descends for intermission.

PARADISE

Upon returning from intermission we peer through the scrim to see what looks like a large safety net apparatus laid across the floor of the stage. As the second half starts a team of acrobats bounce across the net using it as a trampoline in an act Cirque du Soleil calls "Paradise". The "Paradise" act brings together two circus skills that have never been combined before: The Korean Cradle and the Tramponet (a combination of trampoline and safety net). The artists are thrown between three Korean Cradle stations placed at an unprecedented distance from each other, and rebound off the Tramponet, which is 98 feet (30 meters) long. Eventually, catchers perched overhead on Korean cradles catch the bounding acrobats and toss them about on the trampo-net. The act segues into a full-fledged Korean cradle number as performers are tossed from one cradle station to another while performing elaborate aerial twists and flips.

CRYSTAL GLASSES, TIBETAN BOWLS & THE WHISTLER

When the trampo-net is being disassembled and hauled off stage we find the Dead Clown and the Loyal Whistler in the audience. The Dead Clown coaxes the Whistler to perform pieces of classical music. The Whistler then takes the stage to join a fantastical orchestra comprised of performers playing crystal wine glasses and Tibetan bowls (large glass basins filled with water) to create a whimsical opus.

DUO ADAGIO

The next act features the Little Clown and The Clowness in a beautiful, masterful, tender pas-de-deux using contortion and hand-balancing on a rotating circular frame. They are accompanied by two female singers vocalizing to an enchanting melody played on bells.

RHYTHMIC GYMNASTICS (NOT SO SERIOUS ACT)

In an act dubbed "Not-So-Serious Act" Yuliya Raskina, Tamara Yerofeyeva and Alexander Savin perform a balancing/contortion/ manipulation act in which nothing goes right, the two ladies fight and attempt to upstage each other, and eventually the act is interrupted by a torrential downpour of rubber chickens.

EQUILIBRISTE (LADDERS)

An angel hovering over the stage passes a man a ladder. The artist proceeds to climb up and balance on the shaky ladder, amazingly keeping the precarious ladder in equilibrium. With his unnerving balance and finesse as he performs on various ladders, he tries desperately to reach the angel who is watching him from above. The next act is a comedy routine called Teatro Intimo. When eight characters pile into a miniature theatre to present "Romeo and Juliette," confusion upstages them all. Expect the unexpected in this madcap performance.

TOURNIK

In the lead up to the finale we see the Dead Clown riding a bicycle and ascending to heaven in a scene reminiscent of a Franco Dragone show (or the movie E.T.). His friends assemble below to wave goodbye and a celebration ensues.

Eight artists cross paths in an act which marries horizontal bar techniques with circus arts. The artists perform on a central cube-shaped structure, with two additional bars on each side of the cube. The various parts of the structure turn, sometimes all in the same direction, sometimes in opposite directions... just to keep everyone on their toes! The performers exhibit a remarkable sense of timing as they perform elaborate figures, and multiple artists fly through the air from bar to bar. The act is breathtaking; one small misstep would lead to a catastrophic collision.

At the conclusion of the act the cast returns to the stage as the Dead Clown descends from heaven, he is now an angel.

/// SUCCESS!

Corteo's Montreal debut qualified as a world premiere in more ways than one. For the very first time Cirque du Soleil put tickets up for sale ten months before performances were slated to begin, four months earlier than in the past. For the first time the Cirque du Soleil Brand Team developed a temporary logo and visual for the show (which would be replaced around October 2005), and it was the first time that one of Cirque du Soleil's premieres had to be interrupted due to a technical glitch (the computer system that controlled the automation system became overloaded and froze). But the show eventually went on to standing ovations. And it was the first time attendance and sales broke records: 213,000 people saw Corteo premiere in Montreal! The previous record was 170,000 spectators in Montreal, which Varekai set in 2002.

In September 2005, following five months playing to sold-out houses in Montreal, Quebec City and Toronto Corteo packed up, grabbed their passports and crossed the American border to launch the US leg of the show's first North American tour. But not to New York, Los Angeles or even Seattle. Instead, Cirque chose Minneapolis, Minnesota for the first stop in the tour, as a "soft launch". Why? A "soft launch" involves choosing a smaller city which has a lower profile than the company's normal A-list markets, but also fits in well with the tour plan logistics.

The "soft launch" then served as a "dress rehearsal"; playing in this smaller "B" market would allow Corteo a little more freedom to adjust to the turbulence of crossing the border and more time to absorb modifications to the show that are generally made in Toronto, all without the glare of national media attention, the scrutiny of demanding theatre critics, and the sales expectations that go hand in hand with larger, more challenging "A" markets. In short, it gave the tour a little more time to find its legs before hitting some of the Cirque's most important touring cities. The gamble paid off. Corteo solidified by the time it reached more important markets, such as Los Angeles and Santa Monica (in California), and over the years the show has celebrated a number of milestones, both happy and sad.

- On August 13, 2006: Corteo celebrated its 500th performance in Chicago, Illinois.
- In December 2006, Antonia Zadonskaya joined Corteo with a Foot Juggling act: "Elegance, dexterity and coordination are wrapped up in one character that carries us away to a world tied to the traditions of old-time circus, in which Mauro and his friends once played."
- On January 1, 2007: was the final flight of Mauro Mozzani, as the Dead Clown. (He came back later, though).
- Later in 2007, the "Not So Serious Act" was dropped from the show's line-up, allowing for Oleg Ouchakov and Tatiana Gousarova's Acro Duo act (featured early on in Varekai, and as seen on "Fire Within") to take on a new role here.
- On January 20, 2008, Corteo celebrated its 1000th performance in San Diego, California. And in 1000 shows, Corteo had visited 19 cities, traveled over 23,000 miles, shipped over 4,500 suitcases, sold over 310,000 bags of popcorn, played for over 2.2 million spectators, ordered over 10,880 pounds of bananas, went through 4 bass players, jumped over 47,000 times on the teeterboard and had over 220,000 chickens fall from the grid.

- In December 2008, Marie-Michelle Faber, one of the show's musicians, took flight in a rousing Aerial Silks performance. "An old sweetheart tries to reach the world above through acrobatics," her act was described as, "By singing, wondering and talking about love she seeks to touch the heavens." She would later leave Corteo in May 2011 to join in on the creation of Amaluna.
- On June 3, 2009, Corteo celebrated its 1,500th performance in Nagoya, Japan.
- In May 2009, Kit Chatum (show's drummer) left to appear in Viva Elvis.
- In September 2010, Corteo celebrated its 2,000th performance in Kazan, Russia.
- In December 2010, Paul Bisson (the show's long-time male singer) left for Cirque du Soleil's Zarkana.

* * *

In the end, we will all have to learn to fly," says Daniele Finzi Pasca. "Be it with sings, on a bicycle, it doesn't matter. In the end, there will be a party attended by our friends, all those people who loved us so well, recalling memories, little details, fragrances of a life, will gather to honor us. There will be a bed, and a long pageant of emotion will play out before that bed. There will be angels, and if it's a clown that is dead, there will be acrobats, and an entire circus will parade by. To turn a burial into a celebration, there will also have to be music... wild, nostalgic and evocative strains.

If we are lucky, we will look back, and those we leave behind will wave white handkerchiefs and cry out wonderful words to us. If we are lucky, we will leave behind an entire circus that will weep and laugh, laugh and weep, that will celebrate by sharing memories, transforming our life into a modest legend. In the end, we will fly away and the music will take us by the hand and we will begin to dance. We will close our eyes and remember everything, we will invent everything. To become immersed in this show, we needed music that could take the audience by the hand and lead it into a little dream--the dream of a clown who invents his death. Once the music came, it was easier to begin to dance.

TURNING MUSIC INTO MOTION



DELIRIUM

A CIRQUE DU SOLEIL LIVE MUSIC CONCERT

CREATED AND DIRECTED BY MICHEL LEMIEUX AND VICTOR PILON

DELIRIUM

“If someone put together a Cirque du Soleil Cover Band that only played the Cirque's music, do you think it would be popular to the general public?”

A fan of Cirque du Soleil posed such a question in early 2004 and the response provoked was rather negative. Who would want to listen to a cover band play Cirque music, some asked? And why would you want to hear it out of context, others inquired. Cirque fans had been listening to songs out of context through the company's CD releases, how would this be any different? For starters, it would be a different group of people attempting to play the music in different genres than it was intended. But that didn't mean everyone found the idea tough to swallow – including Cirque itself.

Although we can't say that fans helped give birth to the idea of a Cirque du Soleil concert-type show, it wasn't long after that Cirque du Soleil announced something similar...

The first test of this hypothesis can be traced back to 2003 and the company's flirtation with remixing their music catalog. “As Cirque du Soleil ventures towards new creative grounds, its music is doing the same!” a release from CirqueClub advised. “A new music project, called TAPIS ROUGE, unites our music with the talent of some of the best producers in electronic music today. The result is the innovative remix CD: Solarium. The first CD to feature this new ‘chill mix’ approach to Cirque du Soleil's music is now available!”

Later on came a separate, more up-beat dance music urban concept known as DELIRIUM (named after the break room at Cirque du Soleil's Headquarters in Montreal).

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	January 26, 2006
Type:	Touring / Arena
Director:	Michel Lemieux & Victor Pilon
Arranger:	Francis Collard
Finale:	April 19, 2008

Creative Team

Guide Guy Laliberté	Costume Designer Michel Robidas
Guide Gilles Ste-Croix	Lighting Designer Alain Lortie
Creator & Director Michel Lemieux	Sound Designer Yves Savoie
Creator & Director Victor Pilon	Props Designer Anne-Séguin Poirier
Musical Director Francis Collard	Director of Creation Carmen Ruest
Choreographer Mia Michaels	Associate Producer Ian Tremblay

/// CIRQUE DU CONCERTS?

"We will be celebrating the music of Cirque!"

By May 2005, the two CDs were released as a set – SOLARIUM / DELIRIUM. "This 2-disc compilation is packed with chilled-out rhythms (SOLARIUM)) and hot, sparkling beats (DELIRIUM) - a celebration of 20 years of Cirque du Soleil's creative excellence. The SOLARIUM disc is a cool, ambient, chill-out collection, and includes remixes by Ibizarre, A Man Called Adam, Cottonbelly, Christophe Goze and Thievery Corporation. The DELIRIUM disc captures the hot, sparkling energy of a festive dance party, and featured innovative remixes by noteworthy DJs and producers, such as Louie Vega (featuring Jaffa), Julien Jabre, Roger Sanchez, Sasha, François K, Eric Kupper and many more!"

Both concepts proved popular. Would Cirque take the next step?

On February 7, 2005, Scott Zeiger (Chief Executive Officer of Clear Channel Entertainment Theatrical) and Daniel Lamarre (President and Chief Operating Officer of Cirque du Soleil) announced that Clear Channel Entertainment and Cirque du Soleil had formed a partnership to develop and produce a 100-date nationwide North American arena tour, beginning in November 2005. From the press release:

For the first time ever, Cirque du Soleil will perform principally one-night concert engagements in major arenas across North America. The new show will feature the music catalog of Cirque du Soleil and will re-define the concert experience, incorporating Cirque du Soleil's unique brand of innovative staging and its imaginative use of video projections and music. Cirque du Soleil Musique, the music division of Cirque du Soleil, will manage the creative and artistic production of this new venture. Production and promotional aspects will be managed by Clear Channel Entertainment.

Scott Zeiger said, "We are very excited about presenting this new joint venture, and are thrilled to collaborate with a creative team of this caliber. We have always had great admiration for Cirque du Soleil's artistic achievements, and are looking forward to bringing their innovative vision to a much larger audience across North America with this newly configured tour presentation."

"This new collaboration clearly demonstrates what Cirque du Soleil is looking for in building partnerships - leadership, open-mindedness and the willingness to develop creative-driven quality projects. Clear Channel Entertainment is most certainly one of those partners", Daniel Lamarre said.

Overseeing the project for Clear Channel Entertainment will be Executive Vice President, Creative Development, Jonathan Hochwald, and for Cirque du Soleil, Senior Vice President, New Ventures, Eric Fournier. Hochwald said, "This is a dream project for us - an opportunity to reinvent and re-imagine the arena experience and to introduce the genius of Cirque du Soleil's artistic vision to new audiences who will discover the music of Cirque as they have never seen it."

"This new creative platform is the first step to a long-term relationship with Clear Channel Entertainment," added Fournier. "Cirque du Soleil is truly expanding its creative force to other types of ventures with the simple objective of redefining existing entertainment formats with a Cirque du Soleil creative perspective."

On January 26, 2006, Delirium premiered at the Bell Center Arena in Montreal, ushering in a new type of Cirque du Soleil show. Not only would DELIRIUM be the first show outside Cirque's normal acrobatic milieu, it was an experiment to see if the company could penetrate new, smaller markets simply by adopting a new way of touring. It was also a clever way to develop a knowledge based for an arena-based touring model without jeopardizing the brand value of Cirque's current touring production assets. This would eventually give way to Saltimbanco's, Alegria's, Quidam's and Dralion's arena tours.

/// TURNING MUSIC INTO MOTION

Delirium was marketed as the quest for balance in a world that was "increasingly out of sync with reality, pushing the limits of arena performance through technical magnitude, human introspection and creative prowess." It was an urban tale, a state-of-the-art mix of music, dance, theatre, and multimedia. Pumped by this re-energized Cirque du Soleil rhythm, the DELIRIUM tour transported audiences into a universe of delirious sensory folly. This unique, large-scale event was the most massive technical production ever created to tour arenas at the time. (Finding a rehearsal space for DELIRIUM was quite a challenge! In the end, two locations were chosen for the monumental set up, including an abandoned automotive factory.) The 130-foot stage is set up in longitude, dividing the arena into two intimate spaces that allow all members of the audience to be immersed in the show, feeling front and center no matter where they are seated.

Multimedia definitely plays a key role in bringing the audience to delirious sensory folly. Spectators are treated to gigantic, crystal-clear images with infinite possibilities for projections on screens, floors, and the audience. In all, DELIRIUM has 540 square feet of projection space dominating the scene, the equivalent of almost 4 IMAX screens. Projection screens include 4 state-of-the-art roll-up screens suspended from the top of the arena, 2 tulle screens that stand at the stage extremities and 4 wings. 18 25-kW projectors including one in the main character's air balloon cast images around the arena. A unique system of pre-recorded, animated and manipulated live images keeps up with the musical tempo and insures the audience is alert.

Placing all this equipment into an arena is a complex puzzle normally reserved for stadiums, however. The technical coordination required was demanding. Enough equipment to satisfy two mega rock concerts was hauled across North America and Europe, set up and dismantled within just a few hours in every new city. Above the arena, 2 special rail bridges designed especially for DELIRIUM support 130 000 pounds of equipment including 27 motors to permit characters to 'fly' as well as lighting and accessories to be moved about during the show. The main character alone required 4 motors for his actions in the air balloon (two running at 4 ft/sec. and the two others at variable speeds). Setting up was like an enormous game of Tetris, with each piece of puzzle requiring specific coordination and timing. In all, twenty 18-wheeled trailers transported the technical equipment from arena to arena requiring 75 technicians and 25 support personnel.

All that equipment is in support of the artists, though. DELIRIUM showcases 44 talented and multidisciplinary artists, 8 of whom have collaborated with Cirque du Soleil in the past. Each artist has been selected for individual virtuosity. They include 11 musicians, 6 singers, 18 dancers, 8 acrobats and 4 main characters. In all, 20 countries are represented in the troupe, including 2 Americans: Karl Baumann (Las Vegas) who portrays one of the main characters and dancer Alexandra Apjarova (New York). To heighten the musical experience, DELIRIUM is infused with acrobatic dances as well as classic Cirque du Soleil feats including aerial, acro-sport and hand balancing acts.

Costume designer Michel Robidas has designed intricate structural costumes to bring the music of DELIRIUM to life, including an 80 foot volcanic dress. Five luminous swings are used by acrobatic dancers to perform their feats. Four curve-bridges resembling small boats and made of composite material enhance the acrobatic performances. Two are suspended 15 feet above the stage; the other two remain on the ground. And a multipurpose planet drum measuring 15 feet by 59 inches serves as an acrobatic platform as well as a giant drum set comprised of 16 percussive instruments.

Of course it's all about the music.

For the first time in Cirque du Soleil history, lyrics had been created for the instrumental tracks and real words integrated in place of invented language, bringing to the music a fresh poetic dimension. The texts were in English, French, Spanish, Wolof and Portuguese. Robbie Dillon, who contributed texts for Cirque du Soleil's ZUMANITY, composed the English lyrics for DELIRIUM. When the idea of a show centered upon Cirque du Soleil music came to Guy Laliberté, he immediately thought 'urban tribal beat'. Those three words have inspired each member of the creative team. 'Urban' reflects the society in which we live: modern, chaotic and ever evolving. 'Tribal' constitutes the idea of coming together, the hope of escaping one's solitary cocoon and living a powerful collective experience. 'Beat' is sound and movement, the incessant rhythm that unites space, individual and society.

As musical director, producer and arranger of DELIRIUM, Francis Collard's principle challenge was to bring a fresh perspective to these 20 Cirque du Soleil hits. In his words, he "sought to explore elements of surprise in Cirque du Soleil music, to highlight the lyrical and melodic intrigue within the music". The result is a mix of percussive driven pop and electronic music meet melodious ballad and world rhythm sounds. It is precisely this diverse stream of influences that distinguishes the music of DELIRIUM from Cirque du Soleil's double album Solarium/Delirium. Solarium is an ambient remix of relaxing sounds in contrast to Delirium, which is a more percussive and dance oriented CD. The music in the DELIRIUM tour is decisively narrative in nature, with highly dramatic variations that flow in perfect sync with the event's visual elements.

To select the songs, a committee of 11 Cirque du Soleil directors and creative minds was convened. They each compiled a list of their top songs from Cirque du Soleil's musical catalogue of over 500 songs. From those, with the collaboration of musical director, producer and arranger Francis Collard and musical content associate producer Ian Tremblay, a final list of music was established.

In all, 20 of Cirque du Soleil's most memorable musical moments originally created by René Dupéré, Benoît Jutras and Violaine Corradi were re-mixed by Quebec producer, composer and arranger Francis Collard, who “definitely injected new life into these powerful classics.” The result was a hyper-energizing urban tribal beat that “exploded with electronic sounds, percussions and world rhythms.”

Here's what they chose... Following is the song list (in order) with the old title (if applicable) and its original show in parenthesis, plus a review of musical and visual highlights by friend and fellow Fascination writer, Paul Roberts:

“OMBRA” (FROM DRALION)

To begin, a very short intro of the “Ombra” opening instrumental passage, without vocals.

“TOO HIGH” (“SPIRITUAL SPIRAL” FROM DRALION)

Dessy Di Lauro, the expressive original vocalist for La Nouba, sang with spirited passion while gliding across the stage on a domed platform that housed several drums built into the sides. The percussionists rotated around this platform while beating the drums. This seemed like something Stomp might integrate into one of their shows.

“BIRIMBAU” (FROM MYSTÈRE)

Once again, a short version with no vocals that was more like a set-up song for the appearance of the musicians, who rolled across the stage standing on moveable platforms.

“TIME TO GO” (“MOUNTAIN OF CLOTHES” FROM ALEGRÍA LE FILM)

This was the most surprising song to me since it isn't included in an actual Cirque du Soleil show. Singer Jacynthe flew in overhead wearing a sparkling, spiral gown. To me she sounded similar to Irene Marc, the original singer of the studio version. Alexis Messier shined with an energetic wah-wah guitar solo that would make Jimi proud.

“BRIDGE OF SORROW” (“NOSTALGIE” FROM «O»)

A beautiful version of this dynamic, warm song from “O.” Mr. Dillon's lyrics fit wonderfully with the swaying arms projected on the stage-covering screens. The spine-tingling 3-D sight proved once again that Cirque always has something extraordinary up their sleeves.

“BOUR MOWOTE” (“AFRICA” FROM «O»)

“Africa” appears on both the “Solarium” (twice) and “Delirium” CDs and yet another rendition is born. One of the Diouf brothers sang it nicely, but in a lower register than Toumany Kouyaté from “O.” The projection of alien flowers rendered an exotic ambience that took you to places unknown.

“SALOUM” (“LE RÊVEUR” FROM VAREKAI)

Vocalist Juliana Sheffield made her first appearance that also included an amazing hand balancing performance from Andrey Koltsov. This song also featured Jacques “Kuba” Seguin playing a melodic flugelhorn solo while floating in a ring high above the stage.

“BATTLE”

Not sure of the origin, but this sounded like a cross between Mystère’s Taïko and Dralion’s Bamboo – Percussion at its best.

“SOMEONE” (“PATZIVOTA” FROM VAREKAI)

Similar to Varekai’s lightning bugs, twinkling small lights appeared to be hovering above the stage. But soon, performers began to grab the lights, which were on the end of straps, and they flew out over the audience.

“ALONE” (“QUERER” FROM ALEGRÍA)

Cirque du Soleil’s most romantic song began with Jacynthe singing by herself on stage behind red drapes. The song then morphed into a tango similar to the version performed during the Midnight Sun celebration. I love Mr. Dillon’s chorus: “I fly... Looking down from the sky... On a world that’s so small... You can’t touch me at all... I’m too high.”

“DESEJO” (“EMBALLA” FROM VAREKAI)

The live version featured an energized Rhodes electric piano-like solo from Ric’key Pageot that made the Latin beat even jazzier. And to boot, one of the climax visuals of the show was Dessy being lifted in the air wearing a 30-foot “volcano dress.” At the end of the song, performers placed stakes at the bottom of her skirt to fashion a Grand Chapiteau that housed the dancers partying to the rhythms; a nice homage paid to the roots of Cirque. When the excitement died down, Jacques “Kuba” Seguin played a subtle, muted flugelhorn solo that lead into the next famous tune.

“LET ME FALL” (FROM QUIDAM)

The Delirium version seemed a little rushed with Elie Haroun attempting the difficult vocal part. This version featured another great guitar solo by Mr. Messier.

“COLD FLAME” (“OSCILLUM” FROM VAREKAI)

The powerful Russian Swings song from Varekai, but with lyrics. Irina Akimova provided a very nice hoop manipulation. The hoops she used were colored in a rainbow sheen that reflected off the lights (like Mystère’s cube) and as she spun them they appeared to be a solid, shimmering ball. Nice effect.

“ONE LOVE” (“POKINŌI FROM SALTIMBANCO)

version was similar to the song from the “Delirium” studio CD, but of course with new lyrics. The stage-covering projection screen featured some eerie images of animated people walking in and out of doors that were connected by a conduit-like line. A pulse throbbed throughout the circuitry.

“LIFELINE” (“EL PÉNDULO” FROM VAREKAI)

This version stays fairly true to its original form. A four man Banquine act that seemed perfect for any Cirque production accompanied the song.

“TIME FLIES” (“MER NOIRE” FROM «O»)

Four of the singers huddled together on a platform singing magnificent harmonies. The decelerated bridge that featured a solo female lead also included a backing electronic sequencer that floated nicely around the melody line. Then Andrée-Anne Tremblay kicked in with an aggressive violin solo that brought the song back to the main theme.

“KUMBA” (“KUMBALAWÉ” FROM SALTIMBANCO)

From the energy exposed by nearly all the cast, I knew, that the night would soon be closing...

“NOVA ALEGRIA” (“ALEGRÍA” FROM ALEGRÍA)

The End. “A joyous, magical feeling” brought to life in an abbreviated version of Cirque du Soleil’s most famous song.

/// THE QUEST FOR BALANCE

As I stated, the show itself was an interesting hybrid; songs from Cirque shows played in a more “modern” fashion with English lyrics, a huge stage bisecting the arena (a la Corteo) on which the show played, multiple projections on the tall curtain screens on either side of the stage, mixed with a nebulous “plot” of a man searching for meaning. It was also the first time a Cirque show had an opening act, Canadian singer Nitza (later the vocalist for BELIEVE) who would play a 20-minute set of her own originals before DELIRIUM began.

It seemed to be catching on.

The show was also notable for its appearance on the charts! The Billboard Top Tours charts that is. DELIRIUM made it to #6 for 2006 and 2007. But in both cases it was not due to popularity or high ticket price but repetition – Delirium played many more performances during the year than any other show. So, though they had lower attendance per show at a reasonable ticket price, they made up for it in number of performances.

On January 26, 2007, DELIRIUM celebrated its first birthday. Over that year the show’s 45 artists put on 162 performances for nearly a million spectators. They traveled across Canada and the United States with 22 tractor-trailers and 13 busses, making a total of 64 stops in 62 towns. Yes, DELIRIUM found success, but that didn’t mean it was immune to changes. In fact, it needed a little stream-lining. To make the show more flexible in terms of overall logistics, Cirque du Soleil’s Show Quality Service reviewed its format and changed its staging.

Beginning January 27th, DELIRIUM presented itself on a slightly smaller stage (104 feet long instead of 130 feet) situated at one side of the venue in a more traditional theatre-style arrangement rather than long-ways, down the middle, splitting the audience in half. Other than allowing for a better seating arrangement, the new configuration also helped improve projection quality as images were projected from behind the screen rather than from in front as before. Since projections were an important part of the show, it was an undeniable improvement. The images were clearer, more intense and richer in color. With some of the acts having been modified as well, DELIRIUM re-configured itself to give spectators a more accessible, intimate experience, to ensure the show’s continued success (as well as preserve its artistic integrity).

The new configuration would also help Cirque to present the show in Europe, making it easier to adapt to their smaller arena venues. After playing to North American audiences for more than a year, on September 13, 2007, DELIRIUM opened in the Netherlands, kicking off its European tour. But after six and a half months, the tour seemed to run out of steam.

/// DELIRIUM UNPLUGGED

"After having entertained millions of spectators, DELIRIUM began its final series of performances this week. DELIRIUM will be performed for the last time on the weekend of April 20, 2008, in London, UK. For two years, DELIRIUM visited dozens of cities across approximately 20 countries, and on two continents." (Fascination! Newsletter)

Why would Cirque du Soleil give up on their great experiment? According to them it was becoming increasingly challenging to find markets where the show could be presented.

"The technical complexity of the show represented a significant challenge, particularly in Europe," said Jacques Marois, Senior Vice-President of Touring Shows. With many European venues not necessarily suited for a show of DELIRIUM's scale, Cirque was forced to make a decision: try and press on or close and call the experiment a success. "DELIRIUM gave us the chance to explore a world that was previously unknown to us and to visit markets that we could not have covered before," Marois added. "In many ways, the DELIRIUM experience opened doors for Cirque and paved the way for our touring shows in this type of venue. Hats off to all the artists, artisans and employees who contributed to the success of this show!"

After nearly 400 shows played across 90 North American and 34 European cities, in front of some two million spectators in eighteen different countries, Cirque du Soleil pulled the plug on DELIRIUM.

DELIRIUM didn't go without a fight.

"According to the New York Times, SONY Pictures is tapping into the motion-picture theater exhibitions niche, currently serviced by Fathom Events, by creating a competing line of business. Cirque du Soleil fans may want to take notice, as this new unit will beam DELIRIUM, Cirque du Soleil's musical experience, to movie theaters! DELIRIUM's final curtain was filmed in London and will also be released to DVD in the near future." (Fascination! Newsletter)

"We couldn't be more delighted and proud to kick off our inaugural slate of Hot Ticket programming with Cirque du Soleil's DELIRIUM," said Rory Bruer, President of Domestic Distribution for Sony Pictures Releasing. "It's the perfect marriage to have such a visually exciting multimedia show as DELIRIUM showcased in theaters in state-of-the-art high definition presentation. It is stunning to experience the show in this way and it sounds amazing. It's truly the next best thing to being there and experiencing the show "live" and I believe audiences will be blown away by the incredibly creative and talented artists, acrobats and performers that make up the world renowned Cirque du Soleil troupe."

"We are happy to take this opportunity to bring the Cirque du Soleil experience to a new entertainment environment," explained Jacques Methe, Executive Producer at Cirque du Soleil Images. "We believe that DELIRIUM in HD will offer audiences a memorable experience in movie theaters because of its magnitude, the energy of the performers and the diversity of its music going from percussion to electronic music." Said David Mallet, director of the film, "I am really happy with this one-of-a-kind production since the use of twenty cameras allowed us to both capture the spectacular scale and nature of the show along with the incredible skill and intimate interaction of the fabulous Cirque du Soleil artists. This unique cinema experience will be a delight for the viewers."

* * *

DELIRIUM was filmed during its last stop at the London O2 Arena, and though plans were to release a DVD of the performance some time thereafter, they never came to pass. Why? We asked Daniel Lamarre that in an interview in 2010:

"There's no plan for that now," Mr. Lamarre responded. "The problem is that we are creating and producing so many shows at such a rapid pace that we don't want to have too many DVDs in a market where DVDs are getting tougher and tougher to sell. The DVD market is decreasing at a very rapid pace, so it's a business decision to not bring out too many DVD's. And if I'm bringing [out a] DVD, I want the DVD [to be] of an actual [current] show, to help promote the show. And since Delirium is no longer in presentation it isn't a priority of ours."

So DELIRIUM had quietly faded away... until more recently.

In August 2013, Gravitas Ventures struck a deal to become the exclusive Video-on-Demand (VOD) distributor of a variety of Cirque du Soleil programs, which include performance specials featuring the live shows as well as behind-the-scenes documentaries. One of those titles happens to be DELIRIUM as filmed at the London O2 Arena and distributed theatrically via Sony's Hot Ticket network. The performance is available to rent or to own through Amazon Prime and Apple's iTunes, and through Hulu's streaming television service.





The concept of merging The Beatles with Cirque du Soleil began life many years ago in perhaps one of the unlikeliest of places: in Cirque founder Guy Laliberté's Montreal living room. There, as he was visited by Beatle George Harrison after a Formula One Race there, the two struck up a conversation and hit upon bringing a Cirque-style show to London based on "Yellow Submarine," the Beatles' psychedelic 1968 animated film. There were no real details agreed to during that meeting, but the Beatles' company – Apple Corp. Inc. – did confirm in 2001 that the concept was under consideration, but Harrison died shortly before any agreements could be made.

Unwilling to give up on the artistic merits of a marriage between The Beatles and Cirque du Soleil, Laliberté later convinced Paul McCartney, Ringo Star and Yoko Ono to take in some of Cirque's productions as an incentive, eventually obtaining permission from them to use Beatles music in a show concept. What that concept would be was as yet unknown, but in the end everyone involved agreed "Yellow Submarine" was too 60s-themed; everyone wanted something a little more current.

LOVE .

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	June 2, 2006 (Previews) June 30, 2006 (Gala)
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Dominic Champagne
Composer:	The Beatles
Location:	The Mirage, Las Vegas

Creative Team

Guide	Video Proejction
Guy Laliberté	Francis Laporte
Director	Choreographer
Dominic Champagne	Hansel Cereza
Creation	Choreographer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Dave St-Pierre
Associate Creation	Acrobatic Rigging
Chantal Tremblay	Guy St-Amor
Theater & Set Design	Acrobatics
Jean Rabasse	Daniel Cola
Costume Designer	Makeup
Philippe Guillotel	Designer
Sound Designer	Nathalie Gagné
Jonathan Deans	Props Designer
Lighting Designer	Patricia Ruel
Yves Aucoin	Puppet Designer
	Michael Curry

/// COME TOGETHER

The first whiff of something new brewing in Las Vegas wafted over to us in late 2003, following an October 3 accident that saw Roy Horn (of the magical duo Siegfried & Roy) mauled by seven-year-old male tiger Montecore, severely injuring the magician and bringing an end to an era in Las Vegas stretching back to 1990. Over the Thanksgiving holiday that followed, rumors became abundant that Cirque du Soleil and MGM-Mirage had struck a deal to open another show in Las Vegas (both 2003's Zumanity and 2004's KÀ had been announced in the summer of 2002), housing the show in The Mirage's Siegfried & Roy Theater, and beginning performances by June 2005. The theater was to remain dedicated to the magical duo, however, but the rumor was quite substantial; it would place five Cirque du Soleil shows in one city and three new shows in the same number of years. Alan Feldman, an MGM-Mirage spokesman, also said at the time it was "fairly likely" that Cirque du Soleil would produce a show for the vacant Siegfried & Roy Theater.

A few months later (July 2004) we heard "The Beatles Meet Cirque du Soleil" show had been green-lit by Apple Corps, MGM/Mirage and Cirque, but it would take another couple months to learn even the most minute details regarding the production. Thanks to Timothy McDarragh, intrepid reporter for the Las Vegas Sun (and with the translating skills of fellow reporter Molly Ball), we had more to report for the Beatles-inspired Cirque-produced show. Among other interesting tidbits, the article revealed that Dominic Champagne would direct the show (he directed 2002's Varekai), now set to debut in early 2006, and that Cirque had authorization to remix musical passages at will. This was a huge revelation as the Beatles had never before authorized sampling of their catalog.

On October 14, 2004, Cirque du Soleil, Apple Corps Ltd. and The Mirage made it official, announcing a partnership in which they would celebrate the musical legacy and extraordinary experience of The Beatles in an unprecedented live theatre production. This joint artistic venture would mark the first time that The Beatles' company, Apple Corps, has agreed to a major theatrical partnership. From the press release:

"This show is about living The Beatles experience," said Guy Laliberté. "We want to bring the magic of Cirque du Soleil together with the spirit and passion behind the most beloved rock band of all time to create a single, simple statement of delight."

Neil Aspinall, Managing Director of Apple Corps, said, "In the past The Beatles have been approached with theatrical proposals which never promised much beyond a traditional presentation. However, in Cirque du Soleil, Apple is fortunate to have found a creative partner with the same passion for innovation and excellence."

Sir George, who will oversee the music element of the show, said today, "After spending more than 40 years of my life working with The Beatles and their wonderful music, I am thrilled to be working with them once again, on this exciting project with Cirque du Soleil. The show will be a unique and magical experience."

While the project has the approval of Sir Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, Yoko Ono and Olivia Harrison, Paul and Ringo will not appear in the production. "It is a fantastic project for us and I personally am excited to collaborate with such a great creative team," Paul McCartney said.

"How excited can I get -- The Beatles, Cirque du Soleil, an incredible venue in Las Vegas - what could be better," said Ringo. "I'm looking forward to the first show 'cause I'm going to be there and I hope you are too."

"The Beatles and Cirque; I think it's a great combination: The Beatles' agile mind and Cirque's agile body," said Yoko Ono. "George and Guy shared the same vision. They planned to utilize the extraordinary creativity of the Beatles and Cirque du Soleil to produce an uplifting moment in time. We are all very happy to see this project come to fruition," said Olivia Harrison.

Additional details of the content of the show, which aimed to revisit the excitement of the remarkable era when Beatlemania ignited the world, were in creative incubation. And they'd remain there for two more years until Cirque du Soleil was ready to announce the show to the world.

/// THE INNER LIGHT

LOVE brings the magic of Cirque du Soleil together with the spirit and passion of The Beatles to create an intimate and powerful entertainment experience. It captures the essence of love that John, Paul, George and Ringo inspired during their astonishing adventure together. Using the master tapes at Abbey Road Studios, Sir George Martin and Giles have created a unique soundscape for LOVE. "We wanted to make sure there are enough good, solid hit songs in the show, but we don't want it to be a catalog of 'best of's'," said Sir George Martin. "We also wanted to put in some interesting and not well-known Beatles music and use fragments of songs. The show is a unique and magical experience. I think [we've] achieved a real sense of drama with the music, the audience will feel as though they are actually in the theatre with the band. People are going to be knocked out by what they are hearing!" said Giles Martin.

Dominic Champagne directed and wrote the original concept for the show which captures the essence of love that John, Paul, George and Ringo inspired during their astonishing adventure together. LOVE evokes the exuberant and irreverent spirit of The Beatles. "When we embarked on this extraordinary adventure in 2002," said Gilles Ste-Croix, Show Concept Creator and Director of Creation, "we set out to create a timeless, three-dimensional evocation of The Beatles music. Drawn from the poetry of the lyrics, we developed a preliminary concept that explored the content of the songs in a series of scenes inhabited by real and imaginary people. I wanted to create a Beatles experience rather than a Beatles story, taking the audience on an emotional journey rather than a chronological one, exploring the landscapes and experiences that have marked the group's history," said the director.

The international cast of 60 channels a raw, youthful energy underscored by aerial performance, extreme sports and urban, freestyle dance. LOVE is presented in a custom-built theatre at The Mirage featuring 360 degrees seating and advanced high definition video projections with 100-foot digital, moving images. The panoramic surround sound system will envelop the audience who experience The Beatles music like never before. Yes, LOVE is a Rock 'n' Roll poem, a magical mystery tour into the heart and soul of The Beatles music through an exploration of the aesthetic, political and spiritual trends of the 1960s.

“The original concept was to bring The Beatles' songs to life, rather than chronicle their lives,” explains Alan Hills, company manager for Love. Yet the show does move in a chronological order, from the blitz of London in WWII to the psychedelic flower power era of the late 1960s by way of the Beatles' prolific musical oeuvre. Snippets of their famous appearance on the Ed Sullivan show, album covers, newspaper headlines, and photographs of the Fab Four at various stages in their career are part of the visual landscape of Love, along with scenery by Jean Rabasse, lighting by Yves Aucoin, projections by Francis Laporte, and costumes by Philippe Guillotel. The sound design is by Cirque veteran Jonathan Deans.

This 60's vibe begins the moment you step foot in front of the theater area. The lobby, box office, and gift shop areas are colorfully lit with Traxon Mood Lights, color-changing LED panels that also create a walkway into the inner lobby, with the color scheme a series of fades from red to pink to white. Color Kinetics ColorBlast fixtures add sparkle to the ceiling, where one area has colored fluorescent fixtures above glass panels to form a Union Jack, while Zumtobel fixtures outfitted with Color Kinetic's LEDs are set into the floor. The stairs leading from the concession area up to the theatre are lit with Martin Professional Alien 02 fixtures with 50W lamps. Rabasse also designed the lobby with a 1960s theme. “The lobby is basically white on your way into the theatre, but since you've been changed by the experience of the show, there is more color on the way out,” explains Hills. The day look for the box office and gift shop (where there are also architectural fixtures by Indy Lighting and Erco Lighting) is also different from the pre-show look.

Theater, Set & Stage

Acclaimed designer Jean Rabasse does not distinguish between the interior of the theatre and the set design of LOVE. In his view the two are so intertwined that it's impossible to say where the interior of the building ends and the décor begins. The core concept of the design grew from the idea of surrounding the Beatles in a “bubble.”

The first order of business at The Mirage was redesigning the Siegfried and Roy venue for Cirque's new show. Rabasse not only completely gutted the classical 1,500-seat proscenium layout, but also extended it by 50 feet in all directions (adding 500 seats in the process), re-focusing everything toward the center of the room in an in-the-round layout. The vital objective: situate the audience in the intimacy of the experience by putting them as close to the performers as possible. “I set myself the goal of giving the audience the opportunity to connect with the performance at a childlike emotional level through simple stage techniques and transcendent music,” says Rabasse.

In a sense, he was also recreating the atmosphere and sensations of the big top—within a permanent structure. “The space is like a modified tent, which gives it an amazing intimate feeling,” explains Michael Anderson, operations production manager for LOVE. Construction began in August 2005 and the load-in was the following November. The full crew was on board as of December 6, and by June 2006, the show was up and running. “That is a fast turnaround for Cirque in a new facility,” adds Anderson. Marnell Carrao Associates of Las Vegas served as the general contractors.

Construction required digging down an extra 20-feet for the automation systems required for the show. Basically what was left in the space is the supporting wall of the proscenium arch, which cuts the tent-like interior into sections and makes for some rather unusual seating configurations. The south side of the theatre is what was the Siegfried and Roy stage and backstage area: its grid and support steel are also still in place. The center of the space, where the old proscenium opening was, is the central path across the new stage area, now referred to as “Abbey Road.”

While the set elements are certainly attractive to look at, few things on stage are there for purely decorative purposes. Everything has a function. Six entrances/exits lead to and from the stage, with four control booths — lighting, projection, stage management, and automation — one at each corner of the theatre, with each booth tied into time code: projection relies on time code to sync the projectors to the music; lighting has certain cues triggered by time code. Robert Juliat followspots are located in “garages” in the corners of the room, while the sound console is in the seating section along the south wall. A shop for electrics, rigging, automation, and projection is located where Siegfried and Roy's famed lions and tigers once lounged. “From one animal to another,” joked Anderson, referring to 98-person crew that keeps Love up and running. “There is a running crew of 70 people, and another 28 for maintenance, broken down into different departments,” Anderson adds, listing sound, props, electrics, projections, rigging, wardrobe, automation, and carpentry. “Every space in the theatre is used by many departments.” Anderson's right hand man was David Dovell, technical director.

In keeping with the intimate feeling of a circus big top, the farthest seats in the LOVE theatre, those in the last row of the balcony, are just 98 feet from the stage, and a mere 28 feet from the center of the stage to the first row. Auerbach Pollock Friedlander, performing arts/media facilities planning and design consultants, created the drawings and designed many of the theatrical systems, working hand-in-hand with Cirque du Soleil on the new arena seating, 25,000 square feet of overhead technical support, sound and communications systems, and a fully automated stage deck.

The look of the open stage is deceptively simple: with 141 automation axes, it is one of the most sophisticated scenic automation installations in any theatre to date. The stage is made up of five main lifts constructed by Show Canada. In addition, there are two “sloats”-sliding lid over automated trap-two trampoline lifts, and four triangle dual axis traps, all built by Conception D. Bédard in Montreal. “The four hinged trap decks combined with the stage lifts allow the stage area to be transformed into a 1,600 square foot black hole, giving the visually stunning appearance of a void which only moments before was filled with scenic elements,” explains Len Auerbach, principal of Auerbach Pollock Friedlander, who also worked on the extensive rigging and automation systems required for a Cirque du Soleil show of this magnitude.

The rigging system includes four overhead tracks as well as nine motorized overhead trolleys that are integrated with wireless controls and travel at a maximum speed of six feet per second for transporting scenery and performers. Designed and manufactured by Stage Technologies Inc based in the UK and Las Vegas, "These units are the key to the overhead acrobatics using the three dimensional space in the theatre," explains Auerbach. "The trolleys are fitted with vertical hoists on a rotational axis. A typical trolley unit consists of four vertical hoists mounted on a rotating chassis, allowing performers or scenery to be moved vertically or horizontally while rotating simultaneously." There are a total of 22 vertical hoists and eight rotating chassis and 12 fixed winch assemblies are positioned on the grid surface to assist with the movement of scenic elements in and out of the space. "Stage Technologies has been there for us since day one and continues to be" says Mike Anderson. Kevin Taylor, CEO of Stage Technologies Inc, worked very closely with the team in the initial months of rehearsals and continues to offer 24-hour support with the assistance of Stage Technologies specialized engineers based in the US and UK. "We are pushing yet another envelope of technology on this show and without the support of Stage Tech there is no way we could have pulled this show together," says Anderson.

The greatest challenge for Jean Rabasse was to allow for seamless transitions between scenes with complex decors. For example, the show opens in the sky and then the scene dissolves to the rooftops of London for the Beatles' last concert atop their building in Savile Row, and from there it travels to the gritty ruins of wartime Liverpool. It was quite a challenge.

Sound & Light Design

Jonathan Deans, Sound Designer, says the fact that LOVE is based on the music of the Beatles posed a huge challenge above and beyond the regular demands of designing the sound for any other Cirque du Soleil show. *"With the Beatles' music, the audience arrives forearmed with a deep knowledge of the music and the sound has to meet and exceed their expectations.* The difference is that in other shows the music is written specifically for the show, and it can be developed in any way we like, to suit us," he says. "The technology isn't there to impress, but to make sure the experience is moving. It doesn't matter that there are 12,000 speakers, what's important is that each seat is fitted with six speakers in order to hear the Beatles' music like it's never been heard before." To achieve that objective, Deans has assembled and deployed an audiophile's dream wish list of equipment. There are eight sound system zones in the theatre, each with dedicated Meyer M1D Stereo Line Arrays capable of functioning independently of one another. Each zone provides the listener with fully immersive 360-degree surround sound that can be precisely placed one foot in front of the listener or up to 80 feet away in most directions and moved in any direction.

"The challenge with lighting LOVE was to focus the spectators' attention on one highlight or one artist specifically on this in-the-round stage," admitted Yves Aucoin, Lighting Designer. "The biggest challenge is that the songs are so well known," he says. "People have 40 years of images in their heads already."

Yves aimed to recreate the mood of the 1960s, with the lighting design he created for LOVE. “There were big changes in trends during that time,” he notes. The color palette is bright and cheerful, turning psychedelic as the 60s progress. He wished to preserve the warmth, color and tones of that decade, from rock’n’roll to psychedelic. Yves was very much inspired by album covers, photographic news reports from the 1960s as well as the separation of photos in different colors and the stretching of images, which are trends that the Beatles themselves initiated with some of their album covers. Therefore, the lighting rig is all exposed, based on the concept of being in a studio, with the fixtures hung against a black ceiling. At one point, a portion of the audience closest to the stage is covered with a large white cloth, and Aucoin paints it with psychedelic patterns that are best seen from the higher seats in the balcony.

Yves created a very distinct world for each of the songs of LOVE. His biggest challenge was to work with a 360-degree stage, on which the front light shining on the action is actually also the back light for half of the spectators. The lighting style that characterizes Yves can be identified through his use of new technologies such as automated lights. His preferred color palette is a warm one, although the feeling on stage usually guides his choice of colors. “I am influenced by the music and the work of the Artists. I am usually the last Creator to make final adjustments to my work during the creation of a production.” says Yves.

Did You Know?

The theatrical lighting system represents state-of-the-art technology with 916 ETC Sensor+ dimmers, an ETC ETCNet2 network with a fiber-optic backbone and routers for a series of VLANs, each with its own color-coded cable system. The system also includes 60 portable ETCNet2 network nodes, 10 rack-mounted ETCNet2 nodes, and 24 racks of ETC SmartSwitch relays. The entire show is run on a grandMA console (with a back-up) with a grandMA Light to run the ETC SmartSwitch relays.

One of the most spectacular scenes visually, is “Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds,” when the entire theatre seems to sparkle under a canopy of light. “The LEDs used in ‘Lucy’ are Color Kinetics iColor Flex. We have approximately 4,000 individual LEDs that are individually addressed,” explains John Bartley, head of lighting for LOVE. “The interesting thing is how we integrated them. The riggers came up with an ingenious elaborate fly system. Throughout the grid the strings all pulled back to a head block and arbor. We had custom tubes made to guide the light strings through the grid. We then integrated the network through our existing fiber backbone to get the control back to the Light System Manager in the booth. We created another network in the theatre. We used MOXA Ethernet-to-Fiber converters. Very cool product.”

Projection

Lighting is used in other ways too, for projection as an example. The theatre has ten 12,000-lumen projectors for each of the two huge 2,000-square-foot panoramic screens, plus four 832-square-foot semi-transparent screens that are moved by eight motors and served by four 16,000-lumen projectors. Francis Laporte’s projections for LOVE blur, bend, and extend the definitions of theatre design. They evoke time, place and mood through a picture-perfect succession of moving images in a state of constant flux. Laporte’s work seamlessly integrates digital video production and projection technology with the interior structure of the theatre, the show’s lighting design and the more traditional three-dimensional set elements featured in the production.

Francis Laporte's projections for LOVE blur, bend, and extend the definitions of theatre design. They evoke time, place and mood through a picture-perfect succession of moving images in a state of constant flux. "LOVE evokes the world of the Beatles, and therefore connects with the imagination of the audience. So I tried to find ways to make the connection timeless, by recalling time-honored techniques such as watercolor, which I used like a painter." Laporte's work seamlessly integrates digital video production and projection technology with the interior structure of the theatre, the show's lighting design and the more traditional three-dimensional set elements featured in the production.

Above all, however, the projections must work in perfect synch with the music and the actions of the artists as they explore the journey of the characters inside the Beatles' songs and immerse the audience in the emotion of each scene. That is why Laporte deliberately avoided a high-tech look. Instead, he opted for a fluid *mélange* of shadows and silhouettes, archive footage, natural elements and pigmentation, photographic collage design, time-honored techniques such as watercolor and composite video images. To reflect the different eras in the story of the Beatles, the projections transform from sepia tones to kaleidoscopic design and from black and white images to a psychedelic parade of color. To achieve all this, Francis Laporte combined the latest technologies with a more established approach, using advanced high-definition digital technology to reinterpret the graphic techniques of the 60s.

Many of the images are what Laporte refers to as "hand-crafted; more two-dimensional than 3D." He uses water and oil, collages, and colors that relate to the 60s, what he calls "Yellow Submarine colors. Yet I wanted everything to be as timeless as possible and not at all 2006," he says. A clever sequence involves multiple pairs of yellow rubber rain boots, echoing a Michael Curry-created prop on stage where a dancer is in an armature with multiple pairs of the rubber boots attached as puppets. "The sequences were shot in Montreal, using high-definition video," explains Laporte. "The psychedelic world on stage is a little surreal. The boots as the stars of the video give another focus to what is onstage." Curry also created three full-scale VW Beetles used in the show, and two large-scale paper puppets for the "While My Guitar Gently Weeps" sequence.

Laporte discovered that the Hippotizer gave him an advantage in staging the show. "The real time options such as scaling and color correction allow you to be as fast as the lighting designer in building a scene," he says. "There is no delay in rendering. I kept the door open at all time to making changes." His rendering farm was originally in Montreal, then moved to Las Vegas. "The files are huge and we used multiple computers," he adds. To create birds that fly in a natural way for "Yesterday," Laporte used Green Hippo's flocking program that allows the CGI birds to follow a target by using a joystick. This was developed in conjunction with Sean Westgate and the Green Hippo programming team. While Laporte worked on the ideas for various images, his media guru, Luc Lavergne, worked out the technical solutions.

"Sometimes the simplest images are my favorite," says Laporte, pointing out that his images for "Strawberry Fields" were made by pouring white cream into a fish tank and shooting the movement in the water at high speed (400 frames per second). He then colored the results digitally. "High tech doesn't always give you the smoothness of the cream in the water," he notes.

To create images of bubbles, Laporte put oil in water and blew with a straw. "It's hard to shoot bubbles," he explains. "They act as a mirror and you can see your reflection. With the oil there is no reflection." Not to mention that the mixing of oil and water is a perfect flashback to the psychedelic era of the 60s. "What I created is high-def technology in a hand-crafted way," he adds. "Computer bubbles look like computer bubbles. I wanted it to look more natural, more organic, with slow movement."

Custom software directs the flow of crystal-clear panoramic moving images projected onto 100-ft-wide screens. A key element of the programming is the time-coded system that ensures the projections' programmed cues are synched up flawlessly with the recorded music used in the show. The system can respond in real time should that become necessary at any point during a show. The real-time authoring system also gave the show's creators the ability to mix and change multiple layers of images on the fly during rehearsals to create the exact mood and precise effect they were seeking for each act.

Francis Laporte points out that the projection system for LOVE is not only more elaborate than anything used in a previous Cirque du Soleil show, it goes beyond anything ever attempted in any permanent theatrical production in terms of its size, power, complexity and capabilities. "At Cirque du Soleil, we have the great good fortune of working in a context where everything isn't seen in terms of constraints," he notes. "Instead, there's a shared determination to see how far we can push the limits."

While this is the most technologically advanced theatre ever built, most of the technology is not on display and therefore does not come between the audience and their enjoyment of the show. In addition to the visible elements there is a highly sophisticated infrastructure at work behind the scenes and above the auditorium. There are nine lifts and eight automated tracks and trolleys that can simultaneously move 24 props, set elements or performers, and they provide the production with 140 different ways to put a performer into the air.

By integrating the lighting, projections, acrobatic equipment and sound design into this environment, Rabasse has created the ideal immersive space in which to present the music of Beatles and the performances of the Cirque du Soleil artists. And for Rabasse, the central and constant role of his design is the music, and the way it sounds. "You can create true theatrical magic using simple techniques, and when it's integrated with the sound system that Jonathan Deans has created for LOVE the result is an experience that is completely immersive and totally involving," he says.



/// HERE COMES THE SUN

Inspired by the poetry of the lyrics, the creative team designed a series of scenes inhabited by colorful characters in extravagant costumes. Costume designer Philippe Guillotel, who has worked on projects ranging from French choreographer Philippe Decoufflé to the Albertville Winter Olympic Games, admits that “the 60s are not really my thing,” but he was intrigued when Gilles Ste.-Croix, Cirque du Soleil's director of creation, asked him to design costumes for a show based on The Beatles. “I knew that they accepted a lot of creativity, and decided the best approach was to pull the characters out of the songs and bring them to life.”

Like the other designers for LOVE, Guillotel was aware that millions of people worldwide, including the potential audience members, had imagined these characters as they listened to the songs. “You can't make mistakes,” he admits. So to immerse himself in Beatles lore, he went to their hometown of Liverpool, England, to do research. “I visited the grave of Eleanor Rigby in the cemetery of the church where they say two of the Beatles, John and Paul, first met,” he says. “I also read a lot about The Beatles' era, and tried to decipher the songs via translations into French.” In doing so, Guillotel discovered a universe of people that were easy to pull from the lyrics. “There is even a statue of Eleanor Rigby, thanks to The Beatles. These people have been glorified,” he says. In creating the imaginary universe of The Beatles in the period of 1961 to 1969, Guillotel looked at influences such as London's colorful Carnaby Street flower children clothes and the later East Indian styles brought from the ashrams. “From post-WWII through to the hippies, there were enormous social changes, such as sexual liberty, and the summer of 1969 and Woodstock. I was young and saw those images as well.” Therefore, Guillotel set himself the tough challenge of evoking a sense of time and place to fit the various eras of the Beatles' career as a group. To achieve that goal he has used Victorian and traditional designs juxtaposed with fanciful, youthful, colorful fashions to reflect the inventiveness of the Beatles' visionary and revolutionary creative energy in all its moods. “I wanted to pay tribute to the creativity of the Beatles with my designs and to accomplish that I've tried to be as creative as they were.”

A team of experts has been working around the clock to craft Guillotel's 331 multi-layered costumes, using highly textural fabrics and incorporating everyday materials such as foam, plastic, industrial objects, inflatable inserts and lights. His designs also called for the creation of custom-designed textiles, including netting that fluidly takes on different shapes as the artists move on stage. “I don't really have a signature style,” says Philippe Guillotel. “But I don't like to put in costume elements that are merely decorative. I want things to work, to be functional. If I include a button, it's not there for show. It's there because it has a job to do. And although they have their uses, I don't really like the so-called ‘noble’ fabrics as much as more modest, everyday materials.”

Many of the LOVE costumes are exceptionally large and highly crafted, almost like outsized puppets or mascots. Some, as in the Mr. Kite scene, are imbued with fantasy and whimsy, featuring concepts such as an oversized accordion or a fog effect concealed within the costume (which exemplifies the significant crossover between props and costumes on this show). For the Sgt. Pepper Parade Guillotel took a fresh approach to the Savile Row tailoring tradition by turning suits inside out to expose their colorful linings and create a punchy, expressive visual statement.

The key characters in the show are directly inspired by individuals mentioned by name in the Beatles' songs, and Guillotel has rendered their costumes in a stylized form that recalls a comic-book graphic approach to the clothing worn in wartime Liverpool. One of the most amusing costumes is the Queen of England, whose dress is on an armature that is exposed in the back and she herself is in a picture frame, as if in a painting. "The costume is flat on the front as if it were two-dimensional," says Guillotel. "But it gets more supple as the eras go by and she can wrap it around herself."

A fat character referred to as "Mr. Piggy," represents the bourgeoisie, the excess of the establishment. "There are motors and fans inside to keep the costume inflated," notes Guillotel. "This works better than foam and gives the actor more physical liberty in the costume." The character Julia (who represents motherhood) appears in a ball gown, and in one of the most spectacular costumes in the show, as a jellyfish "flying" through the Octopus's Garden in the sea. There is also a chorus of Groupies and Lovers populating LOVE, and their costumes are informed by the 1960s and 1970s. But Guillotel is quick to point out these designs are interpretations, not reproductions, of actual fashions of the time. "That would have been the easy way to go," he points out. "But it would have been far less well suited to the intentions of the show."

The first character that Guillotel designed for LOVE was the "man from the motor trade" (translates to a car salesman, from "She's Leaving Home"), although here he has a ladder as if he were a fireman or in the building trades. With his ladder, he picks up Lucy from her sky of diamonds. "He loves her," says Guillotel, who dressed Lucy as if an acrobat from the 19th century in a crinoline and bustier. "He remains earthbound as she flies off. His costume looks massive but is actually very light." Guillotel also designed the English Bobby costumes for the ushers, treating them as if they were characters in the show, along with Sgt. Pepper and all the others. "The Bobbies' hats are almost like The Beatles famous haircuts," notes the designer, noting that these hats were made of real hair, nothing synthetic for Sir Paul (McCartney). In one scene, everyone on stage is wearing a Beatles mask, to represent their worldwide fame, and the universal recognition that would swell to Beatlemania.

Many of these characters use or interact with the close to 600 stage and acrobatic props in the show, including luminescent umbrellas and two 32-foot-long remotely manipulated trains adorned with flickering candles. The show also features a multitude of musical instruments presented in unique ways. There are close to 600 stage and acrobatic props in LOVE, including luminescent umbrellas and two 32-ft-long remotely manipulated trains adorned with flickering candles. The show also features a multitude of musical instruments presented in unique ways. From unusual drum kits and destroyed cellos, Beatles guitars and triangles to fantasy instruments of pure whimsy. There's even a piano from which masses of bubbles erupt.

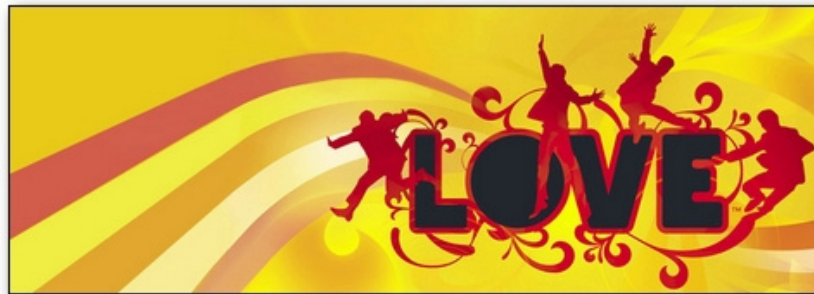
Designer Patricia Ruel says a prop is more than a mere object or costume element, "A prop can play a decisive part in defining a character and evoking a time or a place. It can also help establish mood and atmosphere." The props in LOVE are a blend of antiques, junkyard discoveries, off-the-shelf hardware and custom-designed handcrafted pieces. One item can appear in many guises throughout the show.

A perfect example is her use of umbrellas. An umbrella can be used to symbolize the broken wings of Blackbirds and in an instant it is transformed into fish floating through the Octopus's Garden only to reappear as psychedelic images in the universe of Mr. Kite. Later in the show, umbrellas reveal swirls of red petals in Hey Jude. "A great deal of work has gone into the creation of the characters," Ruel notes, "Each of them owns objects that help in that process." Character development is reflected in the evolution of certain props such as Eleanor Rigby's train of belongings. Drawn from the lyrics of the song, Eleanor Rigby's story is carried with her on a train lit by candles; each carriage represents a specific era in her past. Charred and fragile from the war, the train grows throughout the show as she collects memories.

Sgt. Pepper's story is reflected in his collection of eclectic musical instruments. After his marching band is destroyed in the war, he collects the debris of everyday items. Teapots and pipes, pots and pans, whatever he manages to recover in the wreckage of war, is assembled to become his instruments. These 'restored' instruments are actually constructed of lightweight PVC and vacuform and feature detailed patina work which gives them their antique, destroyed appearance. In addition to Ruel's creations, renowned puppet designer Michael Curry has assisted in the development of three Volkswagen beetles: the smoking car, the rolling car and the crash car. The crash car is constructed out of puppet components, which allows the artists to break the car apart in choreographed movements. Curry also developed a quirky device made from yellow rubber boots, and two large-scale paper-puppets for the lyrical While My Guitar Gently Weeps sequence.

"LOVE is on many levels closer to theatre than to circus and the prop poetically reveals and supports the development of the character as it evolves throughout the show and the history of the Beatles," Patricia said.

/// ALL TOGETHER NOW



The show may be a technological marvel, but it all comes down to the music. As Music Directors for LOVE, Sir George Martin and his son Giles Martin were at the epicenter of a revolution in the musical legacy of *The Beatles*. The result is an unprecedented approach to the music for a stage production. "After spending more than 40 years of my life working with *The Beatles* and their wonderful music, I am thrilled to be working with it once again, on this exciting project with *Cirque du Soleil*," said Sir George Martin, "The show will be a unique and magical experience." Using the techniques that Sir George Martin pioneered in the sixties, linked to the best technology today, each listener will be immersed in the world of *The Beatles*."

One of the challenges of the job was getting the balance of the songs right," said Sir George Martin. "We wanted to make sure there are enough good, solid hit songs in the show, but we don't want it to be a catalog of 'best of's'. We also wanted to put in some interesting and not well-known Beatles music and use fragments of songs."

The Martins spent two years constructing the music for LOVE by combining every facet of *The Beatles* recordings. The panoramic sound experience in the custom built theatre will be the closest anyone will get to hearing the band play live again and the closest anyone can get to actually being in the studios with them. "Our mission was to try and achieve the same intimacy we get when listening to the master tapes at the studio," says Giles Martin. "The songs sound so alive. The last thing we wanted to create was a retrospective or a tribute show. *The Beatles*, above all else, were a great rock band. A lot of people listen to *The Beatles* in a conventional way (radio, MP3 player or car, for example) but never in such a space."

Here is what they came up with...

BECAUSE

Creating a portrait reminiscent of the ports of Liverpool, sailors climb dramatically on ropes toward the Heavens. The a cappella voices of John, Paul and George pave their ascent. Each pull of the rope elevates the intensity of anticipation, foreshadowing The Beatles revival. Anchored at the other end of their lifelines is a scene from Savile Row. In an instant the sailors (who represent both the strength of a nation and the gateway through which The Beatles were exposed to the musical influences that would ultimately shape their lives) descend from their summits and raise the set, taking us from the place where it all began to The Beatles' final performance in 1969 atop the roofs of London.

GET BACK

The bombastic pulse of the Abbey Road drum solo fast forwards the scene from Liverpool to The Beatles' farewell concert. An explosion of energy, light and color burst onto the stage powered by The Beatles' rock anthem, "Get Back." Nostalgia of the 1960s is juxtaposed with newfangled dance styles -- "House" and "Jacking" -- and an unusual bungee tête-a-tête, as the celebration barrels toward an unsuspecting conclusion.

GLASS ONION

Marked by the ending strings from "Glass Onion," the festivities are brought to a startling finish and we flash back still further to the war years of The Beatles youth. The vibrancy and levity become shrouded by the grim realities of WWII that shaped the four boys' revolutionary attitudes and musical tastes. Sgt Pepper's band is symbolically destroyed amid the chaos and devastation, and the grim landscape soon becomes a setting for change and renewal. Sgt. Pepper is the band leader of the old guard who must overcome the loss of his instruments. A symbol of the pre-war way of life, he reinvents himself with a new band of the times. Initially traditional and meticulous, Sgt. Pepper learns to adapt his instruments, his music and himself to the new times.

ELEANOR RIGBY

Depicting the resurrection and resilience of a post-war nation, Eleanor Rigby (a resilient English woman challenged by loneliness, age, and war) pulls the weight of her past through the rubble. Interpretation of key characters from The Beatles musical and historical narratives emerge including Father McKenzie (An old preacher indignant about change, he is frustrated that his world is crumbling and his sermons are not heard, deafened in large part by the new age of Rock 'n' Roll), The Queen (English heritage and royalty are imbued in Her Majesty, who symbolizes the pride of a nation and the affection the citizens have for their Motherland), Mr. Piggy (an aristocratic traditionalists dead set against the new culture being brought on by Rock 'n' Roll. He'll eventually partake in the tea ritual, getting more and more sucked into the youthful revolution of love and freedom), the Children of Liverpool (the children growing up in the surreal paradise of war-torn England in the 1940s, much the same way that The Beatles did themselves. The innocence of their youth is shrouded in the rubble of conflict and devastation. The grim reality of their youth serves as a catalyst for them to challenge convention and inspires their unorthodox musical tastes), and The Fool (silly, yet profound, the Fool is the duality that lives in all of us. He is fun, loveable and enigmatic, and marches to his own off-beat. He is restless, yet soulful; mischievous, yet always good-hearted. He exudes happiness even in the darkest hours, lightening everyone's spirits and showing them beauty in an absurd world.) Interwoven in this homage to The Beatles tragic heroine are hints of "Julia," "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "A Day in the Life."

I AM THE WALRUS

The fresh, enchanting presence of The Walrus glides onto the stage in a hypnotic hybrid of "Popping," "Waving" and "Boogaloo" dance. A creature of glamour and unbridled youth, the Walrus is the spark of change from the old guard and the new era of music and dance. He spreads his contagious energy and breathes new life into the stodgy world of the Old School English Establishment.

I WANT TO HOLD YOUR HAND / DRIVE MY CAR

An upbeat "I Want to Hold Your Hand" followed by a medley of "Drive My Car", "What You're Doing" and "The Word" signal the euphoric onslaught of Beatlemania. Crazy fans and screaming groupies bombard the stage in flurry of acrobatic activity. Teeter boards and trampoline beds launch the ensemble to new heights just as these early hits launched The Beatles to astronomical fame. The acrobats in Rock 'n' Roll Run, the Teddy Boys represent the new wave of uninhibited youth in the 1950s and 1960s. They are Elvis and Marlon Brando "wannabees." They are sexy and sassy and they flaunt it for the girls with zeal. They are products of a new philosophy in music and culture. The age of Rock 'n' Roll infected no youths more than the Groupies - girls unleashed into a delirious and frantic obsession to chase boys, demonstrate lust and dance their bobby socks off.

ABBEY ROAD

A collage of sound bytes create a fictionalized conversation between John, Paul, George and Ringo. Using The Beatles master tapes, Québécois comedian François Pélusse pieced together this intimate exchange, which is illustrated by the projection of shadow figures.

GNIK NUS / SOMETHING

Introduced by "Sun King" played backwards, this sensual choreography shows how fleeting and fragile love can be. Set to the classic tune "Something," a young male solo dancer is tantalized by four women who fly in and out of his reach.

BEING FOR THE BENEFIT OF MR. KITE

The topsy-turvy world of fame gone awry comes to life. Mr. Kite's macabre circus is populated by a dizzying frenzy of nightmarish creatures and faceless characters. Indicative of the media frenzy and controversy that surrounded The Beatles during their meteoric rise to fame, the Russian Swing artist whirls and twirls high over the crowd performing 360-degree feats of aerial acrobatics. Excerpts from "Cry Baby Cry," sound effects from "Good Morning Good Morning," laughter from "Piggies," noises from "I Want You (She's So Heavy)" "Helter Skelter" and audio snippets of The Beatles joking around during recording sessions can be heard throughout this delirious mix.

HELP!

Four extreme sports athletes take to the stage in this fast-paced, nail-biting number. The skaters take blading to the extreme, leaping 11-foot tall ramps -- and each other -- with a continuous barrage of flips, twists and jumps.

BLACKBIRD

In this comedic interpretation of The Beatles poetic lullaby "Black Bird," Dr. Robert (a doctor of mysterious character, and not necessarily of medicine) vainly attempts to help four mangled, disenchanted black birds find their wings and take flight again. A gracious host, Dr. Robert gladly supplies "tea" to unsuspecting drinkers and encourages them to take leaps of faith into new and sometimes intoxicating ventures.

YESTERDAY

Reminiscent melancholy rooted in the love that once was and the longing of what could be.

JAM SESSION

A lively repartee between the four band members. Created from the authentic recordings at Abbey Road Studios, the sound bytes evoke the presence of The Beatles within an intimate studio setting.

STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER

Assembled around a mysterious piano, Dr. Robert introduces the Nowhere Men to an unusual tea drinking ritual. This euphemistic stimulant launches them and the show itself on a psychedelic trip. The surreal "Strawberry Fields" is underscored in the closing stages by "Penny Lane," "In My Life," "Piggies" and "Hello Goodbye." The four Nowhere Men, fans of The Beatles, are the zeitgeist of LOVE, evoking the enduring camaraderie, impassioned spirit and wide-eyed aspiration of both the band and their generation.

PARADE

Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band comes back to life in its full regalia in a moment of hallucinogenic hilarity. Continuing the experimental journey, the parade emerges reborn with instruments imbued with fantasy and whimsy.

WITHIN YOU, WITHOUT YOU

Turn off your mind, relax and float down stream ... Here the children of Liverpool are taken on a wild ride atop a billowing bed sheet, a visual psychedelic stream, which envelops the audience, launching them on a magical journey. "Within You Without You" can be heard over the drums from "Tomorrow Never Knows."

LUCY IN THE SKY WITH DIAMONDS

The trip continues with the glittering daughter of the heavens, Lucy, soaring through the air in this aerial contortion number. Connecting with the earthy Fireman who keeps her aloft, Lucy lets her hair down and rejoices in this moment of exhaltation. Lucy is the glamorous, albeit rebellious, daughter of wealth and propriety. She seeks to find what money cannot buy, soaring to new heights only after she meets the brutish Fireman. The ultimate conduit between reaching for the stars and keeping her feet planted firmly on the ground, the Fireman is Lucy's Romeo. He is an "everyman" with modest goals and means, who dedicates his strong body and enormous heart to the transport of this mismatch made in Heaven.

OCTOPUS'S GARDEN

The surreal voyage takes a plunge into the Octopus's Garden, where marine creatures perform a slow-motion aquatic ballet.

LADY MADONNA

The dance ensemble performs high-energy "Gumboot" choreography. Lady Madonna embodies the strength and beauty of motherhood. She is a brave and generous woman. In a celebration the strength, beauty and courage of motherhood, Lady Madonna dances with her lover, Sugar Plum Fairy (the ever-charming bluesman), surrounded by children at her feet. Sugar Plum Fairy personifies the link between old-world Blues and new-wave Pop, bridging the oceans between America and the UK.

HERE COMES THE SUN

This tranquil moment of enlightenment is the climax of the psychedelic trip, bridging Western values and Eastern culture. Four female artists perform aerial yoga in a garden of contemplative light, evoking the spiritual journey taken by The Beatles and their new-found state of consciousness.

COME TOGETHER

Led by a Krishna-like figure, this sensual dance is an unbridled release of sexual energy, wrapped in a political statement of the times. It's an exhibition of free love in rebellion of the accepted conventions of order. Krishna opens the minds of others to new sounds, new cultures and new tastes. He is the link between East and West as he rejoices in the body beautiful and the spirit serene.

REVOLUTION / BACK IN THE USSR

In this energetic trampoline performance, long-haired free-spirits playfully attempt to tame and jostle the authorities with their daring, fast-paced acrobatics.

WHILE MY GUITAR GENTLY WEEPS

A solo female dancer ponders the sad loneliness of unrequited love. She contemplates her past in a soulful dance under a rain of falling love letters.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Julia is the mother of an orphan; an ephemeral presence in the life of a child of Liverpool. Julia evokes John Lennon's mother, whose tragic end was a defining and compelling force to his creative identity. This somber yet whimsical tale features a dramatic aerial straps act and a poetic recounting of personal loss and eternal love.

HEY JUDE

Red poppy petals swirl as a symbol of remembrance. The consoling lyrics and soothing melody are a chant of reconciliation.

SGT. PEPPER (REPRISE)

In this explosion of joy, performers soar on latex tubes and Korean ropes as the entire cast revels in Beatlemania euphoria with the audience.

ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

A montage of The Beatles projected on red Kabuki curtains that fills the audience with wonderful nostalgia and a message of LOVE.

/// LOVE IS ALL YOU NEED

It's been a long and winding road from initial spark to the eventual staging of The Beatles LOVE, but through dedication and working hard eight days a week, Cirque du Soleil has given us a smashing spectacle that's just getting better all the time. Since The Beatles LOVE by Cirque du Soleil had its premiere in 2006 the show has celebrated a number of highlights, such as:

- On September 22, 2006, almost 200 Cirque du Soleil "Passionates" descended upon the theater for the 7:30pm performance, giving their brand of LOVE to the performers. (CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas!)
- On July 11, 2008, LOVE celebrated its 1,000th performance, announcing 1,947,238 visitors had seen the show since it premiered.
- On August 20, 2010, LOVE celebrated its 2,000th performance.
- On September 21, 2012, LOVE celebrated its 3000th performance.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



KOOZA

Between strength and fragility, laughter and smiles, turmoil and harmony...



Following the successful launch of Corteo in 2005, Cirque expressed a wish to get back to its roots, find simplicity in its shows (as Corteo has the largest number of automation cues for a touring show up to that time) and celebrate the essence of its original street-fair beginnings by getting back to basics. The development got underway even before Corteo left Canada with the appointment of Serge Roy as Cirque 2007's Director of Creation (August 26, 2005) and the company would look to both thrills and clowning for inspiration. Did that mean John Gilkey (Quidam, Varekai) or Rene Bazinet (Saltimbanco, Alegria Le Film) would be the show's Director?

Although fandom debated the merits of both as a director of such a creative endeavor, neither was tapped for the job. The job ultimately fell instead to David Shiner, known as a clown (he performed in Nouvelle Expérience) and a director in his own right. Initially we were only able to discern (from either Quebec City newspaper "Le Soleil" – who ran a story in November 2005) that the costume designer would be Marie-Chantale Vaillancourt (from Corteo). And through casting calls via Cirque du Soleil's casting website, we learned the kinds of disciplines they were looking to integrate into Cirque 2007. By May 2006 we'd discovered Cirque was looking for Wheel of Death and Teeterboard artists, not to mention artists who could perform on the Trapeze, the high wire and who could juggle.

Back to basics indeed.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	April 19, 2007
Type:	Touring / Bigtop
Director:	David Shiner
Composer:	Jean-François Côté
Finale:	Currently Touring

Creative Team

Guide	Lighting Design
Guy Laliberté	Martin Labrecque
Director	Sound Co-Designer
David Shiner	Jonathan Deans
Director of Creation	Sound Co-Designer
Serge Roy	Leon Rothenberg
Costume Designer	Makeup Designer
Marie Vaillancourt	Florence Cornet
Composer	Acrobatic Equipment
Jean-François Côté	Danny Zen
Set Designer	Props Designer
Stéphane Roy	Rogé Francoeur
Choreographer	Props Designer
Clarence Ford	André Simard

/// BACK TO BASICS

By June 2006, steady progress had been made behind-the-scenes regarding the show: Some 30 artists had been signed out of the 53 needed. A full-day of brainstorming with the show's creators occurred, which made it possible to get a review of the show in its entirety, in order to gain a better understanding of director David Shiner's vision. A 1:6 scale mock-up of the big top was mounted for the purposes of developing the scenography for the show, preliminary concepts for the costumes were underway (and approved by Guy Laliberte), with fabric selection underway.

Other creation milestones also followed: In September 2006 a number of proposals under consideration for the show's name had been whittled down to three, with Diesel, the marketing agency working on the project, starting to submit ideas for visuals. On October 12, 2006, the Void, an important set piece, was deployed for the first time in the Studio, followed by the Bataclan, the show's set center-piece, on November 6, 2006. On November 3, 2006, advanced tickets went on sale for the as-yet unnamed show, noting performances would take place in Montreal from April 26th to May 27th and in Quebec City from July 5th to July 15th (though "previews" were later scheduled to begin by April 19th) and the stage was set: in just six months Cirque du Soleil would launch its latest touring production.

In the meantime, filming of a documentary on the making of Cirque 2007 got under way ("A Thrilling Ride Through Koozå"). Shooting began with the team's visit to Scène Éthique on Friday, October 13th and with permission from the Director of Creation, the film crew would be present during key moments of Cirque 2007's creation-production adventure. Through them we'd learn about the show's theme, set and stage, costumes and, of course, characters:

Theme

Koozå, whose name is inspired by the Sanskrit word "koza," meaning "box," "chest" or "treasure," tells the story of a melancholy loner (The Innocent) in search of his place in the world taken on a journey through strength, fragility, laughter, turmoil and harmony. "Koozå is also about human connection and the world of duality, good and bad," says the show's writer and director David Shiner. "The tone is fun and funny, light and open. The show doesn't take itself too seriously, but it's very much about ideas, too. As it evolves we are exploring concepts such as fear, identity, recognition and power."

Koozå also represents a return to the origins of Cirque du Soleil and combines two such circus traditions - acrobatic performance and the art of clowning. The show highlights the physical demands of human performance in all its splendor and fragility, presented in a colorful mélange that emphasizes bold slapstick humor. Between strength and fragility, laughter and smiles, turmoil and harmony, Koozå explores themes of fear, identity, recognition and power.

The show is set in an electrifying and exotic visual world full of surprises, thrills, chills, audacity and total involvement.

Set & Props

"I wanted to capture the essence of circus itself by creating a scenographic environment that offers true proximity to the audience and where the danger is palpable." - Stéphane Roy, Set Designer.

KOOZÅ's set evokes a public square that metamorphoses into a circus ring. The circular stage provides the audience with excellent sight lines through 260 degrees. There has been no attempt to conceal or disguise the acrobatic equipment. The structure of the big top is always in full view. Everything is done out in the open with simplicity and transparency in order to concentrate the audience's attention on the artists and the acrobatic performances.

The stage is dominated by one major set element, a traveling tower called the Bataclan, which alters the configuration of the performance space as it moves. The Bataclan moves artists in and out of the spotlight, serves as a bandstand and is flanked by two curved staircases. The decoration of the Bataclan is inspired by Hindu culture, Pakistani buses and Indian jewelry.

Overlooking the Bataclan, the giant fabric structure called the Void, was printed with motifs inspired by the internal structure of leaves to give it a decidedly organic look. The "sails" that frame the Bataclan can be opened and closed like the petals of an enormous flower by just two people using ropes and pulleys.

The surface of the stage is decorated to look like a starry sky, and in the center ring is a graphic representation of the sky in Montreal on the night of the first public performance. The stage is ringed by recessed lighting units that cast a warm glow onto the faces of the performers, much like the footlights of a 19th-century theatre. The diameter of the top of the stage is 36'; it is 42' at the bottom step. This is the diameter of a standard circus ring, as set by the minimum size of a ring horses could comfortably be at gallop within. It is the highest stage ever designed for Cirque du Soleil (39" vs 30-36" usually), as space was needed underneath for the Jack-in-the-Box hydraulics (which propels "The Trickster" 6-7 feet up in the air).

Costumes

"It's been a great challenge, but it's also full of traps. You don't want to exaggerate or slip into creating a caricature when you're trying to capture a character." - Marie-Chantale Vaillancourt

For KOOZÅ Marie-Chantale Vaillancourt has drawn on a wide variety of sources of inspiration: everything from graphic novels, the painter Klimt, Mad Max movies, time-travel movies, India and Eastern Europe. She was also inspired by clock movements, tin soldiers, marching band uniforms and children's book illustrations. All this merges to create a look that alludes to Alice in Wonderland, Baron Munchausen and the Wizard of Oz. There are many rapid costume changes during the show and Marie-Chantale researched magicians' quick-change techniques to create costume magic of her own. In the Charivari number the garments switch from gold to red in a fraction of a second. The challenge, she says, was not so much the quick change itself as the fact that the artists are performing acrobatics and forming into a human pyramid at the same time as the transformation and they can use only their thumbs to pull off the trick.

Marie-Chantale had percussion instruments made out of molded carbon for the Skeleton costume. They look and sound like bones when the performers hit them against each other to create a musical rhythm. The “Bad Dog” costume proved to be another huge challenge because the performer wearing it has to be able to move the dog’s ears, stick its tongue in and out, dribble and wag its tail. For the Juggler’s costume Marie-Chantale found a fabric made of mirrored squares that reflect the light and make him look like a living disco ball. The effect is so dazzling she was actually afraid he might blind himself when he moves his arms.

The “Rat Cape” is a costume that creates the illusion that rats are running down a performer’s body before disappearing into a trap. This would be relatively easy in a film, but it’s a lot more difficult to achieve live on stage. Following a long period of trial and error, the final Rat Cape costume is made up of 150 fake fur rats with crystal eyes to catch the light. The running effect was inspired by the mechanism of vertical blinds and several of the rats are fitted with little wheels to make them seem even more alive.

There are more than 175 costumes and 160 hats in the show – 1,080 items in all, including all the shoes, props, wigs and so on. The designs include truly spectacular luminous coats and hats made with fiber optics and LEDs molded in translucent resin to diffuse the light – with this delicate fabric, each coat takes 60 hours to make and the hats involve 30 hours of painstaking work. One army costume features more than 400 individually-sewn metallic flaps to create the effect that it is armored.

Characters

- The Trickster – Charming and sophisticated, The Trickster is a sublimely quick and agile being, a genius who knows all about the world of KOOZÅ because he created it. He appears and disappears at will and there’s electricity in the air each time he arrives on stage. He created this world for The Innocent and keeps a watchful eye out for him. He teases him, and plays tricks on him with his powers, but it’s The Innocent’s own subconscious that leads the dance.
- The Innocent - The Innocent is a naïve and melancholy loner carried off into The Trickster’s world. Outwardly childlike, ingenuous and simple, he is eager to get to know the new world he’s in, but as soon as he uses The Trickster’s powers he discovers an unexpected and jarring environment, a reflection of his soul.
- The King - The King is the king of fools, the most burlesque of all the characters. His hair is tousled and his crown has a mind of its own as he tries desperately to gain the respect of those who are crazier than himself.
- The Pickpocket - The Pickpocket is a wily criminal in the guise of a clumsy clown. He makes improbable balloon animals and is constantly on the run from a pair of cops. And he almost always manages to give them the slip. He’s a master scam artist and he’ll steal the shirt off your back in no time at all!

- Clowns - The two Court Clowns are The King's foolish footmen, his indispensable sidekicks in the extravagant adventures in KOOZÅ's realm.
- Heimloss - The very strange Heimloss lives beneath the stage where he's in charge of the mechanical machinery that gives life to everything in the hidden world of KOOZÅ.
- The Bad Dog - In this crazy world, even The Dog is nutty. He chases everyone, barks and is impossible to control. The word "training" means nothing to him. But like everyone else he's drawn to The Innocent and becomes his playful, over-the-top companion.

/// CHARIVARI

As the stage lights rise, we find The Innocent at play with his kite, attempting to get it aloft. When a courier interrupts to bring him a rather large-sized package ("Delivery for Mr. Innocent!"), things turn mysterious - he's not expecting a package. The parcel is a peculiar box, strangely festooned and ornamented, with no return address on hand. Mr. Innocent runs his hands over and pokes at the chest, which opens - the devilish Trickster bursts onto the scene like a jack-in-a-box! He produces a magical wand that, with the flick of a wrist, illuminates the world of Koozå and places its machinery in motion. The lights come up, the Bataclan goes into motion and the music begins to play in earnest. He really get's things moving! The show burst into action with the house troupe in a cacophony of acrobatics, song, and movement. Using small trampolines imbedded in the stage, the house troupe jumped, bounced and flew to create a whimsical world for The Innocent to enjoy. But they also showed off their various skills by forming human pyramids of various sizes and numbers, manipulating Dralions, and generally running amok. The act culminates with the "Crash Bash", a daring dive into a circle of fabric inspired by traditional Inuit game of blanket toss ("Nalukau").

CONTORTION

Sparkling in their gold-laden costumes, three young contortionists take the stage next to bend themselves in ways unimaginable. What sets this number apart is the artists' innovations in movements and position, their speed, and the way they work as a team to create tableaux of sculptural beauty. Julie Bergez, Natasha Patterson and Dasha Sovik perform a set unmatched anywhere inside or outside of Cirque. What these girls can do with their bodies is simply mind-blowing. And when Dasha performs a round-the-world leg-walk, the big-top goes nuts!

SOLO TRAPEZE

As the bendable sisters slowly slide off-stage, the house troupe marches to the forefront in a 1-2-3-4 pyramid arrangement, reminiscent of a bowling pin setup - and that's just what they are. One of the clowns came out proceeded to throw the frame. The "pins" fell to reveal seventeen year old Darya Vintilova, solo trapezist from the Ukraine. Strongly invoking a bad-girl image, Darya is all rock and roll in this act. She struts about the stage, teasing the audience (and the Trickster) with her raw femininity, before grabbing up her trapeze bar and taking to the skies. Instead of facing forward, her trapeze flies side-to-side (from stage-left to stage-right) which affords a very unique view of a very traditional circus solo trapeze set.

DUO UNICYCLE

Yury Shavro and Diana Aleshchenko take the stage next in an exceptional and highly pleasing unicycle act that is part dance and part acrobatics, but all heart. That's because a twist on the classic unicycle number introduces a passenger to the action here. The two performers create a pas de deux in constant motion around the stage in a combination of balance, acrobatic control, physical strength, choreographic grace and a spirit of partnership. Yury and Diana begin their pas-de-deux slowly before picking up the pace for a real acrobatic treat - the manipulation of Diana over Yury's head and on his shoulders while he continues to pedal.

HIGH WIRE

Twin high wires criss-cross diagonally stage left to stage right at 15 and 25 feet above the stage, and four tightrope walkers add their own tension to the 6,600 pound load on each rope. Angel Quiros, Angel Villarejo, Vicente Quiros, and Roberto Quiros (The Dominguez's from Spain) lay siege to the high-wires next, taking to them with ease. The brothers skip and dance across as if they have forgotten they are twenty-five plus feet from the ground without a safety net. A point we become acutely aware during the performance. The boys assemble a narrow moving platform in the sky for Vicente to play on. And if we weren't all hyperventilating by that point, he stands on it, balances, takes a chair, and balances on it. He then eases himself back down in the seat crossing his legs in defiance.

SKELETON DANCE

The second-half opens with the help of the Innocent, who uses the magical wand he recovered from the Trickster to kick-start the show. But while the Trickster commands control over the powers residing within the wand, the Innocent does not and unleashes hell on earth - literally. Personages, skeleton clad, take the stage and along with Death, dance a burlesque waltz reminiscent of a Las Vegas Showgirl review (complete with feathered skeleton show girls!). As soon as we're done "dancing the Koozâ", the skeletons began their own brand of boogie, click-clacking their bones to announce their arrival, and that of the next number.

WHEEL OF DEATH

Continuing the theme, Carlos Enrique Marin Loaiza and Jimmy Ibarra Zapata (from Columbia) appear defiantly on stage, now doused in reds, with devilish horns. They take to Koozâ's 1,600 pound Wheel of Death that had up until that time hung insolently at the top of the Grand Chapiteau, and rotate the contraption to heart-stopping speeds. While we just had a thirty minute intermission to catch our breaths, it was quickly taken from us as the guys walked, ran, skipped and played inside - and OUTSIDE - the metallic rings. Like the Highwire, the Wheel of Death is positioned diagonally stage left to stage right in order to break with the usual symmetry and bring the action as close as possible to the audience.

JUGGLING

Balls, hoops, and clubs fly in unprecedented numbers and at speeds that the eye and the brain can't easily process. And they don't just pass from hand to hand, they arc and fly into waiting props and receptacles with a seemingly impossible accuracy. This juggling act has been called, quite simply, the best in the world.

BALANCING ON CHAIRS

Zhang Gongli, dressed in nothing but muscles and a loin cloth, takes over and calms things down. His act is as simple as it gets: eight chairs and a pedestal, but what he uses them for will amaze. Over the course of a few minutes, Gongli stacks the chairs at an ever increasing height (up to 23-feet from the stage floor) to bend and flex his impressively toned body for us. There's nothing flashy about his performance, just a slow mount and dismount and a wonderful stage presence. Gongli has one of the best all around artistic performances in Koozå, and it shows here.

TEETERBOARD

Last but not least, the show comes to its final number with the Korean Plank. Once again the house troupe takes to the stage to bounce off of something, this time a teeterboard. With it they fly skyward, twisting and flipping in triple, quadruple, and quintuple somersaults! And like all the other acts in Koozå, the troupe kicked it up a notch by strapping stilts to their legs and letting loo-oo-ooo-ooose! Totally high energy and totally crowd pleasing.

Our time in the Trickster's land comes to a close shortly thereafter, once again leaving us with the Innocent and his attempts to catch his Kite on a spit of wind. Only this time it catches and climbs high, high, high in the sky filling the Innocent with pure child-like wonder.

/// IT'S BIZARVELOUS

The name of the show – KOOZÅ – had been finalized in November 2006, but would be kept close to the vest (fans heard about the name early because its trademark was registered on November 26, 2006). On February 7, 2007, Cirque du Soleil released the full creative team listing and held the show's official press unveiling on April 11, 2007. The show, taking Cirque du Soleil back to its roots, thrilled audiences in Montreal and has gone on to delight audiences across North America - celebrating its 500th show on August 8, 2008 in Chicago, it's 1000th show on December 1, 2009 in Santa Monica, California – and in Japan, celebrating its 1500th show on June 25, 2011 in Tokyo, Japan. Koozå will celebrate its 2000th show somewhere in North America as the show returns to US soil for a brief year-long run before heading off to Europe beginning in January 2013.

Since its premiere there have been a few modifications, beyond your average cast changes and turnover.

In 2010, Anthony Gatto departed Koozå for more a more permanent position at Cirque du Soleil's La Nouba in Orlando, Florida. His slot was replaced with a Manipulation number - a hoops act with such a high level of difficulty it's a rare demonstration of skill. Combining fluidity of movement, physical contortion, exceptional balance and impressive dexterity, her performance is out of this world, whether she is spinning one, two, three, or even seven hoops simultaneously. Koozå also debut a Hand-to-Hand act in rotation, described thusly: "Never losing contact, two strong, flexible performers move almost imperceptibly, assuming positions impossible without an impeccable sense of balance. The artists 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."

Koozå continues to toddle around the globe under the Grand Chapiteau with, as yet, no end in sight.

WINTUK

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL



WINTUK

The story of WINTUK, Cirque's "Winter Tale" for children, begins with an announcement on November 20, 2006. The announcement made by Guy Laliberté, founder of Cirque du Soleil; Hank Ratner, Vice-Chairman of Madison Square Garden and Cablevision Systems Corporation; and Jay Marciano, President, Madison Square Garden Entertainment eluded to a show with a narrative thread and a storyline designed to present the theme of Winter; however, most of the creative details of the show would be made known in the coming year.

The as-yet-unnamed Cirque production was being created specifically for the Theater at Madison Square Garden and would run for ten weeks for the next four years each winter, beginning in 2007. The creative team would use traditional stage techniques and the very latest in theater technology to bring the audience of nearly 5,000 as close as possible to the performers. And there would be an emphasis on color, music and comedy as well as the customary circus arts the public had come to expect from Cirque.



ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	November 7 – January 6 (2007/08) October 30 – January 4 (2008/09) November 11 – January 3 (2009/10) November 17 – January 2 (2010/11)
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Richard Blackburn
Composer:	Simon Carpentier
Location:	Madison Square Garden, NYC
Finale:	January 2, 2011

Creative Team

Guide	Choreographer
Guy Laliberté	Catherine Archambault
Director	Projection
Richard Blackburn	Francis Laporte
Creation	Sound Designer
Fernand Rainville	Leon Rothernberg
Set & Props	Sound Designer
Patricia Ruel	Jonathan Deans
Costume Designer	Acrobatics
François Barbeau	Daniel Cola
Composer	Makeup Designer
Simon Carpentier	Eleni Uranis
Song Writer	Acrobatic Equipment
Jim Corcoran	Guy St-Amour
Lighting	
Yves Aucoin	

/// THERE IS NO SNOW?

On April 27, 2007, Cirque du Soleil, MSG Entertainment and BASE Entertainment announced the world premiere of Wintuk presented exclusively at the Theater at Madison Square Garden from November 1, 2007 through January 6, 2008. "Experience the excitement of Wintuk with the whole family, only in New York this holiday season," the announcement said, "and share the enchanting winter tale of one boy's quest to find snow and adventure!"

"This is a real first for MSG Entertainment and Cirque du Soleil," said Jay Marciano, President, MSG Entertainment. "The debut of Wintuk this holiday season marks the first time that these world-class entertainment companies will unite to present a Cirque du Soleil production, created exclusively for the Theater at Madison Square Garden. Premiering only in New York, we look forward to entertaining audiences with Wintuk throughout the holidays for the next several years."

The show is playful, musical, and bursting with the energy of the city and the broad sweep of nature. A cast of 50 performers weaves thrilling circus arts, breathtaking theatrical effects and memorable songs into a meaningful seasonal story that resonates with the whole family.

"This new creative challenge for Cirque du Soleil is very inspiring," said Gilles Ste-Croix, Cirque's Senior Vice-President of Creative Content. "Creating a new show based on a family-oriented storyline and theme has made us look at different artistic forms. We're using large-scale puppetry and transforming traditional acrobatic numbers into fun and games experienced from a child's perspective. We really hope Wintuk's tale will create a sense of child-like wonderment in the audience."

Cirque du Soleil would incorporate many firsts into this new production. Wintuk was designed exclusively for the Theater at Madison Square Garden – Cirque's first permanent address in New York City for a show presented outside the Big Top. Additionally, Wintuk would be the first Cirque show created specifically for a family audience. "People of all ages will identify with the lead character Wintuk, and his quest to find snow and adventure" the release went on to say. And Wintuk would be the first Cirque production to be built around a specific precisely-defined premise: the theme of winter.

According to Cirque's release, the new production also marked the first time director Richard Blackburn worked with Cirque du Soleil.

"Blackburn is a leading theatrical creator, playwright, director and actor-manager. His shows are probably best known for combining actors with oversized marionettes and sets, and integrating a wide variety of multimedia techniques into his productions. In 1979, he became the artistic director of Le Theatre de la Dame de Coeur (TDC) in Upton, Quebec. Richard has also worked on overseas assignments with TDC, notably in Singapore for the opening ceremonies of Esplanade Theatres on the Bay in 2002 and as part of Expo 2005 in Japan."

Fernand Rainville, Director of Creation, has worked in Quebec theatre as a distinguished actor and director since 1985. In addition to his long list of stage credits, Fernand co-directed the bilingual Montreal production of *Les Misérables* and has worked extensively in television. He also co-directed the opening ceremonies of the Montreal 2005 - XI FINA World Championships and created and directed the Cirque-produced pre-game show at the 2007 Super Bowl in Miami.

But how would these two craft Cirque's "winter tale"?

/// CRAFTING THE ADVENTURE

In early press releases by Cirque regarding the show, Wintuk became "an enchanting tale about a boy named Jaime and his quest to find snow and adventure. Jaime lives in a city where the arrival of winter has brought long shadows and intense cold – but no snow! He interacts with an extraordinary cast of high-energy urban street characters, including acrobats, dancers and talking marionettes. But when the snow doesn't arrive, he embarks on a quest with three companions – a female shaman who's lost in the city, a shy man destined to discover his courage, and the shadow of a young girl – all to bring the snow back to where it belongs. The adventurers journey to an imaginary Arctic - a world without sunlight (Wintuk) - where they encounter the rich culture of the People of the North and extraordinary giant characters made of ice. When at last the sun returns, they fly home on the wings of a giant crane and generate a swirling snowstorm."

But as with any work-in-progress changes are inevitable. For instance, by the time Cirque and MSG were prepared to officially announce the show – as if some of their other numerous announcements weren't "official" enough – the release on September 18, 2007 brought with it some indications of changes to the show thematically, such as: "Jaime" becoming the lead's character name (after the young kid who played him) rather than Wintuk, and Wintuk becoming the name of the aforementioned Arctic world without sunlight – to where the characters of the show journeyed. What brought about those changes? Creative workshops, intense meetings in the round and refinements based on space confinements, time restraints and other factors. The following entries are excerpts given to us by an anonymous Cirquester from the Wintuk Creators' Notebook, and they feature some very interesting behind-the-scenes notes regarding the creation of the Madison Square Garden show. Picking up just following the official announcement, we hear from Richard Blackburn (Director), Fernand Rainville (Director of Creation), Mathieu Gatién (Assistant to the Director), Marie-Eve Lemieux (Props Assistant), Geneviève Barrière and Michel Granger – in their own words – as they experienced the creative process of bringing Wintuk from the page into the theater.

February 9, 2007:

Members of the Production team have barely taken their places, but already we have the complete storyboard and an acrobatic skeleton. Some of the images from the storyboard for the show, which was completed by Robert Massicotte on December 6, will be presented to Daneil Lamarre shortly. Fernand Rainville, Director of Creation, and Richard Blackburn, Director, are working feverishly to complete the casting and confirm the acrobatic disciplines. The troupe will be made up of a total of 50 artists. We signed our first artist's contract last week.

On January 23, a preliminary set design was delivered by designer Patricia Ruel, while François Barbeau has submitted all the preliminary costume designs. These designs are aesthetic intentions that will be used in defining the language of the show in concert with the director. We should have the final designs by mid-March. A small team is starting to assemble in the costume workshops, under the supervision of Mona Tremblay, to produce the first few prototypes. Two puppeteers from Théâtre de la Dame de Coeur demonstrate a handling technique using a puppet from one of their shows. Designers have made a first visit to the workshops at Théâtre de la Dame de Coeur to learn about their working methods and puppet-handling techniques.

Almost 40% of the show's numbers will involve puppets. One of the project's challenges will be to harmonize our know-how with that of our collaborators: artisans from the Cirque costumes and props workshops will have to work very closely with those of Théâtre de la Dame de Coeur, who have the necessary expertise in "marionetics" (a word we coined for the technique that lies behind this discipline). Fifteen of the fifty artists will bring these puppets to life during performances. Their coaching and training will involve techniques similar to those used for our athletes. The next steps: Simon Carpentier's musical intentions, auditions in New York and the final concepts by mid-March...

March 9, 2007:

On February 19, in New York, Fernand Rainville, Director of Creation gave a presentation on the show concept and storyboard to our partners at Madison Square Garden. Here's what one of our partners, Mr. Tim Schmidt, had to say afterwards: "First of all, let me say again that we all loved the presentation. The show has the feeling of a timeless fable that will appeal to all ages. We all feel like we may really be witnessing the birth of a new New York institution. I can't say enough about it! You guys have really outdone yourselves! Again, we'd like to thank everyone for their work so far. I think this show will have a unique universal appeal."

Needless to say, these were encouraging words for the Creation team, which will have to outdo itself in this unique, tremendous adventure. The work is being carried out at an unbelievable pace, and the atmosphere is incredibly intense, because the final concepts are going to be presented in mid-March. So soon? Oh yes!

Spring is just around the corner, and the snow storm of a few days ago was a good reminder of nature's beauty and strength, and of how unpredictable and fragile it is. You will soon meet the Folk of the North created by François Barbeau, Costume Designer and see Patricia Ruel's inspiring and evocative set design, which takes us from the urbanity of the big city to imaginary wide-open spaces inhabited by disturbing shadows and Ice Giants. For this innovative winter tale, the Creation team is exploring several original avenues.

First, a puppet plays the show's protagonist. Last week, the initial prototype for an oversized Whimsical arrived at the Cirque workshops, enchanting our teams and making everyone aware of the stimulating challenges that lie ahead. The Whimsicals are magical dogs—not the kind you'd ever find in a pet shop, which are absolutely adorable, whacky, funny, wild and silly; they'll be sure to delight the audience, not to mention the Merchandising Department!

Second, the show includes songs. Jim Corcoran has joined the team as songwriter. That was some of the good news from February! He is currently working on the musical cues with composer Simon Carpentier. The cues are bits of song that provide information and move the story along. As a joke, Mr. Corcoran challenged himself to producing the next holiday season classic. I have had the privilege of hearing what these two artists have been working on and, I have to say, Jim may well achieve his goal. The Winter Show project is unique in that the acts are all justified in the script, meaning that the guest artists' expertise and acts will serve to illustrate the story. This very simple tale is about a little boy on a quest to find snow. His search takes him on an extraordinary adventure. A small Casting delegation, including Director Richard Blackburn and Fernand Rainville, will be going to New York at the end of March to look for the rare gem to take on the role of this pivotal character in our story.

April 6, 2007:

Only two seasons to go before the carpet is rolled out for this much-anticipated event. At that point, we'll be talking about a carpet covered in snow and a wonderful winter's tale sure to be enjoyed by adults and children alike. These seven months will be needed to finish preparing the show. Initial training got underway on March 12, and will continue until August. Rehearsals will be held in Pointe-aux-Trembles, in a refitted space that will be a carbon copy of the show's venue. A 150-foot wide stage with acrobatic ramps will be built, allowing artists to rehearse their respective acts. Also planned is the setup of a big top at the intersection of Highway 40 and Boulevard du Tricentenaire (near Montréal). These conditions will enable the Production team and designers to put the finishing touches to the work. This is an interesting challenge, considering we have only eight weeks of rehearsals. It's worth noting that the show's preparation period will be the shortest in Cirque's history!

Apart from acrobatic numbers, the Winter Show's concept rests on the introduction of puppetry. At the workshops of the Théâtre de la Dame de Coeur, in Upton, the prototypes of the most complex giant puppets have been completed and artistic intentions finalized. At the Costume Workshops, research and development is making good progress.

The mock-ups are done, while color testing and fireproofing of original, never-before-used materials are in progress. At the Follow-up Props-making Workshop, development work on the manufacturing of puppet coverings is on the right track, which is quite a feat, if you consider that we have to dress 14-foot high ice giants! As regards the set, Scène Éthique will submit the design and manufacturing plans at the end of April. Given the special nature of the project, which will see the light of day during the Christmas season, we like to say that Santa's workshops have opened a few months earlier to ensure on-time delivery. And like any self-respecting Santa's workshop, we sometimes have to put up with grumpiness!

As far as Casting is concerned, most of the show's artists have signed their names on the dotted line. Numbering fifty, they come from just about everywhere, including Germany, Argentina, Belarus, Canada, the United States, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Italy, Mexico, Russia and the Ukraine. As to the leading roles, the artist who will play the part of the young boy has yet to be discovered. On April 1 in New York City, auditions were held to find the boy whose character will be questing for snow on the stage at Madison Square Garden.

This all-new Cirque du Soleil production will be presented from November 1, 2007 to January 6, 2008. Madison Square Garden, our partner in this adventure, is deploying every effort necessary to ensure that this story becomes a big hit. On May 2, the show will be performed before the owners of MSG, as well as some 150 sales reps from New York State. The aim is not only to spike the interest of retail outlets, but to present the scenario in the hope that that this story will, with the passing of the years, turn into a classic. (Geneviève Barrière and Michel Granger)

April 24, 2007:

"This new creative challenge is very inspiring for us," said Gilles Ste-Croix, Senior Vice President of Creative Content. "Creating a new show based on a family-oriented storyline and theme has made us look at different artistic forms. We're using large-scale puppetry and transforming traditional acrobatic numbers into fun and games experienced from a child's perspective. We really hope Wintuk's tale will create a sense of childlike wonderment in the audience."

Cirque will experience many firsts with this new production. Wintuk has been designed exclusively for The Theater at Madison Square Garden, Cirque du Soleil's first permanent address in New York for a show presented outside the Big Top. Additionally, Wintuk will be the first Cirque du Soleil show created specifically for a family audience. People of all ages will identify with the lead character, Wintuk, and his quest to find snow and adventure. And Wintuk will be the first Cirque du Soleil production to be built around a specific precisely defined premise: the theme of winter. With all of these firsts, the new production is certain to amaze everyone from long-time Cirque du Soleil fans to those experiencing the excitement of Cirque for the very first time. (Richard Blackburn & Fernand Rainville)

May 4, 2007:

The name of the show that will be put on by Cirque du Soleil at Madison Square Garden was recently unveiled: Wintuk. The name evocative of wide-open northern landscapes, with a seasonal resonance and amusing sound is also a breed of dog! Look up Wintuk on Google and, past the links referring to our show, you will learn a bit about this breed of Alaskan malamute. Come to think of it, we also have dogs in the show, but ours are funnier. But do you pronounce it Win-touk or Win-tock? It is Win-touk. I would have pronounced it Win-tock, like tick-tock!

Time's a-wastin'! It is passing very quickly.

Not a moment to spare. It is high time to reveal to you the names of the designers who are working on the show. Listing off the highlights and accomplishments of all the show designers' careers would keep me tied to this computer for days. If you don't mind, I will keep it simple.

In set design, props and puppet esthetics: PATRICIA RUEL - Patricia made the props for LOVE and KÀ. This is the first time she is in charge of décor for Cirque. In costumes and puppet esthetics: FRANÇOIS BARBEAU - François made the costumes for Dralion, the FINA show and, well, François does it all. Makeup: ELENi URANIS - A partner of François Barbeau on Dralion and FINA. In musical design: SIMON CARPENTIER - The music in Zumanity is his!

In puppet design: RENÉ CHARBONNEAU - René designed the puppets for the Théâtre de la Dame de Coeur for almost 30 years. In acrobatic rigging design: GUY ST-AMOUR - His name has been associated with Cirque shows since the early days, most recently with LOVE. In acrobatic performance design: DANIEL COLA - From artist for La Nouba to designer for LOVE. In lighting design: YVES AUCOIN – “A New Day” for Céline, LOVE for Cirque.

In choreography: CATHERINE ARCHAMBAULT - Catherine has worked with Cirque for several years. She did a remarkable job on DELIRIUM. In projections: FRANCIS LAPORTE - Soon to be an old hand at Cirque. Varekai and LOVE come to mind; he is also working on the magic project for Vegas in 2008. In sound: JONATHAN DEANS and LEON ROTHENBERG - Jonathan, master of sound for several Cirque shows, and Leon who just did the sound design for KOOZA. (Fernand Rainville)

May 11, 2007:

If you believe that the milder weather of the last few weeks has melted the enthusiasm of the team behind the Wintuk show, think again! The Cirque blizzard destined to sweep through New York City next November is approaching on the horizon, and our teams are busy getting ready for it. Last week, Director of Creation Fernand Rainville and Production Manager Michel Granger went to the Big Apple to present the Wintuk creative concept to our partners responsible for promoting the production. They showed a short video tracing the show's storyline and unveiling a few of its creative and technical surprises. Among other things, our partners were able to see the Inuit and Siberian influences apparent in many of the costumes as well as the techniques developed to move the show's puppets. The response from those in attendance was very positive, suggesting great things ahead for Cirque's first show in New York City.

After several weeks of intensive research to find the perfect home for the Wintuk team until it leaves for New York City, a former garden products factory in Pointe-aux-Trembles, a district in eastern Montreal, was chosen. The 40,000-sq.-ft. structure will be renovated to provide a fitting space for our artists and creation staff, and even the production offices. Bringing the various teams closer together will help them make the most of a very tight production schedule. Let's not forget that the entire Wintuk team will have only eight weeks to deliver the goods. A big top will also be pitched along Highway 40, near the factory, so that equipment and materials required for the show can be put in place.

June 29, 2007:

It's official! After a mere 11 months in development, Wintuk, a winter tale for the whole family, will be ready for its debut! With a furious work schedule, creators in high gear and ideas in abundance, the story of Wintuk is taking shape beautifully in preparation for its premiere in New York next November. With this extremely tight creation deadline, Director Richard Blackburn is carrying out the demanding and meticulous process of exploring the space and the interactions between scenes, in order to get an unequivocally precise visualization of the show. Inside a large-scale 3-D model of Wintuk's set design, each scene is examined under the Director's microscope.

Surrounding the model are miniature cardboard characters, patiently awaiting their moment in the spotlight. The artists and their costumes are printed to scale, the giant puppets are resized, cut, and placed on their handmade bases, and the timer is set so that every second is accounted for and used to its fullest. Allowing himself to be carried away by his own imagination, and with the invaluable contributions of the project's collaborators, Richard Blackburn creates the detailed sequence of events that will define this show, in writing and in images. Day by day, as the images accumulate and develop into a storyboard worthy of the movies, the on-set dynamic begins to take shape, issues make themselves known, and Wintuk's Great North becomes a reality. The Director's process is spectacular and fascinatingly methodical. Visualization allows the Director to pinpoint the opportunities for fun and surprises which will make Wintuk a playful adventure, with high-level performances and unpredictable action!

Further to this rigorous preparation and visualization, the artists will have a short rehearsal period, during which they will be able to devote their energy to the story. This is when the visual score takes a backseat to the electrifying energy of our artists so that Wintuk can come to life as an inspiring, imaginative metaphor and an unforgettable show experience for the whole family! (Mathieu Gatien, Assistant to the Director)

July 27, 2007:

Are you familiar with the tale of Alice in Wonderland? The passage I enjoy the most is when Alice finds herself surrounded by oversize objects, including a huge cup with a spoon the size of a shovel! And now here I am, right in the middle of the creation of Wintuk, surrounded, in turn, by giant props. Our own Alice, Designer Patricia Ruel, is working closely with our mad hatter, Costume Designer François Barbeau. Together they are creating the aesthetics of the giant puppets that will be part of Wintuk's cast of characters. Our wonderland will be inhabited by a family of dogs that are perfectly irresistible despite their impressive size. To create these enormous bow-wows, our designers drew inspiration from the personalities of six dogs suggested by our Stage Director. The Costume and Props teams were charged with the task of covering the dogs' puppet structure. The result is simply magical! The dogs are garbed in coats made of crazy white fur dyed in different shades for each member of the canine family.

On stage, these large, friendly beasts amble between swing-style lampposts. The streetlamps—our other giant puppets—have their own personalities as well. Inspired from the swing singers of the 1930s, they sparkle like stars in their sequined costumes. For a few weeks Cirque's costume and props workshops morphed into ice cube factories. All were busy building giant cubes made of fabric which were modified and patinated to make them look like massive pieces of ice. Once assembled, these cubes become ice giants. In total, three gargantuan monsters will be manipulated on stage by puppeteers. From ice factory to feather factory: To clothe two mammoth birds, we needed some 400 giant feathers, each of which is composed of four or five different fabrics superimposed, assembled and fastened on the birds' bodies. Altogether, we used more than 20 different fabrics to give these birds their splendid look. Putting together these giant props proved to be an extremely stimulating challenge for us. The results of all this teamwork will no doubt sweep the show's audiences into the unique world of Wintuk! (Marie-Eve Lemieux, Props Assistant)

/// MEET THE PRESS

With the Wintuk Blizzard gathering steam throughout summer 2007 and with only a few short months left until premiere, time was of the essence. On September 18, Wintuk met the press for the very first time. Fernand Rainville, Director of Creation, Michel Granger, Production Manager and René Charbonneau, Puppet Designer, were on hand and took a few minutes to present an overview of the show.

“The high-energy world of Wintuk is populated by dozens of characters,” said puppet designer René Charbonneau. “Some of which are oversized marionettes embodied or operated by live artists – such as the lampposts. To breathe life into these fantastical creatures, Cirque du Soleil called upon Michael Curry, the acclaimed puppet designer for Disney’s *The Lion King* on Broadway (for the dogs, birds and ice giants) and René Charbonneau (for the lampposts), cofounder of Théâtre de la Dame de Coeur in Quebec, Canada.

The lampposts are designed and engineered to move as naturally as possible, and they are finished in materials, colors and textures that endow them with distinct, individual personalities, capable of expressing a full spectrum of emotions through their movements and facial expressions. The over-sized animal puppets—dogs, birds and ice giants—are costume hybrid devices worn by the performers to help create the magical world of Wintuk. The large bird puppets stand over 14 feet tall with a 10-foot wing span. The height is created by the artists wearing stilts. The whimsical canine characters represent a dynamic union between acrobat and puppet. The dogs are designed to accentuate the acrobatic proficiency of the artists while maintaining the animals' natural movements. And the mobile lampposts are 13 feet tall and articulated to bend their necks, turn their heads and even bat their eyelashes. Their movements are powered by compressed air.

“The score of Wintuk is an eclectic mix of styles that takes the audience on a lyrical and melodic ride to a land of ice and frost,” admitted Simon Carpentier, the show’s composer. From the imaginary urban setting of the first act to the magical wintry realm of the second act, the music blends multiple instruments and genres to create a riveting and decidedly joyful soundscape. While the audience will recognize the various musical styles most commonly associated with New York City—urban rhythms, jazz, hip hop and rhythm and blues—they will quickly be carried away by the otherworldly rhythms of a fantasy world. The audience will be pulled into a magical world filled with strange noises: stones scraping against each other, the tinkle of chimes, and breath blowing through a hollow bone—makeshift instruments that go back to the dawn of time. Backed by six live musicians, the Shaman sings in an invented language.

And, of course, there’s the theater and set design...

The set design for Wintuk reflects the show's winter theme, but before even considering the idea of representing cold and snow on stage, set designer Patricia Ruel had to confront a problem of scale... literally. The dimensions of the WaMu Theatre at Madison Square Garden - a 4,500-seat auditorium with a 20-ft ceiling above the 100-ft wide stage - imposed constraints that in the end offered some unexpected possibilities.

“As soon as I saw the space I realized I would have to make a design not just for the stage, but for the space in front of the frame,” says Ruel. “We removed the first row of seats and took over the boxes on both sides of the stage.” The result: a performance area that takes advantage of the full width of the room in a layout with a “wide-screen” aspect ratio that resembles CinemaScope.

The set elements are integrated with the show's acrobatic equipment, giant marionettes (which Ruel co-designed), lighting, projections and costumes to form a cohesive, interconnected whole. The story of Wintuk takes place in two primary settings: The City and the Land of the North. It opens in the Alley, where clothes lines are festooned with 205 garments, to suggest the bustling life and activity of a tight-knit urban community. Inline skaters and cyclists speed along ramps that run the full 100-ft width of the stage and puppeteers concealed in hidden trenches operate giant lamp posts.

In the second half of the show the action moves from the City to the mythical Land of the North, where a seemingly fragile lacy Frozen Forest has been cut out of an extremely tough white fabric used to make temporary winter car ports. The material reflects light and evokes the crackling cold of winter. Translucent curtains, snow banks and huge blocks of “ice” interact with the lighting to create a wintry set ting in which huge Ice Giants and Arctic birds can come to life. The designs on the white velvet stage curtains were etched into the fabric with acid.

Projections are an integral element of the set and have been designed to be especially appealing to children by using a winter light palette predominantly made up of pinks and blues. Ice and snow are recreated on stage through a seamless, subtle blend of materials, textures, colors and lighting that dazzle from close up and at the same time play to the entire auditorium - especially during the show's climactic snowstorm, which begins gently on stage and eventually swirls and grows to fill the whole theatre.

It was a rousing success.

After only one press release two months ago, close to 150,000 Wintuk tickets have been sold, according to Daniel Lamarre. “This proves that the Cirque brand is very, very strong in New York, which gives us a significant competitive advantage,” he says. “The other thing is that people love Cirque’s acrobatic performances, which they will see in this show. I also think that we will be going where no one has gone before with the puppets, because the word puppet does not do justice to all the technological development put into creating them. People will be highly impressed by what Mr. Blackburn has created.”

Wintuk had a final dress rehearsal on Monday, October 29th before premiering to favorable-but-mixed reviews: “Everything here is but a shell of the usual Cirque du Soleil whimsical spirit and creativity,” said the Asbury Park press of the show. “This is not an experience that will take your breath away or make you gasp in amazement at the beauty of it all. [...] That whole aspect of wondering “How did they do that?” is missing here.”

/// A WINTER TALE...

In a city where the arrival of winter has brought long shadows and intense cold... But there is no snow!

Wintuk is an enchanting winter tale about a boy named Wintuk and his quest to find snow and adventure. Wintuk lives in a city where the arrival of winter has brought long shadows and intense cold - but no snow! He interacts with an extraordinary cast of high-energy urban street characters, including acrobats, dancers and talking marionettes. But when the snow does not arrive, he embarks on a quest with three companions - a female shaman who's lost in the city, a shy man destined to discover his courage, and the shadow of a young girl - to find the snow and bring it back to where it belongs.

The adventurers journey to an imaginary Arctic - a world without sunlight - where they encounter the rich culture of the People of the North and extraordinary giant characters made of ice. When at last the sun returns, they fly home on the wings of a giant crane and generate a swirling snowstorm. The show is playful, musical, and bursting with the energy of the city and the broad sweep of nature. A cast of 50 performers weaves thrilling circus arts, breathtaking theatrical effects and memorable songs into a meaningful seasonal story that resonates with the whole family.

There are many whimsical characters...

- Jamie -- Jamie is a bright, open-minded young boy with a boundless sense of curiosity. Always willing to meet new people, he encounters someone who will change him profoundly - someone who has the rare insight to understand the language of the puppet lampposts and dogs! Jamie doesn't hesitate for a second to embark on a perilous journey to a far away place in order to find out where the snow has gone.
- Wimpy -- Wimpy is a timid young man so afraid of his own shadow that he seeks refuge in a trash can. But he is destined to discover his own courage.
- The Shaman -- The Shaman is a homeless woman living in the city with her loyal dogs. Stories are whispered of her strange mystical powers: She can summon the Moon and make the Northern Lights dance. She proves a true friend to Jamie when she pulls out all the stops to help her companions in need.
- Shadow Girl -- Shadow Girl is a playful young girl who appears in the form of a shadow. She is the same age as Jamie and spends her time taunting him with silly games. She also has a special relationship with the Shaman and her dogs. But danger lurks over the horizon where the ice giants hatch their evil plans.
- The People of the North -- Impervious to the cold, the People of the North are swift and agile. Under the watchful eye of the High Priestess, they welcome the Shaman and her whimsical dogs back to their icy homeland.

- The Puppets -- The six dogs are friendly creatures, in spite of their impressive size. They are loyal to the Shaman and become good friends with Jamie and his companions. They are called Chief, Slowjo, Mama, Puppy, Curly and Rasta. The six lampposts are all-knowing and all-seeing. They are sympathetic to Jamie's mission and guide the young boy in his magical quest. The ice giants are created when the ice breaks up from a confrontation between the Shadows and the People of the North. They rise up against the Sun's return.

And a dozen great acts!

CHARIVARI

A group of young people take an alley and its ramp and hill by storm to present an acrobatic charivari act. Trial riders mesmerize the audience with their technical twists, acrobatic turns and one-wheel spins. One of the riders pushes audacity to the point of executing figures over and around the head of an artist who lies on the ground. Skateboarders and inline skaters tear up and down the ramps while a rope-skipping specialist turns a simple children's game into a bona fide acrobatic discipline.

SLACKWIRE

Can you walk on a clothesline? An acrobat shows it can be done. He stands on one of the clotheslines transformed into circus apparatus. He performs a series of striking moves and about-turns as he walks to and fro on a slack wire, showing off his incredible balancing skills.

JUGGLING

A dandy who shudders at the thought of getting her suit dirty is boxed in by a group of playful puppet dogs who are bent on drawing her into their game. The dogs bring her a series of objects that she uses to perform a high-speed juggling act.

ROLA BOLA

A city worker is dispatched to a park where a lamppost is on the blink. The acrobat performs an astounding balancing act using the countless props his coworkers toss him—pipes, panels, boards and globes. He piles up the assorted objects on top cylinders on which he balances. But will he manage to turn the light back on?

RAGDOLL

A life-size rag doll tumbles out of a strange package. A thief and a businessman fight over the seemingly lifeless toy, spinning it around and bending it in impossible positions. But is it really a rag doll?

POWERTRACK

A madcap cops-and-robbers chase leads into a thrilling trampoline performance featuring precision acrobatics and split-second timing. When policemen, thieves and even the dogs get caught up in the fun, it's anyone's guess how this heart-stopping act will end.

INNERTUBES

In their icy cold homeland, the People of the North make a buoyant entrance as they bounce up and down frantically on inner tubes.

CYR WHEEL

Artists representing the People of the North slip inside large metallic rings and perform a surreal act based on balance and precision of movement to create quick spins. Jamie discovers that he is a quick learner.

HOOPS

The High Priestess appears at the top of the hill, greeted by her people below. With the flexibility of a contortionist and the skill of a tightrope walker, the artist performs a hoops act in which she folds her arms and legs in mind-boggling positions.

SWISS BALLS

A duo of acrobatic clowns spring into action to present a high-energy act in which they bounce up and down on Swiss balls like springs to create comedy.

AERIAL STRAPS

An artist performs an acrobatic ballet as she flies above the stage full of grace and elegance that symbolizes rebirth, the coming dawn, and the Sun's victory over the Shadows.

RUSSIAN BARS

The People of the North's spears suddenly transform into acrobatic devices, in which the artists leap into the air and land on the long, flexible bars resting on the shoulders of the mighty porters. The porters thrust the flyers into the air to perform both vertical and horizontal jumps using their stomachs and hands as lift-off points rather than their feet.

/// A FUTURE FOR WINTUK?

For its second season (October 30, 2008 – January 4, 2009) Cirque added “even more wonder and adventure to the story, with riveting new elements of suspense and intrigue, and surprising twists, turns and reversals for the second season.” Besides enhancing the show thematically, the show also added Power Track, “a daring, high-speed, precision choreographed trampoline act that pushes the very definition of acrobatics to the limits.” They also re-designed a couple of the show’s puppets. The show remained relatively the same after the second season, with minor cast changes here and there as performers came and went, concluding after its fourth season, which ran from November 17, 2010 through January 2, 2011. With the initial contract having concluded and no renewal in sight, there was nothing left but to pack WINTUK up and leave the Theater at Madison Square Garden. In an interview with Jerry Nadal (SVP of Resident Shows) in Fascination, the Unofficial Cirque du Soleil Newsletter, he spoke about at least one potential future for Wintuk: “We were talking about touring it, redesigning the sets to fit into theaters. But we’ve got so much product in North America we thought it probably wasn’t a good idea. So I’ve been looking around for different places to put it.” Alas that has yet to occur; therefore, at present time WINTUK’s last show on January 2, 2011 was its final curtain call.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®

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SEE THE UNIVERSE FROM THE EDGE OF YOUR SEAT.



In 2004, as Cirque du Soleil celebrated its 20th anniversary, the company looked to capitalize on its recent successes and expand beyond their current strong holds of North America, Europe and Japan. Even before then rumors cropped up at regular intervals detailing how Cirque would expand to house resident shows in Berlin, London, New York, Singapore, Tokyo and other worldly cities, many never coming to fruition . But with Cirque du Soleil finding successes in the Asia-Pacific region, it was only a matter of time before something regarding Asia was announced.

On May 2, 2006, the Las Vegas Sands Corp. and Cirque du Soleil announced their intention to create a one-of-a-kind show on the Cotai Strip, then being developed in the People's Republic of China Special Administrative Region of Macau. The new show, conceived and created solely by Cirque du Soleil, was scheduled to open in the Spring of 2008 in a 1,800-seat theater built to Cirque specifications and would be unlike anything we'd yet seen.

It was a doorway into Asia and a new market for Cirque du Soleil.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	July 26, 2008 (Previews) August 28, 2008 (Gala)
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Gilles Maheu
Composer:	Violaine Corradi
Location:	Venetian, Macao
Finale:	February 19, 2012

Creative Team

Guide	Acro Performance
Guy Laliberté	Rob Bollinger
Guide	Costume Designer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Dominique Lemieux
Writer & Director	Lighting Designer
Gilles Maheu	Axel Morgenthaler
Creation	Sound Designer
Neilson Vignola	Steve Dubuc
Set Designer	Projections
Guillaume Lord	Jimmy Lakatos
Rigging	Makeup Designer
Guy Lemire	Nathalie Gagné
Composer	Production Designer
Volaine Corradi	Raymond Saint-Jean
Choreographer	Clown Acts
Martino Müller	Leonid Leykin
Choreographer	
Jeff Hall	

/// THE BIRTH OF THE UNIVERSE

The first staging workshops took place from September 4th through 22nd in Montreal not long after the partnership was announced. The primary purpose for the workshops was to observe the potential of certain acrobatic performances, to bring new ideas to the table and offer the opportunity to ask questions regarding the new production. What was “cosmos” (the working title of the production) really all about? What was its inspiration? How will the environment be simulated? And will staging the show in China change Cirque du Soleil’s creative process? A round-table discussion helped answer these questions:

“We follow Alice, the main character, as she journeys to other planets and meeting imaginary characters in an attempt to discover what is happening in places other than the Earth,” Neilson Vignola, Director of Creation offered in answer to the show’s story and theme. “Alice is a hymn to the Earth’s beauty, a beauty that we seem to appreciate less and less as we search elsewhere in the universe.” To represent the different planets that Alice will visit, a sphere 25 feet in diameter upon which scenes will be projected would move about the theater spectators. (How that would be accomplished had yet to be worked out at this stage, however.)

“The fact that the show is being put on in Macau has in no way influenced the creative process,” Direct Gilles Maheux confirmed. In fact, when he started working on the show, Cirque did not know where it would be presented. To Gilles Maheux (Director), “Ne tuons pas la beauté du monde”, (Let’s not kill the beauty of the world, lyrics from the song Hymne à la beauté du monde [Hymn to the Beauty of the World] by Luc Plamondon) is a phrase that truly sums up Macau 2008.

As for inspiration look no further than Julie Payette, Canadian Astronaut. She’s the astronaut who flew a clown nose from jester Benny LeGrand aboard NASA Space Shuttle Discovery in May 1999. The STS-96 mission was a joint mission between NASA and the Canadian Space Agency (CSA). Astronaut Julie Payette (from Canada) stowed the cargo.

Following a number of follow-up workshops, the show’s concept was presented to Guy Laliberté on November 9, 2006, along with the final set and about 40% of the preliminary costume designs. With “Cosmos” approved, the creative team began to work hard in refining the concept for final form: Cosmos promised to be an innovative show featuring dance (there would be 16 dancers in the cast) and six acrobatic performances: bamboo poles, globes and poles, aerial frame and ladders, a hand-to-hand act, aerial straps and trampolines. But while the show was beginning to come together artistically, real-world problems began to delay the show: the theater wasn’t going to be ready.

Cirque du Soleil expected to welcome the technicians and equipment into the Venetian Macao Theater by November 2007, with previews commencing by May 16, 2008 and holding a Gala premiere on June 15, 2008. But when the Venetian Macao opened its doors to paying customers on August 28, 2007, the theater was not yet ready – the construction company wrangled for six weeks before solving their issues, pushing back the premiere of the new show by little more than a month, but the damage had already been done.

/// TAI YANG JU TUAN

"Tai Yang Ju Tuan, meaning 'the theatre of the sun international Group', will be the official name of Cirque du Soleil in Asian markets outside of Japan."

From the moment Cirque du Soleil announced its partnership with the Venetian Macao, the company knew it needed a brand name that accurately reflected what it was and what it did, for although Cirque du Soleil was synonymous throughout North America, Europe and Japan, the Chinese had no such affinity for the artistic company. And aware that the Chinese word for circus referred to the traditional circus with horses, it was essential the company addressed the issue so it could promote itself and the show throughout the Chinese-speaking world (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and of course Macau and Mainland China). The name "Tai Yang Ju Tuan" was already somewhat familiar in some regions of Asia, specifically with the Taiwanese who were already using it to represent Cirque du Soleil; therefore, adopting it made perfect sense. This new brand, according to Cirque, means:

Tuan (international group), carries the meaning of our message that the world is our playing field. It will allow for potential Asian spectators to understand the scope of what we are offering and give an idea as to the scope and stature of the organization.

Ju (theatre), is the most important part of our Chinese name as it describes what we do. This word allows us to stand apart from the traditional Chinese circus. The Chinese word for "theatre" is much richer than it is in English, since this expression represents several art forms such as dance, song, acting and physical performance. And...

Tai Yang (the sun), is who we are, our identity. It was very important for us that this element be present in our Chinese name. Visually, the sun plays a dominant role in our brand identity. This is the element that people around the world recognize and associate with our shows, whether or not they can read our alphabet.

Both the name of the show and Cirque's brand in simplified Chinese characters were announced on May 29, 2008.

"We are extremely excited to bring this unique show to the Cotai Strip as our first permanent step in China," said Daniel Lamarre, President and CEO of Cirque du Soleil. "The creative challenge is very interesting for us as this area has yet to be developed for its entertainment offers. Thanks to our partnership with Las Vegas Sands, we are anxious for Asian audiences to discover this Cirque du Soleil production.

"We are both proud and delighted to be partnering with Cirque du Soleil and bringing this internationally acclaimed production to Macau and to its first ever permanent base in Asia," said Mr. Mark Brown, President of Sands Macao and The Venetian Macao-Resort-Hotel. "Cirque du Soleil will surely give the people of this region a chance to experience wholly unique and world-class entertainment, an aim to which we are also committed."

/// STAGING THE COSMOS

"For me, ZAIA is an inner journey through time and space. The set, in which arcs and perspective lines predominate, evokes the viewpoint of a human eye looking through a large observatory telescope." - Guillaume Lord, Set Designer

The 1,852 seat ZAIA Theatre is reminiscent of ancient architectural telescopes such as Jaipur in India and the vast stone Mayan observatories of Central America. It is not a planetarium as such, however it contains many visual cues and references that add to the show's underlying theme of cosmic exploration.

In keeping with the primary theme of a journey into space, verticality is an important component of the show and the theatre was designed with a higher than 80-ft/24-meter ceiling and the set elements are intended to recreate the experience of being in space - an experience that is both mysteriously alien and strangely familiar. This is a timeless journey from through the stratosphere and beyond, while keeping an eye on Earth. When the audience enters the theatre, one of the main set elements, a gigantic Sphere, appears to be a chandelier and the walls are illuminated by light sources at ground level, creating the mysterious effect of a deep dark cavern. When the Sphere is revealed in all its constantly-changing glory following the opening number, its full scope and the effect of its trajectory over the heads of the audience is nothing less than stunning.

The proscenium (88-feet high and 97-feet wide) is almost circular, like an oculus (a round window, sometimes called a "bull's eye") made up of several layers that create a sense of depth through perspective lines and curves made of bronze that converge on the single focal point located at the centre of an enormous sun set against the backdrop, known as the "Star Drop," which recreates the night sky with 3,000 fiber optic "stars." Designer Guillaume Lord used a star map to give the Star Drop an accurate representation of the constellations at the exact location of the theatre. And it's enormous: the 12,221 sq. ft. Star Drop measures 121-ft x 101-ft.

The 25-foot-diameter Sphere has an aluminum exoskeleton, a projection surface, weighs 4,000 lbs and moves through three axes. It houses six projectors that beam images onto its six segments through a full 360 degrees. The individual projections take into account the curvature of the Sphere and are stitched together seamlessly to give the appearance of a series of single images. This sculptural mosaic transforms into a lantern, a hot air balloon, the earth and the moon, depending on the requirements of the show.

/// THE COSMIC RENAISSANCE

A major influence on Dominique Lemieux's costume designs for ZAIA came from the inventive ensembles and looks that young people are creating for themselves around the planet. "In my visual research I was inspired by the urban dress of the world's cities," she explains. "A new culture has emerged from the ethnic mix that characterizes the modern city. There's a spontaneous variety that is reflected in the way today's young people dress. The ZAIA costumes refer to this eclectic merging of genres."

The ZAIA costumes also reflect and represent the cultural diversity and differences between groups of characters within the show. For example, to emphasize the importance of show's "urban" dancers and differentiate them from the other characters, they are all dressed in warm colors, while the acrobatic inhabitants of the world of ZAIA are in more reflective materials, whether they are darker or lighter colors.

In other scenes, the performers seem to have emerged from a toy box. Their costumes are decorated with accessories made from recycled objects: pieces of metal, newsprint, a piece of a fan, a rotary phone, a compass, a trumpet and so on. Some costumes evoke animals like coyotes or hyenas, while others recall boats, musical instruments or airplanes.

This show marks the first time Dominique Lemieux has worked with polyester fabrics. The light weight of polyester allows for a technique called sublimation, a technique that fixes designs in the fibers of the cloth and enables her to use a great diversity of colors.

- Zaia -- The central character, the young girl called Zaia, who belongs to the "urban" world, is the focal point of the color red in the show. She's a young girl who dreams of becoming an astronaut and discovering the mysteries of space. Her imaginary celestial journey will follow in the footsteps of her parents and she will encounter love. Her odyssey leads her to take a fresh look at the beauty of Earth and the humans who live there.
- Romeo -- Captivated by the innocence of Zaia, Romeo is a young spectator she meets at the beginning of her voyage. Donned in warm earth colors decorated with gold and copper, he will search for her throughout the story. When they come together at last they will delight each other in a sensual straps duet.
- The Sage -- Drawn from all cultures, the Sage is an almost god-like character, an archetype of a wise old ancestor with his long coat and long tresses, which have gold mixed in with the silver. He is source of shimmering light in the darkness of the night sky, and has the power to transform himself into the character of the Shaman, and his Shaman costume references that of the Sage. A mysterious ageless character, the Sage embodies the memory, knowledge and different eras of humanity. He is the archetype of the ancestor, the first of all ancestors, a kind of bright spot in the blackness of space. The Sage watches over Zaia.
- Clowns -- Sensitive and silly, the clowns are the companions of Zaia in this wonderful adventure. Although they become separated their friendship will reunite them in the end. The clowns' costumes contrast with the other characters in the show. Their outfits are inspired by, among other sources, 18th century explorers. A patina of worn, patched fabrics gives them an old-fashioned appearance.
- Parents -- Zaia's parents, itinerant acrobats on tour in space, passed on to her their wanderlust and desire for discovery.

- The Handyman -- A Charlie Chaplin-like character, the Handyman builds a precarious structure with planks and its pipes. When his shelter collapses, everyone bands together to save him.
- Adam and Eve -- This couple represents original, pure, mythical and eternal love. It is through them that Zaia herself discovers love, a feeling that she will later share with Romeo. In the Adam and Eve hand-to-hand number, the performers wear costumes dyed in shades of turquoise and skin tones. The garments are like a second skin, giving the impression that the artists are dressed in leaves with a texture like ice and crystals.
- The Humans -- These characters of all ages and all social strata represent the last people on Earth. Pressed and jostled in their daily lives, they are equally capable of humor and great impulses of unity.
- The Aristos -- Characters from another era, the Aristos represent high society and elegance as they participate in the aerial number.
- The Weathervanes -- In the globes and poles number, the costumes are inspired by weather vanes that indicate the direction of the wind and a variety of elements such as water, sun and ice.
- The Fossils -- The ice-encrusted Fossils are silent witnesses to the union between Adam and Eve.
- The Primitives -- The Primitives represent the first men who tamed fire and learned to use it. They include us in their celebration of love and fire. The Fire Dancers wear skintight skin-colored costumes that are printed with tattoos, and adorned with leather and metal components.

While there is a poetic, allegorical aspect to much of the show, there is also an aspect of reality and that is reflected in the authenticity of the golden Astronaut costumes. The two Singers in the show wear spectacular flowing robes of velvet that have been distressed to reveal different colors of the layers of materials beneath and studded with bright LED “stars.” The singers also wear spectacular illuminated wigs.

/// A JOURNEY THROUGH SPACE AND TIME

CITYSCAPE

The dance troupe embraces social diversity through a series of choreographies. First, a couple performs a languorous tango to the sound of a bandoneon (a small accordion), the flexibility of the dancers sometimes evokes the movements of contortionists. Then, two other dancers perform a high-energy gypsy dance without any musical accompaniment, tapping out the rhythm on their bodies with their hands as other performers arrive on stage from everywhere. Finally, the entire troupe presents a rhythmic dance that merges styles.

AERIAL BAMBOO

Hanging from a pole, two artists perform a hand to hand act on a pole suspended in mid-air. They move up and down in unison, as if on a surface inclined at a 90-degree angle in the middle of the cosmos. From time to time, one of the artists grips the hand or foot of the other, creating acrobatic figures by executing fluid movements steeped in poetry.

CHINESE POLES ON GLOBES

As her earthly odyssey leads her to the Orient, Zaia discovers acrobats clinging to poles shaped like weathervanes symbolizing the points of the compass perform Chinese Poles act. What makes this act special is the fact that the poles are held by porters who are standing on globes.

DANCE OF THE AUTOMATONS

Characters whose fanciful costumes are reminiscent of toys made from recycled objects perform modern dance and break dancing moves, sometimes as if their bodies were dismembered. One of the dancers rotates on his head like a spinning top at an amazing speed!

ROLA BOLA

A Charlie Chaplin-like character arrives from the sky on a big ladder, and finds bits and pieces of pipe and planks, which he uses to build a rickety structure at center stage. He balances precariously as he makes it climb higher and higher so he can rejoin his “celestial ladder.”

AERIAL FRAME

Under a panoply of ladders slung high above the stage, acrobats perform an act that merges aerial disciplines in a mixture of styles inspired by North Korean acts. To achieve this, four stations are equipped with suspended swivel chairs to hold porters who catch and release the artists flying in both directions. Timing is crucial when flyers perform pirouettes with spectacular spins from one station to the next.

HAND-TO-HAND

Two acrobats evoke the love of the original couple by performing a hand to hand act full of sweetness and sensuality. The two artists create impressive figures and seemingly impossible feats of balance that require absolute mastery and control.

AERIAL STRAPS DUO

A pair of artists uses aerial straps to evoke their nascent passion, sometimes using a single strap for synchronized movements, sometimes a double strap to perform an aerial ballet of seduction, finesse and elegance.

FIRE DANCE

After attending the union of Romeo and Zaia, the Sage, who incarnates an African shaman performs a dance in the dark, twirling a stick that is lit at both ends. Other dancers and acrobats join in. At the climax all them are dancing with incandescent objects and then they disappear into the entrails of the stage.

X-BOARD

In a veritable tribute to weightlessness, acrobats present an act combining two disciplines: Teeterboard and Trampoline. A flurry of criss-crossing flights, rebounds, daring leaps and jumps takes over the stage.

/// A COSMIC DISTURBANCE

ZAIA's initial attendance figures were dismal, atrocious even, to the tune of 20% capacity per show or less. And rumors of its imminent demise were floating around before the cast had 100 performances under its belt. By April 2010, perception regarding the show had soured so much that Cirque du Soleil had to step in for a little damage control and Jerry Nadal, Senior Vice-President for Resident Shows of Cirque du Soleil, had to re-iterate that Cirque du Soleil was at the Venetian Macau for the long haul.

"ZAIA is here to stay, at least for eight more years." No conversation was held between Cirque du Soleil and Venetian about terminating the show before the end of the ten-year contract. That is what the senior vice-president for resident shows of Cirque du Soleil, Jerry Nadal, assured in an exclusive interview to Macau Daily Times. Although he admits the show's occupancy results are far from what were initially expected, he claims that improvements are being made and that numbers are rising every day. As for the recent news that referred to the end of the show within a short-term period, he says they're just rumors.

But changes were afoot.

By the show's second anniversary, the Chinese Poles on Globes and Rola Bola acts were replaced, and a more traditional Asian Lion Dance routine was added. In early 2011, the Aerial Frame routine was removed all-together but that still didn't do the trick. Cirque du Soleil and Sands Macau went back to the drawing board and decided even more drastic changes had to be made. First, the show would get a new name in China - and a new visual but it would take some time for those to make a public appearance.

Beginning September 1, 2011, ZAIA would feature even more new diversified performances and characters. A dazzling Hand-to-Hand act, a high-level acrobatic element of Roller Skates (a la TOTEM), Juggling, and a Lion Dance performance to give the production more of an Asian element were added. The show now would flow like this: the Opening, Aerial Hammock, Roller Skates, Lion Dance, Juggling, Trapeze, Hand to Hand, Aerial Straps & Hoops, Fire, Dragon, X-Board & Trampoline and the Finale. And Cirque du Soleil's immediate goal? Maintain ZAIA as a flagship showcase in MACAU.

"We hope to have three permanent shows in Macau one day and I see a day where we can have a permanent show in big Chinese cities like Shanghai and Beijing and who knows," Lamarre said.

Two months later (November 21, 2011) the Macau Daily Times reported ZAIA's losses continued to mount but that Venetian Macau was willing to shoulder them, Sands China president Edward Tracy revealed. "Ticket sales have gone up" with the addition of new Chinese-style elements such as a lion dance performance and a flying dragon, Tracy said. Nonetheless, the Venetian Macau show remains "the only business sector that doesn't make a profit," he added. Criticism from Sands China chairman Sheldon Adelson led to rumors that the 10-year contract of 'Zaia' would be terminated earlier. But Edward Tracy rejected this possibility. "We are prepared to take a loss to provide that kind of entertainment," he stressed.

But less than three months after that – on February 7, 2012 – the Macau unit of Las Vegas Sands Corp. and Cirque du Soleil announced they were ending the 10-year contract and closing ZAIA, underlining the difficulties faced trying to transform the Chinese gambling enclave of Macau into an entertainment destination to rival that of Las Vegas. Alas, ZAIA - Cirque du Soleil's first permanent production to open in Asia - would have its final show on Sunday, February 19th after several years of disappointing ticket sales, the companies said in a joint statement. Average occupancy at ZAIA in January was just 40%, according to a Cirque du Soleil representative, not enough to recoup the cost of day-to-day operations nor the \$150 million plus price tag for creating the show and its custom-built theater. "In view of the market trend and customer demand shown in the research we've conducted, the company will again be investing to redesign the theater," said Gus Liem, Vice President of Entertainment at Sands China Ltd.

"It comes down to time, and visitors to Macau seem to have little of it," said the Wall Street Journal. "According to the territory's government, visitors (the overwhelming majority of which come from China) stayed an average of just 1.5 nights during the first 11 months of 2011; the average visitor to Las Vegas stayed 3.6 nights in 2010, according to the most recent statistics available."

What's next?

There is no denying that ZAIA had a tumultuous three and a half years, but we had hoped the show would be able to survive its initial troubles and slough off any further misgivings about its quality. Unfortunately it did not get that chance and it, like ZED, became a great loss to the Cirque du Soleil repertoire.

According to the Macau Daily Times Cirque du Soleil and Sands China at the time were discussing a variety of options for working together on other projects. They said that "both organizations are excited by what might come next", without disclosing details of any possible new shows.

Unfortunately nothing as yet has come to pass.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL



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A living poem at the heart of human adventure...

ZED

You could say the journey from A to ZED began all the way back in 1992, when Cirque du Soleil crossed the Pacific for the very first time and made 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. As a limited engagement, Fascination opened May 1992 in Tokyo and then moved on to seven other cities - for a total of 118 performances - before concluding that September. By the end of its tour over 560,000 (569,883 to be exact) saw the show. With the experiment a rousing success, a partnership between Cirque du Soleil and the Japanese people began to form.

Cirque du Soleil returned to Japan numerous times since: with Saltimbanco in 1994, Alegría in 1996, returning again with Saltimbanco in 2000 (as Saltimbanco 2000), Quidam in 2003, and Alegría again (as Alegría 2) in 2004. Both wanted something more, however. The surge of resident productions beginning with 1993's Mystère, gave Cirque an appetite to explore its options beyond Las Vegas. Indeed, Cirque President and Chief Operating Officer (COO) Daniel Lamarre alluded in 2004 to having no less than three new permanent ventures within the "next few years" on the books, with Tokyo at the top of that list. "I wouldn't want to put a calendar to the construction," Lamarre said in an interview, "but I think it's safe to say we will begin work on the Tokyo project very soon."

With an announcement on April 7, 2005 that Cirque du Soleil came to an agreement with the Walt Disney Company and Oriental Land Co., Ltd (OLC for short, the company that administers Tokyo Disneyland Resort – they own the land and the buildings, but Disney owns the content) to open a permanent theater in Tokyo, the journey from A to ZED was well on its way!

The agreement didn't come overnight, however.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	August 15, 2008 (Previews) October 1, 2008 (Gala)
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	François Girard
Composer:	René Dupéré
Location:	Tokyo Disneyland, Japan
Finale:	December 31, 2011

Creative Team

Guide	Choreographer
Guy Laliberté	Debra Brown
Guide	Choreographer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Jean-Jacques Pillet
Writer & Director	Sound Designer
François Girard	François Bergeron
Creation	Equipment & Rigging
Line Tremblay	Scott Osgood
Set Designer	Acrobatic Performance
François Séguin	Florence Pot
Costume Designer	Makeup Designer
Renée April	Eleni Uranis
Composer	Playwright
René Dupéré	Serge Lamothe
Lighting Designer	
David Finn	

/// MICKEY, TOKYO AND CIRQUE

It all started about eighteen months prior, around the time of Quidam's premiere in Fukuoka (10/22/2003 – 12/7/2003). Already quite happy in its partnership with Cirque du Soleil (with La Nouba still going strong at the Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida), Disney showed an interest in initiating a new project to be housed at one of their other resorts. And with Cirque du Soleil looking to break into the Asian market, Guy Laliberté took an hour to meet with a team from Disney and the Oriental Land Corporation, accompanied by Daniel Lamarre, Robert Blain (Senior Vice-President and Chief Financial Officer), and François Macerola (Vice-President of Business and Legal Affairs).

"After that first meeting, Disney contacted us to negotiate a contract," François recounts. "With his powers of persuasion, Guy had succeeded in conveying his enthusiasm to the OLC representatives. They were convinced; they decided to get involved in the major project. We put together a solid team of negotiators," François continues. The team, directed by Daniel Lamarre, set the overall development and business parameters for the project."

The team also included: Richard Dennison, Company Manager for La Nouba, who is knowledgeable about Cirque's relations with Disney; Robert Blain; René Khayat, Senior Legal Counsel; Annie Derome, Development Strategy Director with Business and Legal Affairs; and Gabriel Pinkstone, Assistant to the Vice-President of Production.

"While the Disney people knew us well, we needed to help the OLC folks get to know us. So before we came to a signed agreement, we brought them with us from show to show, to Las Vegas and Orlando," continues François. After came 18 months of intense negotiations—and the whole process concluded with a contract for Cirque du Soleil to present a resident show for 12 years in Tokyo. René, François and the Cirque team could now say "mission accomplished!"

"This will be Cirque du Soleil's first permanent theater and show in Japan and its first permanent venture outside North America," mentions a Cirque du Soleil press release. Currently all permanent ventures reside in the United States (Mystère, "O", Zumanity and KÀ in Las Vegas, Nevada and La Nouba in Orlando, Florida), but there have been rumors of possible installations in London, England; Paris, France; Berlin, Germany and, of course, Tokyo, Japan throughout the years. Cirque will develop the original exclusive show, which is set to premiere August 2008. This as yet named project was mentioned to cost approximately \$140-million US (\$115-million provided by Japan's Oriental Land Co.) and include a theater for up to 2,000 spectators.

/// THE THEATER BREAKS GROUND

The groundbreaking ceremony on the \$140 million USD, 2,000 seat theater project took place on April 18, 2006 at 10:00am, at the site reserved for the theater (next to Disney Ambassador Hotel). Representatives of Takenaka Corporation and Oriental Land Co., Ltd. performed the groundbreaking in the presence of a Shinto priest from nearby Seiryu Shrine, who blessed the project as part of the ceremonies. A total of 47 people related to this project attended the ceremony, which also included traditional Japanese rituals praying for safe completion of the building, and statements by Yoshiro Fukushima (President and COO of OLC) and Francois Macerola (Vice-President of Cirque du Soleil).

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Statement from Yoshiro Fukushima,
President and COO of Oriental Land Co., Ltd.

The groundbreaking ceremony for our permanent Cirque du Soleil theater took place on April 18, 2006. This exciting project is scheduled to be completed in 2008. It is our honor to present in Tokyo Disney Resort, Cirque du Soleil's first permanent theatre outside North America. Cirque du Soleil creates thrilling performances that challenge the limits of human capability, transforming it into Art. Creation of an original show for this theater has already begun and we are sure that it will deliver even more wondrous entertainment to guests visiting Tokyo Disney Resort. The opening of this theater in fiscal year 2008 will coincide with the 25th anniversary of Tokyo Disneyland Park and the grand opening of Tokyo Disneyland Hotel, thus further enhancing the appeal of Tokyo Disney Resort.

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Statement from Francois Macerola,
Vice-President of Cirque du Soleil

It is with great pride and honor that Cirque du Soleil is present today for this unique and unprecedented event in its 22-year history. For the first time ever, Cirque du Soleil will have a permanent home outside North America dedicated to its loyal and devoted fans in Japan. We have designed a theatre that will pay tribute to the unwavering loyalty of our audiences and reflect some of the attributes at the core of Cirque du Soleil's creative impulse: transparency, clearness, youthfulness, energy and strength. The design of the theatre will harness the energy of the sun to warm audiences' hearts. A timeless symbol of youth, the sun has been a constant source of inspiration throughout our history and our shows. It will be the driving force for creators, performers and employees involved in this new project. Today's ceremony marks an important step in the creative process of this new project. It is the beginning of the journey leading to an unparalleled production to open in 2008 - a shining testament to the loyalty and dedication of our Japanese and international audiences.

/// WHETTING OUR APPETITES

By November 3, 2006, the Cirque du Soleil rumor mill was abuzz with some interesting concepts regarding this new production, which had been given the working name of “Zèd” and/or “Production Z”, such as: “Tarot, water, masculinity, meridians, fire, Da Vinci, aerial creatures, compassion, air, femininity, devil, land creatures, mystery, bestiality, shaman and more...” Other statements would go on to talk about the stage itself, which were rumored to be “six meridians (half-arches) positioned in a semicircle define the stage and are connected at the top to the matrix (technical ring), thereby creating roads leading up to the heavens and down to earth.”

The creators had almost all been identified by this date; completion of the creation team occurred by mid-2007 and artist training would begin by late-2007. A storyboard was also being written, including an acrobatic routine suggesting that Bungees, Lassos, Chinese Poles, High Wires, Juggling with Fire, Banquine, Aerial Straps, Hand Balancing, and a Flying Trapeze act would be amongst the disciplines offered by this show.

Robert Massicotte, the official illustrator for many of Cirque’s creations, helped put the director’s thoughts down on paper, “How can we do bungee jumping differently? How can we get a singer to fly — one who, trailing 15 feet of fabric behind him, lands on top of the control booth on the opposite side of the theatre? How do we manage to throw off balance a tightrope walker with a burning pendulum moving perpendicularly to the wire?” Sylvain Auclair, Production Stage Manager for ZED, alluded in an update. “For us, the bottom-line question hasn’t changed: How do we electrify our Japanese audience? All our energy goes into accomplishing just this by harmonizing the beauty of the physical and acrobatic work with a certain theatricality.”

On October 1, 2007, construction was far enough along to announce the show would officially open on October 1, 2008, during the Resort’s 25th Anniversary celebrations. The official name of the theater – Cirque du Soleil Theatre Tokyo – would sit 2,170 people, was approximately 5,400 square meters in area, had a total floor area of approximately 14,000 square meters, and had an approximate price tag of 14 billion yen. The show’s creators were also announced, as was the show’s over-arching theme: a story that would be carried by its characters throughout the show, a “world” vision inspired by poetry and Tarot, in which the four elements (fire, water, earth and air) are represented.

On June 3, 2008, despite a typhoon with steady rain and high winds, over 1,000 people attended the press conference at the Cirque du Soleil Theater in Tokyo to learn the new show’s name and to see a special performance. For Cirque du Soleil, Daniel Lamarre, Gilles Ste-Croix, Line Tremblay and Francois Girard were all on hand for Cirque du Soleil. For OLC, President and COO Yoshiro Fukushima presented. The Nouit character in her lustrous costume and angelic voice descended from the matrix above and was the catalyst for the Japanese “Kabuki Drop” in which a large banner was released to announce the show name and visual (though it had been leaked to the fandom some time before the official announcement)... ZED!

"The show will be more acrobatical than technological, and there will be a lot of human bodies involved," offered Gilles Ste-Croix, Senior Vice-President, Creative Content, whose job is to oversee the artistic aspect of all of the troupe's shows.

"In other words, for anyone who has seen other Cirque shows, the production is more like Saltimbanco than the much more technical KÀ by Robert Lepage."

Director François Girard said that technique will stand in for technology with ZED. "There will be plenty of people flying through the air," he concludes. "There is technology involved, of course, but we've done our utmost to camouflage it."

Following the "Lion's Den" performance in front of Guy Laliberté and the upper echelons at Cirque du Soleil, the show was tweaked for the last few times: the combination trampoline/Chinese Poles number went from a four-person to six-person act during this period, and an aerial silk act, which was only supposed to be an act-in-reserve, was officially added to the program. ZED would go on to premiere on time to rave reviews and spectacular attendance. Since its premiere (and over 1,000 performances), ZED had proven to be very popular and reached the one-millionth guest milestone faster than any other show in Japan. Yes, ZED was well on its way to capturing the hearts and mind of the Japanese...

/// A COSMIC VOID...

"The scenic atmosphere of ZED evokes the pinnacle of the High Renaissance and the dawn of the Mechanical Age." - François Séguin, Set Designer

The story of ZED blossoms in an environment that recalls antique astronomical and navigational instruments set in an ancient cosmos that is at the same time new and somehow familiar. In fact the set takes its inspiration from many eras and influences: ancient science, the inventions of Leonardo da Vinci, the products of the early days of the Mechanical Age, nautical instruments and astronomy all play a part in creating an atmosphere of solidity and tradition, floating in space that looks toward the future. As an example, on the floor of the stage is a representation of the Milky Way, with symbols referring to the different phases of the moon, and star placements.

An alphabet of 26 symbols, known as the Zed Alphabet, appears throughout the set and spells out the periodic table of the elements as well as other words related to the production. And five spheres of various diameters, each displaying their own special effects, form a miniature representation of an Astrolabe – a micro world that reflects the macro world. Made mostly of steel, the suspended astrolabe weighs 19,504 kilograms (43,000 pounds) and is fitted with a net that can deploy and retract as needed.

The theater is quite unique as it is the first permanent Cirque du Soleil Theater outside of North America (they're either located in Las Vegas or Orlando). It opened after about two years of construction and a total business cost of 14 billion yen. The distinctive Theatre roof formed with polyhedrons is designed in the image of a circus tent, the very beginnings of Cirque du Soleil. It is specifically designed to harness the sun's rays from any direction and its glass exterior definitely presents an appearance befitting Cirque du Soleil, the Circus of the Sun.

By the numbers: the building stands about 35 meters high, has approximately 5,400 square-meters of building area and 14,000 square-meters of total floor space to get lost on.

Inside is equally impressive.

Cirque du Soleil Tokyo's stage is one of the largest in Japan with a width of about 35 meters, a depth of about 20 meters, and a height to the ceiling of about 21 meters. The open, semi-circular stage thrusts out into the audience allowing guests to feel even closer to the action. A grid above the audience covers about 1,700 square meters of the ceiling and can support a load of 750 kilograms per square meters. This grid is used for special mechanical equipment and devices that make possible various stage effects.

Such as the "basket" winch from Fisher Technical, a custom ten horsepower counterweight assist winch that provides the means for rigidly securing a four ton piece of scenic and acrobatic equipment through an enormous range of loading conditions; the "net" winches, used to deploy and tension the safety net system for the trapeze (It is a two stage machine, with the first stage rotating a large drum to pull the stage width net into its initial slack position. After engaging a huge ratchet backstop on the first stage, the second stage drives a large ball screw to pull the entire winch system backward (riding on heavy duty FTSI FastTrack) to put over 7 tons of tension on the net); and the "vortex" winches that breathe life into the breathtaking opening curtain effect (done using 25 hp motors coupled with huge drums that are over eight feet in length and four feet in diameter. At over 25 linear feet per second, the drums collect almost an acre of fabric in the blink of an eye!). The fabric itself comprises more than 3,500 square meters of material.

The theater's 2,170 seats are arranged around the semi-circular stage with the seats at the back of the theater about 30 meters away, giving the audience a sense of being close to the action. The seats at the front of the theater are designed to allow a good view of Cirque du Soleil's spectacular aerial acrobatics and other effects by having seat backs that recline and extra space between rows. All the seats have cup holders so that guests can enjoy refreshments while they watch the show. These elements all help provide a comfortable and enjoyable ambience in the theater.

To ensure that the highest quality performance can always be presented, the backstage area includes dressing rooms that can accommodate a total of 70 performers, a training room for physical care and treatment, and a rehearsal room with a 10-meter-high ceiling where acrobats can rehearse. Also backstage are acrobatic and other equipment, a metal workshop for maintaining special equipment, and a costume shop where costumes are maintained.

/// A LIVING POEM...

ZED is a timeless evocation that draws together an imaginary world based on the Tarot and its arcana. It is a world that conjures the vitality of the human condition and holds up a mirror to our true selves. As a living poem, ZED is the meeting of two worlds: the heavens - where iridescent colors, paler shades and pearl and silver predominate - and the earth, which emphasizes ochre, green, turquoise, gold and Venetian blue explode before us.

At the center of it all is a wide-eyed, white-clothed harlequin named Zed (played with energy and innocence by Reda Guernick), who represents all of humanity in all its guises: from wisdom to folly and from discovery to adventure. Zed grows as he discovers the world on his journey of initiation, bridging the gap between the People of the Sky and the People of the Earth.

ZED is above all a show driven by its characters, who are inspired by the mysteries of the tarot. This rich gallery of colorful individuals gave director Francois Girard a poetic premise to build on, and the task of dressing them fell to costume designer Renée April. "I found my inspiration in the world of the tarot, but also in the Italian Renaissance and the world of Leonardo da Vinci, with a nod to other painters of that time, such as Hieronymus Bosch and Raphael," April mused. ZED is the meeting of two worlds: the sky – where iridescent colors, paler shades and pearl and silver predominate – and the earth, which recalls the Italian Renaissance, with an emphasis on ochre, green, intense turquoise, gold and Venetian blue. "I was aiming for a certain homogeneity and purity of line in keeping with the visual world of François Girard," explains April. "The 150 costumes in the show also reveal my playful side, but they are not caricatures. I work a lot through emotion and intuition. I always prefer works that project the viewer into a distant era. Even though that calls for more in-depth research, I am not trying to replicate the era in great detail. I always concentrate more on an interpretation of it."

This world of the arcana, in which ZED finds its inspiration, teems with life and vibrant characters, including the Great Goddess, The Magician, The Sphinxes and the Satyrs – all engaged in a lyrical odyssey to the heart of the human experience. And through eleven different performances, featuring an eclectic cast of mixed progeny one expects from Cirque du Soleil, these characters weave an incredible story of the human condition – from birth, to discovery, to the realization of purpose - sharing and growing. He takes us through eleven different performances featuring the eclectic cast of mixed progeny one expects from Cirque du Soleil. But he doesn't merely walk us through the individual numbers; he helps thread the tapestry that binds them to each other, and us all, completing stunning images framed in breathtaking tableaux from which an entire world is sewn.

ZED – THE TRAVELER

Inspired by "The Fool" of the Tarot, Zed resembles a Pierrot. Wearing a Rasta wig and dressed in all white, his paleness allows him to take on the coloring of the various tableaux in which he appears, and reflects his eagerness to know everything. Called to undergo a transformation, he is both multiple and omnipresent. The initial state of Zed is associated with the unconscious and chaos: his imbecility is obvious, but his silliness is touching because it reveals his vulnerability and naivety. By the end of the journey, Zed represents consciousness, restored harmony and the reversal of the order of things through laughter.

NOUIT – THE GREAT GODDESS

The creator of the firmament, Nouit (Johanna Lillvik, singer) is the incarnation of the Great Goddess, Mother of the Sky and of all beings who inhabit it. As a representation of the starry sky (she is fitted with wings, decorated with 400 LEDs), Nouit expresses an infinite compassion for all beings and is an ally of Zed, whom she understands and quietly watches over, making every effort to help him achieve his quest.

ABRAKA – THE KING OF THE EARTH

Inspired by “The Magician” of the Tarot, the magus Abraka (Kevin Faraci) is the Father of the Earth and procreator of all the creatures who inhabit it. Abraka is all-powerful – he wears a chain mail coat and a large royal collar. When he raises his arms, his four wings, which range gradually from purple to gold, spread out over 18 meters – but his power is earthbound and subject to the omnipotence of the Shaman. He is the guardian of the liberating, jubilant power of Zed.

THE SHAMAN & DJINN – MASTERS OF THE ARCANA

Inspired by “The Pope” of the Tarot, the Shaman is clad in a transparent copper-colored outfit coupled with white-painted tribal patterns that contrast with his black skin. As the carrier of the magic incantation of the universe, he presides over the birth of Nouit and Abraka, who submit to him. It is also he who awakens the elements. In him, Zed finds a guide to initiate him into the secrets of the arcane and accompany him on his path to self realization. The Shaman is accompanied by Djinn, his accomplice and apprentice. Covered in gold leaf and smartly adorned, Djinn is the bringer of light and fire, opening the way wherever the Shaman may go.

KERNOUN – THE GOD OF HELL

Kernoun, inspired by “The Devil” in the Tarot, embodies the troubled forces of the unconscious. Covered in the burning hues of reds, oranges, yellows and ochres, he reigns over the subterranean depths, a kingdom that is one of fire where the Satyrs are his unwitting subjects.

CLOWNS – PLAYING THE FOOL

Oulaï and Nalaï; one is a vindictive petty dictator who seeks to control everything, while the other is just plain lazy and always finds a way to do as little as possible. Together, they form an inseparable duo of buffoons with the splendid naivety and great poetry to both move us and make us laugh.

* * *

And through eleven different performances, these characters weave an incredible story of the human condition – from birth, to discovery, to the realization of purpose – which they then share with us all.

BATONS – THE MEETING OF THE TWO WORLDS

ZED is the meeting of two worlds: the heavens – where iridescent colors, paler shades and pearl and silver predominate – and the earth, which emphasizes ochre, green, turquoise, gold and Venetian blue, explode before us. And Djinn, the baton master, marshals this big bang by combining dance and gymnastics, and demonstrating great agility and exceptional control as he spins three batons around his neck, arms and legs. In the darkness, light or fire, he tosses and spins the batons high into the air and catches them just as easily.

BUNGEE – BIRTH OF THE SKY

As the energy from the meeting of the two worlds begins to dissipate, Nouit descends from the heavens to spread her wings, beautifully framing four artists suspended from bungees who fall precipitously from the heights above the audience to dance a wonderful ballet of happiness, as their movements leave trails of light in their wake. During this scene, a firmament of thousands of stars twinkles in the spotlight. To achieve this effect the vault of the Astrolabe is covered with 2,850 LEDs and the floor of the stage has more than 1,000 fiber optic points of light.

LASSOS – BIRTH ON EARTH

Just as the heavens exuberate in their new-found creation, the earth also comes into its own. Here six guardians of Abraka, master of the Earth, operate lassos with incredible dexterity, their undulating waves helping to harness and amplify the energy of this pristine land to further its existence along all creation. Their costumes are inspired by medieval Asian and Middle-Eastern outfits with bright, vibrant, sunny colors. The gold fabric of the armbands, hat plates and ankle bands is used to portray the gold of Arabic jewelry. The initials used are taken from the aforementioned ZED alphabet.

POLES AND TRAMPOLINE – REACHING UP

Combining Chinese Poles with the Trampoline, the earth-bound stop at nothing to reach the heavens above where The People of the Sky reside. Using the trampoline as a springboard, the artists bounce high in the air, precisely criss-crossing each other on their way to grab the poles.

SOLO TISSUE – FIRST SIGHT

In a stunning display of agility and strength, the graceful performer becomes one with the column of blue fabric that supports and cradles her female form. This breathtaking aerial dance combines elements of acrobatics, contortion and movement to create a stirring and powerful image... one that catches Zed's attention.

WIRE - PENDULUM

A wire is suspended 8 meters over the floor. Above it, a mesmerizing burning pendulum swings back and forth, back and forth. Through balance and precision the tightrope walkers pass each other at a frenetic pace and perform death-defying leaps and breathtaking columns all while trying to keep from plummeting to their doom. Inspired once again by the Renaissance era, the costumes for these high wire artists include a front panel that looks like a rooster's feathers. This was inspired by the position of the male artists on the wire (puffed-up chests). Since the artists cannot wear boots on a high wire, a gaiter and shoe were created of the same color, making it look like they are wearing boots. For the female artists' costumes, embroidered appliques were placed on the torso and the side of the legs to match the gaiters and cuffs of the male costumes. The flaps on the bodice are more delicate and paler than those on the men's costumes. The headpiece is a sort of gold lace tiara, with very light hair scattered with feathers to give it a very airy feel.

JUGGLING – KERNOUN’S FIRE

Ascending from Kernoun’s lair, a father, mother and their children juggle bowling pins and plates at a dizzying speed, on the floor, in columns of two and three. Then the family transforms juggling into an unforgettable moment of drama using flaming torches that illuminate the stage with a huge dome of fire.

BANQUINE - BABEL

Highlighting the extraordinary agility of the human body, the house troupe mystifies by performing acrobatics and human pyramids in a series of dramatic movements and perfectly synchronized crossings that depend on absolute trust. The initial idea was to create water costumes. The “spaghetti” pattern on the arms and legs represents the flow of water. The tulle on the chest is a distorted strawberry. Red and blue were used to show that these characters are noble and elegant. Sure to astound, Banquine is one of Cirque du Soleil’s signature pieces of performance art.

STRAPS – ZED IN LOVE

Two artists use straps to bring the game of seduction to life with Zed in this amazing routine. Their movements show incredible agility, balance and great strength as they soar into the heavens hand-in-hand. One represents the People of the Air, the other the People of the Earth; separate they are longing, but together they bring about the concept of love.

HAND TO HAND – TWO WORLDS MEET

With strength and flexibility, two artists in constant contact move almost imperceptibly to take positions that demonstrate an infallible sense of balance. In their quest for harmony, the performers rely on their intuition and concentration to present a moment of pure serenity.

FLYING TRAPEZE - CELEBRATION

A combined group of trapeze performers from two different family troupes came together to present a spectacularly energetic aerial ballet. (It’s very fast-paced!) Perched on two parallel platforms, they soar in acrobatic flight to reach the hands of their catchers on the trapeze over and over and over again. The speeds at which they fly across the skies of Zed are astounding!

CHARIVARI – A FOND FAREWELL

The whole troupe gathers to present an acrobatic parade of strength and elegance with a series of impressive numbers that combine gymnastics and aerial acrobatics. Among the highlights in the number: human pyramids, flying and daring dives achieved through individual strength.

/// IMAGES: ZED'S TABLEAUX

As we've seen thus far, ZED's tableau is replete with amazing and stark images, an area that many claim Cirque du Soleil has been lacking in a number of its newest productions. Though I can't claim to enjoy every act, nuance and moment in the show unconditionally, a number of images within ZED both greatly surprised and impressed me. One such image is the dramatic opening of the show, a gasp-inducing moment guaranteed to send chills down even the most rigid unfeeling spine.

Void, null and invalid are words that help define for us the concept of nothing, the very state of the world as we first come upon ZED in Cirque du Soleil's beautiful theater in Tokyo. But the notion of nothingness is merely a misnomer, as much of this world is merely hidden from us behind the behemoth of white canvass known as "the Vortex", a scrim which comprises more than 5,600 square materials of material. The Vortex evokes images of what the world might have looked like before the heavens met the earth. For a moment it is a peaceful existence, interrupted only by the cries and laughter of Zed, our guide. But when Zed falls from the heavens into the fertile plains of the earth below – the impetus of the big bang, the Vortex is whisked away at more than six meters per second, making the entire surface vanish in 25 seconds flat. The spectacular birth is one of the most jaw-dropping reveals in a Cirque du Soleil show since the "O" curtain.

Another comes as the energies from the creation of the universe begin to dissipate. Nouit (Johanna Lillvik, singer) – the incarnation of the Great Goddess, descends from the heavens to spread her silvery wings. It's a striking image, beautifully framing four artists suspended from bungees who fall precipitously from the heights above the audience to dance a wonderful ballet of happiness.

A third comes during the Lassos number. Although this number is lifted from the traditional Chinese circus (and performed roughly the same there as here at Cirque du Soleil), it's the staging and what's going on around the act that commands the most attention. Towering above all, his massive wings outstretched and undulating under the power of his fierce voice, is Abraka, providing the song of earth's creation. As he crescendos and holds that final powerful note, his wings (long, colorful capes that radiate in every direction from his core), break away and fly off into deep space, crafting not only a commanding conclusion to an act, but a powerful transformation for the character.

Another comes during the juggling act; Kernoun ascends from the depths of the stage as the entire area is awash in yellow flame. But one of the most spine tingling has to be at the conclusion of the Hand-to-Hand act, performed by Quidam alumni Yves Decoste and Marie-Laur Mesnage. As the act progresses, dozens of performers on wires descend from all points of the theater and converge together on stage. After the entire cast gathers, they perform as a chorus the last verse of the act's song "The World's Meet". It was such a beautiful moment that I couldn't help but shiver in goose-bumps.

/// DISASTER STRIKES!

Friday, March 11, 2:45pm Japan Standard Time (5:45am UTC), a magnitude 9.0 undersea megathrust earthquake struck off the coast of Japan, the most powerful known earthquake to hit Japan, and one of the top five most powerful in the world since modern record-keeping began in 1900. The earthquake triggered powerful tsunami waves that reached heights of up to 40.5 meters (133 feet), traveling up to 10 kilometers (6 miles) inland, moved Honshu 2.4 meters (8 feet) east, and shifted the Earth on its axis by estimates of between 10 centimeters (4 inches) and 25 centimeters (10 inches).

The tsunami caused a number of nuclear accidents, primarily the level 7 meltdowns at three reactors in the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant complex near the epicenter. Residents within a 20 km (12 mi) radius of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant and a 10 km (6.2 mi) radius of the Fukushima Daini Nuclear Power Plant were evacuated. A Japanese National Police Agency report confirmed 15,854 deaths, 26,992 injured, and 3,155 people went missing across twenty prefectures, as well as 129,225 buildings totally collapsed, with a further 254,204 buildings 'half collapsed', and another 691,766 buildings partially damaged.

The earthquake and tsunami also caused extensive and severe structural damage in north-eastern Japan, including heavy damage to roads and railways as well as fires in many areas, and a dam collapse. Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan said, "In the 65 years after the end of World War II, this is the toughest and the most difficult crisis for Japan." Around 4.4 million households in northeastern Japan were left without electricity and 1.5 million without water following the disaster.

Japan was in crisis and although it would take many months and years to recover, the spirit of the Japanese people was not broken. Many attempted to go about their business and reclaim their lives before chaos ensued, and the hope was that the country could get back to business as usual, but that was not meant to be.

/// SHOCKING NEWS...

Shocking news hit the Cirque du Soleil fandom around Noon on Sunday, July 24th - ZED, Cirque du Soleil's resident show in Tokyo, Japan would cease operations and close as of December 31, 2011. It was the proverbial shot heard around the world for Cirque fans. It came as no surprise to learn that ticket sales and attendance had plummeted since the 2011 Tokoku earthquake and tsunami, and based on a review of the expected results and the long-term viability of the show, it was mutually agreed on July 25, 2011 to indefinitely close the Cirque du Soleil Theater Tokyo and cease performances of ZED as of December 31, 2011.

"Because ZED is staged in a custom designed and built theater just for it, the future of this fantastic show is still very much in doubt," Fascination Newsletter said at the time. "It can't tour in either big tops or arenas, and a theater suitable for its size and scope would need to be built (it took about two years and a lot of money to build the current theater for ZED), so clearly options are limited. The most we fans can currently hope for is a complete show recording, but details are not forthcoming at this time."

Thankfully it would not be the last time we heard from the world of ZED, as pieces of the show were salvaged and used to upgrade VIVA ELVIS and MYSTERE on the Las Vegas Strip.

Will ZED surface again?

“ZED will surface again elsewhere,” Francois Girard, the show’s Director, has promised. But when and where and in what form are unknown.

It saddens my heart to know that at the moment ZED has had its final curtain call, the light from all its magnificent stars has dimmed and this spectacular show has as yet not seen another audience.

THE MOST SPECTACULAR ILLUSIONS
FROM THE MAGICIAN OF THE CENTURY



CRISS ANGEL

BELIEVE

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

“Would you believe nine Cirque du Soleil shows in Las Vegas by 2010?”

That’s how one of Fascination’s news briefs read on July 6, 2006, as the unofficial Cirque du Soleil newsletter highlighted a story, published by the Las Vegas Sun, which reviewed potential plans for the expansion of Cirque du Soleil’s empire in Las Vegas following MGM/Mirage’s purchase of Mandalay Resorts International. The purchase brought, amongst other properties, the Excalibur, the Luxor and Mandalay Bay into the MGM/Mirage Resorts fold.

As reported by Las Vegas freelance journalist and podcast host Steve Friess, reliable chatter at the time was that there were preliminary plans for nine Cirque productions on the Strip by the end of the decade, including a new Luxor show, an Elvis-themed production at MGM Mirage’s Project CityCenter, a production to replace “Mamma Mia!” once it plays out at Mandalay Bay, and show No. 9 at an unspecified hotel - possibly a children’s show at Excalibur to counter the adult-themed “Zumanity.”

In response to inquiries about a permanent production show at the Luxor Theater, MGM Mirage spokeswoman Jenn Michaels said, “We’ve been looking at a number of options for the former ‘Hairspray’ theater; we are close to signing a deal and will make an announcement as soon as we are able to do so.” Michaels added that MGM Mirage didn’t have anything to announce regarding headliners and that plans for the Luxor’s entertainment program still needed to be firmed up. But it was the first time the possibility that Cirque du Soleil would inhabit a theater at the Luxor had been mentioned.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	September 26, 2008 (Previews) October 31, 2008 (Gala)
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Serge Denoncourt
Composer:	Eric Serra
Location:	LUXOR, Las Vegas

Creative Team

Guide	Composer
Guy Laliberté	Eric Serra
Guide	Choreographer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Wade Robson
Illusions & Star	Lighting Designer
Criss Angel	Jeanette Farmer
Director	Sound Designer
Serge Denoncourt	Jonathan Deans
Creation	Images & Projections
Pierre Phaneuf	Francis Laporte
Associate Creation	Makeup Designer
Christiane Barette	Nathalie Gagné
Set Designer	Acro Equipment
Ray Winkler	Jaque Paquin
Costume Designer	Acro Performance
Méridith Caron	André Simard
	Props & Puppets
	Michael Curry

/// MINDFREAKED

By the mid-2000s, the ever-increasing Cirque du Soleil empire constantly looked at ways to expand their horizons and do for other entertainment mediums what they did with circus: reinvent it. This line of thinking led to many projects – from hotels and entertainment complexes to creating arena concerts, musical revues and resurrecting vaudeville, but one of the oft-thought areas of amusement that the company considered was the re-invention of the magic show. Like the circus, magic is a source of wonder, amazement and the unexpected – ripe for a Cirque du Soleil makeover. But however hard and deep Cirque researched and developed their concept they either decided they couldn't do it, or understood that magic was a personality-driven medium (think Penn & Teller, David Copperfield and Siegfried & Roy) and the project dropped. But when illusionist Criss Angel's star began to rise as his show Mindfreak became increasingly popular, all parties involved began to talk giving birth to what would ultimately become **CRISS ANGEL BELIEVE BY CIRQUE DU SOLEIL**.

Questions regarding the necessity of having yet another magic show on the Strip, even if produced by Cirque du Soleil, and just who the magician would be began almost immediately. Criss Angel's name – the star of A&E's magic series Mindfreak – was immediately rumored. But who was this Criss Angel?

Criss Angel had one of the highest advance tickets sales of off-Broadway productions during his fourteen month 600 performance run of "Criss Angel MINDFREAK" which he created, produced, directed and starred in. Criss Angel MINDFREAK (the television show) was at the time scheduled to film its 70th episode in its third season shot exclusively at The Luxor. Publishing house Harper Collins was releasing Criss' highly anticipated first book, Criss Angel MINDFREAK: Secret Revelations in April 2007. Criss had also been named 2001, 2004, 2005, 2007 and 2008 Magician of the Year (by The Academy of Magical Arts), making him the first five-time and back-to-back recipient ever to be awarded these most prestigious accolade. Criss was also unanimously selected as the recipient of the 22nd Louie Award for outstanding achievement in the art of magic. Recently, Criss had also added acting to his resume, guest starring in an episode of "CSI:NY".

But internally, Cirque du Soleil already knew who Criss Angel was; they'd already begun developing a magic-based concept with MGM-Mirage by August 2006 with François Macerola, named Executive Producer, Guy Caron as Creative Director and Nancy Malette, as Production Manager.

By that December most of the creative team had come together, running a few technical and dance workshops (December 1st, 2nd, and 4th) to get the creative juices flowing. On December 6, 2006, Serge Denoncourt (Director), Guy Caron (Director of Creation) and Criss Angel met with Guy Laliberté to present the show's concept. And what a concept: it was the first time the entire production process would take place in Las Vegas, it was Cirque's first magic-based show, and it was the first Cirque show with a celebrity starring in the lead role. Although the show concept was approved one director would not go forward with the project: Guy Caron. After a period of prolonged reflection, Guy Caron decided to withdraw from Luxor 2008 concentrate on the development of new Creative Content projects.

(Did he perceive just how challenging a magic show with Angel would be?) Pierre Phaneuf, an Assistant to the Vice-President of Creative Content and New Project Development, would take over the position (and see the project to its conclusion).

By mid-March 2007 a detailed design of the set, stage and all its elements were due, and Eiko Ishioka was scheduled to present preliminary costume designs (she would later be replaced by M  r  dith Caron). In April construction bids on the theater renovation were due and demolition of the old fixtures set to begin. And by May the illusions workshops would begin.

And the wheels kept turning...

Then according to Vegas Pop's Luxe Life column by Robin Leach, Cirque du Soleil was on the verge of making an announcement about the oft-rumored Criss Angel "magic show" sometime around March 15, 2007:

"It's now official that Cirque du Soleil will present 'Mindfreak' magician Criss Angel in a \$100-million+ magic spectacular as first reported in LUXE LIFE. The news is imminent and a countdown of just four days has begun. LUXE LIFE has learned that invitations will be issued to TV crews and journalists within 24 hours to meet at the Luxor on Thursday, Mar. 15 at 2PM for the actual announcement with Cirque executives from Montreal and Luxor president, Felix Rappaport, along with other MGM officials also in attendance."

March 15th came and went without any announcement; Luxe Life reported that the conference had only been postponed.

But on March 22, 2007, Cirque du Soleil and MGM/Mirage announced their next co-production: Cirque Luxor (not the official name,) featuring the magical talents of Criss Angel. An article in Variety noted a few facts about the announcement at the time: "The production purportedly will cost \$65 million USD. The amount covers the cost of theater renovations and creation expenses. It will be the sixth permanent Cirque show on the Las Vegas Strip (Cirque Elvis 2009 will be the seventh.) It is the first time Cirque will feature a star performer. From the announcement:

Always on the lookout for the next artistic challenge, Cirque du Soleil is working with Criss to fuse his revolutionary illusions and mind-blowing artistry with acrobatics, dance, puppetry, music and poetry to tell a story, taking audiences on a bizarre and fascinating journey. Re-inventing the traditional magic show has been a long-standing desire of Guy Lalibert  , Guide and Founder of Cirque du Soleil. Five years of extensive research and development were spent exploring the world of magic and how to re-define the experience. The crucial element, a young, edgy and talented artist and mystifier, was found in Criss Angel. With his incredibly unique creativity, Criss is now working with the experienced team of Cirque du Soleil creators led by Director Serge Denoncourt to bring this dream to life.

"I wanted to distance myself from the swimsuit-clad babes and cheapo variety acts, and do a more theatrical magic show, with emotion. Something that would reflect the aesthetic of the Italian theatre," said Denoncourt.

The director considers illusionist Criss Angel currently the best in his field, a genre that has seen nothing new since David Copperfield in the '80s. "But if we hadn't hit it off so well, we wouldn't work together. We're both really happy. We don't want a show that's too clean, too rigid, too cute. We want to be a little more provocative," acknowledges the director. "Because I love magic, because I love Criss, and because I love Cirque du Soleil, we will bring to Vegas a different magic show. And I say it's about time!"

Since he was six years old, Criss Angel has immersed himself in a multitude of art forms, from performance artist to mystifier and provocateur. Since then, a relentless work ethic combined with talent, skill and vision has made Criss one of the most provocative artists of our day. From creator, producer and performer in his television series, specials and live shows, Criss has redefined the term "artist" for the 21st Century.

"When I first met Guy Laliberté, I said, 'Guy, you reinvented the circus and the poetry you create is unlike anything the world has ever seen. Imagine if we could reinvent magic like you reinvented the circus.' That is my dream, that is my quest, and that is exactly what we are going to do when we open up this show."

"I've spent 15 years creating and evolving a concept that the world of entertainment has never seen," said Criss Angel. "Now, I'm thrilled to be working with Cirque du Soleil and Felix Rappaport and his amazing team here at the Luxor to create an experience that goes beyond even my wildest expectations. I am confident that this collaboration will culminate in what is destined to become one of the most exciting shows Las Vegas has ever seen and redefine magic in the same way Cirque du Soleil has redefined the circus."

Daniel Lamarre, President and CEO of Cirque du Soleil, said, "This production represents a new, distinctive type of creation for Cirque du Soleil. We believe there is a market for an unconventional magic show with production values audiences have come to expect from Cirque du Soleil."

Gilles Ste-Croix, Senior Vice President of Creative Content at Cirque du Soleil said " Cirque du Soleil has always worked with an acrobatic foundation for each of our shows; with The Beatles LOVE we were privileged enough to have The Beatles music as our center; with this project - magic will be at the core. We are excited to combine our years of research and creative expertise in the areas of staging, lighting, sound design, projections, costume and make-up design with Criss Angel's one of a kind experience as a creator and performer of illusion, special effects and magic."

/// CRACKS IN THE MIRROR?

"Cirque du Soleil has taken out a huge insurance policy to cover its first headliner, illusionist Criss Angel. Vegas Confidential has also learned that Cirque is working on a Plan B in the event that the 'Mindfreak' star is not able to carry out his commitment to do 4,000 performances in the \$100 million production at Luxor over the next 10 years. The show is to open in late July."

The blurb above, from Norm Clark of the Las Vegas Review-Journal in early 2008, raised a lot of eyebrows. It would be the first indication that all was not well with the partnership even in this early stage, although nobody understood that fully at the time. Indeed, many long-time Vegas entertainment journalists began to ask: how much Cirque is too much? Mike Weatherford of the Review-Journal posed that very question in an article for his paper. Indeed fans and followers of Cirque have been asking that very question since Zumanity premiered in 2003.

Renewed concern came in part from the 20% stake in Cirque du Soleil that Nakheel and Istithmar World of Dubai purchased on August 6th:

The Dubai money should aid the "acceleration of our development," Cirque's president, Daniel Lamarre, noted. [...] But each time Cirque opens a show on the Strip, there is a renewed gap between the company's ambitious plans and the skeptical local reaction. Talk to Cirque, and you hear something like this: "Give me as many venues as you have, and I'll find the right creators," Lamarre says. "When I walk into our creative center in Montreal, there are more ideas than there are theaters available to us." Talk to Las Vegas locals and others in the show community, and you hear something like this: "The Cirque shows are wonderful, but enough already. Isn't there anything else out there?"

The reason for the insurance policy became clear when it was announced that on Wednesday, July 30th 2008, Criss Angel would attempt to escape from the Spyglass Hotel in Clearwater Beach, Florida before it imploded – all on live television: "There's 550 sticks of dynamite that will be below my feet, there's a helicopter that needs to hover 30 feet above the roof. If I don't make it through the handcuffs, five locks and four doors in no more than three minutes and 30 seconds - if I'm one second late, that helicopter needs to leave without me. Who knows, I could trip, I could have trouble picking a lock."

And how happy was Cirque with this stunt? "Cirque is not very happy about my decision to do this because they have a lot of money invested in me and in the show. They would prefer that I don't do it. Whether I kill myself or twist my ankle, it would still have a detrimental effect -- obviously one more than another -- on us opening. And there's a lot of money that ticks away every day that show's not open and we're not ready to roll. So they don't want me to do it. They're not happy with this decision."

Angel did attempt the stunt, and survived of course, crawling away from the wrecked building after seemingly missing his helicopter getaway. (It was also one of the lamest "escape" attempts we've ever seen. No attempt was even made to suggest some sort of "magic" was involved...)

/// JUST BELIEVE

A year after rumors of discord between Cirque and its new star personality began circulating (they really didn't want him doing the implosion stunt) the name of the new show was announced by Cirque (on April 17, 2008) – BELIEVE – and we got our first glimpse of its presentation:

On his death bed, legendary magician and escape artist, Harry Houdini told his wife the following; "After my death, many people will claim that they are still able to communicate with me. If their claims are valid, they will be able to tell you a code word - that word is BELIEVE."

CRISS ANGEL Believe, from Cirque du Soleil is a haunting exploration deep inside the inventive mind of mystifier Criss Angel as he hovers between the land of the living and a surreal world uniquely woven together by the distinctive imaginations of Criss Angel and Cirque du Soleil seen exclusively at Luxor Las Vegas.

Unlike traditional magic-themed shows, CRISS ANGEL Believe transcends any preconceived notion of what it means to be emotionally engaged by the arts of mysticism and illusion. A fantasy, an allegory, a highly theatrical tableau of mood, reverie and emotion set against a backdrop of dreamlike darkness and light.

Criss Angel stars as a surreal, enigmatic Victorian Noble. Along a path of imaginative exploration, he encounters Kayala and Crimson, two women who represent different aspects of femininity. Along his path he also discovers four comical Ushers who introduce the audience to the baroque theater of Criss' mind. Also part of the production is an intense troupe of characters and dancers who mix a multitude of styles into a high-energy visual feast, punctuated by moments of grace and sensuality.

The stunning illusions in CRISS ANGEL Believe are not presented as standalone elements, but as interdependent components using heightened imagery, fantastical creatures and impossible feats of legerdemain, all of which are integrated into the dazzling, colorful fabric of the story.

Criss Angel BELIEVE was slated to celebrate its gala premiere on October 31, 2008, chosen because every Halloween for 10 years following Harry Houdini's death, his wife held a vigil to test the legitimacy of people who claimed to be able to communicate with Houdini. To claim success they needed to say the code word - BELIEVE. But would fans of Criss Angel be able to hold a vigil for him on Halloween?

/// THE CURLY SHUFFLE

Just weeks after Cirque du Soleil and MGM/Mirage made the official announcement about BELIEVE, its thematic content, and when the show was slated to premiere, rumors began circulating that the show would have to be delayed for "unforeseen circumstances". By June 30, 2008 some truth to those rumors became known: Cirque du Soleil announced that the debut of "Criss Angel Believe" would be pushed back two weeks. Ticketed previews that were to begin on Sept. 1 would begin Sept. 12. The private party to mark the "official" debut had been pushed from Sept. 12 to Oct. 9. Spokeswoman Anita Nelving said technical delays made the cast about five weeks late moving from an off-strip warehouse into the custom theater at the Luxor.

The move affected 14 shows that already were on sale but they would not be the first.

On September 8, 2008, Mike Weatherford in the Review-Journal had some interesting things to say about the cause of the latest delay for the Criss Angel show:

With [KA and LOVE], the main goal of previews was to make tweaks or changes based partly on audience reaction, Cirque spokeswoman Anita Nelving explains. If automated props or sets broke down in the course of things, everyone took it in stride. This time illusions are involved and "there are elements that can't be worked out during previews," she says. If a technical gaffe exposes how a trick is done, that's a real problem. "This is the first time we've created a show of illusion, and we underestimated the amount of time we needed." On the other hand, a member of the show's production staff reports (through a third party) that "Believe" is "just out and out boring," and that the illusions are more of the close-up variety that don't hold up in a large theater.

Then the show was delayed yet again. On September 17, 2008, just mere days before the show was set to begin its original set of preview performances, came official word of yet another delay. The \$100-million showcase would now publically debut at the Luxor on October 31st according to the Review-Journal with a gala premiere to happen sometime after...

"I can't imagine a more fitting night all year for Criss than Halloween, the night that marks the 82nd anniversary of the death of his and the show's inspiration, Harry Houdini," Angel's publicist, Steve Flynn, said. "Believe" originally was scheduled to open publicly on Sept. 12.

Publicists for Angel and Cirque say the magician and show's director, Serge Denoncourt, insist every aspect of the technical show, which includes illusions, acrobatics and pyrotechnics, be perfect before it opens, and more time was needed.

The latest decision to delay the premiere was announced Saturday after more than 400 Cirque employees and artists took in a performance Friday. The creative team met afterward and it was then decided to move the premiere to Oct. 31 and restore the preview period to its original timeframe.

Organizers first delayed the premiere in late June because of apparent technical difficulties. The premiere was then rescheduled for Oct. 10. Further "enormous complexities" were cited on Sept. 2 as the schedule for preview performances was pushed back a second time. While the change didn't affect the Oct. 10 premiere, the decision effectively axed the first two weeks of preview performances.

Saturday's announcement restores the preview period to its original five-week run, with the first performance taking place Sept. 26. "The preview period is an important part of our creative process as it allows the show to develop in front of a live audience," Cirque du Soleil spokeswoman Anita Nelving said.

"Believe" will blend Angel's illusions with the costumes and acrobatics that are part of Cirque du Soleil productions. Angel will give about 5,200 performances over the next decade. His contract will see him perform five nights a week for the next 10 years, with an additional five-year extension option.

/// JUST A PEEK...

On September 18, 2008, with public previews still a week away, Cirque du Soleil sent out a little peek into the world of illusionist Criss Angel to whet our appetites so we'd BELIEVE:

"Clear your mind; recognize the principles of being, and feel yourself being transported into a fantastical world of surreality. Allow a visionary journey to begin where the child within you is reborn, setting free the wonder and amazement of your own imagination. Feast on this imaginative vision. Experience the reality of what you see on stage but remember reality is only what you think you see. This mystifying adventure is nothing more than an allegory which tells the tale of one man's search for love and meaning as he attempts to decipher his existence within a multifaceted vortex of reality and illusion. Immerse yourself in a metaphysical dreamlike state where dancing rabbits and similar oddities are the norm. Magic is now reborn. Prepare yourself for an intimate celebration of art forms bleeding together to create a virtual landscape of Illusion, song, dance movement and mysticism. All pre-conceived notions of truth and existence be left at the door. What you're seeing may not be real.

Don't believe your eyes.

Welcome to CRISS ANGEL Believe."

- The Ushers - Luigi (Martin Boisvert), Lars (Abdelkader Chelef), Slim (Mariano Nicolas De Yorio) and Maestro (Mateo Amieva).
- Kayala (Elena Serafimovich) - a wondrous beauty draped in white.
- Crimson (Aminah Abdul-Jillil) - a monster of nightmarish proportions.
- Lucky, the Rabbit in "Homage to the Rabbits."
- Other Characters - The Dolls (Gigi, Taz and Charissa), Hyena (a rabbit gone rabid), The Paparazzi (with cameras ablaze), The Crowmen (black birds to prey on the weak), Grand Master Tronik (a grand and beastly puppet), Mole (a creature of the underworld), Zangelica (half girl, half rabbit, all legs), Dega (a young rabbiteer), Auntie B & Father Luminus.
- Dancers - Deirdre Barnes, Liana Blackburn, Angela Brickhouse, Matt Carroll, Pamela Chu, Hiroaki Kumagi, Martha Nichols, Donnell Flanrico Quaker, Logan Schyvynck, Sherisse Springer, Ben Susak, Jesse Weafer, Bruce Weber, Shigeki Yamada, and Sara Zanelletti.
- Musicians - Elvis Lederer (Guitar), Jose Pepe Jimenez (Percussion, Electronic Percussion & Drums), Nitza (Singer), and Jean-Francois (Djeff) Houle (Bandleader, Bass & Electronics)

/// TRAIN WRECK?

"I've spent 15 years creating and evolving a concept that the world of entertainment has never seen," said Criss Angel in a release by Cirque du Soleil. "Now, I'm thrilled to be working with Cirque du Soleil and Felix Rappaport and his amazing team here at the Luxor to create an experience that goes beyond even my wildest expectations. I am confident that this collaboration will culminate in what is destined to become one of the most exciting shows Las Vegas has ever seen and redefine magic in the same way Cirque du Soleil has redefined the circus."

Criss Angel BELIEVE had its first "Lion's Den" performance on September 12th, opened its doors to preview performances on the 26th and by the 30th, reviews were pouring in: everything from "horrible" to "terrible" and all points in between. It was clear that BELIEVE was nothing short of a train-wreck, but the coup de grace - DOUG ELFMAN's article from the Las Vegas Review-Journal - seemed to sum it up nicely:

Criss Angel fans flew in from as far away as London to see his new Cirque du Soleil show open at the Luxor on Friday. The verdict by many? Creatively, "Believe" is a possibly unsalvageable "waste of time" and a "dead end" that literally bored some audience members to sleep. On Saturday night, reaction was even worse. "Everyone in the bathroom was chanting 'bull--'" from the urinals, Damon Ranger of Chicago told me Saturday. "It was absolutely awful. You can 'Believe' how bad it is - because it's terrible!" People streamed out of the theater on Saturday screaming about how poor it was. A group of six women was led by a woman yelling furiously, demanding their money back. "Dude, it's a train wreck," Ranger said. On a scale of 1 to 10, he declared "Believe" a zero.

Here's what they saw, as described on Wikipedia:

PREMONITION

Criss comes towards the audience and throws his wristband into the crowd. Once a spectator catches it, Criss has the person tell their name, where they're from, and to pick any word out of the English language. A small, locked box (always within the view of the audience) is then lowered from the top of the stage, where Maestro opens it and brings its contents - a clear plastic jar with a piece of paper in it - to Criss and the selected audience member. Much to the amazement of the audience, the paper contains the name, location, and chosen word of the participant.

TESLA COIL

Criss is suited up in a chainmail outfit as a very large Tesla coil is presented onstage. Criss goes to enter the cage surrounding the coil, but Crimson has other plans. She turns the power to the coil all the way on, causing sparks to fly and the theatre lights to go out. A pained shout is heard from Criss, and he writhes on the ground in pain as human-sized rabbits in doctor's coats lift him onto a gurney and roll him offstage.

LUCKY & HOMAGE TO THE RABBITS

A small rabbit appears on a large projection screen, desperately trying to escape. It makes its way out and hops onto a box, taking a small microphone and discussing Cirque du Soleil show rules and how it is now going to take over the show. While assuring the audience that no animals were harmed during the production of the show, a large light burns out and falls from the top of the stage, crushing Lucky and killing him instantly. The Ushers come out to find Lucky, placing him on the front of the stage as multiple rabbits come out to dance for their fallen friend. While they dance, Lucky's corpse is taken away, only to be replaced with Criss' body on a gurney. Crimson, who seems to be leading the dance, rips Criss' form off of the gurney and onto the floor, where all of the rabbits fight over it to get a piece. They then dance around with his limbs, head and torso, before being shoed away.

HUMBODIK

The Ushers reassemble Criss, before running offstage to get "the machine". Crimson reappears, dancing for the body of Criss while the machine is brought out. Criss' body is then lifted from the ground, before being engulfed in CO2. After the CO2 is blown away, we see Criss, whole again.

THE DOLLS & DOVES

Three dolls - Gigi, Taz and Charissa - appear, dancing seductively while they dress Criss. Criss does some sleight of hand with doves, before he disappears into a cloud of CO2, reemerging with his own pair of wings. He levitates above the stage for a few moments, before disappearing into the stage.

POPPY

Grit, a rabbit, appears on the stage and performs some contact juggling, while a large rabbit hops onstage to watch him. Two men dressed up as poppies come out and spin around, as a very large poppy is brought onstage. Suddenly, the poppy opens to reveal a beautiful woman clad in a white unitard. She performs some aerial acrobatics as Criss appears through a trapdoor in the middle of the stage. He stands on a platform made of thorns, staring up at the woman in awe, a hand clutching at his heart. The woman descends from her flower into Criss' arms. The two embrace before she gets off of the platform.

SCARECROW

Two men in white, billowy skirts wave large white fans before Criss, hiding him from view. When he is show again, he is shouting in pain, as Crimson is crawling through his body. Kayala hides behind the Ushers, who urge her to save Criss. She goes to run offstage as Crimson exits Criss' body, but Crimson catches her and begins to strangle Kayala. Criss has escaped his thorny prison, and runs over with a large white cloth to protect Kayala. He makes Kayala vanish under the white cloth, as Crimson makes herself vanish under a red cloth. Criss rips the red cloth away to reveal a burning tree. He then runs offstage to follow Kayala.

DE KOLTA CHAIR

The four Ushers appear on the dark stage with flashlights, looking for Criss. They come upon many rabbits, before Zangelica appears onstage with a baby carriage. The doll-sized Criss and Kayala appear from the carriage, before Lars picks up the smaller Criss and sits him on a chair. Lars and Maestro then lift a cloth over the chair, allowing Criss to reappear as normal. Maestro then begs him to perform his "favorite trick", the De Kolta chair. Kayala, a chair, and a large box are then brought onstage. Criss places a purple cape over Kayala, having her move her hands before she disappears. The box is then opened to reveal her.

DANCE OFF

Multiple Moles appears onstage and begin to dance. Criss and Kayala run offstage as the Ushers begin to play Rock, Paper, Scissors to decide who will dance against the moles. Each dances in turn, the most notable being Lars break-dancing on his head.

TRONIK

Criss and Kayala return, and the Ushers begin to haggle them about their romance. Criss only smirks and replays that they "can kiss the monster", the monster being a lurking Tronik. Kayala runs offstage as Criss and Maestro run into the audience, Lars, Luigi and Slim running offstage to get whips and shields. Criss goes back onstage and defeats Tronik with magic. The creature staggers back for a moment, before regaining itself and heading toward Maestro, who cowers. The creature then removes its arms and torso, revealing Criss inside.

METAMORPHOSIS

Crimson appears onstage and begins to seduce Criss, along with partially undressing him. He is then thrown into a wooden crate, while Crimson and her minions writhe upon the stage, tying up the crate. Crimson then climbs atop it, hidden in a cloud of CO2 before a firewall goes off. Criss then appears atop the crate, and begins to open it, revealing a straight-jacketed Crimson inside.

WEDDING

Kayala is revealed, wearing a white wedding gown with a huge train following her. The Ushers come out to congratulate her as Criss is seen to appear atop the wall of the train. He then begins to walk down it, marrying Kayala after his descent. The two proceed to kiss as the Ushers pose for photographs. A large pool of blood begins to form on the gown's train, growing large with each flash of the camera. Finally, the gown is ripped from Kayala. A spotlight shines on Crimson and her paparazzi, before Criss is illuminated, Kayala lying on the ground next to him.

PAPARAZZI

Criss and his Ushers fight to keep the paparazzi away from Kayala's lifeless form, the paparazzi dancing with Crimson before the wind blows them away. Criss mourns for Kayala before the Ushers take her away. A large projection of Crimson appears before Criss, knocking him to the ground.

IN TWO

A large, mechanical-like table is rolled out, along with figures sharpening chainsaws on it. Criss is chased offstage by a Crowman, before one of the Dolls brings him back on and throws him upon the table. Crimson takes a chainsaw from one of her henchmen as Criss is bound and shackled to the table, before sawing him in half. Blood and gore spill out everywhere, each half of Criss' now-lifeless body pulled in separate directions offstage.

FUNERAL

The Ushers come out and mourn over Criss, placing red roses on his grave. Crimson walks out with a Crowman and a wheelchair, spitting on Criss' grave before throwing her black rose on the ground. She is then covered by a blanket on the wheelchair and spun around so that she is no longer facing the audience. More mourners bestow roses upon Criss' grave as Kayala comes out in a black mourning gown, placing her white rose gently upon her beloved's grave. A large scrim comes down upon the stage before the wheelchair begins spinning. The figure seated removed the blanket, revealing Criss. He turns around to look at the characters of his surreal adventure, but the lights have gone dark and they are no longer visible. He then turns back to the audience, his whisper of "Believe" echoing throughout the theatre.

/// ANGEL OR DEVIL?

The initial previews were not well received; reactions were thoroughly negative. The show opened to equally harsh reviews, citing a lack of the magic Angel is known for as well as a confusing and uninteresting theme; reviewers felt neither Angel nor Cirque were able to perform their capabilities. By December 17, two months into the show's run, the Luxor was offering a 40% discount on show tickets. In lieu of quotes from theater critics, by January 2009 the Believe website used positive critical quotes from selected celebrities, including Angel's then-girlfriend, Holly Madison. Over the next year many reviews of the show would share roughly the same sentiment though the show continued to fill seats well enough (but whether it was making money or not remained to be seen).

Criss also had his fair share of run-ins with the press and celebrities alike. After Cirque spent some weeks tweaking the show, blogger and television personality Perez Hilton attended a performance on Friday, April 17, 2009. During the show, Hilton used his Twitter account to message over half a million of his subscribers "We are 20 minutes in and Criss Angel's Vegas show, Believe, is unbelievably BAD!", as well as other criticism. As the show was ending, Angel singled out Hilton, had him stand up, and declared to the audience that "we have the world's biggest douche-bag asshole in the house!" To which Hilton replied "Thanks for the free tickets."

Hilton, who is a fan of Cirque du Soleil, later noted that "until 'Believe,' Cirque has had an incredible track record of excellence. I have seen all of their Vegas shows and loved them all."

In the aftermath of the incident, Cirque du Soleil, but not Angel, issued an apology to Hilton, as well as anyone else present in the family-oriented show. Speaking also on behalf of hotel owner MGM Mirage, Cirque du Soleil called Angel's remarks "inappropriate and disrespectful", noting that "Cirque management will address such behavior privately with any of its artists to ensure it will not happen again." The Vegas media reaction was strongly against Angel, who was viewed as having broken a major taboo among casino employees in the largely tourist economy by insulting a guest, notably during an economic downturn. Angel had even threatened Norm Clarke of the Review-Journal over some of his comments, suggesting he promised to take out his other eye (Norm wears an eye patch).

Criss Angel was becoming a bad boy, and a very visible liability to Cirque du Soleil's brand. By December 14, 2009, though, according to Robin Leach's column for the Las Vegas Sun, Criss Angel was in the process of integrating seven new "extraordinary" illusions into BELIEVE, hoping to stem the negative press.

He has already been rehearsing all of them during the day and performing his shows at night. Now he's waiting for Fire and Building Department approvals to add them into the show. Luxor President Felix Rappaport confirmed the delay in adding the illusions. "We'd hoped it would be December, then January, but now realistically with the additional building changes and the show coming up to code in every aspect, all the inspectors say Criss can have everything in place for March in time for new marketing and promotion."

/// FOR MY NEXT TRICK...

With all the reaction to the debut and first performances of the show, it was obvious to fans that something had gone wrong and that changes would be in the offing. From what had been heard by rumor this had been happening all during the creation process, with Angel battling with Denoncourt and Cirque over the direction of the show. If there was a general conclusion to be drawn from most of the fan reaction, it was that the show was too much "Cirque" for Criss Angel Mindfreak fans and too much "Mindfreak" for Cirque du Soleil fans. Trying to straddle this middle ground, it couldn't succeed with either audience.

Another area of contention was the entire approach of the show, which had Angel attempting a stunt which would go "horribly wrong" resulting in transporting him (and thereby the audience) into the fantasy realm where he would take on the persona of the "Victorian Noble." The problem with the approach was it was inconsistent; once Angel was in the Noble persona he would perform an illusion only to then directly address the crowd in the present as Criss Angel. He would go into the fantasy realm and back out again several times during the show, with no resolution of the plotline of his character. (Unlike the show of Ziegfried & Roy, who used a similar fantasy/reality motif but kept the fantasy sections distinctly separate from each other and reality.)

Changes were coming. But the changes were slow to arrive, leading some to think nothing was being done. It was actually that, when dealing with two creative organizations (Angel and Cirque) more time needed to be taken to make sure all parties were satisfied with the new direction. It also took a long time for construction and rehearsal, as props and stage changes needed to be made to very tight tolerance. New illusions were incorporated into the show over time, but by then the reputation of the show had been established.

After a bit more than a year of performance it was decided that Cirque's approach was not working, and that Angel's original approach would better fit his persona. This meant jettisoning nearly all of the "Cirque-ey" elements; Angel's Victorian Noble character, the continuing fantasy plotline, the multiple types of dancing rabbits, various characters, and live music. It was decided to focus strongly on Angel and his interaction with the audience, and adding more illusions to the show. But change again was slow (taking more than a year), as instead of releasing artists immediately it was done as contracts expired, leading to the dancing contingent shrinking and shrinking over a period of time until just a couple remained (until their contracts expired).

The debut of "Version 2.0" of Criss Angel Believe is hard to pinpoint, as Cirque has never "re-launched" the show or made a point of its re-invention. Our best guess is that most all the elements of the new show were in place by May, 2010. The show is now largely devoid of "plot," and has become a showcase for large-scale illusions featuring Angel (over 30 new illusions were added). Some of the characters (Ushers, Kayala, and Crimson) appear in a reduced form, and the music is now all pre-recorded (though it sounds to be original music). But that's not all... in short order, according to Robin Leach, a new opening is coming for BELIEVE (to celebrate the second half of the show's 10-year contract) and a potential new "revolutionary levitation" act, which has reportedly taken him nearly two decades to perfect. What's the trick? He will levitate many people from the audience simultaneously to float with him.

The debut of "Version 3.0" is much easier to pinpoint, however.

On October 25, 2013, an announcement was made that Criss Angel would undergo surgery in January 2014 to repair a shoulder injury. Criss was initially diagnosed with a Supraspinatus tendon tear, superior labral anterior posterior tear and subscapularis strain, which took place a year or so prior. He continued to perform throughout 2013 despite the trauma; in fact, he has not missed a show – over 2100 – since BeLIEve's premiere 5 years ago. However, Criss exacerbated the injury during his double straightjacket escape in Times Square in New York City. He had no choice but to have surgery to repair his shoulder and avoid permanent damage, so the show went dark from January through April. And when it returns, "it will have a whole new look," he told Robin Leach of the Las Vegas Sun. "We've got new music, lighting and costumes..." Criss will not be permitted to do the upside-down straightjacket escape over the audience's heads when "Believe" returns. His apprentice, 22-year-old Krystyn Lambert, will perform the stunt. However, Criss is adding material for the show's return.

"Our opening is completely new. Then we're adding my version of Lance Burton's signature 'Oscar With Swords' illusion. He's never given the rights to anybody before, but he allowed me to 'Angel-ize' it. I pay homage to Lance, who is held in the highest regard and twice awarded Magician of the Year.

He performed more than 5,000 shows for over 5 million people next door at the Monte Carlo. Also for the first time in the past five years of 'Believe,' I will go right into the audience to perform close-up magic. I wanted to make it more intimate, interesting and exciting with the audience 360 degrees surrounding me. We'll have a video camera on the close-ups to show on our big screens. Next comes the most revolutionary levitation you'll ever see. This will be its year. It's the most complicated thing I've ever undertaken in my career. It's already taken years to develop, but we're planning it for later this year."

I guess we'll have to see it to believe it!

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



An adventure in the teeming world of insects...



Although OVO would become the 25th Cirque du Soleil show in the 25 years since the company's birth in 1984, there's little from a fan perspective that can be said regarding the show's overall development. Much of its creation was overshadowed by the celebrations of Cirque du Soleil's 25th anniversary, which in retrospect seemed more exciting. However, on August 6, 2007, the French-Canadian press published a quote from Daniel Lamarre that put a 2009 touring show in our field of view: "In 2008 we will launch three new permanent shows: [One in] Las Vegas, one in Macau and [one in] Tokyo. In 2009, we will present a show supplementing Macao, the Elvis show in Las Vegas and a new tour that will be opened in Montreal."

It didn't take fans long to discover more details regarding the new show – Cirque 2009 (working title) – set to launch in Montreal in April 2009. For example, in September 2007 we'd learned of the Director, Director of Creation and Set Designer for the new show - Deborah Colker, Chantal Tremblay and Gringo Cardia respectively - and it would be the first time Cirque du Soleil not only had a female Director, but a female Director of Creation too! This would be Deborah Colker's first collaboration with Cirque du Soleil and the company's first bringing a decidedly Brazilian flair. And what kind of show did she have in mind? The theme of the show, she said, would be about nature and insects.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	April 23, 2009
Type:	Touring / Bigtop
Director:	Deborah Colker
Composer:	Berna Ceppas
Location:	Currently Touring

Creative Team

Guide	Set & Props Designer
Guy Laliberté	Gringo Cardia
Guide	Lighting Designer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Eric Champoux
Director	Sound Designer
Deborah Colker	Jonathan Deans
Director of Creation	Equipment & Rigging
Chantal Tremblay	Fred Gérard
Costume Designer	Acrobatic Performance
Liz Vandal	Philippe Aubertin
Composer	Makeup Designer
Berna Ceppas	Julie Bégin



/// A HEADLONG RUSH...

OVO is described as a headlong rush into a colorful ecosystem teeming with life, where insects work, eat, crawl, flutter, play, fight and look for love in a non-stop riot of energy and movement. The insects' home is a world of biodiversity and beauty filled with noisy action and moments of quiet emotion. In fact, the name OVO means "egg" in Portuguese. This timeless symbol of the life cycle and birth of numerous insects represents the underlying thread of the show. And you'll see some of this insect influence graphically, as OVO hides an insect in its name: the two letter "O's" represent the eyes while the letter "V" forms the nose. It's a concept that permeated throughout the entire design aesthetic of the show – in the set and stage the artists would dance upon to the costumes each of them would wear throughout the performance.

"I work with movement and ideas. Everything that moves fascinates me," says Deborah Colker, Director of Ovo. "And I love to subvert space [and] ideas to find new bodies and new movements." When she was young girl in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Colker loved music and wanted nothing more than to dance. But this was a time when mothers decided what was best for their little girls, so she ended up playing volleyball. Dance and volleyball and school proved to be too much, so Deborah had to give up dancing. But she never forgot her dreams. "And then, when I was sixteen years, I had a great crisis. I stopped everything and I came back to dance. And dance, I think that could synthesize for me art and sport."

When a mysterious egg appears in their midst, the insects are awestruck and intensely curious about this iconic object that represents the enigma and cycles of their lives. And it's love at first sight when a gawky, quirky insect arrives in this bustling community and a fabulous ladybug catches his eye – and the feeling is mutual. This hidden, secret world at our feet is revealed as tender and torrid, noisy and quiet, peaceful and chaotic. And as the sun rises on a bright new day the vibrant cycle of insect life begins anew!

Costumes

Liz Vandal, the costume designer for OVO has a special affinity for the world of the insects. "I've always had passion for them," she says. "When I was just a kid I put rocks down around the yard near the fruit trees and I lifted them regularly to watch the insects who had taken up residence underneath them. I petted caterpillars and let butterflies into the house. So when I learned that OVO was inspired by insects, I immediately knew that I was in a perfect position to pay tribute to this majestic world with my costumes." Liz has a signature style inspired by futuristic superheroes and by suits of armor from all eras. These two sources inform her designs for the OVO costumes. Flattering lines and an elongated, corseted look are a nod to the world of super heroes while the segmented shells on many of the garments alternate between hard and soft, much like the armor and the bodies of knights in the Renaissance.

Liz's first challenge was to imagine a way to evoke insects without copying their actual anatomy. "The solution was to connect with the feeling of being face to face with a spider, a cockroach or a butterfly," she explains. "Then I made detailed drawings of designs that interpreted their morphology. For example, the dragonfly's wings are evoked by pants made of veined lace, and the mosquito's stinger by a 'Mohawk' of fine red stems.

The idea of the shell also became a metaphor, since the word 'insect' refers to 'sections.' This revelation consolidated my approach." Liz drew on the wealth of experience and know-how of Cirque's costume shop to put it all together. "Together we developed techniques of pleating fabrics to provide three-dimensional muscle, volumes and shells," she says. "The result is a sort of organic origami. The most obvious examples of that are the crickets' costumes. The team also explored the textures of wings and shells using the sublimation technique to poeticize them and give them an evocative texture." Liz and her team in the costume shop have exploited the permanent pleating technique developed by Japanese designer Issey Miyake, which gives certain rigidity to material and creates an organic effect. "We pushed this technique even further, she says, "by printing on colored materials, sublimation and eroding the fabric not only to stiffen it, but also to give it a metallic sheen."

In a play of colors and patterns, Liz implemented variations on a theme by incorporating thin lines on the ants and crickets, and pleated abstract transparent outfits for the dragonflies. She also used materials to suggest insects' shells, and lacy fabrics for the wings and soft sections of their bodies. To enable certain characters such as the mosquito to move, she placed sections of shell within other sections, which open and close to reveal the soft body inside.

With our costumes we wanted to evoke rather than imitate insects says Liz Vandal. "If one thinks of a cockroach, a cockroach is beautiful, in fact. It has a beautiful outer shell. It is slick. But, we don't think of it as beautiful. So, what does it evoke? What is the connotation?" She continues: "The most difficult design to do is to copy nature, because nature is perfect. And when you try to do something closer to that, it becomes ... poor. And so, we have to evoke it. To evoke it, if you go in a larger scale, it's nice because it's just the forms, the curves and the organic feeling that the nature has in the forms and shapes."

Characters

"I made many sketches for the crickets," Vandal admits. "I think it's my third one where I thought: 'Oh! He needs to have leg extensions or something.' And my first impulse was to have [regular knees, as seen on a person], so I made my drawing this way. But my husband told me 'No, no, no! [It is backwards]', then I thought: 'Oh! I would have never thought about that there would be a similar movement but as a mirror.' And that worked so well! So, that was really a discovery. All we see is these extra legs. We lose the human shape, somehow, even though we see his own legs. We cover them with a house like cover, which was very smartly done with a zipper and everything. It's like haute-couture, you know, like everything matches." Ten crickets are the key insects in the show. At times, they have detachable legs that break away from their bodies, which give the impression that there is an insect invasion going on. "I have a particular soft spot for these characters," she says, "because their costumes are so sexy, graphic and vibrant." The initial cricket costumes required 75 hours of work each because of their complexity and the need to give them rigidity while maintaining the flexibility and expandability of the material.

There are other characters too:

Master Flippo is the chief of the insect community, maybe because he's the oldest. He's smart and wise – but eccentric too, and he's very silly sometimes. The whole community respects and likes him even though they know he can be a bit dim-witted.

The Ladybug is big and strong (but doesn't realize it) and full of life. Unlike all the other insects in the community she is not part of a family. She's all alone and lonely, and she's secretly waiting for something wonderful to happen in her life... something like love. When The Foreigner arrives carrying a strange egg she's excited by the possibility that her life – and everyone else's – could be about to change.

And then there's the Foreigner, the character who lands in the middle of OVO. The Foreigner is a fly in constant buzzing motion, a live wire, an attention seeker, full of bravado and misplaced confidence – and sometimes just plain crazy. He is a fly in vintage suit who only reveals his true nature when he falls for the ladybug. After his transformation, he wears a costume of bristling spines. His lanky, angular form contrasts with the roundness of the ladybug. In fact, most characters have two versions of their costumes: the first, more lightweight and functional, for their acrobatic performance, and the second, more richly detailed and heavier, for their life in the community.

Set & Props

The creator of that community is Set Designer Gringo Cardia, who also has been fascinated by insects all his life. "When I was a kid, they made me think of science fiction monsters, which I loved." For OVO, he became inspired by the concept of transformation, but he didn't set out to copy nature so much as to interpret it. "I wanted people inside the Big Top to see the world through the eyes of insects," he says. "And to accomplish that, I played with scale." Gringo also drew inspiration from the structures that certain species of insect create when they establish nests and colonies.

The overall setting of OVO is a stylized habitat that is home to the insects. At times it is a forest, at other times, a cave – or it could even be a house. Gringo's objective was to create an organic environment that could lead to many other places. The show starts with a gigantic egg on stage, obscuring much of the performance space from view. The mysterious object from the outside world is an inexplicable enigma in the eyes of the insects (and a nod to the monolith from the Kubrick film 2001). This timeless symbol of fertility and regeneration reappears in other forms later in the show, laid by the insects.

The largest set element is the Wall, which is set against the rear of the stage. The performers climb on it, disappear into it and use it as a stage, a platform and a launching pad. The Wall measures 60ft wide by 20ft tall and is made of just two moveable components. It is supported only on the sides to allow a floor with built-in trampolines to slide in and out like an enormous drawer. At first, the Wall is concealed by two enormous "skins" designed to create a sense of depth (the larger of the two skins measures 75-feet wide by 50-feet tall), and, through holes and openings, to reveal its secret life as a home to the insects as each of the skins are removed in turn. When revealed you'll discover that there are almost no straight lines to be found anywhere in the set. True to the organic inspiration of the show, the Wall is curved, and so is the stage.

But there is one exception: the Spider's Web. Real spiders' webs are made up of straight lines, so this is a case where art imitates life with a nod towards geometry. It is made of strong woven synthetic straps.

An enormous 20-ft mechanical flower also appears on stage at various times. The flower blooms and becomes much more than an over-scale prop; it's a character in the show. Part sculpture, part puppet, part robot, it is seen from the insects' point of view as a towering, inspiring (and carnivorous!) feature of their environment. Other fauna are found in this world too: three long poles weighing 80lb evoke dandelion stalks. Their spines allow artists to climb them like ladders and appear at various levels above the stage, and there are human-powered self-propelled seeds that move around the stage.

The Music

To create the musical score for OVO, Berna Cepas combined the sound of bossa nova and samba with funk and electro music. And, as you might expect from a Brazilian – there is a lot of percussion in the score. Berna Cepas sampled actual insect sounds to combine with the music directly from the keyboard. He also assigned instruments and individual themes to specific characters. The 8-piece band includes a bandleader/bass and double bass player, a keyboard player, drummer, percussionist, guitarist, accordionist, violinist and a wind instruments player, plus one singer.

/// THE TEEMING WORLD...

As with most Cirque du Soleil productions, OVO begins with a pre-show animation sequence that puts the unsuspecting audience face-to-face with Cirque performers. Here the theme of an insect world is expounded upon by a small assortment of insect characters (namely the grasshoppers) milling about the seating area with an entourage of human scientists dressed in full-protective garb carrying around catcher's nets and magnifying glasses, inspecting the audience, capturing them with their nets and otherwise causing muted chaos.

As the lights dim, our attention is then directed upon the trio of stalks neatly distributed within this microcosmic arena, and to the rather large and inescapable egg-shaped object situated in its center. While we in the audience can only begin to wonder about the impending reveal of the egg and its meaning, a small insect contingent converges upon the stage, ascending the stalks (themselves reminiscent of dandelion stems) to flit about. Once the spectator do's and don't's are understood, the creatures come to life by crying, buzzing, trilling and chirping the show's namesake – OVO.

A rainbow of light washes over the (28ft wide by 22ft tall) egg, bathing it in reds, oranges, yellows, greens, blues, indigos and violets – swirling about in a Technicolor rainbow, projections reminiscent of Delirium. Strobos flash and thunder for fleeting seconds, momentarily blinding, raising the level of tension. But if you're waiting for a dramatic reveal à la Saltimbanco, "O" or ZED, you'll be sorely disappointed. The world goes pitch black and the egg simply deflates, its collapsed hulk simply drug offstage left. When the lights arise – the insects swarm.

There are nine (9) different performances (acts) by this multi-cultural cast of 53, each a new and exciting peek into this creepy-crawly world that Deborah Colker, a renowned choreographer, has created for us, a headlong-rush into this teeming buggy ecosystem. Theirs is perhaps a right-of-passage dance, itching and scratching their way across the stage to showcase their world to us, to welcome us and to invite us.

ORVALHO (DRAGONFLY)

They part to reveal a lone dragonfly (Vladimir Hrynchenko), who performs a graceful balancing act in and out of the slender stalks and twisting tendrils of an elegant plant. The plant is an intricately conceived set-piece that, upon second glance, is a balancing cane twisted in a spiral to elevate him above the stage. (This apparatus is a perfect example of the show's particular style: an organic inspiration whereby there are almost no straight lines to be found). At the top rests a normal balancing block, which he puts to great use in his hand-balancing act (it takes extraordinary control and strength to transfer his weight from one hand to the other as he maintains equilibrium upside down on top of the foliage), but he also uses the curvature of the apparatus to slip, slide and flit about in a very calm, soothing manner.

THE FOREIGNER

As the dragonfly slowly flutters off stage, a strange and alluring character begins to traverse the pathways of the Grand Chapiteu, carrying an ovo of immense size securely upon his back. The Foreigner is a fly in constant buzzing motion, a live wire, and an attention seeker, full of bravado and misplaced confidence – and sometimes just plain crazy. The sexy spider doesn't stand a chance of winning his heart when he sees The Ladybug for the first time. He's instantly smitten! "OOOOHKAY!" – After coming in contact with the Ladybug, the Crickets steal off with his egg, leaving the Foreigner dazed and confused.

FOOT JUGGLING & ICARIAN GAMES (ANTS)

The hardest working insects in the community are the bright red Ants. As soon as they're awake they spend their day gathering food: On the menu today – kiwis and corn. But it's not all work. They play with their food, too – with their feet – in an astonishing display of precision juggling that climaxes with ants juggling ants. Combining the ancient art of Chinese foot-juggling with the equally old art of Icarian Games, this sextet of Asian-girl cuteness (Han Jing, Kong Yufei, Pei Xin, Su Shan, Wang Shaohua, and Zhu TingTing) takes the stage by storm and do not disappoint. The ants work in tandem, flipping their food about with ease. And just when you think you've seen it all they flip themselves while also flipping their spoils!

AERIAL ROPE (BUTTERFLY)

A small cocoon ascends as the ants march off the stage, beautifully introducing the next performance: a performer struggling to break free of its cocoon. Moments later, she spreads the silk threads after emergence to evoke the delicate wings of a butterfly. Her metamorphic birth then gives way to two other butterflies that soar into the sky on a strong forest vine. Maxim Kozlov and Inna Mayorova (from Russia) combine hand-to-hand, ballet, contortion and an aerial flying act to perform a sensual dance of trust and love, wrapping themselves and each other in a single Spanish Web rope that allows them to swoop and land, leap and fly in perfect unison.

THE FOREIGNER DEUX

After their performance, we meet up with the Foreigner again as he continues his search for his Ovo. But his presence in this world isn't liked by all and gets into a mock sword fight with Flippo, the male matriarch of this little insect community. Flippo is smart and wise – but eccentric too, and he's very silly sometimes. The whole community respects and likes him even though they know he can be a bit dim-witted.

DIABOLO (FIREFLY)

In a mix of high-speed diabolo and seemingly impossible juggling a firefly sends one, two, three and finally an astonishing four spinning spools arcing very high in the Grand Chapiteau and back to earth in perfect coordination.

CREATURA (CATERPILLAR)

Part Slinky, part insect - the Creatura dances to a tune that is all his own. He's a bendy, twisty knot of stretchy limbs in constant motion. Performed by Lee Brearley, he is figuratively and literally a human slinky; twisting, twirling, lifting, and flopping about the stage in a multi-colored tubular (caterpillar-esque) costume.

And then... the scarabs take to the scene.

VOLANTS (SCARABS)

Volants is one of the more intriguing original creations from the Cirque; it combines the techniques and talents of flying trapeze, banquine, and Russian swing amongst a hand-full of other disciplines. Here a team of black-and-gold colored scarabs take to the skies and fly about the top of the grand chapiteau. On both ends exists a staging platform and two standard pendulum swings from which the trapeze flyers launch and the catchers catch, but in the middle, however, rests a second platform from which to catch and launch the flyers banquine-style. It's quite an amazing set-up!

Intermission. When we return to our seats and the house lights dim once again, the stage lights rise without fanfare to begin the second half of the show, almost as if we just pressed play after pausing a video presentation.

CONTORTION (SPIDERS)

Hanging from all points of the insect's stage is a spider's web, spun about to set up the contortion act of a trio of deadly female black widow spiders. One of the funny spiders reveals her sensual side when she attracts the attention of a group of Crickets by weaving her body over, under and through the strands of her web. She's soon joined by another bright, dazzling spider contortionist who casts a sensual spell of her own. A relatively well done, typical contortion set performed by Svetlana Belova from Russia begins, perfectly framed as the ruler of her kingdom. Two other spiders (performed by Robyn Houpt, USA; and Marjorie Nantel, Canada) join the fun, crawling about in the web and cavorting on stage to draw other non-suspecting insect-prey into their grasp.

ACROSPORT (FLEAS)

The yellow and white costumed fleas jump on stage next for AcroSPORT, a combination of dance, acrobatics, athleticism and sheer agility. Performed by Anna Gorbatenko, Natallia Kakhniuk, Khrystyna Maraziuk, Elena Nepytayeva, and Olga Varchuk from the Ukraine and Belarus, these costumed insects fling themselves through the air and come together in graceful, perfectly balanced sculptural formations.

SLACKWIRE (SPIDER)

In a tour-de-force performance, a black spider defies gravity and physics in a succession of seemingly impossible feats of strength and balance as he traverses a wire that appears to give him no support. First strung loosely close to the stage's floor, then raised 20 feet or more above the stage, Li Wei performs an amazing number of hand-balancing and coordinated techniques on this tension-less wire. One hand, two hand and no-hand (cane) balancing techniques are made without a fuss. He even makes riding a uni-cycle upside down powered only by his hands look easy. At one point he hangs at a 45-degree angle over the ground, some 15 feet below, and he tops that with an upside-down unicycle act. And the wire is in almost-constant motion up and down, adding to the degree of difficulty.

POWER TRACK/WALL (CRICKETS)

The last remaining scrim is then removed from the stage revealing an enormous wall and trampoline. The crickets, which we've seen hopping about at various times during the show, finally get to shine here, running, jumping, and walking across – and straight up – an 8m vertical wall without artificial support. Power track and trampolines give them the speed, lift and momentum to take flight. Their athletic ability, physical strength and team coordination take care of the rest. And be on the lookout for the ants, you might catch them crawling along the wall in a perfect line, just like real ants!

EPILOGUE (PICNIC)

The insects once again swarm the stage in the show's finale, a feast for a job well done. This closing dance number also acts as an act sign-off – characters from each of the performed numbers crawl across the banquet table giving the audience a moment to show their approval in claps and cheers.

* * *

Although OVO has gone on to find great success throughout North America, Oceania, and Japan, the show has had its share of detractors. (In fact, OVO received quite a tepid response at premiere by its home-town crowd.) Most of the ire directed toward OVO is due to its explicit buggy theme versus the subtle or even esoteric themes of the shows of yester-year. Many fans have since wondered who Cirque du Soleil's audience was these days... was it adults or children? Alas, most of the indignation has come due to the launch of ZED the year before, a show where many had pinned hopes that Cirque du Soleil would return to what made it great during the Dragone Era, and were at a loss when ZED failed to catch fire. Today, OVO is currently making its rounds around the globe.

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A RIOT OF HA-HAS LA-LAS AND TA-DAS



CIRQUE DU SOLEIL
Schmelky



BANANA SHPEEL



From a fan perspective, the impetus for “Banana Shpeel” resides in part with Cirque’s plans of expansion into the Asia/Pacific region (specifically the People’s Republic of China Special Administrative Region of Macao), and with the company’s desires to “storm Manhattan,” as it did Las Vegas. The Macao show, ZAIA, premiered in 2008 and opened up the Asian region in a way its touring shows had not yet done. The second, WINTUK in Manhattan, would whet Cirque’s expansion appetites world-wide.

Cirque saw such success in the Asian market that Daniel Lamarre, President and then COO of Cirque, was quoted as saying: “I wouldn’t be surprised if we had four or five shows in Macao within five to seven years.” And so Cirque began working on future concepts. One of them (dubbed “Macau II”) was rumored to be a re-invention of the variety show.

Unfortunately, Chinese gamblers did not take to the western-style show and ZAIA began to falter. Limited admittance to Macao from the Chinese mainland, as well as the voracious gambling appetite of those that were admitted, meant the audiences Cirque expected didn’t materialize. Thus Cirque shelved its Asian expansion plans and attempted to nurture its show back to health. But in the meantime, with some success found in New York with WINTUK, Cirque decided to dust off the variety show concept originally designed for Macao and see if it could find success in New York twice.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	November 19, 2009 (Chicago) April 24, 2010 (NYC) May 21, 2010 (Gala) September 14, 2010 (Tour)
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Franco Dragone
Composer:	René Dupéré & Benoît Jutras
Finale:	October 10, 2010 (in Toronto)

Creative Team

Guide	Costume Designer
Guy Laliberté	Dominique Lemieux
Guide	Set & Props
Gilles Ste-Croix	Patricia Ruel
Director & Writer	Props Co-Designer
David Shiner	Jasmine Catudal
Creation	Sound Designer
Serge Roy	Harvey Robitaille
Composer	Lighting Designer
Simon	Bruno Rafie
Carpentier	Makeup Designer
Choreographer	Eleni Uranis
Jared Grimes	Comic Act Designer
	Stefan Haves

/// CIRQUE TAKES MANHATTAN?

Cirque's desires to establish a lasting presence in the Big Apple stretches back years, to its first performances there with *Le Cirque Réinventé*, without much to show for their efforts. But after finding some success on a season basis with WINTUK, the company may have thought a more permanent presence was well on its way. Cirque signed a re-development deal with Related Companies to establish a home on Manhattan's Pier 40, but that opportunity eventually fell through when tax-payers voted down the re-development plans. (The Pier is now used as a children's sports complex.) But it didn't take Cirque long to find another venue...

"In February 2010 Cirque plans to bring a new show to the Beacon Theater in Manhattan for a multiple-month run that it hopes will become an annual institution," The New York Times reported. "And in 2011 Cirque is to establish a four-month summer extravaganza in Radio City Music Hall as a warm-weather counterweight to the 'Christmas Spectacular' - sans Rockettes, but populated with acrobats and clowns. These will be in addition to the company's touring tent productions [...]. Also continuing will be "Wintuk," Cirque's \$20 million annual winter holiday show at the WaMu Theater at Madison Square Garden."

What would this new show for MSG Entertainment entail? While details about the show itself were not released, where else it might play sounded quite interesting. [The] still-unnamed show for Radio City Music Hall, "will fully utilize the space and spend half of each year in Paris or London," and have 72 to 80 performers, said Mr. Laliberté.

While rumors had been circulating the fan-circuit for a number of weeks/months, other media outlets began to pick up on the potential of Cirque du Soleil re-inventing vaudeville, much like the company re-invented the circus years before. Variety reported that the "new stage production [would] reportedly be written by Laurence O'Keefe ("Legally Blonde"), although Madison Square Garden Entertainment, which owns the Beacon, would only confirm that for one of several shows being developed by Cirque, David Shiner (also helmer of Cirque's "Kooza") [was] at work on a new offering about vaudeville, with a cast of 50 to 55. No venues or dates were announced. [The show was rumored to open] at the Chicago Theater in Chicago [from Nov 19 to Dec 31 2010] before it [went] to Gotham for a multiple-month run at the Beacon Theater."

On September 9, 2009, Cirque du Soleil announced its "Vaudeville" concept to the world as:

BANANA SHPEEL, a roller-coaster mix of styles that blends comedy with tap, hip hop, eccentric dance and slapstick, all linked by a hilarious narrative that ignites a succession of wacky adventures. This is not circus, or a musical or a variety show, or even vaudeville. It is Banana Shpeel, created by: Serge Roy (director of creation), Jean-Francois Cote (composer/musical director), Jared Grimes (choreographer), Dominique Lemieux (costumes), Patricia Ruel (sets), Bruno Rafale (lighting), and Harvey Robitale (sound).

Propelled by crazy humor and intense choreography, Banana Shpeel plunges us into the world of Shmelky, a cruel and irritable producer who dangles fame and fortune in front of Emmett, an innocent and romantic actor who has come to audition for him.

Emmett soon finds himself trapped in a flamboyant, anarchic world where Shmelky sows terror and reigns supreme. Emmett falls in love with the beautiful Katie and meets a bunch of absurd characters, including the strange Banana Man.

The show's cast featured Annaleigh Ashford, Michael Longoria, Claudio Caneiro, Daniel Passer, Patrick de Valette, Gordon White, Wayne Wilson, Dmitry Bulkin, Tuan Le, Vanessa Alvarez, and Joseph and Josette Wiggan, along with Robyn Baltzer, Alex Ellis, DeWitt Fleming, Jr., Luke Hawkins, Kathleen Hennessey, Adrienne Reed, Anthony J. Russo, Melissa Schott, and Steven T. Williams.

But who was this mysterious Banana Man and how would Emmett escape the clutches of Shmelky and his henchmen?

Audiences were about to find out...

/// LA-LA'S AND TA-DA'S?

Banana Shpeel opened for limited preview performances in Chicago on November 19th; the reviews were horrid. The show not only failed to connect with critics, it also failed to connect with audiences – a flop of major proportions!

And it didn't take long for the negative reviews to make the rounds. In fact, even before the show ended its engagement in Chicago the Chicago Tribune, Playbill Magazine, Theater Magazine and New York Theater Guide all reported that Banana Shpeel would be going for a re-write and according to those sources, Broadway leads Michael Longoria (of Jersey Boys) and Annaleigh Ashford (of Wicked), who joined the cast of Banana Shpeel with much fanfare, had been written out of the show due to too many storylines and characters. Cirque du Soleil also had no choice but to postpone the opening of its "twist on vaudeville" at the Beacon Theater to allow for a full month of new rehearsals. Thus, rather than opening on February 4th as previously announced, the show would open for New York City previews on February 25th. But, for those keeping score, it wouldn't be the first delay.

Cirque du Soleil attempted to placate critics and audiences alike in New York City with an Open House (on February 10, 2010) at the Beacon Theater, which also coincided with the unveiling of the show's marquee. The first 100 guests who arrived with a banana in hand would win two complementary tickets to the show (with the bananas donated to Life Center, a local New York homeless shelter). During the afternoon the Banana Shpeel cast would lead the public into the theater for an exclusive sneak peek at the show's creative process. Guests would see rehearsals on stage, make-up demonstrations, costume displays, and take photos with costumed performers. Local restaurants and businesses would also provide complimentary snacks.

But it didn't work.

Michael Riedel of the New York Post (not the most balanced of sources, but still) wrote a scathing "review" of Banana Shpeel on that day and from the way he described the situation, the show went from bad to worse:

“What’s set to open Feb. 25 at the Beacon Theatre is no minor accident. It is, according to several people working on the \$20 million production, a ‘train wreck,’ a ‘catastrophe,’ a ‘nightmare’ and, not to put too fine a point on it, ‘one of the worst shows you’ve ever seen.’ Performers and writers have been fired (only, in some cases, to be rehired the next week); rehearsals are chaotic; the director, David Shiner, is described as ‘clueless’; and Madison Square Garden Entertainment, which owns the Beacon and has shoveled \$10 million into this fiasco, is furious.” According to the report, Guy Laliberté beamed himself down to New York to check up on the revised “Banana Shpeel.” He didn’t applaud at the end. In fact, sources say, he thought the show was worse.

Uh oh.

It came as no surprise when Cirque du Soleil announced another delay in the show’s debut, this time to March 7th. The reason? “The latest delay is attributed to the fact that creatives, who are busily reworking the production, need more time to integrate new performance elements.”

/// UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

Banana Shpeel slipped its March 7th premiere date, which only further drove speculation that the show was in imminent danger of collapsing completely. Had Cirque du Soleil unleashed a lemon of a banana? With reviews for *CRISS ANGEL BELIEVE* and *VIVA ELVIS* in Las Vegas also lack-luster, patrons and fans began to wonder. Then on March 10, 2010, Cirque du Soleil surprised us all by announcing *BANANA SHPEEL* was “under new management” – it’s latest bid to rescue the production.

Marty Schmelky, producer extraordinaire of such box-offices smashes as *The Phantom of the Banana*; *Annie Get Your Banana*; *Fiddler on the Banana*; *The Best Little Banana in Texas*; *Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Banana*; and *Gentlemen Prefer Bananas*, announced today that he has closed the deal with Cirque du Soleil to allow Schmelky Productions to produce the new show *Banana Shpeel*. Under his management, *Banana Shpeel* will begin performances at the Beacon Theatre (2124 Broadway) on April 29, 2010, instead of March 17.

“To the good people of New York and the entire tri-state area who have so wonderfully supported my shows for all these decades, my newest creation *Banana Shpeel* still needs more time to ripen. The truth is, my friends, that the bananas are still a little green,” explains cigar-puffing Schmelky. “I am still holding auditions because *Banana Shpeel* has to be like me: bold, wacky and colorful.”

In describing the new show, Schmelky is moving in a new direction from his previous productions. “I’m mixing together different ingredients and we will showcase dance, comedy and circus arts in the fancy-schmancy Beacon Theatre on the Upper West Side.”

Banana Shpeel would feature an international cast of 38 performers including the main character of Schmelky, played by Broadway veteran Danny Rutigliano, best known for his role as Timon in *The Lion King*. Assisting Schmelky are two slapstick sidekicks performed by Daniel Passer and Wayne Wilson and his wacky assistant Margaret played by Shereen Hickman.

As Schmelky works to complete his latest show, he is disrupted by a comedic trio: Claudio Carneiro, Patrick de Valette and Gordon White. The show offers incredible acrobatic performances, including Russian hand balancer Dmitry Bulkin; Vietnamese hat juggler Tuan Le; Spanish foot juggler Vanessa Alvarez; Canadian Hand to Hand duo Preston Jamieson and Kesley Wiens; and Russian contortionists Tsybenova Ayagma, Tsydendambaeva Imin and Zhambalova Lilia. Banana Shpeel featured diverse dance elements, including brother-sister tap dance duo Joseph and Josette Wiggan and a talented ensemble comprised of Robyn Baltzer, Kassie Brown, Adrienne Jean Fisher, DeWitt Fleming Jr., Karida Griffith, Luke Hawkins, Kathleen Hennessey, Adrienne Reid, Anthony J. Russo, Melissa Schott, Josh Scribner, Alexis Sims and Steven T. Williams.

The production – now “a riot of ha-ha’s, la-la’s and ta-da’s” rather than “a new twist on vaudeville”, would begin performances on April 29th with a gala premiere on May 21st. If all was successful, Banana Shpeel would run through August 29th.

But all would not be successful.

Reviews came in and although they were more positive than those in Chicago (even a number of fans deemed the show “fun”), BANANA SHPEEL still could not connect with either critics or audiences alike. And thus on June 14, 2010, producers of the show announced that BANANA SHPEEL would give its final New York performance on Sunday, June 27th – a full two months early – with a hefty discount on tickets (\$39/\$49 versus \$35 to \$89 for previews and \$45 to \$110 for regular shows).

/// THE BANANA SHPLITS

Leaving New York City was not the end to BANANA SHPEEL’s legacy, however. Cirque du Soleil in cooperation with Mirvish Productions brought the show to Toronto for a limited engagement (September 14th through October 10th) at the Canon Theater, where, Mr. Lamarre said, Cirque was hopeful that the show would finally find an audience. Furthermore, according to Broadway Mania and San Francisco Broadway World, Cirque would go on to announce a tour following the Toronto stop, presenting a special engagement of BANANA SHPEEL at San Francisco’s Golden Gate Theater from Saturday, October 16th through Sunday, November 14th, and in Orange County, California from December 7th through December 26th. As a “fair bit of tweaking” had been rumored to have taken place after the curtain fell in New York, Toronto was Cirque du Soleil’s last hope for the show as it began its tour. Alas, audiences didn’t like BANANA SHPEEL in Toronto any more than they had in New York City or Chicago before it – reviews were awful:

From the Toronto Sun:

[The clowns] are charged with carrying the full weight of a second-rate narrative that Shiner has imposed as seeming justification for forsaking the big top for the theatrical big-time. And frankly, that's where things start to fall apart; for in attempting to hitch a ride on vaudeville's rather shabby coattails, the folks at Cirque seem to have overlooked the audience on whose collective imaginations Cirque's success has been built.

Over the years, Guy Laliberté and Gilles Ste-Croix have consistently refused to simply tell a story, instead setting scenes that force every member of their audience to impose his or her own narrative - a brilliant way to draw an audience into a show...

Now, with a narrative served up on a platter - Shiner takes the whole premise of the Ed Sullivan Show and almost succeeds in converting it into the Dead Sullivan Show as a Schmelky Spectacular, overseen by impresario Marty Schmelky, played by [Danny] Rutigliano - it all just seems a little tedious, as he tries to pass an amuse-bouche off as a main course...

But ultimately, though no one is killed in this collision between Cirque and vaudeville, no one really walks away uninjured either.

From Eye Weekly:

[David Shiner] makes the clown acts the show's focus and turns the measly five acrobatic acts into short interludes in two hours of "comedy." If the clown acts have always been your favourite part of Cirque du Soleil, this show is for you. If not, you have been warned...

If a show makes clowns the most important element, they should at least be funny ... but Shiner has given none of them interesting material unless you think "shut up" is a witty comeback line...

The three clowns who join them really lower the tone. One is a horrid caricature of a senior with palsy and Alzheimer's and we're supposed to laugh when his walker is kicked away and he falls down. The second is a horrid caricature of a sleazy Latino whose specialty act makes fun of deaf people. The third is a would-be flasher in red briefs, who is funny as in "creepy," not "ha-ha."

But the final three acts, though amazing in themselves, suffer from being too similar - hand-to-hand followed by hand balancing followed by contortion and balancing. Cirque du Soleil is famous for its costumes, but Dominique Lemieux's are downright ugly here. The period shifts unaccountably from the 1920s in Act 1 to the 1960s in Act 2 - a bit odd since vaudeville was dead by the '60s. To remain creative, a company needs to experiment; this experiment just doesn't work out. It would be better for Cirque du Soleil to withdraw Banana Shpeel than flog it on tour and endanger its reputation.

From The Globe and Mail:

Since Banana Shpeel's New York run, only minor changes have taken place. The show still seems like, if I can quote myself, "a reinvention of The Muppet Show with clowns in the place of Kermit and his cohorts" that works in its own idiosyncratic way, but never feels entirely worth the effort...

The scripted jokes fall pretty flat much of the time. Perhaps, in retrospect, it was unwise for Cirque to hire a mime (David Shiner) to write and direct their first show with proper dialogue...

The foulness of the language and the sexual jokes are a poor fit with this colourful show. Sure, they would hardly raise an eyebrow in a teen comedy, but in the context of Cirque's otherwise uplifting aesthetic, the crassness (a character calling another "retarded", an "elderly" clown shaking like he has Parkinson's) seems tasteless - even, perhaps, sacrilegious...

Dominique Lemieux's shiny, spangly costumes are the definition of gaudy. Particularly appalling are the neon and glow-in-the-dark flapper outfits - they look like the early Nineties doing the Twenties. Simon Carpentier's songs are a mish-mash poorly matched with the dance sequences. Jared Grimes's tap numbers are all about clatter, speed and athleticism, but leave subtlety in the wings. They're the equivalent of watching Bulkin do 1,000 push-ups: impressive, but what's the point?

With the reviews not-so-favorable in Toronto, BANANA SHPEEL's San Francisco engagement (as well as one in Orange County, California, which was to follow), were abruptly canceled. The show's future beyond Toronto was never announced and the concept quietly died away, with its last performance in Toronto on Sunday, November 14, 2010. It folded up and went quietly into the night.

/// THE TWIST ON VAUDEVILLE...

You've heard the show's sordid story... but what of the show itself? Let us now explore a little of what Banana Shpeel was all about thanks to press materials now no longer available:

Banana Shpeel is the latest show from producer extraordinaire Marty Schmelky and features a colorful array of slapstick comedy, eclectic dance and unique acrobatic acts. The larger-than-life personality presents the diverse talent he has gathered from around the world, as zany characters spread chaos throughout the theatre. In his long and illustrious career, Schmelky has created such unforgettable hits as *The Phantom of the Banana*; *Annie Get Your Banana*; *Fiddler on the Banana*; *The Best Little Banana in Texas*; *Bring in da Noise, Bring in da Banana*; and *Gentlemen Prefer Bananas*. With *Banana Shpeel*, Schmelky is moving in a new direction from his previous shows. "I'm mixing together lots of different ingredients in a big blender that will combine dance, comedy and circus arts in the fancy schmancy Beacon Theatre on the Upper West Side."

Banana Shpeel features an international cast of 38 performers including the main character of Schmelky, played by Broadway veteran Danny Rutigliano, best known for his role as Timon in *The Lion King*. Assisting Schmelky are two slapstick sidekicks performed by Daniel Passer and Wayne Wilson and his wacky assistant Margaret played by Shereen Hickman. As Schmelky works to complete his latest show, he is disrupted by a comedic trio: Claudio Carneiro, Patrick de Valette and Gordon White. *Banana Shpeel* is a roller-coaster mix of styles that blends comedy with tap, hip hop, eccentric dance and slapstick, all linked by a hilarious narrative that ignites a succession of wacky adventures. This is not circus, or a musical or a variety show, or even vaudeville. It is *Banana Shpeel*!

Costumes

In *Banana Shpeel*, costume designer Dominique Lemieux brings modern and retro together. “The cut of the costumes recalls the vaudeville era, while the fabrics and materials are contemporary,” she says. “What makes the costumes original is the juxtaposition of the two.” Historical allusions can be found throughout. The geometrical shape motifs used in several costumes, for example, evoke the Art Deco years of the 1920s and Cubist painting, with a nod to the industrial era.

Dominique Lemieux has tapped into the world of the Marx Brothers and vaudeville to create the costumes. She has used illusion as a leitmotif because the characters are immersed in a world of deception and facade. The costumes gradually pass from monochrome to colors that use vibrant shimmering and changing materials to evoke the flamboyance of the world of vaudeville. Iridescent ribbed fabrics, holographic effects, marabous and sequins, quick costume changes, phosphorescent fabrics, oversized jewelry: everything is designed to accentuate the artificial and the eccentric. The enormous light box that forms the backdrop of the stage shines a diffuse light that creates optical illusions on the costumes: colors appear and disappear as if by magic, depending on the background.

Banana Shpeel is also a show of contrasts. Director David Shiner loves exploring the extremes of the world of the clown, and the costumes reflect the alternating Machiavellian and angelic facets of the comic characters.

Some close-ups on the costumes:

- The egocentric, megalomaniac producer Schmelky’s costume is made of a moiré lamé (a base of satin laminate): silver turns to green under the light. His costume reflects the visual splendor of vaudeville.
- The pink, blue and green of certain costumes recall the retouching of period photographs.
- The Elizabethan collars with polygonal ruffs worn by several characters are made of tulle, a light transparent mesh fabric.
- The designs on the pants and jackets worn by some of the dancers were inspired by distorted patterns of windows.

Set & Props

“The concept for the set of *Banana Shpeel* was inspired by the aesthetics of Vaudeville, the cabarets of the 1930s and German Expressionist cinema,” says Patricia Ruel. “We wanted to achieve a distinctive look that would blend the old with the new. We explored the dramatic potential of color through the play of light and shadow mixed with bright primary colors, while showing, through shapes, images and cutouts, the playful side of director David Shiner’s aesthetic.” Designer Patricia Ruel also explored the dramatic possibilities of color, and created shadows and light through the use of bold primary colors. Given the historic nature of the heritage theatres in which the show was to be presented, it was hard to suspend much of the lighting equipment from the ceiling, and the backstage area offered very little space for storing scenery and props.

To escape these constraints, the color changes are made with a huge, thin, lightbox screen positioned at the back of the stage. To create different levels on the stage floor, Patricia Ruel designed a large moveable modular unit with a high-gloss surface to reflect the colors of the costumes and the screen. To maximize space in the wings without restricting the size of the props Patricia opted for a two-dimensional approach to certain elements. Flat, sometimes folding, props reinforce the impression of a world of illusion and visual trickery.

Selected set elements and props:

- To evoke the world of illusion in which Schmelky evolves, and at the same time create an atmosphere that is both surreal and fun, many of the set elements were made as flats. The use of photocopy textures in a modern interpretation of black and white photography adds to this environment of visual trickery.
- Shapes such as the moon and the heart, and cutouts of some of the set elements and props, illustrate the playful side of director David Shiner's aesthetic.
- In the evil producer Schmelky's scene as a magician surrounded by paper tigers, revue dancers and transvestites, the magic boxes on both sides of the stage are inspired by the glitzy carnivals of yesteryear.
- Light plays an important part in the set elements: the enormous stage curtain is pierced with tiny holes that give the impression of a starry sky in a pattern that evokes the 1930s.
- For the set to integrate easily from one theatre to the next, the scenery is designed to enter and exit on the flies typically found in traditional theatres.
- The musicians are revealed from time to time as silhouettes against a stormy sky projected on the lightbox. Their art nouveau style bandstand is made of wrought iron.

The Show

The show offered interesting acrobatic performances, including:

- Russian hand balancer Dmitry Bulkin;
- Vietnamese hat juggler Tuan Le;
- Spanish foot juggler Vanessa Alvarez;
- Canadian Hand to Hand duo Preston Jamieson and Kesley Wiens; and
- Russian contortionists Tsybenova Ayagma, Tsydendambaeva Imin and Zhambalova Lilia.

Banana Shpeel also featured diverse dance elements, including:

- Brother-sister tap dance duo Joseph and Josette Wiggan, and
- A talented ensemble comprised of Robyn Baltzer, Kassie Brown, Adrienne Jean Fisher, DeWitt Fleming Jr., Karida Griffith, Luke Hawkins, Kathleen Hennessey, Adrienne Reid, Anthony J. Russo, Melissa Schott, Josh Scribner, Alexis Sims and Steven T. Williams.

/// CIRQUE SLIPS ON ITS OWN SHPEEL

The final decision to close was Cirque's, Mr. Lamarre said, adding that the company never came under pressure from MSG Entertainment to leave the Beacon so it could book more profitable acts. For his part, Jay Marciano, president of MSG Entertainment, said in a statement that regardless of the "Banana Shpeel" debacle, his company would continue its "long-standing relationship" with Cirque, including on the major Cirque production scheduled for Radio City Music Hall in 2011 (ZARKANA). Today Cirque du Soleil does little to acknowledge the show. But we have to ask: what went wrong? Patrick Healy of the New York Times asked Cirque du Soleil that very question and put together a fantastic overview of the entire situation – "How Cirque Slipped on its 'Shpeel'" – which you can also read in its entirety below:

Less than six weeks after opening in New York, "Banana Shpeel" – the latest high-budget, high-profile show from Cirque du Soleil – is scheduled to close on Sunday. For Cirque, the show was supposed to be another milestone: a production that could compete artistically and commercially with Broadway, blending signature Cirque acrobatics and clowns with elements of vaudeville, dance and musical theater. Instead "Banana Shpeel" will go down as one of the most frustrating failures in Cirque's history.

With an original budget of \$20 million, the production not only had the Cirque touch but also a team led by David Shiner, the renowned clown and co-creator of the hit 1993 Broadway show "Fool Moon," as writer and director. And the show was booked for the Beacon Theater in Manhattan, which had reopened in 2009 after a \$16 million restoration. Now the closing notice stands as the first time that Cirque has quickly shuttered a major show, said Daniel Lamarre, the company's president and chief executive. And the experience has clearly had an effect: Mr. Lamarre said it was too early to say if Cirque would try a theatrically driven entertainment like "Banana Shpeel" again.

"We tried something very new and very different for Cirque, which is what we love doing – tackling new creative challenges – but obviously this was a difficult and somewhat surprising process for us," Mr. Lamarre said in a telephone interview from the company's headquarters in Montreal. "I think it will take some time to understand what happened with 'Banana Shpeel' in New York."

According to interviews with nine executives and artists who worked on "Banana Shpeel," the production appeared to suffer from competing creative impulses. Cirque is known for using a highly improvisational, free-form process to create shows, preferring to experiment with clown or circus acts rather than to work with a script. In the case of "Banana Shpeel," however, the plan was to use a conventional plot, with music and dancing, as well as actual characters, like an overbearing, off-color theater impresario named Marty Schmelky, and an array of clowns and actors who spar with him.

Yet for long stretches of development in 2009, Mr. Shiner and his team were still not working with a scripted story; instead, artists involved with the production said, Cirque emphasized the importance of working with a blank canvas and creating vaudeville numbers with bits of story interspersed. (Several attempts through intermediaries to reach Mr. Shiner, who lives in Germany, were unsuccessful over the last week.)

"There was such a struggle getting everyone, people in the rehearsal room, senior Cirque executives, on the same page about what the show was supposed to be," said Annaleigh Ashford, a Broadway actress ("Hair," "Legally Blonde") who was hired in late 2008 to play the main female role in the show. "But I got the clear sense that Cirque, while wanting a different sort of show, also didn't want a show that looked too much like Broadway."

Mr. Lamarre said Cirque wanted to avoid putting labels like "Broadway" and "musical theater" on "Banana Shpeel," so as not to predetermine the shape of the show or the expectations of audience members. Still, he added, "When you're working on a show that you're hoping will be different from other productions out there, you can run into problems as people try to determine what the show is."

Within Cirque, meanwhile, the problem of determining what "Banana Shpeel" would be came to a head last fall, when Mr. Shiner and his cast and team held a closed-door performance of their work for senior Cirque executives, including Guy Laliberté, who created Cirque in 1984 and built it into a global brand with total revenues of more than \$700 million a year.

By all accounts, the performance was poorly received. The show struck executives as a little of everything (vaudeville, theater, clowning, acrobatics) but neither entrancing nor memorable by the standards of Cirque — whose popular shows include "Ka" (a gravity-defying production, inspired by martial arts performers) and "O" (a water show). It was also a nerve-racking performance, according to several people involved, since a pre-New York run of "Banana Shpeel" was soon to open in Chicago.

Shortly afterward Ms. Ashford and another actor hired for his theater experience, Michael Longoria ("Jersey Boys"), were let go from the production. (The show's composer, Laurence O'Keefe, who was a co-writer of the music and lyrics for "Legally Blonde," had already quit the show last June because of concerns about the competing, conflicting visions for the production, he said.)

Mr. Shiner and his team quickly and heavily reworked the show, focusing on Schmelly, his troupe of clowns and the vaudeville acts rather than the more traditional musical numbers. But it was all to disappointing ends: In December "Banana Shpeel" opened in Chicago to disastrous reviews, and Cirque executives declared that the show was not even close to ready for New York.

"A lot of people have told me that a normal producer would have given up after Chicago, but we're not a normal producer," Mr. Lamarre said. "That said, we don't think we're invincible, we weren't arrogant about it. We weren't pleased after Chicago. But the spirit of Cirque, working day and night to make the show work, is a point of pride for us, and we wanted to give our team a chance to fix the show."

The Beacon in Manhattan, meanwhile, passed up bookings for three months awaiting "Banana Shpeel" preview performances, which ended up being delayed three times, from early February to, ultimately, April 29. With continued reworking of the show, the production budget ballooned to at least \$25 million from \$20 million, Mr. Lamarre said.

More people began weighing in with proposed changes, including executives at MSG Entertainment, which owns the Beacon Theater and is a partner in "Banana Shpeel" and other Cirque productions. (The Cirque show "Wintuk" has become a Christmastime staple at The Theater at Madison Square Garden.) The Cirque team had sole artistic control over "Banana Shpeel," but the MSG Entertainment team had a financial stake in the show, as well as in the decision to turn over the Beacon Theater to Cirque, which meant ousting its popular March residency by the Allman Brothers.

Once "Banana Shpeel" finally began its run in New York, opening on May 19 and accompanied by heavy television advertising, weekly ticket sales were only a fraction of Cirque's projections. And almost four weeks after opening, Cirque officials announced they would close the show.

Paul Binder, the founding artistic director of Big Apple Circus, with which Cirque has been competing in New York City in recent years, was invited to a dress rehearsal of "Banana Shpeel" and also attended opening night. While he said he admired much of the talent in the show, he added that he sensed right away that Cirque might have a problem building an audience. "The reality is, people have very specific expectations with Cirque shows, and 'Banana Shpeel' turned out to be neither fish nor fowl — neither circus act nor theatrical vaudeville entertainment," Mr. Binder said. "So I think it was probably difficult to get a large audience excited about a show when many didn't really understand what it was."

Perhaps it's for the best...



Viva

ELVIS

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY VINCENT PATERSON

LIVE AT

Aria

RESORT & CASINO

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ELVIS PRESLEY ENTERPRISES, INC. AND CKX INC.



On November 24, 2011, shocking news from the Las Vegas Sun reverberated throughout the Cirque du Soleil community: Citing poor ticket sales, MGM Resorts International was exercising a clause in its contract deal and asked Cirque du Soleil to replace Viva Elvis at CityCenter by the end of 2012. “As attendance levels have not been meeting expectations, we have asked our partners at Cirque du Soleil to replace the show,” a company statement said. “We will work closely with Cirque as we explore future entertainment options.” This was the first time that Cirque du Soleil, which has come to dominate the big-production showrooms on the Strip, had been asked to shutter a show since arriving in Las Vegas in 1993 with “Mystere” at Treasure Island.

But it would not be the only show the company had been asked to close.

Like with ZAIA in Macao, there is no denying that Viva Elvis had a tumultuous time on the Strip, but there was hope amongst some circles that the show could survive its difficulties, especially in the light of some thematic changes that were being implemented around the same time the call to replace the show was announced, and muster on. The announcement by MGM Resorts International all but squashed those hopes and later - on August 31, 2012 – Viva Elvis had what we perceive to be its final curtain call.

ESSENTIALS

Premiere:	December 16, 2009 (Previews) January 8, 2010 (Gala)
Type:	Resident / Theater
Director:	Vincent Paterson
Composer:	Elvis Presley
Location:	ARIA, Las Vegas
Finale:	August 31, 2012

Creative Team

Guide	Choreographer
Guy Laliberté	Bonnie Story
Guide	Choreographer
Gilles Ste-Croix	Napoleon Dumo
Writer & Director	Choreographer
Vincent Paterson	Tabitha Dumo
Creation	Choreographer
Armand Thomas	Mark Swanhart
Musical Director	Choreographer
Erich van Tourneau	Catherine Archambault
Theater & Set	Rigging
Mark Fisher	Guy St-Amour
Costumes	Acrobatics
Stefano Canulli	Daniel Cola
Sound Designer	Makeup Designer
Jonathan Deans	Nathalie Gagné
Lighting	Props
Marc Brickman	Patricia Ruel
Image Content	
Ivan Dudynsky	

/// I GOT A FEELING IN MY BODY

In May 2006, about the same time rumors were floated about Cirque creating what ultimately became ZAIA in Macao, and amongst the buzz regarding the Cirque/Beatles mash-up (which became LOVE at The Mirage), Cirque du Soleil announced that it had entered into an exclusive arrangement with CKX Inc., owner of the rights to the name, image and likeness of Elvis Presley, for the creation, development, production and promotion of "Elvis Presley Projects" throughout the world. From the press release:

These Projects will consist of touring and permanent shows at fixed locations that will be produced by Cirque and incorporate the name, image, likeness and music of Elvis Presley. They will also consist of multimedia interactive entertainment "Elvis Experiences" that incorporate the music, memorabilia, audiovisual works, and the life and times of Elvis Presley.

Cirque and CKX have agreed to open at least one touring show in Europe and/or Asia and one "Elvis Experience" outside of the United States by 2008. Beginning in 2009, at least one Elvis Presley Project will be opened in each of the next six years. Beginning in 2014, at least one Elvis Presley Project will be opened every two years during the next eight years, through 2021.

These projects are in line with Cirque's new business strategy of diversifying our artistic content through different live productions in order to reach out to as many people as possible throughout the world. Cirque and CKX will each own 50 percent of each Elvis Presley Project, sharing equally in the costs of creating, developing, building and producing each project and in the profits from each Project.

A few short months later – August 21, 2006 – an official announcement was made regarding the partnership, including an interesting bit about the production taking up residence at the centerpiece of the hotelier's infamous CityCenter mixed-use project: Aria. The announcement was timed for Elvis Week, when Elvis fans from around the world flock to Memphis, Tennessee, for the anniversary of his death on August 16, 1977.

Robert F.X. Sillerman, Chairman of CKX, Inc., commented, "I am pleased that during this time, when we remember Elvis Presley and celebrate his life, we are able to announce his return to Las Vegas, a place where he truly rose to iconic status. And with the remarkable creative talent of Cirque du Soleil, fans who saw Elvis perform, as well as those who never had a chance to see him, will be able to experience Elvis in an entirely new and exciting way. This will be the first step in establishing a twenty-first century presence in Vegas for the King."

Guy Laliberte commented, "This new creative challenge is exactly what we strive at accomplishing in the development of our new productions. Cirque du Soleil is thrilled to be involved in CityCenter and we are particularly honored to be entrusted with this assignment. We are working closely with our partners to ensure the public will have an unforgettable encounter with the King of Rock and Roll."

Elvis had a unique relationship with his adoring fans in Vegas and a large part of our mission is to recreate the excitement and the spirit of joy he generated here."

All became quiet on the Elvis front for more than two years following the press announcement. Many had begun to wonder whether or not any of the "Elvis Projects" would ever come to fruition, especially as costs associated with the construction of the massive CityCenter project skyrocketed and construction lagged. Others wondered whose idea the Elvis project was to begin with and how it came about. Daniel Lamarre, President and COO of Cirque du Soleil, fielded that question in a statement to the company's employees:

Actually, the story behind the Elvis project is quite simple. Following the huge success of LOVE, we were approached by the owners of the rights to the Presley estate. Elvis Presley is an undisputed icon of contemporary music history, so we decided to immerse ourselves in his universe and develop different projects. There are several possibilities on the table, including a permanent show, a tour, interactive experiences and other ideas involving television and film. I won't deny that we were a bit skeptical initially, which led us to conduct a study to find out how people perceived the idea of associating our brand with that of Elvis. It turns out that people think it's an excellent idea! I anticipate that this show will be as successful as LOVE.

And we waited. On December 15, 2009, Cirque du Soleil unveiled VIVA ELVIS, written and directed by Vincent Patterson, to the world:

"On a creative level, it was extremely stimulating to draw our inspiration from this musical icon," said Guy Laliberté. "Viva ELVIS showcases the raw energy and pure talent of Elvis and highlights the exhilaration and beauty of his music on a grand scale."

"It makes perfect sense that Elvis should live on in Las Vegas, where his iconic status was cemented," said Robert F.X. Sillerman. "When we teamed with Cirque du Soleil, we knew that any show they created would match Elvis' larger-than-life presence. So we were pleased to open the vaults at Graceland and make available to Cirque du Soleil historic archival materials, recordings and concert footage that would help them create a show that will carry Elvis' legacy into the future."

"Elvis has always been in the forefront of new, contemporary entertainment and technology," said Priscilla Presley. "I believe Viva ELVIS continues this and reaches out and expands his legacy in a new, creative and exciting way."

"The show's acrobatic elements, set designs and other artistic components are part of an overall creative vision designed to showcase the timeless music of Elvis, his unique voice and unequalled talent as a performer," said Gilles Ste-Croix, Senior Vice-president of Creative Content and New Project Development at Cirque du Soleil.

"The unique strength and power of Elvis was in his voice," said Vincent Patterson, the show's Writer and Director. "I was greatly inspired by the originality and complexity of this musical legend. What I tried to paint, in all humility, is the show he might have created today."

/// A LITTLE LESS CONVERSATION...

"'Larger than life' are the watchwords that inspired our acrobatic approach to Viva ELVIS." - Daniel Cola, the show's Acrobatic Performance Designer.

The lines between scenery elements, acrobatic equipment and props in Viva ELVIS are not always clear – and that, according to designer Mark Fisher, was a deliberate choice.

The design of the Elvis Theater has a conventional proscenium layout reminiscent of an opera house. The stage is wide and the backstage area and wings are vast. They have to accommodate the large-scale set elements and the need for speed in changing scenes imposed by the rapid pace of the show. The curtain and the stage floor are decorated with golden disks that recall the 151 Elvis Presley albums, singles and EPs that went gold, platinum or multi-platinum in the USA. The sides and the rear of the stage are fixed areas while the center is composed of 16 platforms, separated into 12 sections which can rise to a height of ten feet. Depending on the scene, the platforms may at various times in the show support performers, singers, dancers or set elements. The widest platform measures 18 feet by 80 feet and is raised by four powerful motors 26 feet below the stage.

The predominant color of the whole set and theatre is gold in a reference to the baroque era as well as to Elvis' own identification with gold as the universal symbol for the wealth of kings, and as a stylized reference to all of his gold records. "Elvis has transcended reality and become a kind of mythic figure," says Mark Fisher. "So his reappearance in Las Vegas has to be done on a scale that reflects that status."

The Viva ELVIS costumes are inspired by Presley's life, his entourage, his concerts and his films too. Elvis Presley defined the image of the Rock'n'Roll rebel in the '50s and '60s, first with pink and black suits, then with leather jackets, black pants, a pompadour hairstyle and a casual manner. This iconic image, which embodies all the excitement, turbulence and the ideal of freedom of the era, is still on the cutting edge 50 years later. "I flirted with the look of the Elvis years through an approach that is both classic and graphic," says Stefano. "I brought to it a contemporary touch that reflects the vitality of the era. I've borrowed from 1950s design and sublimated it to create a world of eclectic Technicolor lines to come up with a dynamic fantasy that highlights the body." (As an example: Urethane foam wigs recreate the Elvis hairstyle in a Japanese manga comic strip interpretation).

The fabulous imagination of '50s and '60s America, which was expressed through the cinema, advertising and magazines of the time, was also a source of inspiration for costume designer Stefano Canulli. But his work is neither a reproduction of stereotypes and details of the period, nor is it a retro aesthetic. There are a total of nearly 400 Viva ELVIS costumes, employing some 1,500 components such as 450 pair of shoes, some 150 custom wigs and dresses (some of which adorned with some 100,000 crystals), and for the first time at Cirque du Soleil, some of the costume accessories use flocking – coating a surface with fibers to give it the appearance of velvet.

And of course there's the music...

Viva ELVIS highlighted the music of an American icon who changed rock and roll forever. Elvis Presley created an art form for the masses with his voice, his movements and his provocative image as the herald of adolescent rebellion in the 1950s and 1960s. His music was an explosive mixture of rhythm and blues, gospel, country and the music of the South that brought rock and roll to the forefront of popular music.

By creating a reinterpretation of the music of Elvis, Cirque du Soleil set out to present the songs of the King of Rock 'n' Roll in a contemporary form that evokes the spirit of Elvis in every way. "What would the songs of Elvis be like if he were doing them for the first time today?" asks Musical Director and Arranger Erich van Tourneau. "With all humility, I set out to evoke the soul and the spirit of Elvis Presley, while building a bridge between his music and future generations of fans." The styles of Viva ELVIS move from Delta blues to rockabilly, soul to gospel, through Dixie and Southern folk music. Some of the songs even evoke garage rock and punk, steeped in waves of hip-hop and urban music. But one thing is certain and remains consistent: the sound of Viva ELVIS is pure rock.

One of the biggest challenges was to establish a balance in the selection of songs. The score had to include enough of Elvis's hits but not be a simple "best of" playlist. Some of the songs were chosen to fit the narrative of the show, but above all it was Presley's boundless energy and his disarming charisma that dictated van Tourneau's choices. "I wanted to highlight his rebel side, recall his sexy and provocative facets and seize the powerful and charismatic Elvis you see in the documentary *Elvis '56* and *Elvis*, the television broadcast of his 1968 comeback concert," he says. One thing's for sure: choosing thirty songs from such a rich catalog of work by the greatest songwriters of the era was as delicate a task as it was challenging.

Before starting work, Erich van Tourneau and Ugo Bombardier reviewed and recorded 914 authorized and unauthorized albums and countless films, concert recordings, interviews and home recordings – a job that took more than 3,000 hours! Armed with tens of thousands of samples of Elvis's voice (17,765 to be exact), Erich van Tourneau, assisted by Ugo Bombardier, often wove several sequences and colors into the same songs, sometimes changing the key. In creating his remix, Erich was looking to accentuate and boost the emotional charge of the songs. For example, he incorporated ragga rhythms into *King Creole*, and urban and hip-hop sounds into *Blue Suede Shoes*. But in all such cases, the watchword was to be respectful of the spirit of the original recordings. The live singers in Viva ELVIS are all female; the only male voice is that of Elvis himself – on the grounds that only Elvis could possibly do justice to Elvis when it came to portraying his vitality and seductive charm. Isolating his voice on the original recordings was a major technical challenge, because his voice and the instruments were almost always recorded on the same tracks.

All of this and more were brought together to create VIVA ELVIS... but what was it like to experience?

/// IT'S NOW OR NEVER

Viva ELVIS is billed as a harmonious fusion of dance, acrobatics and live music; a tribute to the life and music of Elvis Presley. Nostalgia, modernity and raw emotion provide the backdrop for his immortal voice and the exhilaration and beauty of his music. Created in the image of The King of Rock 'n' Roll – powerful, sexy, whimsical, truly unique and larger than life – the show highlights an American icon who transformed popular music and whose image embodies the freedom, excitement and turbulence of his era. Significant moments in his life – intimate, playful and grandiose – blend with the timeless songs that remain as relevant today as when they first hit the top of the charts. Viva ELVIS focuses on the essential humanity of the one superstar whose name will forever be linked with the history of Las Vegas and the entire world of entertainment – Elvis Presley – through the following scenes:

BLUE SUEDE SHOES

One of the seminal songs that propelled Elvis to fame, Blue Suede Shoes opens the show with raucous abandon, featuring a dynamic ensemble of 30 dancers and 24 acrobats boogying, bouncing and flying through the air. A giant jukebox adorns the stage (the chrome and gloss black structure is 70-feet wide and 22-feet high with dance platforms on two levels. It also incorporates a 50-foot tall video screen) until a giant blue suede shoe rolls on (the shoe is 29-feet long, weighs 7,000 pounds and is made of steel and fiberglass). The eight-piece band and four female singers energize a showcase filled with Elvis imagery, colorful graphics and vintage footage of euphoric fans.

DON'T BE CRUEL

This number pays tribute to Elvis' fantastic recording career and the sheer volume of his work. Twenty-four dancers take the stage for the classic song, featuring glittering images of flying gold records on eight LED panels, and six enormous RCA and Sun gold records lowered from the rafters. Synthetic paper material was used to create the romantic 'letter dresses' of the late '50s.

ONE NIGHT WITH YOU

An epic-sized guitar (a tubular aluminum structure measuring 45 feet by 18 feet), a symbol of Elvis' love of music and his larger-than-life persona, serves as an imaginary playground for Elvis and his twin brother Jesse Garon, who died at birth. The song is a duet between a female singer at a piano and Elvis himself.

ALL SHOOK UP

Gospel music was at the very core of Elvis' artistry. This powerful rendition of an Elvis classic, performed by one of the singers in a rich setting of colorful stained glass imagery, lends the dance number a Southern revival feel.

SAVED

Elvis loved singing gospel more than any other musical genre. In fact, each of his three Grammys was for a gospel recording. This euphoric number combines dance with acrobatics.

GOT A LOT OF LIVIN' TO DO

Full of thrills and daring feats, this is a trampoline number inspired by street acrobatics and Elvis' fascination with the Marvel comic books that he had read since he was a boy, amusement parks and superheroes. Seven acrobats in stylized superhero costumes defy gravity in a stunning cavalcade of synchronized jumps, leaps and bounces. The set features seven trampolines and the whole structure was inspired by Elvis' love of fairgrounds, which he would visit with his friends after hours. The structure weighs some 30 tons and takes up the full 78-foot width of the stage, is 23 feet deep and 32 feet tall. Offset printing was used to create the anatomical patterns on the comic book superhero-inspired costumes.

HEARTBREAK HOTEL

A ballad of love, sorrow and separation, Heartbreak Hotel features four dance couples - the men dressed as army officers and the women wearing airmail envelope dresses. They are torn between loyalty to country and their emotional ties to their loved ones.

LOVE ME TENDER

A duet sung by Elvis and a female singer is underscored by a montage of still photographs and newsreel footage of Elvis' two years in the army.

RETURN TO SENDER

Boot camp as performance art - a large ensemble cast of dancers, acrobats and marching band musicians puts on a dizzying array of hip hop moves, and high-bar calisthenics on a huge 15,000-pound structure that consists of five fixed bars and two sets of parallel bars on three levels. Backed by a gigantic American flag made of whimsical stars and stripes (made of genuine long underwear and boxer shorts - and with only 48 stars because Elvis entered the service in 1958, the year before Alaska and Hawaii were admitted to the Union), the sharp, compelling movements are emblematic of precision, pride and patriotism - all highly distinctive characteristics of Elvis himself.

ARE YOU LONESOME TONIGHT

This aerial pas-de-deux features a soldier and his girlfriend in a dreamy ode to their love and devotion - and their efforts to stay together during his tour of duty by writing to each other.

WESTERN SCENE

Musicians gather around a campfire in a reference to the style and camaraderie of the '68 Comeback Special, and perform a medley of songs on acoustic instruments while two cowboys spin their guns and twirl their lassos in a playful routine. The giant lasso used seen here is 40 feet long, and three giant "cowboys" representing Elvis complete the decor. They are made of fiberglass and measure 35, 31 and 17 feet high.

BURNING LOVE

A cascade of movie clips pays homage to Elvis' Hollywood career. The live band rocks the house and punctuates classic dialogue delivered by the King.

BOSSA NOVA

A young guy triumphantly shows off at a party by building a tower of eight chairs and topping it off with a one-arm handstand.

KING CREOLE

New Orleans sets the tone for this lusty rendition of the title song from one of Elvis' best-loved films. It's Reggae, it's Calypso, it's Cajun, and above all it's fun, as a female singer is accompanied by Elvis in a visual feast of stop-action film clips and dance.

JAILHOUSE ROCK

Jailhouse Rock marked the pinnacle of Elvis' movie career. It's also the centerpiece of Viva ELVIS. A dramatic, mysterious entrance gives way to a high-octane dance and acrobatic fusion performed to the pulsating beat of the familiar anthem. In a tribute to the original film sequence, the iconic prison set is dramatically updated in a number that flips the world upside down.

The challenge for Mark Fisher was to come up with a set for Jailhouse Rock that would reference the iconic set used in the film, but at the same time be original and fresh. He based his new design on the technical requirements for a circus art called "marche inversée." The structure incorporates ten tracks for acrobats to walk upside down, attached by their feet, while dancers perform right side up on other levels. The 82,000- pound set is 60 feet wide, 45 feet deep and almost 40 feet tall. Up to 36 artists appear on it at the same time.

IT'S NOW OR NEVER

The sensuality of the tango and the sophistication of a lounge song connect with the audacity of an innovative pole performance featuring eight female performers and the four men they seduce.

CAN'T HELP FALLING IN LOVE

Home movies of Elvis and Priscilla's courtship lead into footage of their marriage ceremony. A singer performs a duet with Elvis atop a scale replica of their wedding cake to accompany graceful ballet dancers and roller-skaters.

LOVE ME/DON'T

Two seven-foot hoops - scale replicas of Elvis and Priscilla's engagement rings - descend from the grid for two couples to perform a sensual cerceaux act to a rocking arrangement of Love Me. A female singer and guitarist join the party for Don't.

VIVA LAS VEGAS

Used in the last few songs in the show, this set captures the glamour of Las Vegas with a huge ceremonial staircase as its central feature. Pavilions on the side house the musicians; decks above the pavilions serve as stages for the dancers, jugglers and other circus artists. To complete the glamour and provide the show with a climax, there are two beautiful gold-leaf sculptures of Elvis in iconic poses from the peak of his popularity in Vegas. Showgirls wearing colorful plumes parade down the central staircase while all other cast members wear shimmering reinterpretations of classic Elvis jumpsuits (of which there are 50). A medley of songs pays tribute to the glitz and sparkle of Elvis' Vegas years.

SUSPICIOUS MINDS

Suspicious Minds opens with a soulful riff and builds to a thunderous finish. A couple caught in a trap of passion and anger express their feelings for each other in an energetic acrobatic dance. Once the duo is reconciled, the set fills with performers emerging at the top of the staircase in fringed jumpsuits, recreating Elvis' signature stage moves.

HOUND DOG

The entire cast brings the show to an unforgettable finale with a dynamic, modern celebration of the song that marked Elvis' rise to fame.

/// DOIN' THE BEST I CAN

The show began preview performances as planned (on December 18, 2009), but the euphoria surrounding Cirque du Soleil's suaré into the life and times of Elvis Presley quickly began to fall upon hard times. A combination of construction delays and last-minute revisions had delayed VIVA ELVIS planned gala premiere on January 8, 2010 (what would have been Elvis' 75th birthday) to February 19, 2010. Many began to wonder whether lightening could strike twice with a "musical revue" type show (as The Beatles LOVE was proving to be a runaway success just down the Strip), or whether Cirque du Soleil had bitten off more than it could chew.

"The show is not complete, and it's not what we wish," Ste-Croix told Mike Weatherford of the Las Vegas Review-Journal a few weeks before the show opened. Ste-Croix, Cirque's senior vice-president of creative content and new project development, said CityCenter CEO Bobby Baldwin wanted previews for the Aria opening and holiday season, sooner than Cirque would have liked given their creation schedule. Lagging ticket sales and half-filled shows had a number of tongues at MGM/Mirage and Cirque du Soleil wagging: changes had to be instituted and soon! The show's executive producer, Stephane Mongeau, later confirmed that the show was undergoing a major reshuffling, among them the recent departure of the main Elvis actor, Leo Days, a top Elvis tribute artist.

In the first incarnation of the show, VIVA ELVIS told a familiar story in an almost flat monotone. By the beginning of 2011, however, the show had been given new blood with a controlled but frantic fever pitch worked in for good measure. "The narrative has been cut down and the Col. Tom Parker character relocated," said Robin Leach, correspondent for the Las Vegas Weekly. "The dancing seems faster and more electrically charged. Now it's all showmanship throughout and makes the blue suede shoe even larger than it was with the dancers sprawled all over it. Now after more than a year of studio engineering, it's the new soundtrack that propels the show along at a much faster pace and energy."

But the jubilation surrounding this round of changes didn't last long either, and by the end of summer, it was reported that MGM was working with Cirque du Soleil to modify VIVA ELVIS, which it acknowledged for the first time was losing money and drawing sparse crowds. On August 10, 2010 the rumors regarding those additional changes were made official by Renee-Claude Menard, senior director of public relations for Cirque, through the following announcement:

"Cirque du Soleil and MGM Resorts International have always had an active and open relationship about their projects. As for all Cirque du Soleil productions, we constantly review all aspects of our shows including the creative positioning and the business results. These discussions have been on-going for Viva Elvis and we have decided to modify the show to make it less of a biographical representation of Elvis and more of an acrobatic Cirque du Soleil spectacular production.

As a result of the recent tragedies in Japan, Cirque du Soleil has had to make a difficult decision to close its permanent show ZED by the end of this year. But in making that difficult decision an opportunity presented itself to enhance Viva Elvis. ZED features some of the most impressive acrobatic acts ever presented on stage and we truly wish to continue bringing these performances to our audience. In the last weeks, we have reviewed the possibilities and have decided to fully integrate these beautiful acts in Viva Elvis and to present them to the millions of people who visit Las Vegas annually.

Cirque du Soleil is a creative-driven organization and wants to ensure that this integration is done well and fully respects its artistic objectives. To do this, the partners have agreed that Viva Elvis will take extended dark dates beginning in January 2012. This integration is expected to be completed by the end of the first quarter. We will also take this time to review all marketing strategies to reposition Viva Elvis.

I would like to specify that we expect to have the same total amount of artists on stage and the financial investment both in the creative integration and new marketing initiatives are still under complete evaluation."

/// ALL SHOOK UP

From the moment Cirque du Soleil announced that VIVA ELVIS would get a makeover to "make it less of a biographical representation of Elvis Presley and more of an acrobatic Cirque du Soleil spectacular production," speculation ran rampant regarding just how drastic those changes might be. All we knew was that the cast and crew were summoned to a meeting just before the announcement was made. They were told that Cirque would be pouring more than \$10 million into the makeover, that MGM Resorts International wanted results within two years, and it was even possible that the show's name could change.

Explaining in more detail by phone, Cirque du Soleil's senior publicist, Renee-Claude Menard said "we would have made changes anyway," even without the misfortune of "Zed." Cirque and MGM Resorts officials already had agreed "we knew we wanted to make it more acrobatic. ... What ZED brought to the table was an opportunity."

Cirque and Aria already had "common agreement" that "the biographical expression of Elvis was not necessarily appealing to our demographic and the type of demographic we'd like to have, so let's look at it a different way. Make it a Cirque du Soleil spectacular featuring Elvis as a singer," Menard said. As such, the character of Elvis' manager, Tom Parker, as narrator would likely be eliminated, though "I think we have to wait until the changes are all done," Menard said.

VIVA ELVIS had planned an extended dark period at the beginning of January 2012 where the Banquine number and the Aerial Straps duo from ZED would be integrated. Until then the show would remain "as is".

/// EASY COME, EASY GO

With VIVA ELVIS seemingly on the right path again it came as somewhat of a shock that a mere three months later, and without the new changes going into effect, MGM Resorts International called for Cirque to replace VIVA ELVIS outright, but that's exactly what happened on November 24, 2001 – Thanksgiving Day:

MGM Resorts has asked Cirque du Soleil to replace its show "Viva Elvis" at the Aria by the end of 2012, citing poor ticket sales. The move is the first time that the Canadian company, which has come to dominate the big-production showrooms on the Strip, has been asked to shut a show since arriving here in 1993 with its first permanent show, "Mystere" at Treasure Island.

"As attendance levels have not been meeting expectations, we have asked our partners at Cirque du Soleil to replace the show," a company statement said. "We will work closely with Cirque as we explore future entertainment options."

An internal Cirque du Soleil memo was sent to the cast of "Viva Elvis" on Wednesday afternoon announcing MGM's intentions. "Viva Elvis" has played 900 performances at the Aria resort at CityCenter, to nearly 1 million people.

"Viva Elvis" is the newest of the seven Cirque du Soleil shows along the Strip - its 1,840-seat, acoustically refined showroom costing an estimated \$100 million.

The show was previously scheduled to go dark for a 90-day retooling in January and reopen in early spring. A top Cirque official told the Sun Wednesday evening: "The extended dark period for a full revamp of the show will now not take place. It will just be the regular dark period from Feb. 4-11, but we will make previously planned artistic adjustments ... We will also be integrating the Banquine act from our 'Zed' show for sure."

Cirque du Soleil had the following to say to its employees regarding the unanticipated announcement:

While the artistic merit of Viva ELVIS is exceptional and has touched close to one million guests with nearly 900 shows since opening in December 2009, we have been notified by our partners at CityCenter of their likely intention to ask Cirque to replace the show at the end of 2012.

All of us at Cirque du Soleil are saddened that we may have to bring Viva ELVIS to the end of its journey. However, we respect the decision of our partner as ticket sales have not met expectations. We will now take the appropriate time to focus on redeploying as many of the show's employees as possible, when the time comes, and evaluating next steps for exploring the many possibilities for creative content.

We are excited that throughout 2012, we will continue to celebrate the life and legacy of one of the world's greatest music icons. We are grateful to have the opportunity to share this exciting production with hundreds of thousands of guests from around the world during the months ahead.

I know we will all continue our work on this production with the same professional drive and enthusiasm for which Cirque du Soleil is known. Like you, I am proud of our work on this show and understand that this is simply a business decision.

But Viva Elvis's lack of success is relative. Since the show began in December 2009 it has reportedly been seen by more than one million people in over 900 performances. However, with Cirque's dominance in Las Vegas being what it is, Aria had hoped for a packed house every show. Aria's theatre had been only 60-percent full on average though, compare that to 99-percent occupancy for "O" and LOVE, shows running thirteen years and five years respectively. Even the nineteen-year-old production of Mystère still fills 82-percent or more at Treasure Island's theater, according to Renée-Claude Menard.

/// ALRIGHT, OKAY, YOU WIN...

You know, much like Elvis' own personal story, the journey of VIVA ELVIS is one filled with ups and downs, misadventures and comebacks, and winners and losers... but perhaps just too many swings to survive. And like Elvis himself, I feel VIVA ELVIS is being taken from us too soon. With the additions of Banquine and Aerial Straps from ZED, the removal of the Wedding Cake and the tightening of other routines, new visuals and banners, and the dismissal of the Colonel Parker narration, the third edition of VIVA ELVIS had shaped up to be a fantastic show indeed.

Alas, that's neither here nor there.

Cirque du Soleil announced the show's replacement - ZARKANA, which would begin preview performances on October 25th and have a gala premiere on November 8, 2012. And Cirque had said they would attempt to re-locate as many artists as they could, which all but hammered in the final nail for this show's chances of reappearing elsewhere in the future.

But you never know.