



Corteo
CIRQUE DU SOLEIL[™]
!?!?

CirqueCon Montreal 2005

Sponsored by the Facination! Newsletter

The second unofficial gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates

Friday, April 22 - Sunday, April 24, 2005
Montreal, Quebec, Canada



CIRQUECON MONTRÉAL 2005

The Second Unofficial Gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates

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Friday, April 22, 2005 to

Sunday, April 24, 2005

Marriott SpringHill Suites Vieux-Montréal

Montréal,
Québec,
Canada

And so the journey continues. Or begins anew.

We heed the call, that whisper on the wind. Louder this time, reaching farther.

So again we gather. Together.

Old friends. New friends. Faces never before seen, yet souls familiar.

Again we bond with fellow Passionates.

Bearing witness to that which is newly created, still forming, unexplored.

Wrapping ourselves in its warmth. Together.

And the creators welcome us. Inviting us to peek behind their mask.

What mysteries will be revealed?

We come from far away. But we know where we are.

We are home.

Together.

Bienvenue!



CIRQUECON MONTRÉAL 2005

Schedule of Events

FRIDAY APRIL 22, 2005

3:00pm-5:00pm

TOHU La Cité Des Arts du Cirque
2345, Jarry Street East
Montréal, QC H1Z 4P3
514-376-TOHU
www.tohu.ca

“TOHU TOUR”

(Pre-registration required 50 people maximum)

A combination of dream merged with reality (kind of like a Cirque show), TOHU is creating a “hub” of circus performing arts in Montréal. This tour will cover all aspects of the site, from environmental considerations to their burgeoning circus memorabilia and art collection.

6:00pm-7:30pm

Keith Johnson/LouAnna Valentines Suite (Room # TBA)
Marriott SpringHill Suites Vieux-Montréal
445, rue St-Jean-Baptiste
Montréal (Quebec) Canada H2Y 2Z7
514-875-4333

www.springhillmontréal.com

“WELCOME TO CIRQUECON MONTRÉAL 2005 MEET AND GREET”

OPEN TO EVERYONE! We invite you to our room for a little "get to know you." We'll have munchies and such for consumption (hopefully some from *your* area of the country!). We'll get a chance to meet each other, and talk about our next sojourn CirqueCon Vegas 2006! Have a Cirque collectible you'd like people to see? Show it here!

Special Seed Money Project - One of our members, Barbara Lewis, has made a very kind offer to help us perpetuate our activities. She purchased several KA “creator's notebooks,” and has offered them to us for use in fundraising. The idea is to sell the programs above “face value,” with the funds above Barbara's cost being donated to CirqueCon to provide “seed money” for future years. This “seed money” would be available to start research on the next event, before it is announced and memberships sold. Once memberships start coming in the account is replenished, ready for next time! Should we ever cease activities, the fund would be donated to a Cirque-friendly cause, such as OXFAM or a local circus group. We will be offering these programs at the Meet and Greet for \$25.00 USD each. Please note this is not a “membership” in next year's event, this is a “donation” for the future, and will not be refunded.

8:30pm-10:00pm

La Basilique Notre-Dame de Montréal
110 Notre-Dame St. West (a two-minute walk from our hotel)
Montréal, QC H2Y 1T1
514-842-2295
866-842-2925

www.therewaslight.ca

\$10.00 CDN adults

“AND THEN THERE WAS LIGHT” (Field Trip)

Some may wish to take in this interesting presentation on the history of Montréal and the Basilica in words, lights, projections and sounds. Images are played across large screens and canvas sails strung throughout the sanctuary. (The soundtrack is presented on headphones in English or French).

SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2005

11:45am-approx. 4:00pm
Cirque du Soleil International Headquarters
8400 2nd Avenue East
Montréal QC H1Z 4M6
1-514-722-2324
www.cirquedusoleil.com

“CIRQUE DU SOLEIL INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS TOUR”

Where all the magic and wonder is created! Cirque du Soleil opens its doors to CirqueCon Montréal 2005 members. A maximum of 150 people may enter the building; they will be checking ID against the CirqueCon Montréal 2005 database. No cameras are allowed.

Please gather/park in the large parking lot at the south end of the facility (nearest TOHU). Gather at the striped wall of the Cirque headquarters. Note there is no overhang there, so if it might rain, be ready!

Cirque has also offered us the opportunity to shop at their Headquarters Boutique! This is the first time the IHQ Boutique has been open to non-employees ever! It is similar in "style" to the boutiques on tour, with everything out and available for handling. Availability will be limited to what is in the IHQ Boutique, and they have limited quantities of some items. Cirque is also offering a 15% discount! They will only accept CANADIAN CURRENCY/COINS OR CANADIAN CURRENCY TRAVELERS CHECKS. No credit or debit cards. They will also only allow 50 people in the Boutique at one time.

5:00pm-7:00pm
Restaurant du Vieux Port
39, Saint-Paul Street East
Old Montréal, QC H2Y 1G2
514-866-3174

www.restaurantduvieuxport.com

(At the corner of Saint-Paul Street East and Saint Gabriel, just down the block and east of our hotel)

“CIRQUECON MONTRÉAL 2005 GROUP MEAL”

(Pre-registration required)

Gather with other Cirque Passionates to eat, drink, and talk of our shared “passion.” A perfect way to prepare for the wonders to come.

7:00pm-10:30pm
(Tapis Rouge/VIP & Merchandise/Concession tents open at 7:00pm
Seating begins at 7:30pm
Show begins at 8:00pm sharp.)
Jacques Cartier Pier
Vieux Port Montréal

“CIRQUE DU SOLEIL'S CORTEO”

Finally! On its World Premiere Weekend, the new touring show in only its fourth public performance. With many of us together in our special seats (purchased oh, so long ago) we will watch as Cirque “combines the passion of the actor with the grace and power of the acrobat to plunge the audience into a world of playfulness and spontaneity situated in a mysterious area between heaven and earth. Corteo evokes the full spectrum of emotion and experience: love, friendship, pain, joy, wisdom, beauty, life and even death, through a timeless celebration in which illusion teases reality.”

AFTER THE SHOW
Restaurant du Vieux Port
“TIME FOR DESSERT”

After the show ends, some of us may go back to the Restaurant du Vieux Port (open till Midnight), or even other places in Old Montréal, to have dessert or coffee and “de-compress.”

CIRQUECON MONTRÉAL 2005

Greetings, fellow Cirque Passionates! Keith J. here with a Program Book Introduction.

We are gathered in a marvelous city, in a great facility, at a special time and with welcoming hosts. And it holds the promise of many surprises, both big and small. It will be a delight to finally meet you all.

Getting ready for CirqueCon Montréal 2005 presented special challenges. The exponential increase in attendance (400% more than our first year) was daunting. Finding the right facility and a nice place to have a group meal, in a city we weren't intimately familiar with, took time, but in the end I think we've come up with solutions that will satisfy nearly all.

Our numbers tell the story. For CirqueCon Vancouver 2004 we had:

31 members total, all of whom attended *Quidam*,
11 rooms rented at the "Headquarters" Bed and Breakfast,
4 rooms rented by members at other places, for a total of
15 total hotel rooms, approximately 33 room nights.
Quite impressive for a first-time ad-hoc fan event!

Compare that with our CirqueCon Montréal 2005 numbers (as of press time)

130 members total,
60 purchased our Standard membership, representing 90 people,
66 purchased tickets through us,
43 purchased tickets elsewhere, for a total of
109 total tickets purchased,
40 rooms rented at the Marriott SpringHill Suites,
2 rooms rented at other places, for a total of
42 total hotel rooms, 144 room nights total.

Our members come from more than half of the United States, all the Canadian provinces that touch the US except Manitoba (what's with them Manitobans, anyway?), three locations in Mexico, and even Australia. WOW! And we would have been able to say we had someone from Germany, but he recently moved to Florida oh well. <G>

Our numbers make it clear this years' event won't be the "intimate gathering of close friends" we had in Vancouver. For some that might be a disappointment, but the potential to meet other new Cirque fans from all over North and Central America should present new opportunities. We hope at the end of your journey you find yourself welcome amongst fellow Cirque Passionates. We are not alone, and we are growing...

In this Program Book you'll find, in our "Le Temps Présent" section, information about *Corteo*, the new Cirque du Soleil show we will be seeing. In "Le Passé" we extensively cover CirqueCon Vancouver 2004 in words and pictures (it was quite the odyssey, check it out). And finally, in "L'Avenir," we tease next years event, what everything's been leading up to... but you'll have to go to the back of the book to find out.

We welcome you all! And it all comes together. Here. Now.

Invoke! Provoke! Evoke!

CIRQUECON MONTRÉAL 2005

OUR FRIENDS ARE HELPING OUT CirqueCon is strictly volunteer-run, fan-based and fan-centered. We take no remuneration except for (we hope) recovering our expenses. We do it out of our passion for Cirque du Soleil and the desire to bond with others like us. We start each year fresh, with no carryover funds from the previous affair.

We have talked to so many kind people this year we can't even begin to count them all. One of them had an intriguing idea on how we might perpetuate the CirqueCon concept. For details, see the Schedule of Events under Friday's "Meet and Greet."

YOUR CIRQUECON MONTRÉAL 2005 TEAM (in alphabetical order):

--**Rich Alford** The newest member of our "committee," he showed his worth quickly. His graphic sense is evident throughout this book, our badges, our tickets and maps everything! He has touched everything we do, and made it better doing so.

--**Ricky Russo** - Lent the support of the Fascination! Newsletter to efforts early on. Compiled and edited the collection of articles from Fascination! for the Vancouver Program Book, and supplied the on-site Vancouver articles for this year.

--**Jeff Tolotti** Though taking a backseat role this year, was the On-Line Instigator & Publications Coordinator for CirqueCon Vancouver. Produced and compiled CD #2, which he graciously allowed us to continue producing. Now the Administrator of the CirqueTribune.com Cirque du Soleil fan forum.

--**LouAnna Valentine** In addition to being a lovely and supportive spouse, lent moral support, consulted on many decisions and prepared the luscious spread of food and drink at our Meet and Greet Cocktail Hour.

--**Keith Johnson** - Whatever else needed to be done. CD's #1 and #3, tons of writing, research/phone calls, hotel and meal booking, being an overly detail-conscious jerk... you get the picture.

THANKS THIS YEAR GO TO:

Cirque du Soleil André Belanger, Internet Marketing Manager, and his team: Roxane Prince, John-Pierre Beeks, Lisa Willet, and Anne-Josée Dionne, and Ugo Bergeron in Group Sales. The biggest Thank You of all goes to Mr. Belanger. Without our asking, he originally approached us and asked if they could do something with us for Vancouver. He is the man who "worked the system" internally at Cirque. And he made the suggestion that our next event take place in Montréal. We all owe him a debt of gratitude I'm sure we'll never be able to express adequately. Tohu Michel Pilon, for his flexibility in fitting us in.

Marriott SpringHill Suites Vieux-Montréal Caroline Gauthier, Event Manager, and Josée Lefevre, Corporate Sales Manager, for shepherding a first-time group coordinator through their system.

Restaurant du Vieux Port Tina Mourdoukoutas, Group Coordinator, for her flexibility.

Tourisme Montréal Helene Chagnon, Manager, Meeting and Convention Sales, and Delia Germani, for help with research.

Last year we were also aided by several kind individuals, who we'd again like to recognize:

--André Belanger and Genevieve Bastien of Cirque du Soleil.

--Isabelle Panelli-Public Relations, Michael Wilder-Technical Director, Mika Ono-Assistant Tour Manager, Martin Gagnon- Tapis Rouge Suite Manager, and the many other people on the *Quidam* site who helped us and showed us around on Saturday.

--Gillian Morris at Dunn Mitchell Communications.

--Leslie Lewington and Paul Findlay of the Bed & Breakfasts for so kindly allowing us to book their properties.

--Our friends at The Old Spaghetti Factory in Gastown.

--Susan Graham of Tourism Vancouver.

--Norwescon for the Program Book Bags.

CirqueCon Montreal 2005

What's Happening and Where...



1 Marriott SpringHill Suites Hotel-Old Montreal

445, rue St-Jean-Baptiste, Montreal, H2Y 2Z7

www.springhillmontreal.com - (514) 875-4333 - (GPS N45 30.379 W73 33.280)

2 TOHU, la Cité des arts du cirque

Friday afternoon, 4/22/05 @ 3:00pm, (Limited Attendance)

2345 Jarry Street East, Montreal, H1Z 4P3 (6.5 Miles from Hotel, Metro transportation available)

www.tohu.ca - (514) 374-3522 - (GPS N45 33.591 W73 36.966)

3 Cirque du Soleil Headquarters

Saturday morning, 4/23/05 @ 11:45am

8400, 2E Avenue, Montreal, H1Z 4M6 (6.5 Miles from Hotel, Metro transportation available)

www.cirquedusoleil.com - (514) 772-2324 - (GPS N45 33.662 W73 36.850)

4 Restaurant du Vieux Port

Saturday evening, 4/23/05 @ 5:00pm

39 Rue Saint-Paul est., Montreal, H2Y 1G2

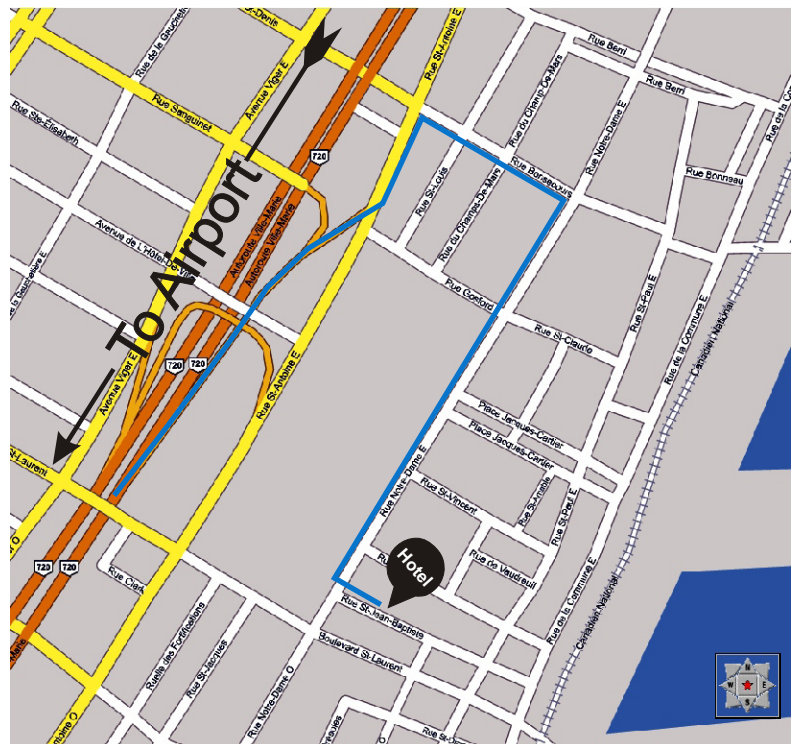
www.restaurantduvieuxport.com - (514) 866-6171 - (GPS N45 30.374 W73 33.203)

5 Cirque du Soleil Show Site

Saturday evening, 4/23/05 @ 7:30pm

Jacques Cartier Pier, Montreal

(GPS N45 30.433 W73 32.955)



CirqueCon Montreal 2005

How Do I Get From The Hotel To The Restaurant?

Restaurant Du Vieux Port

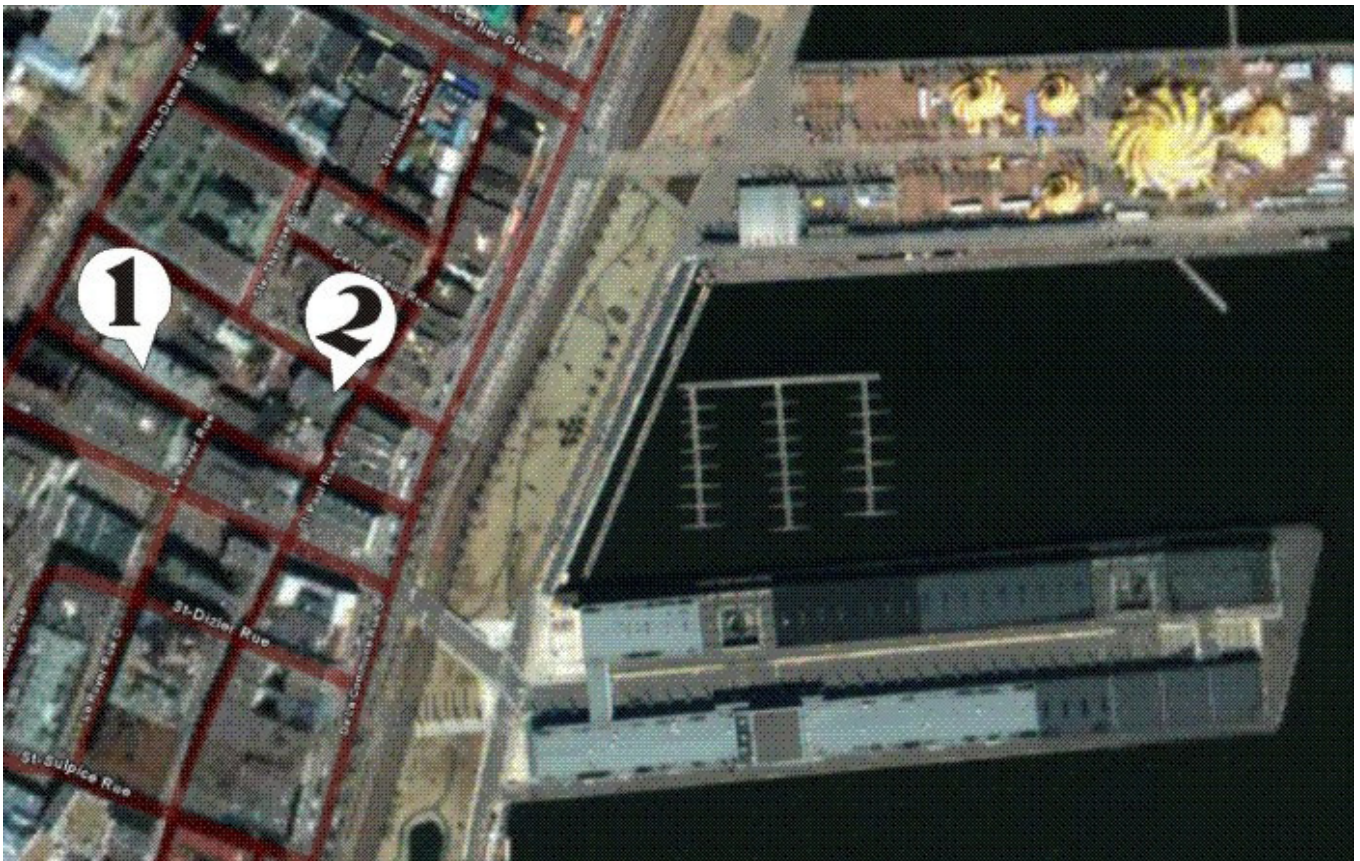
**39 Rue St-Paul est.
Montreal, QC, H2Y 2Z7
(514) 866-3175 W122 99.999 N099 00.999**

The restaurant is “just down the block and around the corner”

From the hotel (1) turn left and walk down rue Saint Jean-Baptiste toward the water (SW).

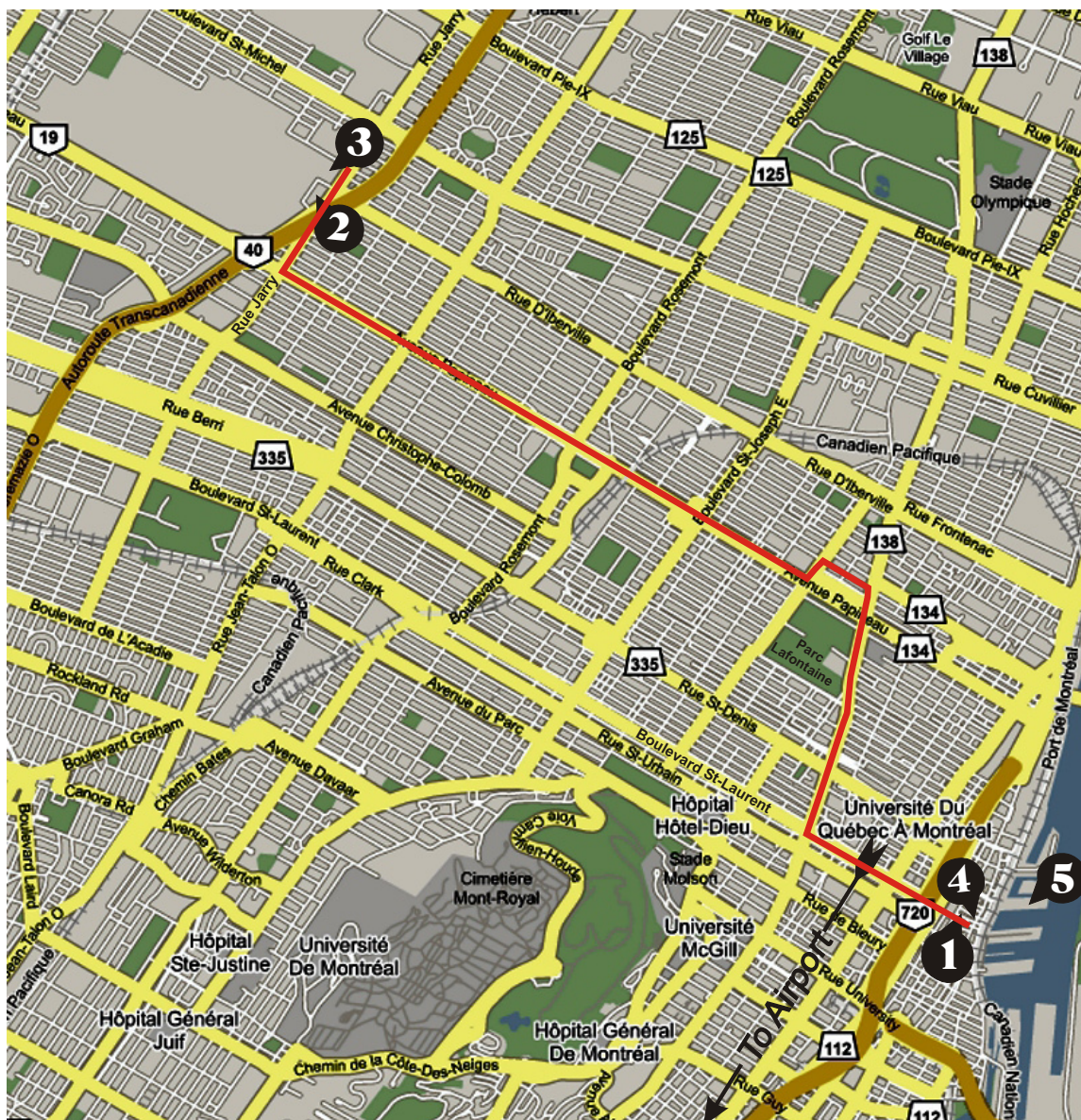
At Rue Saint Paul est. Turn left and walk up one block.

The restaurant (2) is located at the end of the block on the left.



CirqueCon Montreal 2005

How Do Get From The Hotel To Cirque/TOHU



1 Marriott SpringHill Suites Hotel-Old Montreal

445, rue St-Jean-Baptiste, Montreal, H2Y 2Z7
www.springhillmontreal.com - (514) 875-4333 - (GPS N45 30.379 W73 33.280)

2 TOHU, la Cité des arts du cirque

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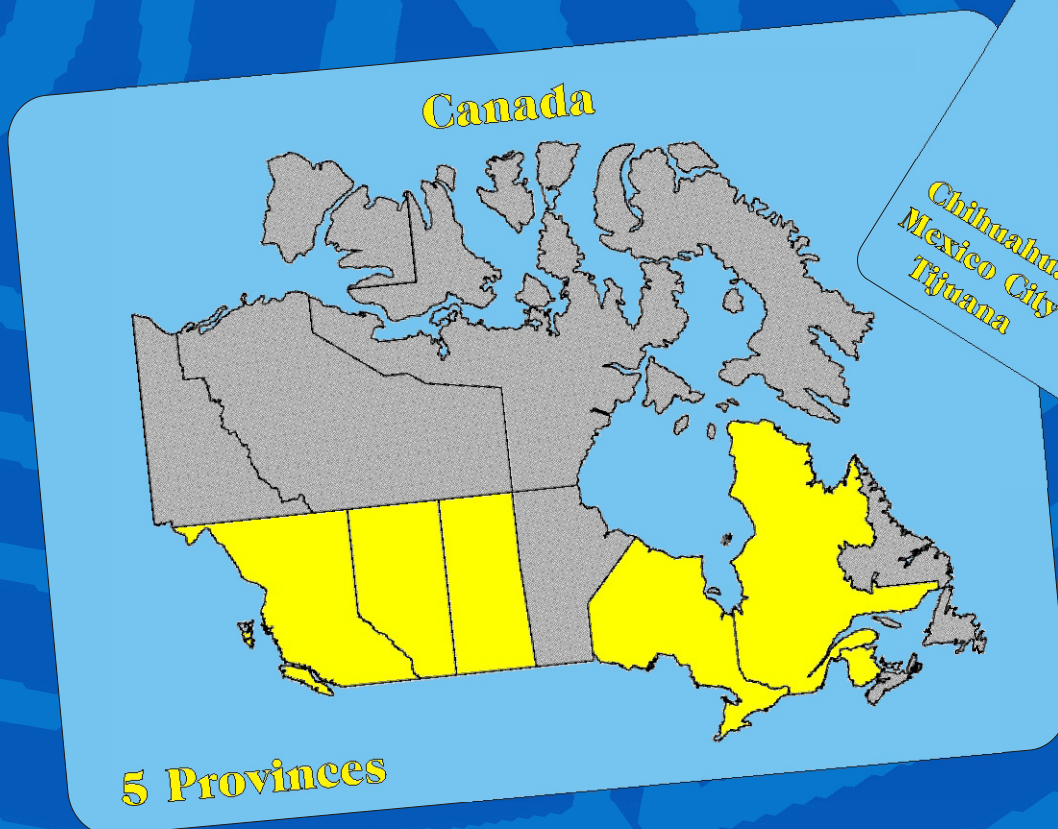
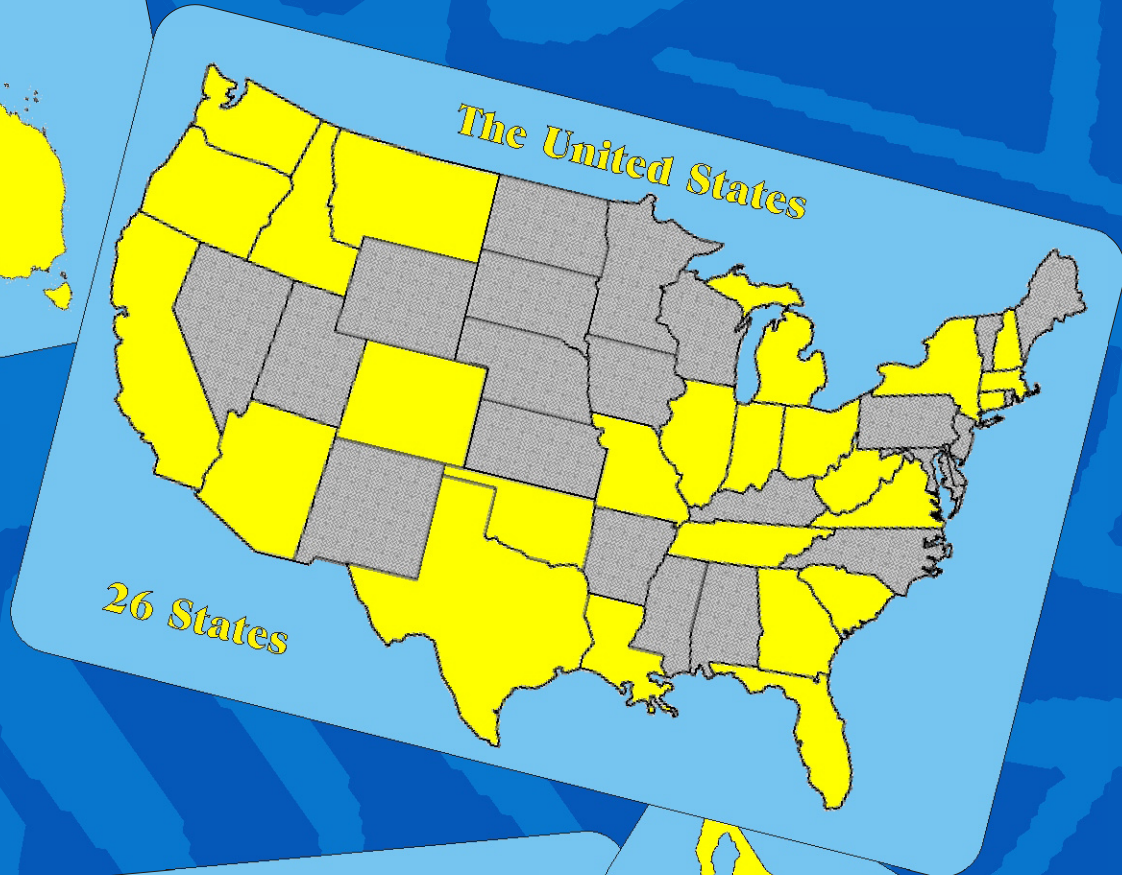
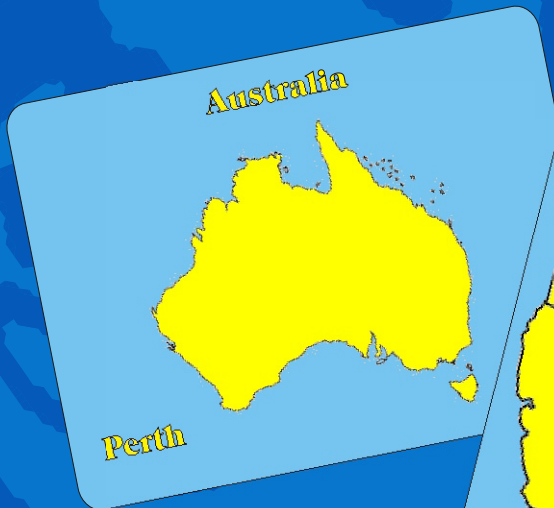
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Jacques Cartier Pier, Montreal
(GPS N45 30.433 W73 32.955)

CirqueCon Montreal 2005

The second unofficial gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates

Where are we gathering from?



Montreal, April 6, 2006

Bonjour!

I would like to welcome you all to Montreal, our home. As one of the Cirque Club crew members, I'm happy to meet you on this very special occasion. <Invoke>, <Provoke> and <Evoke> are the best words to describe what you'll enjoy during your visit. I hope you have a pleasant stay in Montreal and a great time at Cirque du Soleil IHQ.

I would also like to congratulate the organizers of this get-together. This is a great opportunity to meet people from different horizons that share the same passion as you. Have a very fulfilling weekend and a wonderful evening under the Grand Chapiteau.

Sincerely,

Roxane

Cirque Club Cast Member
Cirque du Soleil
www.cirquedusoleil.com

Corteo™

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



CIRQUE DU SOLEIL PRESENTS THE WORLD PREMIERE OF *CORTEO*

Created and directed by Daniele Finzi Pasca

Performances begin on April 21, 2005 under the blue-and-yellow Grand Chapiteau in the Old Port of Montreal

Corteo™, Cirque du Soleil's latest touring show, will premiere in Montreal's Old Port on April 21. This 17th production from Cirque du Soleil will be joining ten other productions currently in performance around the world.

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 colourful loser who shines a light on all that is difficult and beautiful in life.

Corteo evokes the full spectrum of emotion and experience: love, friendship, pain, joy, wisdom, beauty, life and even death. *Corteo*, a timeless revel in which illusion teases reality.

The cast and the acts

The cast of *Corteo* 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 du Soleil's spectacular performances. *Corteo* redefines the springboard, the Korean frame and the tightwire, and presents acts that are as original as they are innovative. The desire to surprise and move audiences is a big part of the inspiration behind *Corteo*.



CREATORS

Guy Laliberté

Founder and Chief Executive Officer

Guy Laliberté was born in Quebec City in 1959. An accordion player, stiltwalker and fire-eater, this daring visionary founded Quebec's first internationally renowned circus. With the help of a small band of kindred spirits, Laliberté recognized and groomed the talents of the street entertainers from the Fête foraine de Baie-Saint-Paul and created Cirque du Soleil in 1984.

Already a multitasking artist, Guy Laliberté quickly dove into the business world to plan and maintain the growth of the young company. Despite the group's lack of experience, he managed to convince financial institutions to back the project, winning them over with the originality and audacity of youth. He also developed a network of partners around the world to help Cirque du Soleil make a name for itself abroad.

Guy Laliberté was the first to orchestrate the marriage of cultures and artistic and acrobatic disciplines that is the hallmark of Cirque du Soleil. Since 1984, he has guided the creative team through the creation of every show and contributed to elevating the circus arts to the level of the great artistic disciplines.

Thanks to its founder's vision and talent for bringing people together, Cirque du Soleil has become an international organization, as much in terms of its makeup as in the scope of its activities and influence. Guy Laliberté now heads an organization with activities on five continents.

In 1997, Guy Laliberté received the Ordre National du Québec, the highest distinction awarded by the Government of Quebec. In 2001, he was named a Great Montrealer by the Académie des Grands Montréalais. In 2003, he was honoured by the Condé Nast group as part of the Never Follow Program, a tribute to creators and innovators.

Daniele Finzi Pasca

Creator and Director

"I grew up surrounded by images and imagery. And I put them into motion."

For Daniele Finzi Pasca, 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 circus, and eventually established a reputation in theater 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. And I put them into motion."

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. On his return to Switzerland, he founded a company called Sunil's Clowns, which changed its name to Teatro Sunil in 1986. Teatro Sunil is still "home," but Daniele also travels the world, with his own productions and as a guest director with other theater and circus companies.

A prolific writer, Daniele does not restrict his creative output to the stage. He has also published *Come acqua allo specchio*, a collection of short stories. (The show *Passo Migratore* is based on one of the stories from this collection).

Daniele's lifelong fascination with clowns and clowning took root at the famed Circus Nock, where he performed in an acrobatic clown number. He has since developed a personal

approach to the tradition which 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. He also directed the highly-acclaimed Cirque Eloize shows *Nomade - La Nuit le Ciel est Plus Grand* and *Rain - Comme une Pluie dans Tes Yeux*.

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 circuses 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 the 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 for Daniele Finzi Pasca symbolizes the journey of life. "The labyrinth is a great voyage: To find yourself you have to lose yourself," he explains.

Daniele Finzi Pasca was born in Lugano, Switzerland in 1964.

Line Tremblay

Director of Creation

"I have become a child of the circus."

Line Tremblay has worked in the creative world of Cirque du Soleil since the foundation of the company in 1984.

Before joining Cirque, Line worked in film and television, notably as an Assistant Director at Radio-Canada. Starting in 1992 she worked as Franco Dragone's assistant in the creation of the Cirque du Soleil shows *Mystère*, *Alegría*, *Quidam*, "O" and *La Nouba*. She was also the Artistic Director of *Quidam*. Her close working relationship with Franco gave her an insight into the inner workings of show direction.

A newcomer to the equestrian field, Line worked with Gilles Ste-Croix as his assistant in the creation of the 2000 show *Cheval Théâtre*. She worked with Franco Dragone once again in the creation of the Celine Dion show *A New Day*. She returned to Cirque du Soleil in 2003 to work on *Corteo* as the first woman in Cirque's history to occupy the position of Director of Creation.

The Director of Creation's job is to produce a synergy and create an atmosphere of unity in the creative team. Line also took part in the recruiting of the team, which includes several first-timers at Cirque, and she played an active role in the casting of the artists. With the creative team in place, Line has overseen the meshing of each member's individual artistic approach with the overall creative philosophy of Cirque du Soleil.

"My role is a bit like an orchestra conductor," she says. "The challenge for *Corteo* was to fuse Daniele Finzi Pasca's lyrical language of clowning with the emphasis Cirque places on the highest standards of acrobatics. We had to seamlessly integrate the best of Daniele with the best of Cirque. We constantly have to renew ourselves and reinvent ourselves with each new show, and I believe we have managed to pull that off once again this time."

Line first fell in love with Cirque du Soleil in 1984, drawn by its freewheeling spirit, a spirit she says has never gone away. "When I was a kid I wasn't crazy about the circus. But I discovered the childlike wonder of it in 1984. For me, circus is the most complete art form. It addresses the audience on the visual, the emotional and the physical level all at the same time. I have become a child of the circus. I was destined to a life in this milieu."

Line Tremblay was born in 1956 in Hull, Quebec.

Jean Rabasse Set Designer

"My signature is to pay very close attention to the details, the colors, the surfaces, the textures. To be very meticulous about these things, and to never repeat myself. I like to mix things up."

Oscar nominee and César winner Jean Rabasse has worked extensively in dance, theater and cinema as a set designer and decorator. He has been the resident designer for Philippe Découflé's dance company DCA for more than ten years.

Jean was nominated for an Academy Award and won the César for his sumptuous, elaborate designs for the 2001 film *Vatel*. His other film credits include *Astérix*, directed by Claude Zidi, *The Dreamers*, directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, *La Cité des Enfants Perdus* and *Delicatessen* directed by Caro and Jeunet, and Norman Jewison's *The Statement*.

"I don't make a distinction between the various disciplines I work in," he says. "I bring theatrical, mechanical effects to cinema and cinematic techniques to the stage."

Jean Rabasse is currently designing two Cirque du Soleil productions, *Corteo*, and the recently-announced permanent production for the *Mirage* in Las Vegas. He says never likes to do the same thing twice. "I like to mix things up. My signature is to pay very close attention to the details, the colors, the surfaces, the textures. To be very meticulous about these things, and to never repeat myself."

For *Corteo* Jean Rabasse and director Daniele Finzi Pasca decided to divide the rotating stage in two, with half the audience facing the other half, so they would be able to see the performance but also have the performers' point of view of the audience beyond.

"My basic concept for the show is that the audience is entering a theater where the same circus has been playing for 200 years," explains Jean. "I love this idea because it allows me to mix up all kinds of styles from the baroque to the modern. But the last thing we wanted to do was recreate a kitschy old-fashioned circus, because we must have the modernity and youth of Cirque du Soleil's acrobatics and high technology, which really doesn't exist anywhere else."

Jean Rabasse was born in Tlemcen, Algeria in 1961.

Dominique Lemieux Costume Designer

"I have a penchant for noble fabrics and natural materials, such as linen and silk, that accentuate the natural beauty of the artists."

Dominique Lemieux designed the costumes for all Cirque du Soleil's productions between 1989 and 1998. Every single show *We Reinvent the Circus* (1989), *Nouvelle Expérience* (1990), *Salimbanco* (1992), *Mystère* (1993), *Alegria* (1994), *Quidam* (1996), "O" and *La Nouba* (1998) bears her unique imprint.

As a costume designer, Dominique does a lot more than simply outfit the artists. Her designs play a key role in creating the fantastic characters that populate the Cirque du Soleil universe.

With an expert eye, Dominique weaves colours, patterns and fabrics into fabulous costumes. But her choice of material is not strictly guided by aesthetic considerations alone. For Dominique, determining how fibres react to skin, movement, fire or water is of vital importance, and she never loses sight

of the artists' needs.

Dominique's passion for drawing started at an early age and led her to study fine arts at Concordia University. After earning her degree, she worked as an art designer and children's book illustrator. She later enrolled in the scenography program at Canada's National Theatre School (NTS), where the courses she took in drawing and costume design took her career in a whole new direction.

From 1986 to 1988 she worked as an assistant to François Barbeau, one of Montreal's top costume designers and also a teacher at the NTS. During this period, her creations could be seen on stages across the city. Her skills were soon much in demand among directors from every corner of the theatre world in Quebec.

To create the costumes for *Corteo*, Dominique Lemieux wanted to accentuate the natural beauty of the artists. "The show's theatrical approach distinguishes it from all previous Cirque du Soleil shows," she explains. "We are closer to traditional circus, in which the humanity of the artists is revealed. That translated into costumes that resemble regular street clothes."

Since joining Cirque du Soleil in 1988, Dominique Lemieux has never ceased to amaze spectators worldwide with her astonishing creations.

Dominique Lemieux was born in 1957 in Montreal.

Philippe Leduc Composer and Musical Director

"In a very broad sense the music is operatic. I'm trying to stretch the musical spectrum at Cirque."

Composer, arranger and conductor Philippe Leduc describes himself as a workaholic, and that is borne out by the sheer volume of his work. His compositions and arrangements have literally been part of the background music of daily life in Quebec since the early 1980s.

A graduate of the faculty of music at the Université de Montréal, Philippe composed the news theme for the television network Radio-Canada and the soundtrack music for innumerable other highly-rated TV shows, including the Cirque du Soleil production *Solstrom*.

Philippe has been in demand as a composer of advertising jingles for a wide variety of national and international accounts. But as prolific as he has been for commercial clients, he has always made time for his own compositions.

Philippe, who composed for the Cirque du Soleil television series *Solstrom*, describes his orchestral score for *Corteo* as "very visceral music," but he is quick to add that there are many ethereal passages and passionate moments, too.

"I started with the physical," he says. "There is a relationship between the movements of the performers and the music. In a very broad sense the music is operatic. I'm trying to stretch the musical spectrum at Cirque."

Philippe sees *Corteo* as a show full of contrasts and musical moods, from solo guitar to an imposing orchestral presence. "It's very beautiful at the end," he says, "but along the way it's funny too. There are surprises and laughter around every corner. There are medieval influences with ancient instruments and traces of the 1930s but it's all very current music."

In a first for Cirque du Soleil, the music will depend on a great deal of improvisation. There are several "duels" between a virtuoso violinist and an expert accordionist which

will be completely different for every performance.

Philippe Leduc was born in Montreal.

Maria Bonzanigo Composer and Musical Director

"We created a language together. A way to communicate intimately with the audience and the music is an integral part of that language."

Maria Bonzanigo has worked closely with Corteo director Daniele Finzi Pasca since joining his company Teatro Sunil in 1984 (before it was even known by that name). Her music has been integral to many of the Sunil's best-known shows, including Te Amo and Tres Tristes Tangos.

Maria has also appeared in Sunil productions as an actress and dancer, and has worked as a director and choreographer too, for her own music and for other composers' works.

Maria Bonzanigo studied composition with Paul Glass and dance with Rosalia Chladek and went on to develop a highly personal approach of her own to creating music for the stage. In addition to her work for theater, she also composed for the highly-acclaimed Cirque Eloize circus shows Rain and Nomade (which were directed by Daniele Finzi Pasca).

"Working with Daniele Finzi Pasca for more than 20 years, we created a language together," says Maria. "A way to communicate intimately with the audience and the music is an integral part of that language."

For Corteo Maria Bonzanigo is sharing the duties of composer with Philippe Leduc. She is concentrating on the portion of the music that is performed by the artists in the show, while Philippe has been developing the orchestral soundtrack compositions.

"We're taking artists and acrobats and putting them in a show that is more theater than circus," explains Maria. "The music reflects that theatrical aspect of the show. The style is a kind of modern/medieval, with African, Asian and Latin American rhythms. It's new and simple at the same time."

Maria Bonzanigo was born in 1966 in Lausanne.

Teatro Sunil Hugo Gariulo and Antonio Vergamini - Acting Coaches Dolores Heredia - Dramaturgical Analyst

"Our challenge was to bring out the fragile side of the acrobats. We would like each artist to contribute something unique."

Acting Coaches Hugo Gariulo and Antonio Vergamini come to Corteo from Teatro Sunil, the theater and dance company founded by the show's Director, Daniele Finzi Pasca in Switzerland in 1983.

Motivated by a deep commitment to humanitarian principles, Daniele has placed the tragicomic figure of the clown at the core of Teatro Sunil's productions such as Rituale, Icaro, Aittestás, Visitatio, Te Amo and Tres Tristes Tangos to express a broad range of human experiences and emotions. He has called Sunil's emphasis on sensitivity and the sense of touch "the theatre of caress."

Hugo Gariulo and Antonio Vergamini have been key members of the Sunil creative team as actors and directors for many years and have been working closely with all the artists of Corteo (including the musicians) to develop their acting skills and introduce them to the world of the clown.

"Our challenge was to bring out the fragile side of the acrobats," says Hugo, "and they are more used to putting the spotlight on their strength."

Working with a large cast has given the two coaches the opportunity to finally realize artistic dreams they have held for a long time. However, many of the artists they are working with have never acted before. "Their lack of experience is a challenge," admits Antonio. "But it also means they are more generous and ready to be open. Above all, our challenge was to bring out the fragile side of the acrobats. We would like each artist to contribute something unique."

Asked to describe the show, Hugo says there will be many dream-like images and a great deal of humanity on stage. "The artists will not be hidden by their makeup or their costumes, they will be presenting themselves to the audience," he adds. "We wanted the audience to see in their faces the children they once were and the old people they will become."

Hugo Gariulo was born in Uruguay in 1965, Antonio Vergamini in Italy in 1967 and Dolores Heredia in Mexico in 1966.

Martin Labrecque Lighting Designer

"My first intention is to highlight the emotionthe subtextof the show."

Corteo is the first Cirque du Soleil show Martin Labrecque has worked on.

He has supplied the lighting for nearly 90 theatrical productions, creating designs for some of the leading theatre directors in Quebec. Martin Labrecque won a major award for his work on the 2001 production of Mikhail Ugarov's play L'Homme en Lambeaux and for his lighting for the 2005 production of Le Peintre des Madones ou La Naissance d'un Tableau by Michel-Marc Bouchard. That same year he won an award for the best Montreal production for Everybody's Welles Pour Tous which he co-wrote with Patrice Dubois. Martin has worked before with Daniele Finzi Pasca, the director of Corteo.

Martin is therefore familiar with Daniele Finzi Pasca's humanist and poetic world view, and that's why he is seeking to bring out the emotional dimension of Corteo through his lighting. "My first intention is to highlight the emotionthe subtextof the show," he says.

In a subtle balance of traditional techniques and modern overtones Martin's design evokes the ambience of a more traditional circus combined with a playful contemporary spirit.

"I'm using chandeliers, footlights and flashlights in a panoply of isolated lighting effects to create an intimate atmosphere for the show," he explains. "And I'm using lateral lighting as the basis of the concept. That's because the division of the stage in two which is a first for Cirque du Soleil more or less dictates the lighting setup for Corteo."

Martin Labrecque was born in Montreal, in 1972.

Jonathan Deans Sound Designer

"When sound isn't focused, it's just noise."

Jonathan Deans, one of the most sought-after sound designers in the musical theatre world, is the man behind the changing sound environments of Corteo, his seventh sound design project for Cirque du Soleil. Having produced the soundscapes of Saltimbanco, "O", Mystère La Nouba, ZUMANITY and KÀ, Jonathan finds Cirque's "work-in-progress" and team-oriented creative approach very stimulating.

A successful child actor, Jonathan was fascinated by

electronics at an early age. At 15, he joined the Royal Shakespeare Company, where his keen interest in sound began to blend with a theatrical context. After a spell as a sound engineer in the music industry, notably at Morgan Studios where he brushed shoulders with famous artists such as Cat Stevens, Paul Simon and Rick Wakeman, he made his way back to the theater to mix the sound for the musical comedy *A Chorus Line*. One success soon followed another and he became the sound recording operator for many productions including *Evita*, *Cats*, *Bugsy Malone* and *The Sound of Music*.

As soon as the West End caught wind of Jonathan's success, he was hired as sound designer on the musical *Marilyn*. This was followed by work on shows including *Time*, *Les Misérables*, *Mutiny*, *Jean Seberg* and then on Broadway *Ragtime*, *Fosse*, *King David*, *Damn Yankees*, *Taboo* and *Brooklyn*, to mention a few.

His numerous achievements as sound designer have garnered him plenty of prizes. In 1998, for instance, while putting the finishing touches on the soundscape of *La Nouba*, he received the Entertainment Design Award for Production of the Year for his contribution to "O".

For Jonathan Deans, Cirque's permanent theatres and its Grand Chaapiteau are two quite different worlds when it comes to sound design. He finds that the beauty of the Grand Chapiteau is in the proximity between the artists and the audience, which creates an intimacy that is the foundation of the entire entertainment experience.

The innovative staging of *Corteo* posed a real challenge for Deans because the set, the performance space and the audience are split in two with a 360-degree seating plan. He had to ensure that the general sound is in perspective to what each section of the audience is viewing and that called upon all his skills and experience.

Jonathan Deans was born 1954, in England.

Danny Zen **Acrobatic Riggering Designer**

"The riggers are the people closest to the artists. They've got the artists' lives in their hands."

Danny Zen first arrived at Cirque du Soleil in 1990 to work as a welder in the company's workshops. He brought with him several other qualifications too: He's an accomplished hang glider, a fierce paintball competitor and he can sew just about anything.

Danny went on the first European tour of Cirque Réinventé in 1990, then moved on to *Nouvelle Expérience* the first show he worked on as a rigger. He toured with *Saltimbanco* in 1992 as a tent technician, was a member of the team that created *Alegría* in 1994 and was Chief Rigger for *Quidam* in 1996.

Because he is involved in the design and creation of the equipment in *Corteo*, Danny Zen sees the work of the rigger as more than mechanical.

"It is creative in its own way," he says. "We have to work closely with the set designer to create new equipmentsuch as the lustrewhich are acrobatic devices and at the same time, set elements. That calls for a marriage between technological requirements and the artistic demands of the show."

Danny has worked to develop the safety standards in use throughout Cirque du Soleil's productions and has been active in the training of all riggers for the company.

He is constantly aware of the need for safety as the first

priority for any piece of equipment or set element used by the artists. "The riggers are the people closest to the artists. They've got the artists' lives in their hands," he explains.

Danny Zen was born in Saint-Luc, Québec in 1965.

Nathalie Gagné **Makeup Designer**

"At Cirque du Soleil, makeup, along with the costumes, defines the identity of each character. One of my goals is for all our artists to take pride in this 'other self' that the makeup reveals in them."

After *Quidam*, "O", *La Nouba*, *Varekai*, *ZUMANITY* and *KÀ*, this is Nathalie Gagné's seventh contribution to the creation of a Cirque du Soleil show. This time, her makeup designs breathe life into the characters of *Corteo*. On Nathalie's previous stints with Cirque du Soleil, she created new makeup designs for the shows *Mystère*, *Alegría* and *Saltimbanco*.

Increasingly, Gagné strives to get the artists involved in the creation of their onstage look. "Unlike actors, acrobats aren't used to studying their own faces. One of my goals is to get them to do just that, and help them find within themselves what I call 'lines of force' that will serve to build their characters," says Gagné, who since 1995 has crafted more than 250 separate makeup designs for Cirque. Her final concepts were culled from over 2,000 sketches.

Nathalie Gagné is also responsible for ensuring the integrity of all makeup designs that bear her signature. Since the performers apply their own makeup, workshops in makeup techniques are now part of the general training provided to all Cirque du Soleil artists. Gagné first teaches performers how to do their own makeup, and then writes a step-by-step application guide for each of them.

Before joining Cirque du Soleil, Nathalie Gagné worked in theatre, film and television. She was twice nominated for a Gémeau award for best makeup, all categories combined. The honour is conferred by the Academy of Canadian Cinema and Television.

STORIES FROM CIRQUECON MEMBERS:

How has Cirque du Soleil affected your life? We asked members for their stories.

BARBARA LEWIS:

Summer 2004 - When I decided I had to see Quidam one more time, I found I needed to travel from Chicago, Illinois to Calgary, Alberta to see it before it left North America. So I got tickets for the second night of the run there. When I flew into Calgary I participated in the usual question/answer process with the Canadian customs agent in the airport.

Customs Agent: What are you going to be doing in Calgary on this visit?

Barb: I am going to see Cirque du Soleil.

Customs Agent: Have you seen it before?

Barb: Yes. Many times.

Customs Agent: What are you... some kind of ... groupie?

Barb: Yes, I've been accused of that before!

We both laughed, and he encouraged me to take in some of Calgary's other sites.

RICH ALFORD:

Eleven years ago, on a trip to Las Vegas, I had planned ahead by getting tickets for shows for most of the nights I had planned to be there, leaving a few nights for some gambling. One evening I was having a pretty good run at the Blackjack tables (I'd been there for HOURS) when I was offered some complimentary tickets for Mystere. I didn't know much about the show or Cirque; I'd heard it was a circus show without animals and was all in French, so I was only a little interested in going. But it was free, and I didn't have anything planned for that night.

I had great seats, a couple rows back and right in the middle, (which was kind of

cool). I sat down, the show started - and I was immediately hooked. I laughed so hard I was almost in tears when the 'baby' first came on stage. For the duration of the show I was in another place, where anything is possible with little effort. Even flying; I had never seen a show where a person flew out over the audience.

Each new act was a whole different experience. I knew I would have to see the show again, because there was so much happening there was no way I could see it all and I didn't want to miss anything. At the end, during the Taiko drum act, the big drum was lowered from the ceiling with the drummer hanging on by his legs, pounding the drum with all his might! Amazing is the only word that comes close to describing it.

When the show was over my hands were hurting from applauding so much. I knew I had found something very special. What I didn't know, but found out quickly, was that I had also found a new friend, one that would amaze and delight me and many of my friends over the last eleven years (where did the time go?). Since that night at Mystere I've lost count how many Cirque performances I've seen over the years. The one thing I continue to marvel at is that no matter how many times I see a show, I see something I didn't see before and, each time, it's as wonderful as the first time.

JILL CHAPMAN:

In September, 2001 we won an auction for a CDS premiere show, including admission to the invitation-only after party. That December, when we received the shows' schedule for 2002 we felt privileged to know their schedule in advance. We finally agreed on Cirque 2002 (Varekai) in Montreal, it was be our first trip to Cirques "home city". Our wonderful CDS correspondent, Anik, even managed a tour of Headquarters for us!

We arrived late Tuesday night at our beautiful little hotel, across the street from

the tent. It was amazing to see the grounds all lit up at night.

Wednesday night finally arrived and we dressed up for the occasion. It was surreal to walk up the cobblestones with everyone dressed in their finest and with limo after limo pulling up in front of Le Grand Chapiteau! The press was everywhere; we watched as they interviewed Debra Brown. It was all so exciting! We were pleased to find our seats in the second row of Section 104. We found out at intermission, when many people asked for their autographs, that several Canadian hockey players were in front of us with their girlfriends. The very front section was reserved for dignitaries, such as the Canadian Prime Minister, and Guy himself!

The show was amazing, of course! Afterwards a large band played and led us all over to the party. After a harrowing climb in high heels up a metal staircase, we had arrived!

As we walked through the silver-tinted doorway we were overwhelmed with music and lights. Performers hired for the party were everywhere. They even had a Plexiglas box filled with foam and bubbles, where many beautiful ladies and men danced and twirled throughout the night! There were ladies clad only in bikini bottoms and a whole lot of body paint wandering around or passing out hors d'oeuvres. Some were themed to the kind of food they had, others we couldn't tell what they were! There were performers doing hoop tricks, and many more unusual creatures everywhere. There were bars at both ends of the party, and a large dance floor set up with a live band at the far end. It was fun to see all the Varekai performers with their friends and families, celebrating a great show and having a good time.

Two days later it was all gone and the party location was back to being a warehouse, as if it had never really happened!

During that weekend we also met some great new friends; Ricky, LouAnna, Keith and Paul. It was an unforgettable once-in-a-lifetime trip!

So don't worry if I seem down at CirqueCon Montreal 2005. It's only because I'm remembering that magical night.

KRISTINA A. PIET 19 year-old Athletic Training Student at Northern Arizona University.

In my senior year of high school I was struggling with the thought of graduating without knowing what I wanted to accomplish in college. I had always been studious, but the uncertainty of my future had me stressed and I was starting to panic halfway through my senior year.

It was December 23rd, 2003, when I saw Cirque du Soleil's Varekai for the first time. I had previously seen "O" two years earlier, and was excited to finally get a second dose. I knew that the show would be breathtaking, but I never expected a revelation to dissipate my educational apprehension in the form of a single performance.

The moment I saw Andrew and Kevin Atherton soar through the Grand Chapiteau I was awestruck. Their graceful act moved me to tears and I turned to my mother after the show saying, "I'm sorry mom, but I have to join Cirque." Thus was I inspired to continue my schooling in order to one day become an Athletic Trainer for Cirque.

A couple of months later I sent Andrew and Kevin a letter of gratitude, explaining how their act had touched my life. When I went to see Varekai a second time in May, 2004, I managed to get a note to them through Claudio Carniero (one of the clowns), who seemed quite baffled by the Cirque-style make-up I had painted on my face.

Over subsequent days I was lucky enough to converse with the Athertons, and they sent

me momentos, happy they had inspired me to continue my schooling. After completing my first semester of college with a 4.00 GPA, I have not forgotten those first miraculous moments of enlightenment as I gazed at their weaving forms against the blue big-top. I have many years of education to go, and I will work in many settings before I gain enough experience to join Cirque, but I can already see the Grand Chapiteau rising in the distance down the path my life is taking. All I have to do is stay focused on the road ahead.

Thank you, Andi and Kev, for touching my past and inspiring my future.



ALEX ROGERS:

I had missed Saltimbanco when it came to my home of Perth, Australia. My friends had seen it but I wasn't keen to go by myself, and the tickets weren't cheap.

When Alegria came, my sister bought my family tickets for Christmas. I went along not really knowing what to expect. I had been to other circuses before and enjoyed them, but this promised to be something more. From the start of the show, with Fleur and the band winding their way through the crowd, it was more magical and unusual than anything I had seen before! The Bronx with their strength and ability (how I longed to be like them!), the Angels flying on the Russian Bars, the Singer in White, the two contortion girls, the Snowstorm. . .

I was transfixed and gob smacked that something like this could exist. I had to go

back! So I went by myself and got a ticket in Section 101, 3 rows back. I could feel the full force of the snowstorm, see the trapeze from the front, and fully appreciate the show. This time I could concentrate on the music, too.

I was approaching 30 at the time and going through a mid-life crisis (which comes early these days). I was an engineer and not particularly happy with my life. I was searching for something but not sure what it was - a way to express myself and allow my creativity to run free, but in a non-verbal way. In Alegria and Cirque du Soleil I found it! From that moment on I threw myself into circus (training and living it) and it became my passion. My goal was to audition for Cirque du Soleil within 5 years. Doing what, I hadn't decided.

My first taste of circus training was a course in juggling, diabolo, stilts, acro-balance and staff twirling. When that ended I wanted something more physical, and it came in the form of a newspaper article about a guy from the U.K.'s Circus of Horrors who taught bungee trapeze locally. I went along and was quickly hooked. One of the assistant teachers was from Cirque Bizirque, a local circus school that I wasn't aware of. I soon started going there, studying aerials (static trapeze and tissu) and acrobatics. I also learned stilt walking, diabolo, devil sticks, Chinese pole, hoop diving, and German Wheel. At my most active phase I was training 6 days a week, leading up to an audition for the Australian National Institute of Circus Arts (unfortunately I didn't make it).

These days a number of little injuries have slowed me down. I've since been involved with the School on a volunteer basis. I've assisted with space maintenance, administration and show organizing, and have been President of the School for the last 18 months. My fiancé Mesha & I have performed together a number of times on tissu and trapeze, been stilt walkers at festivals and shows, and have organized and

helped produce several shows for the School.

Auditioning for Cirque du Soleil has been put on the back burner for the time being. Mesha and I are setting up our own company to hire out for performances. We're interested in adding more dance to our work. And I'm also interesting in directing, with a number of ideas for possible shows for the school!

But I'll never forget that one inspirational, life-changing moment, sitting in the dark of the Grand Chapiteau.

CirqueCon Vancouver 2004



The first unofficial gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates

CIRQUECON VANCOUVER 2004: BEFORE THE ADVENTURE BEGAN

(By: Keith Johnson, Seattle, WA as published in the Fascination! Newsletter, June, 2004)

Part of the magic of Cirque du Soleil is how the artists make it look so easy. The audience sees only the final product - the act - not the years of practice leading up to it. But it's those years of practice that make the act work. It takes not only the artist, but coaches, teachers, parents, judges, physiotherapists - an entire team. And so it is with group excursions, like CirqueCon Vancouver 2004. It took more than one person to make it happen.

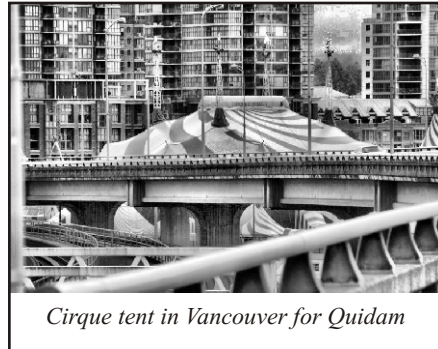
It took a team. And that team has a story.

Which takes us back to before the real story starts. My wife LouAnna (also known as "Lucy") and I have been involved in literary (non media-centered) science fiction convention planning for 20 years. We work on Convention Committees that meet throughout the year and form a team that presents SF conventions in the Pacific Northwest. We call our main convention Norwescon and it occurs every year over Easter weekend, attracting 2,500 science fiction fans to Seattle. It's by no means the largest SF convention in America, but we're proud of it.

Working on a convention gives you a sense of the number of things that need to be done. Tons of research, phone calls, messages and meetings are the norm. There are myriad small details that need to be decided or acted upon. You can't just snap your fingers and

make it happen.

I've taken that approach in organizing group trips. I've done several including groups of SF fans going to the world science fiction convention, also known as "WorldCon," in Orlando, FL in 1988 and Anaheim, CA in 1992, with about 20 participants for each trip. My job as Trip Coordinator was to do the research, make the calls and photocopies, and provide a basic framework for the members. I learned much by doing those trips - what works, what didn't, how much "control" members felt comfortable with and where they felt too constrained.



Cirque tent in Vancouver for Quidam

Which brings us to Summer 2003. Here at Fascination!, a kind source had just supplied us with tour dates much further into the future than had yet been made public. This confirmed what we had already heard by rumor - that

Quidam would bypass Asia after its year-long tour of Japan, and make two stops in Canada over late Spring 2004 before embarking on its year-long tour of Australia. This was quite significant for us, as it meant Quidam would be on the North American continent for only a short time before being unavailable again, perhaps for years.

After our trip to see Alegria in Vancouver earlier that year, LouAnna and I knew of the fun of a romantic weekend in a beautiful city such as Vancouver. So we instantly knew we would have to do it again for Quidam. We also decided, since we had "converted" several of our relatives and friends to Cirque fandom, that it might be fun if we enlarged our group a bit and invited them along with us.

LouAnna's father ("Dad") was instantly enthusiastic. LouAnna also asked her

Aunt Barb and Cousin Shelly, whom Dad would travel from his home base of Spokane, WA to Missoula, Mt to pick up and bring to Seattle so we could spend the weekend together. In addition, my Best Man and his wife decided to join us. Erstwhile editor Ricky Russo also decided to fly from Orlando, FL to join us for the weekend. So from a small party of two we were quickly a party of eight.

With a party that big, housing becomes an issue. For Alegria in Vancouver we stayed for the first time in a Bed and Breakfast. The B&B we chose was close to the Cirque tent site, a Victorian-style house in a quiet neighborhood. Though it was hot the weekend we went and the room had no air conditioning, it was cozy, quiet and, yes, romantic. What fun it would be, we thought, if everyone stayed in rooms at one B&B. It would be fun, affordable, and homey. The rest of our party was amenable, but before we could make our reservation, things changed.

Back in Newport News, VA, Jeff Tolotti was a frequent contributor to the Cirque du Soleil Yahooogroup. Around the time we were thinking of making our reservation, Jeff posted an idea on the message board. What would people think about a group trip to see Quidam when it came to Vancouver? Several people soon responded that, indeed, they would be interested. The discussion then centered on which weekend would be best. A consensus started to gather around May 14-16, 2004, two weeks prior to the Memorial Day Holiday.

Without consulting my wife (a fact she now frequently reminds me of <g>), I posted privately to Jeff to tell him of my group, and that the weekend we were considering was one week hence, May 21-23. I also told him of our plans to book rooms in a Bed and Breakfast. Would his group, I suggested, consider

changing their weekend if I could arrange to block out all the Bed and Breakfast rooms for our usage? He consulted with the Yahooogroup, who took to the idea.

With the weekend decided upon, it became my responsibility to book the bed and breakfasts. Owners Paul Findlay and Leslie Lewington seemed receptive to the idea, but not at our original choice, Windsor House. They suggested their two other properties, Douglas House and Cambie Lodge, which it so happened were right next to each other on the same street! They would be happy to block out all the rooms in both houses for that weekend if we agreed to use those two properties.

The plan was simple. I would have a hold on all the rooms, so no one would be able to contact the B&B directly. I would take reservations from interested parties and keep track of them. At a point just after the first of the year, I would relay the information to Paul and Leslie, and inform the room holders to put the rooms in their names by getting in direct contact with the B&B. At some point in late March I would release my hold on the rest of the rooms, allowing the B&B to fill up rooms not used by our members.

But what should we name our event? We needed something memorable. I had organized my other SF fan tours under the moniker "Tour De Mondo," but that didn't seem to fit. I also suggested "CirqueCon," an offshoot of the "-con" naming of SF conventions (Norwescon, Worldcon, etc.). That seemed to fit the bill better. In order to convey the idea that this might be one in a series of events (if we might be so lucky as to survive our first attempt and actually want to have a second) we added the location and year to the name, making it "CirqueCon Vancouver 2004."

So we had a weekend, a name, and a place to stay, but how would we get the word out? We needed a forum to describe our to anyone that wanted to see it at any time. Jeff had a solution for that; creating a webpage with the basic information. I provided text concerning the Bed and Breakfasts, with complete room descriptions, pricing (in American dollars including all taxes), and the procedure for booking a room. Jeff was also "on the ball" removing room listings as rooms filled. By the time we got the website up tickets had gone on sale to Cirque Club members.

In addition to the webpage I felt we needed an outlet for "progress reports" or more frequent announcements. So we asked Editor Ricky if he would put the Newsletter's sponsorship behind the endeavor. He agreed, so CirqueCon Vancouver 2004 became "Sponsored by the Fascination! Newsletter."

I proposed a simple agenda for the weekend, so that people could have the maximum amount of time to see the sites of Vancouver (several, it turned out, used the time to take in multiple viewings of Quidam, some as many as four!). I felt a group meal was a must, and had originally proposed it for Friday evening. When it became obvious that several members wouldn't be arriving until very late on Friday or early Saturday the dinner got moved to Saturday afternoon at 4pm, prior to that evenings show. I looked for a place that could accommodate a group our size, while still allowing the option of seperate checks, space to sit together, and a menu that was varied enough for different diets. We finally settled on the Old Spaghetti Factory in Gastown, the

original restaurant in the franchise. They seemed willing to work with a group with our quirks and could get us fed in a reasonable amount of time.

Now the question became whether to schedule anything Friday evening. LouAnna and I worked on an idea of having a combination "Cocktail Hour" and "Show and Tell" session. Friday would probably be the only opportunity for us to share our finest Cirque collectibles with each other. LouAnna, ever the social hostess, wanted to put out a spread of meat, cheeses, candies (Aplets and Cotlets of course!) as well

as some of the "Cirque du Rose" wine we had found. So she started planning the food spread, while I informed everyone to bring their collectibles. The Bed and Breakfast folks graciously allowed us to use the kitchen area of Douglas House for the gathering.



Vancouver BC Skyline

Rooms started to fill. We eventually reached capacity at Douglas House (the "main" house) bolstered by my initial group renting four of the buildings seven rooms (three others attached technically to the house were actually in a business apartment building next door). As we went along, I spoke to each of our members by phone to bring them up to speed (and from what I heard later raised some of them out of their sleep, for which I apologize). They all had various questions involving the rooms, payment, and getting over the border. But the most often asked question was whether we might be able to do anything "special" during the weekend, such as a backstage tour or meeting a performer. Most questions were easy to answer. I started an e-mail mailing list and sent information on weather, traffic and how to best cross the border and what kind

of identification would be needed. Interestingly several members of the group, spurred on by Jeff, planned to fly into Seattle where they would rent vehicles and drive up. They did this because rates to fly directly into Vancouver seemed to be much higher than Seattle.

As people started to commit, and our numbers quickly grew from eight to 25, I started to think about aspects of my SF convention running experience that might apply. While it wasn't my intent to act as "activities director" I wanted to provide an outlet for people to express their interests for things to see in Vancouver. I've found that people in group tour situations tend to give in to the "will" of the most dominant people in the group and subjugate their own desires. So I started a running list of items people were interested in, sending it back to the members on a regular basis.

I also felt it would be nice to have some sort of permanent "souvenir" of the gathering. For SF conventions that comes in two forms. One is a "badge" worn to indicate that you're a member, or "part" of the convention. Since many of us had never seen each other before, I thought would be a good way to "break the ice." The other would be a "Program Book" that serves as a "guide" to the weekend, with schedules, articles, and pictures.

Ricky and Jeff responded positively to the Program Book idea. The badge was a different thing, as they both felt it a bit "geeky" for our group. It was felt folks would not necessarily want to be visually identified as Cirque du Soleil fans. I got an even stronger reaction when I suggested we get lanyards so folks could wear the badges around their necks! We finally compromised on the badges, with Jeff providing a beautiful design with each persons name and state on them, and making

the lanyards an option. As it turned out our members loved the badges, with most of them wearing them proudly around their necks with the lanyard!

In addition to these items, I had an idea to consolidate a number of pieces of "rare" Cirque du Soleil music that I had collected onto one CD that would be handed out to our members. I wanted to share the first Cirque du Soleil vinyl 45 recorded by their first band La Fanfaronie, and tracks from a first version of the debut "Cirque Du Soleil" CD that didn't make it onto the second re-recording. I wanted to "fill in" missing music from Saltimbanco and Alegria using the limited-edition "Live!" CDs. And I wanted to put in other "source" music and tunes influenced by Cirque, such as Josh Groban's version of "Let Me Fall."

Unbeknownst to me, Jeff had the same idea! His concept was to share tracks from his collection of CDs by Cirque musicians outside of Cirque. He had tracks from Francesca Gagnon, Rene Dupere and Elise Velle, Joey Arias, and others that he planned to use. Upon finding this out, we decided to collaborate and create a two-CD set produced especially for CirqueCon Vancouver. In a mass CD exchange, he provided me with better copies of some of the things I wanted, and I sent him several CD's that he had not aquired yet. We worked independently to compile, sequence, and master our respective CD's, with Jeff doing the final duplication and coming up with beautiful artwork for the covers and CD labels. The Program Book also began to take shape. With Jeff taking the lead as our Publications Coordinator, material started to be written. Ricky supplied a medley of articles about Quidam that had previously been printed in Fascination! Jeff provided another great effort in our color cover and wrote liner notes for his CD. He also handled the

copying, collating and purchasing needed to make 40 copies of the Program Book a reality. (Though we thought we would only need 30 copies, we decided on a print run of 40 to be able to give away sets to interested parties we might meet. As it was, we ended up giving them all away!) I wrote up liner notes for my CD, as well as the "title" page (a bit of pseudo-Cirque program book channeling), an itinerary, and tour history and credits.

(Unfortunately, in the last-minute rush to get things done I completely forgot to include our contact information as well as a copyright statement. Oh well...)

The question of "special Cirque things" was still elusive. I had made no promises in anything I had written or said, but through Fascination!, Ricky knew of some people we might be able to contact. We started making enquiries but didn't think we would be able to do much more than perhaps meet our Quidam drummer friend, BJ, after the show for a drink.

That was before one fateful morning back in April when, completely out of the blue, we received a message from Mr. Andre Belanger from Cirque du Soleil in Montreal. The message stated that he had heard about our efforts and wanted to see if there was a way Cirque du Soleil could work with us. This was totally unexpected, but could be the key to making the weekend special for our members. We decided that Ricky would be the contact point between us and Mr. Belanger. Ricky responded that we would indeed be interested, and kept in contact while Mr. Belanger worked behind-the-scenes at Cirque. We had to keep it confidential until everything was confirmed and ready to announce, but it certainly made us excited.

After some time Mr. Belanger came back with some exciting news. He offered us a pre-show behind-the-

scenes tour of the Quidam site and an after-show meet and greet/Q&A with some performers. In addition, he wanted a smaller segment of our group involved in a discussion of merchandising with Genevieve Bastien, a fellow Cirque employee who would be flying in from Montreal IHQ with Mr. Belanger for our weekend. As if the initial contact wasn't exciting enough, these proposed plans were even more so!

As the final week before the vacation came into view, things started flying at a faster pace. We grew in number from 25 to 30 with some last-minute additions. Since I had released the rest of the Bed and Breakfast's rooms weeks before, and they had all been filled, new members had to make their own room arrangements. Jeff came up with the final designs for the badge and program covers. Final text made its way to Jeff for inclusion in the Program Book. Mr. Belanger confirmed the schedule of events for Saturday, which we excitedly released to our group that Monday.

Wednesday evening, LouAnna's dad Cal arrived with Aunt Barb and Cousin Shelly. We had a bar-b-que and invited LouAnna's kids and our grandkids to a get-together. We planned to use the next day to tour Seattle with our relatives. Everyone was excited about the coming weekend.

In another unexpected occurrence, Thursday morning I received an email from Gillian Morris at Dunn Mitchell Communications in Vancouver. They are Cirque's Vancouver PR firm, and wanted to talk about our group and activities. For what reason I didn't know, but I left a phone message for her before leaving for our days activities. Just after reaching Pike Place Market (Seattle's farmers market) my cell phone rang. Ms. Morris? No, it was Ricky! Mr. Belanger had just contacted

him, asking for the names of everyone in our group. It might be possible to "upgrade our tickets" but no promises. What could *that* mean? I had maintained a master contact list of all of our members, but I hadn't sent Ricky or Jeff the final version. So instead of enjoying Pike Place with LouAnna and our relatives, I was reading and spelling our members names to Ricky over the phone from my copy.

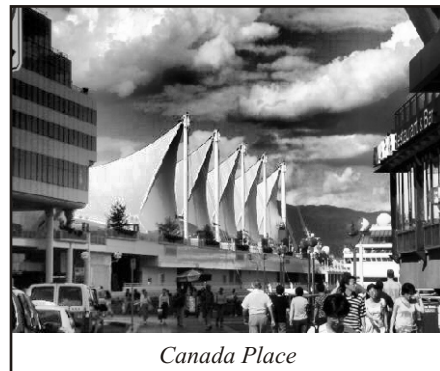
Soon after that my cell phone rang again. This time it was indeed Ms. Morris, who had been made aware of our trip and wanted some basic information for a "Media Advisory" she would be creating. This "advisory" is sent out to all media outlets as a "heads up!" message, letting them know about coverage-worthy events. Unfortunately, when she called, we were right in the middle of ordering lunch at a Chinese restaurant in the Market! My being distracted from our group while chatting on the phone was not what LouAnna was looking for from me. <g>

I gave Ms. Morris the information she needed to create the advisory. At the end of the conversation I asked, "Do you really think the media will come out to see little old us? We're just a bunch of Cirque du Soleil fans." Her voice had that tone of experience I should have heeded. "Oh Yeah," she said matter-of-factly. (I found out later that the "headline" of the Media Advisory she wrote was, "The Cirque Comes To Town!" This would be a bone of contention with many of our members, who reject the term as being too much like "Trekkies." Ms. Morris needed a quick and concise attention-grabbing headline, and had created that title on her own. But it would become the basis for much of the coverage we would later get.)

Friday morning came all too soon. With all of the party supplies, Cirque

collectibles and baggage for five people, both our cars' trunks were quite full. LouAnna, Dad, Barb and Shelly made their way north in one car, while I went to Sea-Tac Airport to pick up Ricky. There I was able to meet up with Jeff, who had arrived a bit earlier that morning and was waiting while the rest of his party flew in from other areas of the country. He had brought all the Program Books and finished CD's with him, and I would take them in my car to have them ready for the Cocktail Hour. While I was admiring the finished Program Book and complimenting Jeff, Ricky arrived. We all proceeded to my car and loaded the books and CD's into the back seat (which I would later come to regret). Ricky had packed lightly, only bringing a rolling backpack. As Jeff went back to wait for his other folks, Ricky and I proceeded to make our way northward, to enjoy what we knew was going to be an unforgettable weekend.

Our fun started long before we caught sight of the Cirque tent. But that's another tale. And one best told by Fascination! Newsletter founder Ricky Russo.



Canada Place



Directed by Franco Dragone

MEDIA ADVISORY

Vancouver, May 20, 2004
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE 'CIRQUIES' COME TO TOWN!

CirqueCon 2004 – The First “Unofficial” Gathering of Cirque du Soleil Fans

WHAT: Passionate Cirque fans from all over North America will be heading to Vancouver this weekend to see Cirque du Soleil's **QUIDAM**! Brought together by their love of all things Cirque, strangers from across North America will be meeting for the first time to attend the Saturday, May 22, 8:00pm performance of **QUIDAM**. This trip has been organized by a few members of the Cirque Club, a web-based membership program at www.cirquedusoleil.com that gives members the opportunity to purchase advance tickets, receive special offers, and chat about Cirque in the member forums. It is through these forums that “CirqueCon 2004” got started. Cirque du Soleil has agreed to offer these fans certain opportunities to enhance their Cirque experience.

The Cirque Fans' schedule for Saturday, May 22 will include:

- ◆ Backstage tour at 1:30pm
- ◆ 8:00pm performance of **QUIDAM**
- ◆ Q & A session after the performance
- ◆ Autograph session with pictures after Q & A

Media are invited to capture images and interviews during the backstage tour, as well as during the Q & A session after the performance.

WHERE: Concord Pacific Place, on Pacific Blvd between Carrall and Quebec Streets. Main entrance at Carrall Street.

WHEN: Saturday, May 22, 2004 @ 1:30pm

MEDIA MUST SCHEDULE THEIR ACTIVITIES THROUGH OUR LOCAL PR AGENCY.

CIRQUECON VANCOUVER 2004: WE'RE OFF AND RUNNING

(By Ricky Russo, Orlando, FL, originally published in the Fascination! Newsletter)

It's Saturday, May 22, 2004, and it's breakfast time in Douglas House, a beautiful old Victorian style Bed and Breakfast on Cambie Street near the heart of Downtown Vancouver, British Columbia. We're just on the other side of the Cambie Street Bridge and the old Expo center on West 13th Avenue. I currently occupy Room Number Two, a small yet cozy single room with a Queen-sized bed, my own sink, a television and a couple of chairs on the second floor of the house. It's raining a bit now, but that doesn't seem to dampen the spirits around here. Chatter fills the air as many of our group awaken to the sounds and smells of mealtime.

Right across from me is Simon Chavez, a twelve year-old here with his dad Todd (from Idaho). He's had his head stuffed in his Game Boy Advance console ever since he arrived. Keith Johnson (from Seattle, Washington) is currently tormenting young Simon about his unrelenting Game Boy playing, which Simon is cleverly not having anything of.

Joining Keith is his wife LouAnna, her aunt Barb Houde, cousin Shelly Blakeslee (both from Missoula, Montana), and his father-in-law Calvin Davis (from Spokane, Washington). Oh, and here comes Jeff Tolotti (from Virginia) and Danielle Wall (from Ontario, California) who are staying next

door at Cambie Lodge, another wonderful Bed and Breakfast selected for our gathering. They represent but a small fraction of the folks I've met thus far, and have yet to meet as this gathering goes on.

What gathering?

Why, CirqueCon Vancouver 2004 of course! 30 fans of Cirque du Soleil came together in Vancouver from across North and Central America to celebrate not only our friendship, but to see Quidam. Quidam, which comes from

Latin for "a nameless passerby," is Cirque du Soleil's ninth production, which premiered in Montreal on April 23, 1996. Since then it has been heralded as one of Cirque du Soleil's quintessential productions, showing us that we are all Quidams in one form or another.

"It could be anyone, anybody," the show's programme allows. "Someone coming, going, living in our anonymous society. A member of the

crowd, one of the silent majority. One who cries out, sings and dreams within us all."

In the world of Cirque du Soleil's Quidam, the one who cries out is Zoë, a young girl who fumes because she believes she's seen everything there is to see, experienced all there is to experience. For her, the world has lost all meaning. Her anger, sharp and unforgiving, shatters her little world and she soon finds herself in the universe of Quidam. Within this universe she is not alone; Zoë is joined by a joyful companion (Target) and a more mysterious character (John) that will



attempt to seduce her with the marvelous, the unsettling, and the terrifying.

It's the marvelous that draws us, we Cirque "Passionates", to Vancouver for this inaugural CirqueCon. It's been organized chaos since we arrived, with our plans changing up to the very last minute. But we're quite excited to be here. Cirque du Soleil says they have some wonderful experiences waiting for us today, but last night was one of the best evenings I've had with people I've never met before in my life.

Last night (Friday the 21st), around 5:30pm, we welcomed our guests and friends in style with a Cocktail/Show & Tell hour, which turned out to be great fun. There were many of Cirque's older programmes and press kits to look through. Keith brought his Cirque Wallpaper books and there were a variety of other rare Cirque goodies. The food (including meats, cheeses, and of course Applets and Cotlets) was catered by Keith's wife, LouAnna and was simply delicious! I met many of the Con's participants at the Cocktail Hour, including but not limited to: Roderick Mariano (from Virginia), Albert Tsai, Shanna Shih, Taylor Jeffs and Steven Rodriguez (California), Dave Lee (Georgia), Gary & Jill Chapman (Oregon), and Rafael & Angelica Serrano (from Tijuana, Mexico!) We drank "Cirque du Rosé" wine, regaled our friendships, and even handed out a few gifts -- our own home-produced CirqueCon programme, a two-CD set of rare Cirque music, and badges with everyone's name on them! It was a taste of things to come...

To be honest, Keith and I almost missed the Cocktail Hour! Why? Thank the Canadian border agents. Honestly, I think the border agents wanted to give a couple of unsuspecting American guys a hard time. Imagine the two of us pulling up to the Canadian border through the truck crossing on Pacific Highway in Blaine with passports in hand and a timetable to keep. At first things seemed to be going well, however, the border agents seemed confused about the 40 programs and 80 CD's we had sitting out in the open in the backseat.

"You're giving these away?" the agent asked. "You're not making any money? They aren't commercial?" Overloading the intelligence of the border-crossing officer, we had to park and take a form into the customs building for review and explain the entire situation to someone slightly more evolved.

Great.



We were detained nearly 45 minutes, as they schlepped us from one building to the next with rudeness prevalent, recanting our story to 3-4 more people along the way. The last woman we spoke with (after getting our paper stamped and cleared by the commercial office) was very anxious and intent on finding some kind of infraction to charge us with. She tore out the entire contents of Keith's

trunk (which was packed very full), and came back with the 6-pack of Cirque du Rosé wine we had for the Cocktail Hour.

We watched as she strutted her way from the car into the building via a side door, a smug look about her. "Okay my little Cirque fans," she hailed. "What's this? You said you had only two bottles

of wine and this is six." Problem is, she didn't bother to look at the bottles. While it was true there were six in the pack, two were Cirque du Rosé wine (the legally allowable limit for the two of us), while the others were sparkling water/cider type drinks and non-alcoholic. Once she realized that she threw the case down upon the counter and bid us a hasty farewell.

"Okay, well, BYE!"

After collecting our IDs from the agent, we grabbed the wine, repacked the car and returned to the roadway, cleared for takeoff. Unfortunately that wouldn't be our only problem getting to Vancouver. We ran into traffic just before the George Massey tunnel -- it was backed up to one lane, so we took an alternate route over the Alex Frasier Bridge (on Canadian Route 91). It put us well out of our way (by about 10 miles or so) but it was the only other option.

But we made it to the party, and I think it was a great success.

Later, as the party started to settle down (and as more of Jeffs party went off to that evenings performance of Quidam) it was decided amongst Keiths group to head down to a restaurant entitled Brothers, in Gastown -- an area where the city of Vancouver began. It's said Gastown was established in the same year that Canada became a nation (1867) and is named after "gold prospector, riverboat captain and saloon keeper John 'Gassy Jack' Deighton." Its old, historic and an interesting place. If I had to compare Gastown to a place I've visited before, I would have to say it's similar (at least in spirit) to the Jacques Cartier Square in the Old Porte of Montreal.

As for today, there's so much planned that I find I'm already super excited!

12:00pm -- Meeting with Cirque Merchandising
 01:30pm -- Backstage Tour of Quidam
 04:30pm -- Spaghetti Factory Group Dinner in Gastown
 08:00pm -- Quidam, Group Show
 10:45pm -- Q&A with Artists
 11:30pm -- Possible Drink with BJ, Quidam drummer

Well... my French toast has finally arrived so its time to put down the pencil and eat. Keith's party will be headed out to Stanley Park this morning and I'm in on that.

* * *

SPECTACLES ABOUND

It's now 6:30pm on Saturday, May 22nd, and what a day it's been up to now! We started our drizzling morning in Stanley Park, a large green urban park in Vancouver, with Keith, Lucy and the rest of his party who wanted to take a horse and carriage ride around the park. I was certainly up for that; it actually turned out quite nice even with the rain. Getting a chance to see the skyline was great, as well as the totem poles Vancouver is so well known for. And let's not forget the stories told by our guide, such as "The Bridge that Beer Built" (referring to one of the nearby bridges that had been built to cross the river for a beer company), and "The Loose Moose" (a tavern).

The horses, Moses & Jim (a Clydesdale and a Belgian) led the charge through an hour ride through Lord Stanley's Park (the same Lord Stanley who owns that nice shiny silver cup - Hockey fans will know what I mean.) The ride was very relaxing. However, even though it was a nice distraction from the city, we ended up running into trouble on the way to our next gig -- the merchandise meeting, which was changed at the last moment to a conference room at the Georgian Court Hotel instead of being on-site as originally planned.

One of the surprises Cirque du Soleil had in store for some of us was a focus meeting with Geneviève Bastien, Project Manager of Licensing at Cirque. She flew all the way from Montreal along with André Belanger, Internet Marketing Manager, to ask our opinions about new and exciting licensing avenues Cirque may be interested in exploring. It became one of the most fascinating aspects of our gathering because, as I see it, most fans don't get a chance to speak with Cirque on this level, and we were privileged to speak with Geneviève on the types of merchandise we wanted to see! For example, we spoke about authentic show collectibles, home decor, "cirque like" adult clothing, behind the scenes books, clothing/items for pre-schoolers, etc. We spent about an hour discussing individual topics, from action figures to video game licensing; it was such an interesting experience! And, of course, one of the most requested items was more live audio recordings of Cirque du Soleil's productions.



At 1:30pm, we were met with red clown noses and black Barron hats (from Saltimbanco) at the Quidam big top for our extensive behind-the-scenes tour of the site, our second big surprise from Cirque du Soleil. The media was on hand and for a while it truly felt like a circus. Jeff Tolotti, Keith and I -- the organizers of CirqueCon Vancouver 2004 -- became lost in this sea of mass confusion, as we had microphones thrust upon us, our pictures taken at will and questions asked randomly. For a few moments it was overwhelming, but once the tour began I forgot all of that and prepared to be



astounded. And what an amazing tour of the site we had, to places I would not have thought possible...

□ The kitchen, where we saw Mark Ward ("John"), André (the new male singer), and various other cast and crew in different stages of show preparedness taking in some nourishment.

□ The Technical Trailer, where the crew keep the various technical aspects of Quidam in top form. The trailer is aptly named too the "Phoenix". The old one, as the story goes, burned down in Europe and the current one rose from its ashes.

□ Behind the stage, where show props like the German Wheel, various ropes, skateboards, the "house" door and the big red balloon are parked in what they call the "garage." We were even given a chance to peek under the stage and see exactly how the artists can see to get to and from their marks -- snake lighting! The tent was buzzing with activity; the technicians were testing the lighting cues as well as the téléphérique, the long track structure atop the big top.

□ And the Artistic Tent, where the performers loosen up, dress and apply their make-up. You'll find the artists here during the show when they're not on cue. The artistic tent is the second largest structure besides the main venue and doubles as a training facility and massage parlor. A few of the artists were even practicing as we went through!

We had barely recovered from our Behind the Scenes tour when Cirque announced their third surprise -- Tapis

Rouge. Tapis Rouge, which literally means "red carpet" in French, is Cirque du Soleil's VIP experience, reserved exclusively for patrons who wish to experience Cirque du Soleil to the fullest. As Cirque Passionates, the Tapis Rouge was the ultimate social gathering. For an hour we were able to mingle with Vancouver's elite, talk with the Canadian press and enjoy Cirque du Soleil's gracious hospitality. Inside this special yellow-and-blue striped tent was an array of delicious foods, exceptional wines & champagne, and a wonderful atmosphere. Video projections of Quidam, Dralion and other Cirque du Soleil productions were strewn upon a remarkable circular screen suspended from the ceiling in the middle of the Tapis Rouge Chapiteau and were accompanied by pulsing music from the Solarium CD.

Tapis Rouge was simply awesome.

The media was still buzzing around and I was being pulled in several directions at once, a very disconcerting experience. CirqueMom and CirqueDad, the parents of Catherine Downey (one of the current Zoë's) and BJ, the show's drummer, came by to say hello as well. Fans had chatted with BJ online twice from Japan and it was a real treat to finally meet the man behind all those words! And let us not forget those reporters, who pulled me aside to talk about my website (Richasi's Le Grand Chapiteau -- www.azlance.com/~richasi/Cirque/), the newsletter (The Fascination! Newsletter), and, of course, about CirqueCon. All too soon though our Tapis Rouge experience was over and another CirqueCon special event came

to a close.

But, as they say, the party isn't over until it's over... and we continued our

celebration at the Old Spaghetti Factory down in Gastown. Imagine 30 Cirque fans from across North America slurping pasta together! It was definitely a treat to dine with all those people. André Bellanger FROM Cirque IHQ in Montreal joined us

as well as an independent reporter for Radio Canada, who was shoving a mic in everyone's face throughout the meal. It was during dinner that André made the very public suggestion that we should all re-convene in Montreal one year hence for the premiere of the new touring show. So it is him we have to blame for CirqueCon Montreal 2005!

And so, with a little more than an hour to spare now, I find myself on my bed at the B&B, awaiting the curtain call for tonight's show! Thus far, I must say, even with the last-minute problems and changes in schedule, things

have turned out better than I expected. Cirque has really gone all out for us, and for that I tip my hat -- a baron's hat, which they also gave to us as a gift-- to them. Tonight, after the show, we have a Q&A with some of the artists and a possible (though very tentative) hangout session with BJ (Quidam's drummer) after that. So, there's still some great Cirque events to come!

* * *

I'M EVERYMAN, I'M ANY MAN

Your world is yours
not mine Quidam.
Your dreams are yours.
You may have touched the stars
but they weren't moved.



What can one say about Cirque du Soleil's Quidam that has not been said before? It's artistic, cinematic, emotional, striking, alluring.... it's beautiful. And it gives one hope. Quidam was simply amazing tonight; the best performance of the production I have ever seen live. There were some technical issues, as no production is entirely perfect, but how can one top being under the Chapiteau with 30-plus Cirque du Soleil fans there especially for this night, not to mention a full house of enthusiastic Vancouverites? You can't, you simply can't. Stupendous!

It's late now on Saturday evening as I write this -- actually I think it might be Sunday morning -- so please excuse me if I ramble. It's been one heck of a day and I'm still reeling from all that has happened. It's unfortunate with the close of tonight's show that our time in Vancouver has just about come to a close. Some of us will be hanging about tomorrow afternoon but the majority will return to their lives by Monday morning. Some even have an extended stay, but for me, my time here is short. I will be leaving in the afternoon with Keith and his party, returning to Seattle before I too must return to my normal, everyday life down in Orlando, Florida.

What a ride it's been though.

The night ended with a wonderful Q&A session with Quidam's artists after the evening's breathtaking performance. The entire CirqueCon Vancouver group was on hand, as was the media, for this very special event. Eight artists from various disciplines and backgrounds came out to chat with us, and for that we're very grateful. In attendance was Shayne Courtright (German Wheel), BJ

(Drummer), Jonathan Cole ("Boum Boum"), Mark Ward ("John"), Christine Cadeau (Jump Rope), the two new clowns (Ohki and Toto), and Catherine Downey ("Zoë"/Singer). We were allowed to take pictures, get autographs and basically ask whatever we wished. It was quite an experience to talk with so many performers at once... some of whom were still in makeup and costume!

Talking with these fine performers was a real treat. While we were only allotted about 30 minutes to speak with them, in that time we were able to learn about their backgrounds and their views on Cirque du Soleil. For example, one of the questions asked was what the show meant to its performers and the

message it tries to send. Johnathan Cole (Boum Boum) piped up and answered that everyone should have his or her own interpretation of the production. It's supposed to invoke emotion but the meaning behind it all is a personal reflection. Mark

Ward also chimed in: "It does have a story line -- a thin story line -- but we don't want to force feed you a storyline. We use images and let you come away with what you think. That's why you see the white suits; you don't really know who they are. It's not until we unveil ourselves that you see who the people are." It's a play on emotions, you see. "Basically," he said in conclusion, "if you walked away questioning anything, we did our job." And question we did.

Keith started out a question by saying, "Something I don't think Cirque fans realize how much time and experience it takes to get to Cirque du Soleil. How long have you been doing what you're doing, in one form or another, before you did it on a Cirque du Soleil stage?" Ohki, the Clown: "I auditioned for Cirque



in 1997 and in 1999. It's a long process. It took me seven years and potentially 10 different jobs that [Cirque] called [about]. The casting process is huge, there's a lot of people there." And he's been a clown for 10 years.

Christine: "I was interested in the part five years before I actually got it. I auditioned [for two years]. I've been skipping since I was seven years old; did smaller shows and fairs and then corporate and business [events]. I never though skipping would bring me somewhere." She was hired by Cirque du Soleil when she was 25-years old and had 13 years of basic experience before she got to Cirque.

Jonathan: "I was originally a gymnast, I started off when I was six. I had about 20 years experience before I even started to audition for Cirque. Because of my gymnastics background, because of my physical abilities they hired me. So when I went into the studio I had no idea what I was training on. They introduced me to circus apparatus and I had a three month process of just trying out individual ones to see which ones they liked. They found that I was good in the air, so they taught me different things airily, but I ended up staying in the studio for two years. I did research and development and created a flying tissu number like Dralion's. We ended up doing special events [with the tissu number]. Next I moved on to «O», where I did the Batteau, the Trapeze number. But I got injured, left, and went on to do [various] things outside of Cirque du Soleil, like bungees, Chinese poles, tumbling, dance and theater. A year later they hired me back to do Quidam, so I've been here for two and a half years."

Mark Ward: "I started performing when I was 11 and supported a dance company in Mexico. In Junior and High School [I studied] gymnastics, singing, dancing, and then I went to New York and danced

ballet in Harlem. Then I went to Chicago; I was very tired. In 1993 I was called by the choreographer of Cirque du Soleil. I had no idea who they were. They called me at 7:00am [and] I wasn't happy; I hung up on them. They called back two hours later, and two weeks [after that] I went [to work] with Cirque du Soleil. I was 27 and now I've been with then 11 years."

You know, there comes a moment in Quidam when Zoë realizes that her time in the fantastical world she's found herself in has expired, and she must return to her more mundane, everyday existence. She's reluctant to leave, of course, attempting to hold on to that last bit of whimsy, the last fragment of folly. And, like Zoë, our time within the universe of Cirque du Soleil was quickly coming to an end, and we too had to return to our mundane, everyday existences. What we take with us, though, is a renewed sense of wonder and appreciation for the artists and crew that make up Quidam. For they truly hold up the credo... Invoke, Provoke, Evoke.

For myself, and everyone involved in CirqueCon Vancouver 2004, I must extend our heartfelt thanks to André Belanger for all the hard work he put into making a day to remember, to Geneviève Bastien for allowing a group of passionates to air our thoughts on Cirque du Soleil licensing opportunities, and of course to Cirque du Soleil and the cast and crew of Quidam for their gracious hospitality.

Without them we wouldn't be so passionate.



THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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Running away to join the Cirque

'It's like a drug,' says one of the Passionates about the object of her devotion — the Cirque du Soleil. **ALEXANDRA GILL** meets the Deadheads of the big top

VANCOUVER

Some people collect stamps, other follow their favourite rock band with a passion bordering on zealotry. There are fans who have seen the film *Titanic* hundreds of times, and those who travel to *Star Trek* conventions all over the world.

Now there are Cirqueques, a new breed of fan who live, breathe and plan their vacations around the touring productions of Cirque du Soleil, the avant-garde acrobatic troupe from Montreal.

"It's like a drug," says LouAnna Valentine, one of the organizers of the CirqueCon 2004, the first unof-

ficial gathering of Cirque du Soleil "Passionates," which took place in Vancouver last weekend.

"Being able to step into an experimental dream for two hours—one that combines athleticism, state-of-the-art technology and stagecraft, emotion and heart, it's addictive," Valentine gushes after Saturday night's performance of *Quidam*, which continues at Concord Pacific Place until June 13.

Among the 31 Cirque fans who were here for the weekend, there are some who have been to more than 50 shows. Other than for the red noses and floppy clown hats that Cirque du Soleil handed out as gifts, it would be impossible to



CHRIS BOLIN/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Cirque Rafael Serrano came from Tijuana, Mexico for the fan-fest.

identify these fans in a crowd.

They are young and old, families and couples. They came from British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, California, Louisiana, Georgia, Virginia, Florida and even Tijuana, Mexico. They met each other through an on-line fan club called Fascination!, which can be accessed at Richasi's Le Grand Chapiteau (<http://reedy-creek.azlance.com:16080/richasi/Cirque/>).

The site was created five years ago by Ricky Russo (a.k.a. Richasi), a die-hard Cirque fan from Orlando, Fla. He formed the fan club two years later, by combining various on-line list groups and chat sites. The group now publishes a monthly newsletter and has 585 members.

Isabelle Panelli, the Cirque du Soleil publicist for *Quidam*, says she was more than a little surprised when she heard the Cirqueques were coming to town.

"Completely," she exclaims, her eyes still wide in disbelief. "We didn't even know they existed, but we were eager to meet them. They're so organized."

Panelli says she's a bit "overwhelmed" as she takes the group on a backstage tour on Saturday afternoon.

"Are there any questions I can answer?" she asks, as the group follows her through the Grand Chapiteau and into the rehearsal room where two young gymnasts from China are practising on the parallel bars.

"I know most of you are actually quite knowledgeable about Cirque du Soleil. You probably know more than me," she jokes.

"What is this one's name?" asks Gary Chapman, referring to Cirque's distinctive yellow-and-blue-swirled Grand Chapiteau. Every tent apparently has its own name.

"That's a good question," says Panelli. She can tell them it took seven days to erect, but she doesn't know the name of this particular tent.

Chapman nods smugly, as if to say he didn't think she'd know. He is here with his wife, Jill, to meet their on-line friends and see *Quidam* for the first time. They will actually be seeing the show twice.

See CIRQUE on page R5

U.S. fans undeterred by the 'Cirque wha?' reaction

CIRQUE from page R1

They have tickets for both Saturday's matinee and evening performances.

"Each show is different," explains Chapman, who will have seen 53 Cirque shows by the end of the night.

"Which means you might get to see all the acts if you go twice," adds Jill Chapman, the fan in this group who can boast of seeing the most performances — 55 in total.

The Chapmans say they fell in love with each other before they fell in love with Cirque, but having this shared obsession only enhances the relationship.

What is about Cirque that makes them all gooey-eyed?

"Everything," Jill declares enthusiastically. "The music, the costumes, the acts, the story, the performers and how it all comes together."

"The ambiance," adds Gary.

"Yes, the ambiance," Jill nods in agreement.

After the evening's performance, the group waits as the rest of the audience exits the tent. They have been granted a special question-and-answer session with the Cirque artists.

Laura Wood, a college student from Olympia, Wash., here with her mom, is ecstatic.

"It's like going backstage to see the Rolling Stones. That's how cool this is to me," she exclaims.

Wood has only seen four Cirque shows in her life, but she visits the Fascination! Yahoo! chat group about twice a week.

"If I had more money, I'd go see them all. It's an expensive habit," explains Wood, who paid \$102 (Canadian) for her ticket, plus gas and lodging at a local bed and breakfast.

Being a Cirque fan is not a mainstream pursuit, adds Wood. "In America, it's not as popular as it is here. Most people, when you tell them you're a Cirque fan, they say, '...'"

"Cirque wha?" Keith Johnson in-

terjects, laughing knowingly.

Johnson is one of the main writers for the newsletter. He's here with his wife, her father, sister and cousin. He'd love to talk more about the group, but first he has to get one of the clown's autographs.

"Sorry, it's been like this all day," he apologizes, as he races off.

Shane Courtwright, one of the lead acrobats in *Quidam*, who hails from B.C., says he doesn't think these Cirqueques are at all weird.

"No, I think it's great. I'm looking to be inspired. I wish I had a web page so I could give them more."

Johnson returns as the publicist sadly announces the end of the

night, and starts herding the group out of the tent.

"It's hard to say what we all share in common," says Johnson. "Cirque is the kind of product that doesn't appeal to everyone. But there are certain people whom it touches on a certain level."

Personally, Johnson thinks seeing the same Cirque show four times in one weekend, as some members of this group are doing, is a bit over the top. But he's proud to be wearing his Cirque jean jacket, which he says helps spread the word.

"Whenever I wear it, people stop and talk to me. It gives me the opportunity to evangelize, if you will."

Johnson expects that the fans of Cirque will continue to grow with the company. "The greatest challenge for the company will be convincing people that each show is a different experience. My parents in San Diego don't understand. They say 'We've already seen Cirque du Soleil,'" but they've only seen *Dralion*.

He also accepts that there are some people who will simply never understand his Cirque obsession, "in the same way that someone who has never seen *Star Trek* doesn't understand why some people dress up in Vulcan ears and go to conventions all over the world. It's an individual thing."





Have You Heard of the Cirque "Passionates"?

ALAIN PETIT

International Headquarters

They don't work at Cirque's International Headquarters, out on tour, or for a resident show. They're not characters in one of our shows either. But they do exist! In May of this year, 31 of them met up in Vancouver to see *Quidam* together.

The Marketing Service's Internet team got wind of this peculiar gathering through regular communications with some of the Passionates. These diehard Cirque fans share their passion on the Web. In addition to congregating in a Yahoo chat group, they publish an online newsletter with close to 800 subscribers called *Fascination*, which provides in-depth, up-to-the-minute information on Cirque.

"We wondered who exactly these fans were," explains André Bélanger, Internet Marketing Manager. "It was the perfect opportunity to take stock of their contribution to our success." So who are they? Most of them are over 35 and American—though there are some Mexicans too. The Passionates earn slightly above-average income, and they all "have a life," says André. Forget your notions of rock-star groupies and Trekkies! These people are huge Cirque fans, and they've seen several of our shows and developed an excellent critical eye for them. They love our productions so much that they'll actually defend them and promote them to anyone who's willing to listen. Though they're a bit more intense, they strongly reflect our target market. In marketing speak they're called "e-fluencers," people with considered opinions who influence many others.

The Vancouver gathering was not planned by our Marketing people. It was three Passionates, including the editor of the *Fascination* newsletter, who coordinated the event by Internet. At the show, they were all invited backstage by the Cirque Marketing team to meet the artists for 30 minutes and ask them questions up close and personal. "The fans who attended never expected such a warm welcome by Cirque staff," adds André. "They were going to Vancouver anyway. They were pleased and surprised that we took such good care of them!"

Is there another such gathering in the works? André Bélanger would like that. "We hope that as many Passionates as possible meet in Montreal to see *Cirque 2005*. We could see up to 500 people willing to travel to take part in this type of event!" Why not? They're some of our best ambassadors! *



Reconnaissance Speciale



Surprises abounded on both ends at the meeting between these Cirque megafans and the *Quidam* artists. The proof lies in a question for Mark Ward, who plays John: "For almost two months, you played the *Quidam* character rather than John. Why were you pushed to switch characters like that?"

"Well, no one pushed me to play the other character," Mark replied. "I requested it. But how the heck did you know that?"

Mark's surprise equalled the Cirque Passionates' knowledge: both were immense!

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