



## **THE JOURNEY AND THE ADVENTURE**

*An Oral History of CirqueCon*

(By Keith Johnson and Ricky Russo)

**Author's Note:** With CirqueCon going on hiatus, we thought it would be fun to look back and reflect on the journey we've taken. It's been a long road with some bumps and bruises but several stories to tell. So consider this a series of personal memories, which solely reflect the views of the writer(s), with their own unique outlook (and, yes, biases). Your mileage may vary.

### **CHAPTER ONE - CREATION**

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, technicians - an entire team. And so it is with group excursions like CirqueCon, 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 30 years. We work on a Convention Committee that presents an SF convention called Norwescon that occurs every year over Easter weekend, attracting 2,800 science fiction fans to Seattle. Working on a convention gives you a sense of the number of things that need to be done. Tons of myriad small details need to be addressed, with lots of research, phone calls, messages and meetings the norm. You can't just snap your fingers and make it happen, expectations must be met. I've taken that approach in organizing group trips. I learned much by doing them - what works, what didn't, how much "control" members felt comfortable with and where they felt too constrained.

Which brings us to summer 2003. 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 make two stops in Canada, including Vancouver, over late spring 2004. This 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 staying in a Bed & Breakfast in such a beautiful city. 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 and invited them along with us. LouAnna’s father (“Dad”) was instantly enthusiastic as well as other friends and relatives. Erstwhile Fascination! Editor Ricky Russo also decided to fly from Orlando, FL to join us for the weekend. With a party that big, housing becomes an issue. 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.

## CIRQUE-WHAT?

# CirqueCon 2004 VANCOUVER

*The First Unofficial Gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates*



Back in Newport News, VA, Jeff Tolotti was a frequent contributor to the Cirque du Soleil Yahoo group (before he would create the Cirque Tribune discussion board). Around the time we were thinking of making our reservation, Jeff posted an idea: 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. Without consulting my wife (a fact she has frequently reminded me of <g>), I posted privately to Jeff asking if his group would consider our weekend if I could arrange to block out all the Bed and Breakfast rooms for our usage? He consulted with the Yahoo group, who took to the idea. With the weekend decided upon, it became my responsibility to book the bed and breakfasts. B&B owners Paul Findlay and Leslie Lewington said they would block out all the rooms for us if we used two of their properties, Douglas House and Cambie Lodge, which were right next to each other on the same street. Done!

But what should we name our event? We needed something memorable. I suggested “CirqueCon,” a derivative of the “-con” naming of SF conventions (Norwescon, Worldcon, etc.). 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.” (A few years later we would change our naming format around a bit, putting the city last with an excitement-inducing exclamation point!

So we had a weekend, a name, and a place to stay, but how would we get the word out? Jeff created a webpage with the basic information. In addition we asked Editor Ricky for the Newsletter's sponsorship as an outlet for "progress reports." 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. We finally settled on the Old Spaghetti Factory in Gastown, 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 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 Cirque collectibles with each other. LouAnna, ever the social hostess, wanted to put out a spread of meat, cheeses, candies (locally-produced Aplets and Cotlets of course!) as well as some of the "Cirque du Rosé" 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. This became our continuing tradition known as the Meet & Greet.

I also suggested 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 that would be a good way to "break the ice."

The other would be a "Program Book" that served as a "guide" to the weekend, with schedules, articles, and pictures. Ricky and Jeff responded positively to the Program Book idea and we all wrote material with Jeff taking the lead. The badge was a different thing, as they both felt it a bit "geeky" for our group - folks would not necessarily want to be visually identified as Cirque du Soleil fans, would they? I got an even stronger reaction when I suggested we get lanyards so folks could wear the badges around their necks! Jeff provided a beautiful design with each person's name and state on them, with 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!



As we went along members had various questions about the rooms 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. We had made no promises, 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 until one fateful morning in Mid-April when, completely out of the blue Ricky received a message from Mr. André Belanger from Cirque du Soleil in Montréal. 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 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 Geneviève Bastien, a fellow Cirque employee who would be flying in from Montréal IHQ with Mr. Belanger for our weekend. As if the initial contact wasn’t exciting enough, these proposed plans were even more so! Our members were ecstatic upon hearing the news.

In another unexpected occurrence, Thursday morning I received an email from Gillian Morris at Dunn Mitchell Communications in Vancouver. They were 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.

And I should say here that, because my cell phone was the only one anyone on the Cirque du Soleil side had, I was the one they contacted with their last-minute questions and needs, and there were many. This caused friction with other members of the group, who felt I had hijacked control in what was a free-form vacation. For example, to make the discussion easier Cirque wanted only a few of us in the merchandise discussion – leaving it to me to decide who to invite! In the end the need to liaison between Cirque du Soleil and CirqueCon, and how I carried out that role, lead to some hurt feelings that have continued to this day, that I regret.

Just after reaching Pike Place Market (Seattle’s farmers market) my cell phone rang. It was 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 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! 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, and 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. (We found out later that the “headline” of the Media Advisory 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.)

## **BORDER FOLLIES**

Friday morning came all too soon. With all of the party supplies, Cirque collectibles and baggage our cars’ trunk was quite full. I went to Sea-Tac Airport to pick up Ricky and meet up with Jeff, who had brought the Program Books and finished CD’s which I would take to have ready for the Meet & Greet. We all proceeded to my car and loaded the books and CD’s into the back seat (which I would later come to regret). Our fun started long before we caught sight of the Cirque tent.

Thank the Canadian border agents. Honestly, I think they just wanted to give a couple of unsuspecting American guys a hard time. Imagine the two of us pulling up to the Canadian border with passports in hand and a timetable to keep. The border agent seemed confused about the 40 programs and 80 CD’s 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 explain the entire situation to someone slightly more evolved.

We were detained nearly 45 minutes, repeating our story to 3-4 more people along the way. The last woman we spoke with (after getting our papers stamped and cleared by the commercial office) was 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 into the building with the 6-pack of Cirque du Rosé wine we had for the Meet & Greet. She strutted

in via a side door, a smug look about her. “Okay my little Cirque fans,” she hailed. “What’s this? You said you had only four bottles of wine and this is six.” But while it was true there were six in the pack, four were Cirque du Rosé wine (the maximum allowed over the border), while the other two were sparkling cider and non-alcoholic. Once she realized that she threw the case down upon the counter and bid us a hasty farewell. “Okay, well, BYE!”





and handed out our Program packet, with 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.

One of the surprises Cirque du Soleil had in store for us Saturday morning was a focus group meeting with Geneviève Bastien, Licensing Project Manager at Cirque. She flew all the way from Montréal to ask our opinions on new licensing avenues Cirque may be interested in exploring. It became one of the most fascinating aspects of our gathering, as most fans don't get a chance to speak with Cirque on this level! We spoke for an hour about authentic show collectibles, home decor, "cirque like" adult clothing, behind-the-scenes books, clothing/items for pre-schoolers, everything 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 all met with red clown noses and black Saltimbanco Barron hats at the service entrance to the Quidam big top for our extensive behind the-scenes tour of the site, our second big surprise from Cirque du Soleil.

But a bigger surprise to us was all the media on hand, and for a while it truly felt like a circus. We became lost in a sea of mass confusion as we had microphones thrust upon us, our pictures taken and questions asked randomly.

We were taken to every corner of the Quidam site, from the kitchen, to the technical tents, to the artistic tent, then backstage and onto the stage itself! We had barely recovered from that when Cirque announced their third surprise -- Tapis Rouge. For over an hour we were able to mingle in Cirque's posh VIP tent, talk with the Canadian press and enjoy Cirque du Soleil's gracious hospitality. Tapis Rouge was simply awesome. 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 in Gastown.

Imagine 30 Cirque fans from across North America slurping pasta together! It was definitely a treat to dine with everyone. André Bellanger joined us as well as an independent reporter for Radio Canada, shoving a mic in everyone's face throughout the meal gathering material for a possible story (that was never produced). And

it was André who first coined the word "Passionates" when he spoke to us of how great it was to have "so many passionates joining together." The name stuck! (And it was way classier than "Cirquies".)

The night ended with a Q&A session with Quidam's artists after the evening's breathtaking performance. Eight artists came out to chat with us, including 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 took pictures, got autographs and basically asked whatever we wished. It was quite an experience to talk with so many performers at once... some of them still in makeup and costume! While we only had a short time to speak with them we were able to learn some interesting things about their backgrounds and their views on Cirque du Soleil.



There comes a moment in Quidam when Zoë realizes that her time in this fantastical world 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 took with us, though, was 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.



## CHAPTER TWO - PREMIERE

# CirqueCon 2005 MONTRÉAL

*The Second Unofficial Gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates*

After CirqueCon Vancouver, we had several decisions facing us. Should we hold another CirqueCon? How would it be run? What form would it take? It was clear to me and others that the “dream” of CirqueCon was a valid one, there was an audience of dedicated Cirque fans who would take to the idea of gathering on a regular basis to take in a Cirque show with others of like mind. How large that audience was we didn’t know, nor how to easily contact them.

I felt that casting as wide a net as possible for members would be the best plan - it would bring more Passionates together and show Cirque that there was power in our numbers. Jeff Tolotti indicated early in the process he did not want to be involved with the CirqueCon idea if it changed into an “all are welcome” model. He, as well as several of the attendees of the first CirqueCon felt a more intimate gathering of close friends was preferable to them. He and others were also not happy with me and some of the things that happened at CirqueCon Vancouver.



I also felt that if CirqueCon were to continue, as with other conventions or conferences it would need a budget and a way to pay for the things it provided without depending on the wallets of the organizers. We started with the idea of a \$10.00 membership fee per member, and for that they would receive a Program Book, badge, a special souvenir for each event, and all the phone calls and time and effort it would take to make the event a reality. The \$10.00 figure didn’t mean we would be making a “profit” off of CirqueCon, only that we would be meeting expenses.

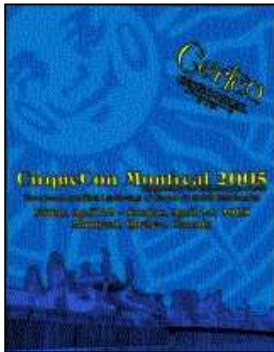
Still, there was pushback on the idea of charging, so much so that we bifurcated our membership into two categories – Standard Membership at \$10.00, and a free Basic Membership which would receive only a badge and the right to attend whatever special activities Cirque might have planned for us.



Without Jeff's participation, we were left without someone who could produce our graphics. Luckily, enter Rich Alford who, as it happened, had also attended our "official" performance of Quidam at CirqueCon Vancouver but wasn't part of our group. He was curious about these people who were wearing badges and being treated special so he sought us out. His offer to help with graphics, design and layout ideas was warmly welcomed. With that we were back to full strength and could proceed to plan CirqueCon Montréal.

We knew it was going to be a learning experience.

## TICKETS PLEASE

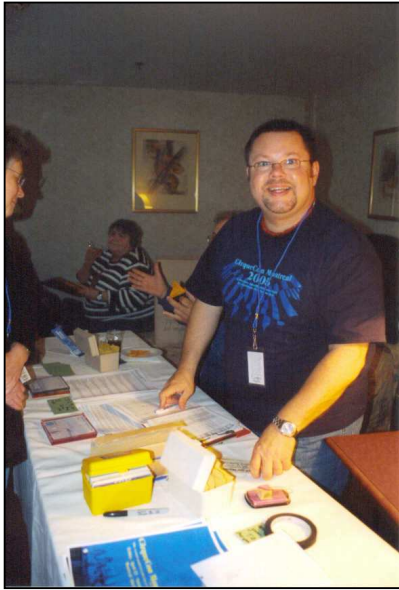


Offering a "group purchase" of tickets was one of our first challenges. I was hoping we would function the same way we had for Vancouver – everyone buys his or her tickets separately. And when Cirque came to us with a proposal for a group purchase I hoped we could do the same thing – have Cirque set aside a certain number of tickets that could be purchased individually. But that's not how group sales work. They were happy to set aside a block of seats – and some of the best in the tent, in middle Section 205 directly surrounding the soundboard. But they wanted one check for the final purchase. So the only way to make it work was if we did all the accounting in-house – taking tickets, processing money, paying Cirque and distributing the tickets to our members. It would be a headache, but if we came up with a simple record-keeping system we could make it work. It also sounded like a good service to offer our members.

So we agreed and set up the tickets to be offered until the end of October. We converted the value of the tickets from Canadian dollars to US Dollars with exchange rates we had at the time (this will become important later). We set up a PayPal account so people could send money electronically, and erstwhile editor Richasi set up our "official" website, which he has carefully shepherded as it has grown over the years with additional events under our belt.

By the deadline we had sold 52 tickets. We communicated this to Cirque, who faxed us an invoice to pay. Then we ran into our first, um, challenge. In the months since we first offered the tickets, the US dollar plunged 13% in value against most world currencies, including the Canadian dollar. So tickets that were worth \$68.00 USD in July were costing us \$76.00 USD when it came time to pay. How embarrassing to not have accounted for that! It put us in a panic; this was something we weren't expecting. Yet having had contact with all our ticket purchasers, we suspected they would understand if asked to pay the balance. But we had promised to get tickets in their hands before Christmas, so we couldn't hold them while we waited for extra money to come in. My wife LouAnna and I decided to cover the shortfall temporarily out of our own personal funds, advising the tickets buyers and asking them to contribute an additional \$8.00 per ticket which, thankfully, they were happy to do.

But that wasn't the end of the financial surprises. With the invoice from Cirque in hand, we now had to pay for our tickets. Cirque takes some credit cards, cashiers checks or certified checks in Canadian dollars. We figured this would be no big sweat; we'd give them our American Express card and let the card do the Canadian to US dollar conversion (after all, that's what they recommend you do on vacation, right?). So we happily gave Cirque the AMEX card and thought we were done with it.



Then we found out it was a hundred American dollars more than we estimated. I then learned American Express charges a 3% fee for the conversion process itself, which, with the large amount of the invoice was somewhere in the range of the aforementioned \$100.00. So I looked at any other way I could get cheaply get payment to Cirque. After looking at multiple options I got a "bank check" from my local bank (which would cost \$35.00), and overnighted it to Cirque, and the first set of tickets were mailed soon thereafter.

Meanwhile, Cirque had another idea brewing. While I was happy with our numbers Cirque wanted to increase our participation. We felt we had covered as much of "Cirque Internet fandom" as we could with updates and posts to Cirque Club, Cirque Tribune, and the Cirque du Soleil Yahoo group. But they proposed something

extraordinary - a special message to a number of their vast database of Cirque Club members! While that was a nice offer, we privately wished they had come up with the idea sooner. In any case the deadline had already passed and tickets would soon be going on sale to the general public. They responded by offering to hold our tickets another two weeks, as well as also blocking seats in Category 2 Section 203.

With a shortened lead-time of two weeks, could we be "light on our feet" and responsive quickly enough? If Cirque was making such an extraordinary offer we felt we had to at least try. So we dropped everything and quickly revamped the website to reflect the new reality. We made sure we could easily handle any additional requests, though we really weren't sure how many we would get. On December 8<sup>th</sup> a message went out from Cirque Club to 50,000 of their members who lived within a day's travel of Montréal. It said...

*"Is there anything more magical than Old Montréal in the springtime? Well maybe Old Montréal in the springtime during a Cirque du Soleil world premiere weekend! Some of our most dedicated fans are organizing an event next spring in Montréal for Cirque du Soleil fans from around the world. This unofficial gathering, headed by Keith Johnson from Seattle, Washington, will be taking place during the world premiere weekend of Cirque 2005 next April and we are thrilled to help him get the message out to you.*

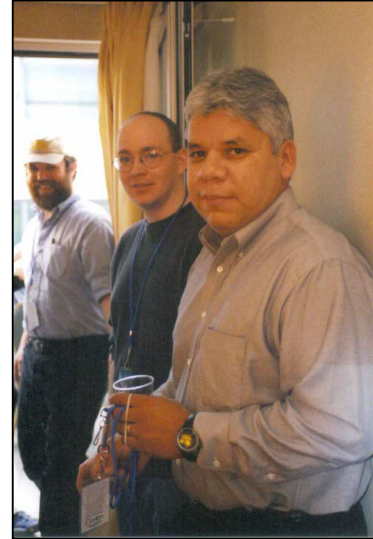
- The event runs from Friday, April 22, 2005 to Sunday, April 24, 2005.

- *Tickets for the conference are for Saturday, April 23, 2005 at 8:00 p.m.*
- *The conference is organized by Keith Johnson, LouAnna Valentine and Ricky Russo.*

*This event is not being organized by Cirque du Soleil but we will be there to help make it an unforgettable weekend! For more information, please visit their website. See you in the spring!"*

Boy, what a build-up: "...An unforgettable weekend!" Thankfully they were saying it, not us, so it had some credibility. We added another 30 or so members who bought 15 tickets, an increase of 30%. But it was a rush to get people into the database and paying within the compressed week we had.

With almost 100 people this wasn't going to be anything like CirqueCon Vancouver. And it disappointed some, who were looking forward to another intimate gathering of Internet-related friends, as Vancouver was. But we knew when Cirque suggested Montréal as our next stop that we would have to be more inclusive and thereby larger. And be able to provide more services, such as an "official" hotel.



## LE HOTEL



With Cirque pitching their 2005 show (now called "CORTEO") in their traditional location of Jacques Cartier pier in Old Montréal, we wanted to try and find a reasonably priced hotel within walking distance, even though we could also avail ourselves of Montréal's excellent subway system. Though the area is full of hotels and inns most all of them presented two problems. First, they were all expensive; we were trying to look in-town, in the highest-rent area of town, filled with up-scale "boutique"-type hotels. Second, the hotels were small. We had rented 16 B&B rooms in Vancouver, and I felt that we would at least double and possibly triple it. So that meant we needed between 30 and 50 rooms. That threw out most of the hotels in Old Montréal.

But there was one hotel that caught my eye, an offshoot of a chain well known in America for its quality; the Marriott SpringHill Suites Old Montréal. The hotel is a business-oriented facility (very similar to Residence Inn), offering amenities geared toward traveling businessmen. And, most importantly, it was only ¼ mile from the

Cirque tent! But would they want to do business with such an “informal” event as CirqueCon? Once I convinced their sales department that we were really a large “family reunion” we were able to work out a deal. But by our rules we had to restrict services to those that had paid for the research, namely paid Standard Members. So, once again, we were compelled to keep the reservation process in-house, and quickly filled 22 rooms. By then Cirque was preparing to send their Cirque Club message, and we soon got an additional 13 room reservations, bringing our total to 35 rooms – 30% of the total rooms at the Hotel! And with that the hotel was sold out, so our members had to make other arrangements.

The final piece of our CirqueCon Montréal puzzle was a group meal. This was made incredibly easy by a reference given us by our contact at the SpringHill Suites, a large restaurant between the hotel and the Cirque tent, the Restaurant du Vieux Port. They were very familiar with groups and knew how to handle our needs very efficiently. Working with them couldn't have been easier. As we got close to our weekend we grew to over 100 Passionates. We scaled up our Meet & Greet, arranging with the hotel to hold it in two of their larger rooms across the hall from each other, one with a huge balcony on which members could congregate. We produced more programs, I also created a third CD of rare Cirque music as a companion to our other two volumes.

Visiting Montréal in April is certainly an experience. It can be sunny one day, rainy the next, and snowy the third. We were eagerly anticipating another amazing weekend as we drove in from the airport. We set up in our rooms and had a great Meet & Greet. Rich had taken the room across the corridor from us and had set up Registration there. Our friends helped out by manning the registration table for the evening. It was noisy, fun, and packed! We ended our evening with a short walk to



La Basilique Notre-Dame de Montréal, one of Montréal's first churches, for a modern audio-visual presentation about the history of Montréal and the church.



Saturday morning was going to be challenging. Cirque had scheduled a tour of their International Headquarters, but had left it to us to figure out how to get there. Fans used the subway, carpool, taxi, or drove to make it the 10 or so miles from Old Montréal to the IHQ. The site of 100+ Passionates in the small lobby of the back entrance was one I won't soon forget!



Cirque was quite organized – they divided us into three groups with chaperones and we were on our way. We visited the entirety of the complex, from the training facilities to the costume shops and around the offices. We finished off at their in-house boutique, where we were offered a 15% discount! It was hard to drag some of our Passionates out of the Boutique, but we were then addressed by Bernard Petoit, their Vice-President of Artistic Products and Patrick Gélinas, Chief of Rigging Equipment. Then we were treated to a buffet while we watched a presentation from Celebrity Cruises, who had just partnered with Cirque on their “Bar at the Edge of the Earth” concept. In fact, two representatives had flown up from Florida just to speak with us!



At the end of our tour, we made our way back to Old Montréal for our group meal at the Restaurant du Vieux Port. Having twice as many people as in Vancouver enjoying their meal was a humbling site. As was the large group of Passionates making their way to the Cirque tent to take in only the fourth performance ever of CORTEO. It was a special ending to a very special weekend, and convinced us that carrying on the dream of CirqueCon was something we couldn't resist.

But next, and finally, came – Vegas!



### **CHAPTER THREE - CIRQUE X 5**

As previously mentioned, our thinking after the success of CirqueCon Vancouver was that Las Vegas would be the logical place to go next. It was a surprise when, at our Vancouver Group Meal André from Cirque invited us to Montréal the following April. Who were we to pass up an opportunity like that? But it meant that Las Vegas would have to wait.



During CirqueCon Montréal we announced that our next event would in fact be CirqueCon Las Vegas 2006. This would be the biggest CirqueCon yet and possibly ever, the culmination of all our efforts and momentum. But it would be quite a journey to get there, with several side trips along the way.

We knew we had to approach Las Vegas with a different mindset; all of our procedures and processes would have to be re-thought and scaled up. The first thing we eliminated was free Basic Membership. If anyone was going to receive any benefit from our efforts they would also have to share in the cost. But we also didn't want to provide too much and require a membership rate in the stratosphere, as would be the case with a professional conference. After all, we weren't taking a salary; we were doing it for the love and the fun. We raised our membership fee to \$20.00, as Montréal's fee of \$10.00 wasn't adequate – a figure that would allow us flexibility to provide some quality deliverables and pay our expenses, though there would still be much we would pay out of our own pockets.

Then we had to come up with a proposal to present to Cirque. We wanted to present ideas of how we wanted to structure the weekend and ways we could work together. We presented our ideas at our first "business meeting" in Las Vegas that fall. LouAnna and I had used the rationale of presenting ourselves to Cirque (in a "professional" manner) as an excuse for an extended weekend stay in Vegas. We met Cirque's representatives the Friday of our trip in their Resident Show offices south of McCarran Airport, LouAnna and I meeting with Meredith Delay, Ticketing Manager for Cirque, as well as one of her associates.

We presented what we hoped to accomplish, what we wanted to improve upon and what we felt would be challenging. Our biggest issue would be show tickets; it would be quite a challenge to handle orders for five shows for potentially hundreds of members. We also advocated for seating in the front center sections of the theatres, which are rarely available through standard ticketing as they are held for casino comps. They listened intently before presenting their own proposals, which included switching the order in which we would see the shows. It was also decided that the best timeframe would be mid-August, instead of during LOVE's premiere weekend as we had proposed.

They made it clear we wouldn't get much attention if we arrived as everyone was working overtime to get LOVE open. Mid-August would be after LOVE had opened with some extra time so those who had been working so hard could take some time off. They also offered to help us in any way they could, including looking for a way to ease the burden of tickets purchases.

While we were in Vegas we also stayed in two hotels that interested us, the Imperial Palace and Treasure Island. We liked both for their central-strip location, the Imperial Palace for its price and the TI because it also had a Cirque show in it. Of course, being the budget property it is Imperial Palace didn't impress us much though the price was right. The TI was much nicer and the contract offer they made was in the ballpark, all the rooms we could possibly need at a reasonable rate. Except that there was this problematic attrition clause.

Attrition clauses are designed so a hotel doesn't lose money if they set aside a number of rooms for a group that later go unsold. It obligates a group to a set amount of room revenue (expressed in room-nights); if the contracts minimums aren't met the group is under obligation to pay the difference. For most groups this isn't a problem but for us - individuals with no ability to pay the potentially thousands of dollars we might be charged if we didn't use up all the rooms we blocked - it was a deal breaker. This was a quandary; we could under no circumstances obligate ourselves personally in this way, but we still wanted to provide a "headquarters" hotel for our members. We tried everything to get the clause removed - moving the deadline for room release back so the hotel had more time to sell the rooms, modifying the room rate, other ideas. But they were adamant.

In desperation I called Meredith at Cirque. We wanted to stay in a hotel with a Cirque show, and the TI was perfect in all other ways except their insistence on the attrition clause. She had experience with these hotels, what might she recommend we do? She asked for a day to consider it. The next day I received a call from my Treasure Island contact - her manager, under encouragement from those way above him, had agreed to waive the attrition clause completely! This wouldn't be the first time the power of Cirque du Soleil in Las Vegas would be made apparent.

We happily announced our hotel deal to our members, but it was soon after that we were handed another surprise, this one from Cirque itself. We had originally agreed CirqueCon Las Vegas would occur in mid-August. But in early March they told us that due to changes in the creation process for LOVE, the schedule for the show had changed and its first series of dark days would occur during our proposed weekend. This was a serious problem, as we were aware of some people who had already planned their vacations and made arrangements based on our August dates. We could proceed with our dates as agreed, but this meant we would be unable to see LOVE. And we couldn't just move a week ahead, as a series of dark days at the other shows dotted the calendar over the course of the next month. So after much discussion it was decided to move the convention forward a month, to September 21-24, 2006. Surprisingly, there wasn't much negative reaction from our members who changed their plans accordingly.

Soon after we announced the change of dates Cirque informed us they had set up what was (for our members at least) a beautiful system for ordering tickets, some with discounts from the normal price. It was a form that would be filled out by the member and faxed or mailed to Cirque directly – we didn't need to be involved at all! They would handle all the processing and payment and have the tickets ready at Will Call when the member arrived. While it was easy for us, it was quite a challenge for them. Their system is normally used for guests of Cirque artists and staff and wasn't designed for the strain that we would soon be giving it. One of the ticketing agents, Lisa Hearting, took the project on and handled many many challenges along the way, working many long hours - she was one of our heroes. We ended up selling almost 650 tickets for the five shows, with LOVE tickets alone totaling more than 150.

As part of our special seating arrangements I also asked if we could fill the entire front row of "Mystère" with Cirque Passionates. They were able to oblige us, and I filled the seats based upon who responded most quickly, starting in the center and filling outward (making sure to put co-organizers Ricky and Rich in what I felt was the "sweet spot"). I wanted that show's "Pappa" to be guaranteed to be one of us!

While Lisa was handling ticketing, Meredith and her assistant Carrie Farina were coordinating with the various departments within Cirque du Soleil to help make our ideas reality, involving many people within each show. She was our contact throughout, always positive and interested in making the event special, even though her manager, Jerry Nadal, kidded her she was not in the charity business. Along with the ticketing arrangements we also announced a sneak peek of some of the "special Cirque activities" that would be in the offing, and our membership took an upward tick. But it wouldn't be the first time that would happen.

We had asked Cirque if they would consider another email similar to the one they issued for Montréal. We made the argument that it should be sent as widely as possible, even overseas, since anyone in a far-off land that would make the time to come to Las Vegas for CirqueCon was a true Passionate. But with membership in the many hundreds of thousands and careful policies about how often Cirque Club membership is contacted, that wasn't something Cirque felt comfortable doing. Instead, they proposed to go more "local," sending out a short message to several markets that "feed" Las Vegas – LA, San Diego, San Francisco, Phoenix, Las Vegas itself and the like. They warned us to be prepared for more members and sent out their message at the end of May. The effect was immediate and ongoing. Our membership, which had been growing steadily but slowly to about 100 people, suddenly exploded, almost doubling within two months!

While we were overjoyed to open our arms to more Passionates, it presented another huge challenge. Our Meet & Greet is one of the hallmarks of CirqueCon, where members meet friends old and new. But so many members meant it would be impossible to host out of a hotel room, we simply had too many people. We looked into spaces at the TI for ways of economically handling all our members. But there was no way we could host a proper Meet & Greet, provide enough snacks and drinks for everyone at the catering rates the hotel would charge, and in addition pay the room rental fee the hotel



would demand. We were stymied, so at LouAnna's suggestion we again went to Meredith at Cirque and explained our dilemma. She calmly said she would see what she could do.

It was a week or so before Meredith suggested that Cirque would like to host it, at their Resident Show Headquarters, and make it a fund raiser for a local charity. This was beyond fantastic! Her thinking outside the box created a win-win-win situation for all. And the way it was carried out would be beyond our wildest expectations.

With the Meet & Greet issue resolved, we continued work on our Program Book and other deliverables. In addition to the casino chip and playing card special souvenirs, Rich also had another idea up his sleeve. One of our disappointments with CirqueCon Montréal was that we couldn't arrange for transportation to take everyone from our hotel in Old Montréal to Cirque Headquarters and back. We had found companies that could to it, but didn't have the time or expertise to make it happen. Rich wanted to make sure that didn't happen in Las Vegas since the Meet & Greet would be happening several miles away from our afternoon KÀ activity. From Cirque he found the transportation company that they used. They were very flexible being able to add busses as needed. Rich set up a system by which those who wanted to take the bus dealt with him directly. For a very reasonable price he got many of our members on the bus, which eventually became known as the "Magic Bus."

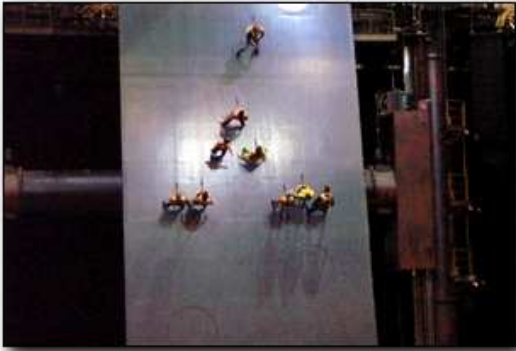
Finally it was time to venture to Vegas. Cirque allowed us use of one of their conference rooms to stuff our Membership Packets, where a cadre of volunteers spent an afternoon stuffing 150 packets full of our materials, as well as a myriad of small items cleaned out of Cirque's promotional closets.

## **Thursday, September 21st**

**KÀ Activities** – We were beckoned inside by Nauticus, one of the show's costumed ushers, and lead to our seats in the central section of the upper tier. As we settled in Calum Pearson (Company Manager), Victoria Webb (Asst. Company Manager), and Stacey Myers (Stage Manager) invited us to watch the day's rehearsal of the grand battle scene that closes the show. For some of us it was our first introduction to KÀ's impressive technical achievements. The theater was certainly striking, even in elevated house lights; we just sat back and drank it all in.



After the rehearsal we were met by Matthew Salcedo and Erica Linz, acrobatic dancers and characters in the show, Julie McInnis, musician and singer, as well as chanteuse Beth Quist for a little chat session. Over the next hour they took our questions like troupers. Once our group exhausted their line of questioning, the coaches, managers and theater staff began to ask questions of us.



(Including, I might add, Sonya Padgett, correspondent for the Las Vegas Review-Journal, who wrote an article about us). What a wonderful exchange of information between groups!

And before the curtain fell on our time with K&A, our new friends gave us the rare opportunity to peek over the railing and into the void, the vast space filled with mechanisms dedicated to keeping the enormous tech of the show afloat.

**Meet & Greet @ Cirque RSD HQ** – By early evening it was time for our traditional "Meet and Greet". To get there many Passionates hopped aboard the CirqueCon Magic Bus and before long we had ourselves a party! The party atmosphere continued inside the RSD-HQ. The spread of food and drink they had for us was unbelievable.

Finger foods and other scrumptious hors d'œuvres fanned out from multiple colorful displays, including salads and vegetable trays, meat and cheese trays and, of course, a decadent desert tray full of chocolaty goodies. Yum! A full liquor bar was on tap, should a drink or two be desired, but water and sodas of all kinds were also available to quench our thirst. While we nibbled on our tapas, Cirque RSD gave us limited free reign of the hallways and rooms on the floor, which had an amazing assortment of Cirque du Soleil history on display through art and artifacts.



Throughout the evening Cirque RSD also held a number of raffles and silent auctions of amazing original artwork, cast-signed show posters, and a variety of Cirque merchandise packages personally created and donated by artists, technicians and other members of the Cirque du Soleil staff in Las Vegas for us to bid on, with proceeds benefiting Street Teens (an organization dedicated to helping youth at risk). All told we raised almost \$6000 for Street Teens, well beyond their expectations.

We were even surprised by warm welcomes from Jerry Nadal, Vice-President of Resident Shows, and Michael Bolingbroke, Senior VP of Live Shows for all of Cirque du Soleil. Mr. Bolingbroke tasked the group with a little bit of homework. Our assignment, which was due at the end of the weekend, was to correctly answer five questions about the company and its artists. The passionate who answered the most questions correctly would receive a special VIP package to attend a premiere anywhere in the world. Each of us thought we had this in the bag until we saw the questions. They were really tough!

1. What is the most commonly injured body part for Cirque du Soleil artists? (The ankle, half of us got that right.)

2. What country does not allow Cirque du Soleil to fly their national flag? What does Cirque fly in its place? (Singapore, in which place they fly the Cirque flag. They don't fly the Quebec or Canadian flag in Singapore either, so all four mast flags are Cirque flags!)
3. What 8 cities in the world has Cirque du Soleil visited and sold over 200,000 tickets in a single run? (Paris, Mexico City, Sydney, Tokyo, Nagoya, Los Angeles, New York and Amsterdam. That's right, not Montréal, where the most sold was CORTEO at 199,680.)
4. What is the house number shown next to the front door on the clown house in "O"? (29, everybody got this right.)
5. How many artists are there in "O" AND how many of them are required to be NAUI/PADI certified? (Total artists is 82, NAUI/PADI certified is 68-all the artists except 10 musicians and 4 contortionists.)

(Three people scored 9 points out of a possible 16, the winner by random drawing was Passionate Jill Colsch!)

**"O"** – At 9:00pm, we reluctantly bid farewell to our hosts at RSD Headquarters, as the hour came to re-board the bus and journey to "O" at Bellagio. At first it seemed the cast of "O" didn't quite know what to make of us. We were loud, but respectful, and ready for a good time. As soon as the performers stepped on the stage and heard our reactions you could see it in their faces: this was not going to be a normal show for them. They were just as excited as we were and prepared to take their performance to the next level, and beyond. And they did!



**"O" Activities** – Building on the excitement from the fantastic performance we were given, we all met poolside following the show. There Dawn Bradley, Theater Manager, and her support staff were on hand ready to continue our amazing Cirque adventure. No sooner did they have us corralled then a number of performers, still costumed (and dry!), made their way out from behind the curtain. We were expecting

no more than 5 or 6, out of costume and wary of a group as large and rowdy as ours, but when a good portion of the cast showed up it was we who were intimidated! Standing those few feet apart eyeing one another were anxious moments, with both sides unable to move or exchange more than quick pleasantries.

An announcement inviting us all up on stage for a group photo with the cast was all it took to break the wall of tension. Members excitedly bounded on stage to mix and mingle with the lot of performers: a Comet, Eugen, a Zebra or two, Guifa, Horsey Guy, a few dancers, a couple of the Batteau artists, one of the contortionists, the Transvestite and the clowns. Soon thereafter the words came, and hugs, and handshakes, and smiles and laughter - from both sides! We melted into one big happy family, with stories to tell, questions to ask (they were just as curious about us as we were about them), and photos to take. No longer were we spectator or performer, ordinary or extraordinary; we had all become Saltimbanques, honorary members of the circus troupe. It was one of those "you just had to be there" moments, you know?



Then after several minutes - time for a little dip in the "O" pool. Cirque du Soleil lowered the massive lifts governing the pool's stage just enough to let the contents bubble up through the porous structure - suddenly there was water lapping at our feet! We wouldn't be allowed to swim laps in the pool, of course. Instead they gave each of us specially-labeled screw-top vials so that we could take a

little bit of "O" home with us. It was a wonderful end to an amazing night; it was all we could do not to "fall in" by mistake! (Wouldn't that have been a hoot?)

## Friday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>

After the amazing late-night evening, very few of us had the energy to be up bright and early. When we did recover it was just about time for lunch. That turned out to be perfect because another of our traditions is the Group Meal, whereby members gather with other Cirque Passionates to "eat, drink and talk of our shared passions". Once again our size prevented the more intimate settings we shared in years past but we had that covered - Treasure Island had a solution that we just couldn't pass up: vouchers for their buffet and a cordoned off section just for us! But there was definitely much more to come.



**Mystère Activities** – Following our Group Meal at the Dishes buffet, the group descended upon the Mystère Theater to begin the day's activities. Bob MacDonald (Company Manager) and Jeff Lund (Asst. Company Manager) were there to greet us. As we interacted with our speakers, a Chinese Poles artist was prepping for integration, a term used to describe the introduction of a new performer into the matrix of the show. It was really difficult to know who to focus on: her or the general manager!



**“LOVE”** – A few short hours later we were at the Mirage getting ready for LOVE, the Beatles/Cirque du Soleil fusion we all came to Las Vegas to see. Immediately following the show we stayed in our seats to observe the change-over between shows with a member of the artistic staff to explain what was taking place. Suddenly, we were unceremoniously dismissed! Wait, what? We were told unequivocally to leave the theater as soon as possible – can you believe that? So we did. It was later learned that Tom Cruise was in the house, which was a point of stress for the security folks, and that a patron required the emergency services of an ambulance, so their already tight turn-over schedule was affected and their focus could no longer be on us.



When the command was given to leave the theatre, I was on the House Manager in a flash. Did they not understand what was going on, who we were, what we were expecting? No explanation was offered. I quickly called Meredith and her assistant Carrie to tell them what happened, as well as explain the situation to managers at our next stop, MYSTÈRE. We later found out the circumstances, and I was greeted the next day with boxes of limited-edition not-for-sale

LOVE caps and a cast photograph as an apology, which we handed out throughout the day to anyone with a LOVE ticket stub.

**“Mystère”** – The crew at Mystère more than made up for the losses at LOVE, turning out a high-stakes, high-energy show that was totally flawless, and in the process, (by our carefully filling all the front row seats with Passionates) granting the wish of one of our Passionates life-long endeavors: to be Bébè Francois' Papa. Although Francois Dupuis did not perform his famous character in our viewing of Mystère (the girl baby did), it in no way diminished the experience – graphics guy Rich Alford was not disappointed one bit. He took to the role with glee, literally jumping out of his seat when the baby's big red ball came to him, flying up the stairs when she came to get him in the golf cart, and wearing that baby bonnet with pride.

Once again we were alerted to stay in our seats after the show. Here, like for "O", we would assemble on stage for a group photo with a handful of Mystère's wonderful cast members. Brian Le Petit's stand in, the baby girl, the Firebird (played by Ross Gibson), and one of the bungee artists had turned out to join us. But unlike "O", there was no trepidation on our parts (or theirs!) about meeting, greeting and

chatting with our new friends. They were gracious with us too, staying much later than normal to be with a bunch of crazed Cirque fans. We all piled on the Mystère stage with Alice the snail for an amazing photograph of the entire group, and then took turns for individual pictures of the cast before calling it an evening.



## Saturday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>

Although Saturday's activities would be the culmination of CirqueCon, there were still a number of exciting experiences ahead. We started at New York-New York with activities at the ZUMANITY Theater.



**ZUMANITY Activities** - We filed into our seats near the thrust of the stage, looking quizzically at the equipment set up before us. A large projection screen sat near the edge of the circular thrust, flanked on either side by two make-up chairs and a small make-shift table with a mirror adorned with lights affixed to the back. Props and costumes also filled the aisles for close-up inspection.

As it turned out, the setup was to help us understand the undercurrents present in the world of this human zoo. Kathy Merachnik (Company Manager), Tim Robinson (Asst. Co. Mgr), and Sharean McVay (Production Assistant), with the aid of artists Joey Arias and Vanessa Convery, converged and met with us while unveiling the secrets behind the stunningly outrageous costumes and make-up designs of the show. And while we watched a number of highly entertaining and very informative video projections (these folks really outdid themselves), Joey and Vanessa transformed before our eyes through the application of their sensational hair and make-up and sexy costumes.

All too soon our time with ZUMANITY came to an end. Each of us got a chance to pose with Joey and Vanessa in the theater's lobby for a quick picture or two before we bid them adieu, which was quite a treat (and a lot of fun for both parties). Fortunately the group would get another chance to meet and mingle with the cast in a mixer set up for us in the lobby of the show's plush theater after the evening show.



**KÀ and ZUMANITY** – We had at least two full rows of the front center section of KÀ reserved for CirqueCon, and after again having been seated by Nauticus we experienced the power of KÀ, including the battle scene we had watched in rehearsal days before. Then it was time to venture back over Las Vegas Boulevard for the last of our shows, ZUMANITY, a sensual performance filled with extra effort.

A personal aside – When ZUMANITY concluded, LouAnna and I gathered our belongings to leave the theatre when I heard my name called. It was Mr. Nadal! He had come over to thank us for bringing CirqueCon to Las Vegas. We, of course, thanked HIM and his staff for all their work and effort, which was done in addition to their normal workloads. After we expressed our appreciation we thought we were done and off to the lobby to mingle with ZUMANITY's performers. But no, we turn around and there is Mr. Bolingbroke! He, too, thanked us for coming. For these two executives high in the Cirque corporate order to be there, close to midnight on Saturday, just to speak to us and say thank you - it was quite the unexpected moment.

The ZUMANITY cast members outside were quite gracious, talking with Passionates (as well as other patrons) for quite some time. We later found out this was a monthly practice for all the shows dictated by Cirque's Resident Artistic Director, who wanted the artists to have regular exposure to the audience who see their shows. Whatever the reason, it was the perfect capper to an incredible weekend.

Cirque's Resident Show division went above and beyond rolling out the red carpet for us, surprising and exciting our members with remarkable, unprecedented access to their theaters, artists and staff. Without their efforts CirqueCon Las Vegas wouldn't have been the special event it was. But the most important factor in the event's success was our fellowship - the friends and family we met in Vegas. Without their belief and participation in the concept of CirqueCon, there wouldn't have been a Las Vegas adventure.

While all the special activities other than the Meet & Greet were things Cirque had done before for other groups (the ZUMANITY makeup session had in fact been previously created for a travel agents convention, where it had been scheduled after lunch so several of the attendees were nodding off in their seats), they had never before had such an appreciative and attentive audience, a comment we heard time and again during our

weekend. We later heard that their post-event analysis had drawn the conclusion that it was a lot of work for the number of people and that any future attempt would include potential attendance as a serious consideration.

Regardless, we like to think that CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas! showed the Cirque Resident Shows division the power of Cirque Passionates in numbers. Enough so that they would eventually partner with the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority to create Cirque Week. Though their schedule is spread out over more time than ours was (the better to get members money in meals, accommodations and wagering as well as in Cirque show ticket sales), it isn't that hard to see where it came from.

After the conclusion of CirqueCon Las Vegas we were elated by the event that had happened, overwhelmed by the helpfulness of Cirque du Soleil and pleasantly exhausted. We had a budget surplus so I suggested we provide a post-convention gift, something to remember the weekend by. I asked members to send any photos or video they might have of the weekend and got contributions from over 20 members.

But what to do with this bounty? I set upon compiling and sorting the pictures into a vast storehouse of imagery from CirqueCon Las Vegas. Eventually there were over 1600 photos sorted by category, telling the "story" of our weekend. But I thought we could go further; I wanted to explore creating a video of our weekend. Rich volunteered to take on the technical aspects, but when his work got too busy I took the project on. In the end we shipped out the 25-minute program and photo library to all our Vegas attendees several months later.

Now LouAnna and I felt we could rest a bit, as our next announced event would be two years later in Tokyo Japan for the show that would eventually be called ZED. But there were other plans afoot.



## **CHAPTER FOUR - "TO PARTY" WITH THE MOUSE**

*CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas* was by and large an enormous success from both a planning and an execution standpoint, and from an attendance and awesomeness factor, but after the hugely successful event we were stumped – where to next? Duplicating the success and surpassing the achievements of Las Vegas would be a monumental undertaking, to say the least, if it could even be done at all. So how could we do it? And would we do it?

These were some of the questions floating around even BEFORE the 2006 event in Las Vegas even began, and for a time became a point of fierce debate between the four of us before, during and after the event came to a close. Why? With the huge endeavor of the Las Vegas upon us and with the launch of ZED in Tokyo still two years away (having already selected that destination as the location for CirqueCon 2008), some of the compliment felt tapped out both mentally and financially (it does cost a lot to visit Vegas for a week and traveling overseas can be quite an expenditure), suggesting a “break” for 2007 suited all involved. But what if there were those of us whose budgetary concerns weren’t as sure and were going to be looking for a CirqueCon in 2007? Shouldn’t we have something to say about it?



So that set my wheels in motion – I had an idea of where we could take CirqueCon in 2007, but it was one of many. After taking some time to research our potential options for 2007 upon returning from the desert (such as re-visiting Montréal for the premiere of *Koozâ*, or traveling to Toronto for *Koozâ*’s filming), I hit upon a winning idea: Orlando.

Florida was chosen due to its designation as a world-class destination, for its world-renown theme parks (especially Walt Disney World, of which I am a huge fan), its warm weather, and because it’s the only place you could find Cirque du Soleil’s other North American resident show (at the time) outside of Las Vegas: *La Nouba*! By merging the playful atmosphere of a world-class theme park and our passions for Cirque du Soleil, what better location to hold the follow-up event than at Walt Disney World? We’d “live it up” in the sun and have a *zippity-du-soleil* time doing it! (It also didn’t hurt that I lived there, but this was not a contributing factor to choosing *La Nouba*).

Once the idea was sold to the Board (a very long, drawn out process by-the-way), I became the event’s Chairman (the one in charge) and Rich Alford my right-hand man. What we’d do to bring this event to fruition was no less than a miracle. The friction-filled procedure of getting the Orlando event approved shaved off precious weeks and months from our creation process; it left us about 7 months from initial announcement to event embarkation (by comparison, 2005 had 11 months from the closing of Vancouver to the opening of Montreal and we knew even before we left that’s where we were headed, and Las Vegas had 17 months following Montreal to come to fruition).

We were also pressured to adhere to a certain set of guidelines not present in previous creation processes. We rose to the challenge even so (but not without airing our concerns) and dove in head first, and with little time to waste!

*CirqueCon 2007: Orlando* was announced in February 2007, a mere twenty-four weeks before it was to be executed (in August 2007), and in the first month alone Rich and I had a number of exhausting questions we had to not only ask ourselves but get answers to.

A daunting task; though it might be cliché to say, many of these questions were answered very quickly, and with little-to-no internal resistance or friction between us (unlike the process for the creation of Las Vegas, which seemed to be more of a hindrance than anything else - but it got the job done). As I was the event chairman I would hold discussions with Cirque du Soleil and Disney as to Tickets, Activities and Hotel, whilst Rich, being "the graphics guy" would build the look-and-feel of our events visuals from the ground up. He wouldn't interfere with what I needed to do and I wouldn't interfere with his freedom of expression. We didn't nit-pick; we just got the job done. And what a marvelous partnership it turned out to be!

#### **SEPTEMBER OR AUGUST?**

Our first thought was to hold CirqueCon 2007 in the middle of September, roughly a year after CirqueCon 2006, which would give everyone a chance to financially recover from Las Vegas; however, after the debacle of announcing our event dates then having to move them back a month in Las Vegas (at no fault of our own), we decided on not publicizing the dates until a few more pieces were in place. That way if Cirque du Soleil changed their minds we wouldn't have to worry about getting people to change their vacations. As it turned out, though, we changed our minds - thinking further about our destination as a kid-friendly one, we came to the conclusion that if we moved up our event dates into the middle of August, those with children could bring them to CirqueCon and Disney for one last hurrah before school started. Although this meant we'd have to put up with slightly higher Florida temperatures, it seemed a good trade off. In the end it wouldn't matter. Only a couple of our members with children actually brought them anyway!

With our dates firmly set we went about next selecting our Headquarters hotel, began conversations with the La Nouba box office on how to facilitate tickets (which would bring new challenges of its own - as they would not be able to handle individual ticket sales like Las Vegas did), began conversations by email and phone with Richard Dennison, La Nouba Theater Manager, about what special activities a group of our size (then largely unknown) could partake in, and even began brainstorming on ideas of how to include the magic of Disney into our weekend (such as contemplating a Disney restaurant for our group meal and/or hosting a "dessert party" under the colorful blasts of fireworks at EPCOT).

Within a couple of days we narrowed down our headquarters hotel options, with the help of Christina Bantug, Group Sales Manager at Disney Park Events. We knew we wanted to be as close to Downtown Disney as possible, but in a nice hotel. And with my penchant for Disney, I

wanted it to be a Disney-themed hotel. At first I chose Disney's Pop Century Resort, one of Disney's basic hotels with buildings themed to specific decades of the 1900s (from the 1950's forward), located just down the street from Downtown Disney. Unfortunately there weren't enough available rooms to house us. Ms. Bantug then offered up some of their "moderate" priced resorts to us, but many of those were further than I had wanted to be, except one - Port Orleans: French Quarter. Chosen as much for its French inspired décor as for its proximity to Downtown Disney, where La Nouba is staged - it seemed like a perfect fit for us.

But although many of our traditional CirqueCon accoutrements were coming into place, and quickly, they weren't without their challenges.

As we found in Montreal and Las Vegas, we were faced with a hotel contract and its various clauses: here the Walt Disney World Resort was no different in what it wanted to offer as a group contract - we assumed full responsibility (financially) for anything and everything, from cancellations to damages, and they assumed none. Of course with a fan-run organization like our own, with limited means and no way to cover incidentals should they happen, negotiations had to occur. Here Keith, although he and LouAnna were unable to attend, pitched in and helped seal this deal. Not only did we get exactly what we needed (each member being responsible for their own charges), we also got their very strict contract reduced to terms we could all agree to.

The only thing we did have to worry about was an attrition clause, but it was low enough that if only 25% of the attendees took rooms at the resort we'd be fine. At first it looked like we wouldn't make our minimum requirements there but a last minute deadline surge pushed us over the edge - phew!

Getting tickets to La Nouba also proved to be more complicated than first thought.

#### **WALKING THE HIGH-WIRE**

With the La Nouba box office not equipped to sell a block of seats to a single group in individual increments, a challenge appeared before us. How could we facilitate the sale of tickets the way Cirque (and we) wanted? Not without some personal risk as it turned out. In order to get our ticket deal done I'd have to purchase the seating block from Cirque using my personal credit card and then "sell" those seats to our membership body, collecting the charges personally before paying Cirque du Soleil in one lump sum. Any unused or unsold seats would then be returned to Cirque ahead of time and I'd be credited. Let me tell you it was quite a site to see thousands pour onto my credit card at one time, but it was a boon to my point accrual program!

Collecting money for and paying Cirque for the seats wasn't nearly as stressful as actually getting the block set aside for us. Although Cirque was very much willing to work with us, our deadlines weren't their deadlines and many days-to-weeks passed by without knowing whether we'd be able to offer seats or not! But those stresses had nothing on the delays revolving around our CirqueCon activities offerings.

As to our other event activities, we floated around a number of ideas behind the scenes. While some of those fell through, such as an evening at Pleasure Island (not wishing to assume liabilities on promoting potential drinking of alcohol), playing mini-golf at Fantasia Gardens (how would we get there?), and facilitating the CirqueSwap (which we initially thought might be a good idea; passionates could bring Cirque swag they could then trade with other passionates, but no one took to it), others didn't: Park Hopping at Disney World and the EPCOT Dessert Party became chosen.

Park Hopping at Disney World would be left to everyone's individual tastes, but the EPCOT Dessert Party presented its own set of obstacles to overcome: First, as it was separately ticketed, admission to the park was required (and not included). And second, a minimum threshold of people had to be met or Disney would not cater to us and our dreams of hosting such a unique party for our guests would be lost. Although we had monetary support from one of our members should we not meet the minimum requirements (thanks Doug!), we overcame the limitation (but just barely) and set ourselves up for a great time under the fireworks around the World Showcase Lagoon. But we were sweating it right up until the last possible moment.

But the biggest challenge on activities was with Cirque du Soleil. What could we do? What would we do? And when would we know? Although we knew something was going to happen at some point in time (like the post-show party, which took the place of CirqueCon's traditional Meet & Greet), other activities with Cirque were still very much up in the air the evening of our arrival in Orlando and the start to our event. Believe it or not, I would not know about our early-morning activities until the night before, when I received a call from Mr. Dennison explaining to me what we'd do and when to meet at the theater! That, of course, prompted a number of phone calls from yours truly to quite a number of members on-site! But it all worked out in the end... we even got free reign of the boutique (at a slight discount) to buy whatever we wanted before it was opened to the public!

Though we had some execution challenges, we had a number of financial ones as well. Printing up all the badges, the programme book, the buttons and all the various bits and bobs created took quite a financial toll. By design most of these items should be covered by the membership fee, and by-and-large, that was true, even at our reduced \$15.00 price-point. Yet even so there were a number of items Rich and I gifted monetarily to make this event happen, such as the reservation costs for the EPCOT Dessert Party (which ran into the hundreds), the assumption of the finance fees for Cirque's ticket charge (Yeouch!), and the majority of the costs of printing the Programme Book (which we initially wanted to take digital, thus lowering our event's overall membership fee), which ran way over than we had estimated. But we had to get it done. And we did.

Regardless of the challenges, over fifty Cirque du Soleil passionates joined us at this new place to party, to live it up. And while these numbers may not sound as impressive as the 190+ folks who joined us in Las Vegas; I found the group in the attendance at our Orlando event to be a great bunch, fantastic and enthusiastic. It really was a wonderful, intimate gathering of friends! And it was a whirlwind weekend that none of us would soon forget.



## LIVING IT UP

**EPCOT Dessert Party --** On the evening of Friday, August 10<sup>th</sup>, we assembled on the banks of the World Showcase Lagoon for our first gathering of the weekend: a scrumptious Dessert Party at EPCOT, Walt Disney World's Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow. Prior to the event the CirqueCon membership was tantalized with the following possibility:

*If you're a regular Disney Park visitor, you've seen privileged groups having special VIP parties behind closed doors with delicious looking foods to eat and impeccable service from Disney cast members catering to their every whim (that is, if you live at Disney like I do). Well, how would YOU like to be a Disney VIP for an evening too?*



*Doesn't having a "group only" area at Epcot just for us, desserts and drinks to sample as we mingle with our fellow Passionates in our very own exclusive spot for Illuminations: Reflections of Earth (Epcot's night-time fireworks extravaganza) sound like great fun?*

Thirty-five Passionates thought so too and joined us for sweets and fireworks at the United Kingdom Pavilion's Lower Terrace, which not only gave us a wonderful area to get reacquainted with one another, but it also afforded us a fantastic view of the show!

Thanks to our friends at Disney Events and our Passionates that bought into this "D-Ticket" experience (that's "D" for Dessert!), waiting for us were a variety of miniature stemware glasses to include Classic Tiramisu, English Trifle, Fresh Fruit and Berries; Pastry Selections in Miniature to include: Fresh Fruit Tartlet, Vanilla Cream Filled Pastry Horns, Chocolate Éclairs, Chocolate and Pistachio Cannoli; and Beverages: Coffee, Decaffeinated Coffee, Hot Tea and Fruit Punch.

We chatted and ate as the spark of a thousand fireworks cast their brilliance over the waters of the World Showcase Lagoon, illuminating our planet's fantastic voyage for all who gathered for its earthly celebration. The food was delicious, the tables set-up nicely, and the view... my god, who can watch Illuminations from the railing anymore!

It was fabulous!

**La Nouba Theater Tour --** The following morning our fellowship gathered at the Cirque du Soleil Theater, Downtown Disney West Side, for a Question & Answer session with Richard Dennison (Theater Manager) and Robert Shuck (Production Manager). But before our festivities could begin inside the theater, Cirque opened the doors to its outside boutique a few minutes early... just for us to peruse!





Imagine over fifty Passionates storming through these castle gates with money in hand and a strong need to have as much Cirque stuff as one could possibly carry - I'm sure we frightened the cashiers at first, but, by the end of our time there they were just as excited and energized about us as we were. And boy did our Passionates spend a fortune!

Once our wallets were lightened and our arms full of souvenirs, we filed into the La Nouba Theater and into seats in the 200 section, patiently waiting to speak

with our hosts. Both Dennison and Shuck were very gracious to us, spending over three hours talking to us about the history of Cirque du Soleil, the positions they held in the company, walking us through what they did on a day-to-day basis, and enlightening us about how La Nouba operated from their logistical and operational perspective.

After answering every one of our most pressing questions (we are quite an inquisitive bunch), our assembly split into two groups - one following Mr. Dennison and the other lead by Mr. Shuck - and visited virtually every nook and cranny of the theater and its space. I don't think there was an inch of the building spared by our excursion! We visited everywhere from the Grid at the very top of the theatre to the Basement:



The Light Booth on the 6<sup>th</sup> Floor (learning all about the operations), descended down the staircase that some fans might have recognized as the stairwell that Isabeau Proulx-Lemire, La Nouba's countertenor, uses to warm up his voice prior to performances (as shown on the behind-the-scenes elements from La Nouba's DVD), wandered behind the Trellis where we pretended to be the ones locked in the asylum, walking back and forth as they do during a live performance, checked out the

Band's Nest where La Nouba's talented musicians play night after night, then rose to the highest level accessible within the theater, the Grid, where an amazing fusion of mechanical equipment and support systems

reside, and back down into the Basement where we got a first-hand glimpse of the Lifts used in the show, where the Costume department, the Make-up areas, and dressing rooms were located. We ended our tour on the Stage after running across a few props (such as the German Wheel, the Park Bench and Clown's Boxes).



It was excellent!

**Group Meal --** Due to its proximity to the Cirque du Soleil Theater, we chose the House of Blues for our gathering's Group Meal, where we met just a few short hours after the facility tour. The House of Blues completely outdid themselves by providing us not only our own dedicated section of the restaurant (where we could get as loud and psyched as we wanted), but also with a wonderful plated meal for thirty-three. No one left hungry - how could you with a three course meal?!



It was yummy!

**La Nouba Green Room Party --** Then at 9:00pm it was off to La Nouba where, once upon a time a door opened and two worlds collided, where dreams clashed with reality and the mundane mixed with the marvelous.

Our fellowship once again split up into two equal groups and took their respective seats in either section 103 (front and center) or section 204 (upper center) for the show. And it was one of the best showings of La Nouba ever! We were in a perfect position to generate some energy - occupying all of Row A and most of C in section 103, and the first three rows of section 204 - and boy did we! We blew the top off that bigtop and within 10 minutes the artists abandoned their





normal run-of-the-mill routine and really juiced it up! It was spot on - no one missed their mark - including the trapeze artists, which generally have troubles connecting (not necessarily their fault). Oh, it was so exhilarating! And one of our fellow members was picked for the Bike Jump routine - Dan Taft - and it was his first time to La Nouba. What an introduction to the show!



Mr. Dennison joined us down in section 103 at the end of the show, taking a seat on the front of the stage, chatting with us and saying how wonderful a show it was tonight. There he advised us all to stay in our seats as he had a few more surprises. But one of his ushers had a surprise in store for him and tried to remove him instead! What a hoot! As soon as the usher saw his badge he backed off quickly and we all had a good laugh. Once the theater cleared out and the crew swept up the set, we all came

together on stage for a group photo with some of the cast and crew! Note the Four Les Cons, the German Wheel Duo (Bruce and Stacey Bilodeau), the Green Bird (Natasha Hallett), Le Titan (Krystian Sawicki), Red Acrobat and the Stroller (Carlos Márcio Moreira).

And if you hadn't quite had enough by that point, after the show we assembled out back in the La Nouba Green Room and patio for a little party with the cast and crew!

Mr. Dennison and company arranged a "chips and drinks" style bash, serving soft drinks, beer, wine, chips, pretzels, and other munchies that was beyond our wildest dreams. Over the next hour or two, many of the show's cast and crew stopped by to mingle, chat, pose for pictures, get rambunctious and generally see what we were all about. It was perfect! And the more inebriated we all became, the wilder it got. Not only were we having programme books and other collectibles signed, it came to the point where certain body parts came under the black sharpie! (Clothing was optional). The party was so much fun, no one on either side wanted to leave!





Some of the cast and crew living it up with us were: Sisaundra Lewis-Reid (Singer), Michele Deschamps (Clown), Sandro Ojeda (Flying Trapeze), Miguel Vargas (Flying Trapeze), Stephane Bayol (Les Con), Antonieta Cuellar (Silks), Rob Dawson (Trapeze), Marcos De Jesus (Cycles), Rokardy (Chairs), Carlos Moreira (The Walker), Justin Osbourne (Les Con), Daniela Rabello (Silks), Karina Silva (Silks), Krissy Van Fleet (Power Track), Benoit Glazer (Conductor), Kristina Ivanova (Power Track), Sarah Touchette (Cleaning Lady), Krystian Sawicki (Le Titan), and Ana Cuellar (Silks) amongst others!



It was the best night ever!

During our conversations with some of the cast, we learned one amazing fact: our excitement was so high, our energy so powerful, and our applause so loud that many of them broke out in gooseflesh. They looked at each other and said "What the hell is going on..." as the cast waited to get on stage from below.

Now that's the power of passionate fans.

## CHAPTER FIVE - SPREADING OUR WINGS

LouAnna and I regretted not attending CirqueCon Orlando, especially when we later heard of the special treatment our members had gotten. It just didn't work out well financially for us, especially considering that we were gearing up for our first overseas CirqueCon – in Tokyo Japan!

We had travelled across international borders before, so some issues were well known to us. But now we were going offshore thousands of miles, where the language is not English. But it had been a place we had wanted to visit for a long time, especially because we are also Disney fans and Tokyo Disney Resort is felt by some fans to be the best Disney resort in the world. And here was Cirque du Soleil, through CirqueCon, providing the impetus!

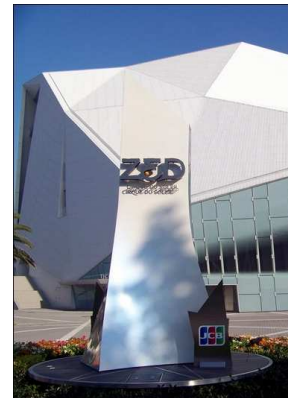
It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity we couldn't pass up.



We established contact with Cirque early, but couldn't really be on their radar screens until much closer to premiere date. Meantime we had other challenges. Our first was finding an "official" hotel. Tokyo Disney Resort is situated far outside of Tokyo proper, though well covered by their extensive rail system. This meant, as in Orlando, we had to rely on "resort" hotels for the convenience of our members rather than a facility closer to downtown Tokyo. Naturally, the two parks are bordered by a string of upscale resorts

including Disney-owned properties as well as representatives of various chains. But which one to choose?

We quickly learned that finding a hotel that Americans (who would make up the bulk of our membership) would be comfortable in would be an expensive proposition. Through Uli Altrichter, a fellow Passionate who worked for Hilton we were put in touch with the Hilton Tokyo Bay, one of the larger of the resort hotels. They were surprisingly easy to work with and very accommodating. But their prices were way more than we were used to - \$200.00 USD for weekdays and \$400.00 USD for Friday and Saturday nights – OUCH! And that was at a



discount. But all things taken into consideration it was our best option.

Japan has some wonderful cuisine and it made sense to try to find a restaurant for our Group Meal that would feature Japanese delicacies. This proved not as easy as we hoped, however. The shopping complex at the Tokyo Disney Resort, Ikspiari, was the only location for eateries in the area outside of restaurants in the various hotels or parks themselves which were prohibitively expensive. But it was difficult to find anyone that could work with us, primarily because of the language and understanding barrier. We contacted several but couldn't communicate our needs.



In an interesting turn, USA restaurant chain Rainforest Café had a franchise in Ikspiari. A call to their US headquarters put us in touch with someone who could help liaison between us and the restaurant in Tokyo. It took some negotiations and clarification, but we finally came to an agreement that suited all, even though part of the compromise was that it would be mostly American food. In the end more than 80% of our members attended the Group Meal, the highest percentage of all our events except Vancouver.



We tried as much as possible to let Japanese Cirque fans know of our event. Steve Long, an east-coast American had lived and performed in Japan for several years so knew the language and customs fluently. He was instrumental in our efforts to add a Japanese flair to our efforts. He graciously offered to help us become known to Japanese Cirque fandom, who had their own Internet-based Cirque forums. Even with his help we only ended up with five Japanese

attending CirqueCon weekend. But they were some of the nicest and kindest people one could hope to meet. We spent one evening of our trip feted to dinner in one fan's apartment on the outskirts of Tokyo. It was such a fascinating exposure to their culture and one we won't ever forget.

As we got closer to our weekend, Cirque put us in the capable hands of Kyoko Hasegawa, the Assistant Company Manager for ZED. She liaised our ticket purchase with the Japanese ticket agency, which had some quirks and wasn't set up to easily handle overseas ticket sales. She arranged an afternoon Q&A session during the day before our "official" performance, where we watched a rehearsal of the trapeze act while





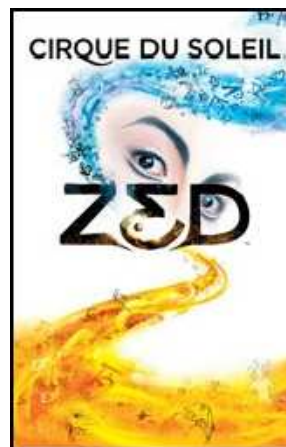
questions were answered by members of the crew. And she helped us with various questions we had about Tokyo Disneyland and Tokyo in general. She was truly a gem.



We decided to host the Meet & Greet out of our room. Big mistake! As members arrived and filled our small room, the volume kept increasing and increasing. We even had hotel staff visit us to (kindly) ask us to quiet down. Hosting a room party was certainly not something done at this hotel. We later negotiated to use a small corner of their coffee lounge for our Sunday Kaffeeklatsch, so we didn't make the same mistake again.



ZED was a marvelous, wondrous show, which makes it all the more sad that it will be closed at the end of 2011, likely never to be seen again. At the end of the evening we were beckoned to the stage for a group picture with some of the cast, including the character of ZED, the singers and several other artists. As I came onstage I noticed one of them was Yves Decoste of the Hand-to-Hand act, clad in his Cirque bathrobe. I approached to shake his hand and tell him of our admiration for his specialty, but he wanted to know about US – who we were, where we came from, how this all came together. But there wasn't time to explain as we were then called to face front for the picture, after which Mr. Decoste was swept away in a different wave of fan appreciation.



We didn't get as many members as we had for our other events, but we expected that. Anyone coming from the United States would have to budget quite a bit just for airfare and a lot of extra time just to get to Japan. But several took it as a jumping off point, using CirqueCon Tokyo to venture off to ZAIA in Macau and other places in the Far East as part of their own "trips of a lifetime." And many spent lots of time in the two Disney parks, taking in the incredible



level of detail and advanced ride technology.

LouAnna and I spent a full two weeks in Tokyo, creating many lasting memories of our own. It was a breathtaking time, spent not only with fellow Passionates but also amongst the hospitality of the Japanese people. If all had decided it would be the last CirqueCon, it wouldn't have been a bad ending. But there was more in store.



Live Passionately!  
情熱で生きる!

## CHAPTER SIX - VIVE APASIONADAMENTE

Once you reach your destination and the curtain falls on an event you've worked hard all year to create, the inevitable question arises: what's next?

During the concept phase of CirqueCon Tokyo we thought perhaps after doing five straight events a break for rest and recuperation was in order, which would in turn give us the answer to that all important question: we'd do nothing. The very last page in our CirqueCon Tokyo programme book did mention our next confirmed event would be CirqueCon 2010: Hollywood, so we really didn't have a plan for 2009. But if there's anything I have learned in traveling overseas, publishing Fascination or producing and attending conventions it's this: expect the unexpected. Don't say you're not, then turnaround and do (or vice-versa). Not only is that bad show, it's also dishonest and tarnishes your credibility as an organization. It's a concept I attempted to get across during the changeover from 2006 to 2007 (we announced Tokyo but said nothing, nor had plans for 2007), and unfortunately it was a process to be repeated after 2008's event came to a close. Although at the time 2008 concluded I had no idea I would be spearheading another event, I felt the possibility had to be left open for one, and not all of us wanted that possibility left open (or understood that we should leave that door open... just in case, you know?)



As you can imagine debates ensued and, crazily enough, over generally the same thing as before: why should we do it and personal budgetary constraints (which would keep some of us from attending). But when CirqueCon 2010: Hollywood became CirqueCon 2011: Hollywood (due to a delay with the show), and we received a passionate plea from our friend and Mexican fan extraordinaire Rodolfo Elizondo about taking CirqueCon to Mexico for Dralion's big-top farewell (at the time it was not known whether it would be converted to Arena format, like Saltimbanco was), Rich and I couldn't pass up his enthusiasm and thus CirqueCon 2009: Monterrey was born.

It also didn't hurt that I had just spent a fantastic weekend in Monterrey attending Quidam with Rodolfo the year before; knowing full well how enjoyable and culturally entertaining Monterrey was, believing in CirqueCon Monterrey wasn't difficult. It would be a lot of fun! And much of the work was already be done - I knew a great place to stay (because I had stayed there!), we both knew a great place to have our Group Meal (because we had eaten there!), and we knew of fantastic cultural activities in which to participate (because we did them!)

During the creative process all three of us ("The Three 'R'-migos": Me, Rich and Rodolfo) quickly and easily took on those tasks for which we were well suited: as Rich was a graphics guy, he'd handle all our



And we even squared away our Meet & Greet concept by renting out boats along the San Paseo Santa Lucia, an artificial water canal that connects Parque Fundidora 2.5-kilometers to the east with Museo de Historia/Plaza 400 (Museum of Mexican History) at the Macroplaza, for us to sail down one evening.

But even with our event activities falling into place quickly, one item was not... Cirque du Soleil.

Initially we weren't sure with whom at Cirque du Soleil we should speak, as we hadn't had dealings with the touring side of Cirque in three years and most of the people we knew had moved on. Once we did finally find the right person with whom to speak (or, rather, willing to speak with us and deal with our unique situations), it was all we could do to actually stay in communication with them. They took "dropping off the grid" to a whole new level!

Would we be able to announce any activities with the Dralion cast and crew at all? Yes, at the very last minute. Unfortunately it caused some headaches for some in regards to late flights: Cirque wanted us Thursday afternoon, a little earlier than we had anticipated!

And just when we thought it was safe to relax... a fiasco with OCESA cropped up seemingly overnight without warning.

Due to the unique situation in which Cirque du Soleil is brought to Mexico, much like it is when Cirque is brought to Japan, the company that sponsors the tour actually assumes business control over the troupe, leaving Cirque du Soleil artistic control only. In a sense the company purchases the tour and controls not only the tour plan, but seating, ticketing, and concessions. In Mexico, that company is OCESA and they are notorious for being erratic, unresponsive, and totally lacking in customer service. And with them handing ticket sales for all of Dralion (not to mention CirqueCon), we assumed headaches would ensue... and they did. Not only could we not facilitate ticket sales for the group, OCESA wouldn't even hold a block of seats for us, so it was everyone for themselves, but once ticket sales did kick-off, the old adage of "if it's not one thing it's another" reared its head: OCESA claimed that everyone had to pick up their advanced tickets in person not at the box office on site but at the Ticketmaster office in the city a few days before the performance.

¿Que?

It caused a mad-dash scramble to collect information from our membership body so Rodolfo could swing by Ticketmaster's office on our behalves and pick up the tickets - if they'd even let him. And although our members took this all in stride, thankfully the power of Cirque and CirqueCon - and the persistence of Rodolfo's connections at Ticketmaster - got OCESA to reconsider and will-call on-site was made available...

The hardest roadblock, which badly bruised us, was the loss of our friend and graphics guy, Rich. Through no fault of his, he had to withdraw from attending early on due to obligations at his place of work (which he was really bummed about because he really looked forward to visiting Monterrey with us), and initially we'd only have to miss



him on-site; he'd still be with us producing our graphics. But as time marched on and deadlines loomed over us, then he too started to disappear for longer and longer stretches without so much as a peep. When we finally heard from him we understood - other obligations took precedent. Did his inability to communicate to us, to me, make me angry? Sure! But once I did hear from him and we talked about it I understood his obligations - he was so bogged down at work he just didn't have time for us. That happens. We moved on.

With Rich unable to produce our visuals for us, neither Rodolfo nor I graphically inclined, and with just a few short weeks left until showtime, we also wondered if we'd be without badges, posters, and gift buttons too!

A nightmare scenario to be sure!

Thankfully Rodolfo knew someone who could step in, and what he'd create for us would absolutely save the day.

Francisco Fernandez, a friend of Rodolfo's, came into the fold quickly, producing logo buttons, post cards featuring Dralion characters in and around Monterrey landmarks, designed a T-shirt concept (that was one of the best we've had yet, in my opinion), developed an event activity ticket concept covering all the activities we'd be pursuing that week (much like the "D" ticket used at Orlando's event) and created a plethora of event logo designs from which to choose. The flood gates had opened and not a moment too soon! With his help we were not only able to get our badges done, but also a number of deliverables we would not otherwise have. His hard work and dedication at crunch time absolutely pulled this event from the brink of disaster.

It's unbelievable but everything came together in the end. Phew! Too bad the weather didn't always cooperate but there's nothing you can do about that!

Monterrey (pronounced with a heavy 'rrrrrr') is a very modern Mexican city situated in the northeastern state of Nuevo León, approximately 150 miles south of the United States border near Texas. Throughout the weekend we experienced only a little of what Monterrey, and really all of Mexico, had to offer by visiting its museums, conversing with its people, and shopping on its streets. But what an amazingly fun weekend we had! A fantastic number of 70 plus "Passionates" joined us this year, the first time we had taken our event south of the border, and what an amazing mix of people we had. Breaking it down numerically, 30% hailed from the United States with the remaining 70% coming to us from within Mexico. Of those, 45% were from the host city (Monterrey). An amazing blend of peoples and cultures that truly lived the CirqueCon motto: Vive Apasionadamente - Live Passionately!



## Thursday, September 24th ///

Within moments of landing, I found Rodolfo and we were on our way to the Holiday Inn Parque Fundidora, our headquarters hotel. We were in a bit of a rush too because within the hour Rodolfo and I were due at the tables set up in the hotel's lobby for our event's opening registration time. We made it! Dozens of Passionates from within Mexico dropped by to pick up their programme packet, Event tickets, their badges, and other CirqueCon branded goodies (such as the T-Shirt, post-cards, and more!) Some just dropped by to say "Hola", including the real Patch Adams (who was also staying at the hotel), but that's a horse of a different color.



Late in the afternoon we kicked off our celebration at Dralion's white Grand Chapiteau with a unique chance to see artists training on an act added since the show was last in country - the Trampo Wall. While we waited at the gates, Ana Cuellar, La Nouba silk artist, met us there for an impromptu chat. As a native resident of Monterrey, she spoke to us about Monterrey's art scene, her travels within Mexico and about her life here before Cirque. Ana also shared with us her trials and tribulations performing night after night after night - including the

development of her own silk act - at La Nouba, Cirque du Soleil at Downtown Disney's West Side.

Before long we took our seats inside the Grand Chapiteau to watch an amazing training session featuring Double Trapeze and Trampoline. One of Ana's friends (and Cirque alum) was there training for the TrampoWall routine; picking up his role rather quickly I might add. And why not, he's a trampoline artist from La Nouba!

After receiving a grand ovation from us for sticking a tramp-jump hand stand, he left the stage. The boys and girls of the Double Trapeze routine took to the rafters off and on throughout our time, warming up for their performance.



After training concluded, Bruce Mather, Artistic Director for Dralion, and a couple of trampoline artists (Dustin Hill, Alejandro Cuenca, Oskana Pochynok, and Ulf Hampus Jansson) joined us for a question and answer session. And although shy at first - our Passionate fans' eyes were just round with admiration for them - they began answering question upon question. What is it like to tour with Cirque? What is your favorite show? What about Dralion do you like? How do you like Mexico fans? What will you do after Dralion closes?



"Uhhh..." What?

Shh, they didn't know! In all we spent a good solid two hours with our friends at Cirque du Soleil but our time with Dralion that afternoon was drawing to a close. Before they let us out of the Grand Chapiteau for the day, however, Bruce had one final announcement for us - we were to join them again Saturday evening between shows for a back-stage group photograph with a few of the artists in costume! WOW!



With the sun now setting beautifully in the sky, it was time to make our way back across the park for our evening stroll around Parque Fundidora's famous Blast Furnace (Horno 3) area and our cruise down the Paseo Santa Lucía to the Macroplaza, our cultural answer to CirqueCon's traditional Meet & Greet activity.

Fantastico!



## Friday, September 25th ///

The morning got off to quite an early start. I was due down at the open registration tables bright and early - 8:00am - before we embarked on our twelve-hour tour of Monterrey city and its environs, a unique and customized tour in Monterrey created by Rodolfo exclusively for the members of CirqueCon Monterrey, visiting museums, shopping plazas, natural places and more! Although there were a few last-minute bumps in our plan (the weather did not cooperate - it started to rain - and our bus was a few minutes late), we took it all in stride and had a smashing day out and about. Highlights included...



Puente de la Unidad -- A cable-style bridge that crosses the mostly dry Santa Catarina River. It is one of Monterrey's highest and most artistically designed bridges.

Grutas de García (Garcia Caves) - - 60 million year old caverns beautifully lining the inside of El Fraile, one of Monterrey's famous mountains, awaited us some 30 kilometers outside of the city's limits. Featuring a rocky-desert with a number of impressive rock formations and chambers, the caves were a

uniquely cool (pun intended) place to visit.

The Cañon de la Huasteca -- One of Monterrey's most famous natural wonders featuring beautiful 300 meter cliffs surrounded by woodlands and jagged peaks is La Huasteca, a stunningly beautiful mountain range.

The Macroplaza -- A 400,000 square meter court consisting of various museums, monuments, gardens, fountains and various other green-space accoutrements. It's anchored by the Palacio Municipal (Municipal palace) on the south end at Constitución Avenue and the Antigua Palacio Federal (Antique Federal Palace) on the north end at Cinco-de-Mayo Avenue.





Monterrey's museums are also located nearby, such as MUNE (or Museum of the North East, showcasing the history of this part of Mexico) and the Museo de Historia Mexicana, or Museum of Mexican History. The Museo de Historia Mexicana is a diamond in the ruff. This place is a treasure trove of exploration, art and enlightenment for those interested in the history of Mexico. At this museum you'll find temporary and permanent exhibits divided into five areas which represent important periods in Mexican history: The initial creation of these lands ("Earth"), the Aztec and Mayan civilizations ("Ancient Mexico"), the Spanish conquistadores and the arrival of the Europeans ("The Viceroy Period"), the Spanish/American wars ("19th Century") and modern democratic Mexico ("Modern Mexico").



Whew, that's a lot of walking about isn't it -- who said Margaritas!?



By the conclusion of our tour at the MacroPlaza and the nearby museums we were all bushed, but our day was not yet over. After just a couple of hours to rest, relax and recharge, for some of us it was back on the bus for Bohemia Night, CirqueCon's night on the town!

While we rocked the night away at Nueva Luna to the band's repertoire of rock, pop, salsa and traditional north Mexican beats, the staff of Nueva Luna kept us filled with steak and chicken fajitas, tortillas,

and various accoutrements. And once the alcohol started flowing there was no stopping us! Bus transportation to and from the Holiday Inn Parque Fundidora to Nueva Luna Restaurant was included.

I chose to leave a little early myself but, oh man did I have a blast!

## **Saturday, September 26th ///**

With the previous night's late return coupled with today's early arrival, you'd think many of us would be dragging - but you'd be wrong! We were up and ready for our exploration of Horno 3 at Parque Fundidora.

We then assembled in the lobby of our headquarters hotel for yet another trip on the bus. This time we were off to Hacienda San Angel for our group meal! And after that, we were off to Mirador del Obispado (Bishop's Lookout), which is located atop Cerro del Obispado, the hill of the same name for yet another fantastic view of the city.



Later, we assembled outside the gates of the Grand Chapiteau for our amazing opportunity to take a group photograph with some of the artists backstage, and then re-assemble at the cast gates out back to give the artists a grand CirqueCon send-off!

Who were those guys with the yellow bandanas?



\* \* \*

If you didn't come to CirqueCon 2009: Monterrey you really missed something special. We had lots of fun with much laughter and kinship, and by the end we all came away with a newfound appreciation for Mexico and its history and culture. Not to mention a renewed sense of wonder of Cirque du Soleil's Dralion! But the journey didn't stop there... there were two very exciting adventures coming in 2010 and 2011 that would take CirqueCon Coast-to-Coast!



## CHAPTER SEVEN - THREE SHOWS. TWO CITIES. ONE EVENT.



While it had only been a few short months since we'd wrapped up our very successful multi-cultural event in Monterrey, Mexico, before long we were ready to jump back into the fray and announce our next exciting CirqueCon adventure - to New York City!

The thought of taking CirqueCon to New York City wasn't a new one. It had been an idea we floated in the past, when brainstorming on places to take Passionates after Las Vegas then later Orlando, because what's more exciting than "Sin City" and Walt Disney World? How about "The City That Never Sleeps"? But with our 2007 event just concluding and our 20089 event already scheduled for Tokyo, it seemed New York City would be off the table for a while (Wintuk, Cirque du Soleil's seasonal winter show, would have to be visited by a mini-con concept created by Rich Alford and I: "Celebri", but that's a different story). The possibility came round for the City in 2009; however, Rodolfo appeared and took us south of the border instead (the most fun I've had at a CirqueCon event ever, by the way), and it was during our time in Monterrey that New York City came to the forefront.



Rumors of another new resident show, something Cirque du Soleil referred to as "a new twist on vaudeville", had been circulating for a while, and in late 2009, BANANA SHPEEL made its rocky debut in Chicago theaters. Although poorly received there, it would be tweaked and land at the Beacon Theater in early 2010 for its run on Broadway, presenting, I thought, the perfect opportunity to finally take CirqueCon to New York City. And with Cirque Hollywood 2010 (which later became known as "IRIS") delayed until Mid-2011, doing BANANA SHPEEL in 2010 seemed like a no-brainer. Even more so when Cirque du Soleil's OVO, the company's 2009 touring production, planned to set up stakes in the city too. And when the rumors of yet another new touring production to premiere in

Montréal for April 2010 came true (TOTEM), we had a Cirque show trifecta, and that we couldn't pass up!

Therefore we offered up three shows, two cities, in one event.



There'd be more to our 2010 event than just exploring "The Big Apple"; for the first time we would expand our traditional weekend to encompass two separate locations spanning a distance of over five-hundred kilometers: one, a new and exciting metropolis for Passionates to explore, a city that never sleeps; the other, a cobblestone-lined historical village, with the familiarity of a heartwarming homecoming. To accommodate both cities we added two extra fun-filled days to our schedule!

Now all we had to do was figure out how to tackle it.

But getting the event from idea to execution turned out to be a bumpy road to travel. And I have to admit I was tiring of traveling down this road. It wasn't all bad, however. Despite the internal strife and feelings of disenfranchisement on my part, we set aside the differences once compromises were reached and put our noses down to get things done.



First thing to consider: where to stay?

Although we knew perfectly well where we wanted to stay in Montréal - the SpringHill Suites by Marriott (our Headquarters hotel for CirqueCon 2005, just a stone's throw from the Grand Chapiteau on Jacques Cartier pier), we didn't quite have that knowledge for New York City. This would be Keith and LouAnna's first visit to Manhattan and although it would not be mine, my choice in accommodations when visiting are less exciting than what CirqueCon was used to. Therefore, Keith took to the challenge and found "On the Ave" on the Upper West Side, closest to the Beacon Theater where BANANA SHPEEL was playing.

Second thing: where to eat?

As the Group Meal is one of the hallmarks of CirqueCon, finding the right place where a large group can sit and have a meal together is usually very challenging: either it's the venue size, lack of menu options or price that generally puts the kybosh on a particular restaurant. Finding a Group Meal location in Montréal was quick and easy - we selected our old friend "Restaurant du Vieux Port", the exact same restaurant where we held our Group Meal for CirqueCon 2005! Finding a place in New York City (although there are many, many restaurants in which to choose) would prove more troublesome - not many in the area of the Beacon had room for a group our size (and didn't cost us, or our members, an arm and a leg - feet are optional). In the end we found the right place: the Amsterdam Ale House. Billed as a charming neighborhood restaurant on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. And at 76<sup>th</sup> Street and Amseterdam Avenue, it was just a couple of blocks from ON THE AVE, our Headquarters Hotel, and the Beacon Theater.

And finally: CirqueCon Activities?



As Meet & Greet Coordinator, LouAnna had both concepts for New York City and Montréal under control (including the Kafeeklatch) and even suggested doing Tea in Montréal for a very select few (registration spots were very limited!). Meanwhile I was embroiled in discussions with Cirque du Soleil on activities the members of our group could enjoy and in figuring out how we could capitalize on being in New York City – could we see a show on Broadway together? Could we do a bus tour of Manhattan? Could we do a picnic out at Randal's Island before OVO started? A number of discussions about those and other possibilities were had, but with the oft-delayed BANANA SHPEEL causing points of stress for us, many of them had to be abandoned. As for BANANA SHPEEL: its delay caused preview performances to be pushed back to late April! Fortunately, and thanks to Cirque, they worked to premiere on April 29<sup>th</sup>, the date of our official group show!



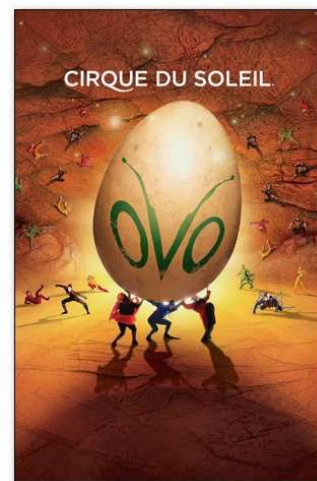
But that doesn't mean more concepts didn't come to fruition, such as a separate meal at Dallas BBQ followed by a "Magic Bus" concept from the restaurant to Randall's Island for OVO (offered by friend and member Rich Alford), or special activities at Disney's The Lion King on Broadway (we just couldn't get on the same page as Disney Theatricals), or getting invited to a special "One Drop" party for TOTEM's premiere in

Montréal (though a select few could purchase tickets at quite high donation price points!)

Bridging oceans and transcending borders while taking in three Cirque du Soleil productions (two of which were brand new at the time) was an exciting step for me and an interesting change-up for CirqueCon. So what did we do?

## MANHATTAN & OVO ///

Although we officially kicked off our New York City excursion early in the morning on Wednesday, holding our Meet & Greet, within a specially designated lobby space at ON THE AVE, the event itself got started the night before with CirqueCon 2010's official "Broadway Night" celebration. Although we'd come to New York City for spectacles by Cirque du Soleil, who said we couldn't take in a musical on Broadway too? Therefore we designated Tuesday night to be our night on the Great White Way and invited all to see and do whatever interested them; the night was theirs! Some of the CirqueCon staff and membership saw Disney's THE LION KING at Minskoff Theater near Times Square, an amazing showcase of the great circle of life.



Back at ON THE AVE the next morning, we handed out our Convention Packet, fulfilled our official T-Shirt orders and even had posters for Passionates to make their mark upon. It was a nice get-together on our first morning together, filled with friends, fun, food and festivities!

With our group viewing of OVO scheduled for later in the evening (at 7:00pm), the rest of the day was open to all Passionates, and we let them loose upon Manhattan accordingly. Later we'd assemble back at ON THE AVE to make the trek over to Randall's Island.



Special event busses were scheduled to leave for Randall's Island from Lexington Avenue, easily accessible via the Lexington Avenue 4/5/6 Subway and from the Metro North 125<sup>th</sup> Street Station. With busses running from at least 70 minutes before show time to 30 minutes following the performance, getting to and from the venue should have been a breeze. For the majority of our Passionates this was the case - Keith and Lucy led a contingent from the Hotel to the subway station where they all caught the busses at the same time; for Rich,

Passionate Josh McCall and I, because of our location at that time day, we were forced to choose a different route. And though we too tried the busses at Lexington and East 125<sup>th</sup> street, none of the appropriately labeled ones ever made stops near us, so we did the next best thing - hailed a cab! And strangely enough, we made it to Randall's Island only a few moments before the busses carrying our brethren - whodathunk?

By then we were all primed for the show. And we enjoyed it!

Immediately following the performance Cirque du Soleil invited us to stay in our seats to meet a few of the creepy crawlies of OVO and get a chance to ask some of the cast and crew a few of our most burning and pressing questions. We were joined at the thrust of the stage by Lee John Brearley (Creaturea Manipulation artist), Michelle Matlock (who plays the "ladybug" character), and the Company Publicist.

It was a fantastic ending to a great day!

## **BANANA SHPEEL & TOTEM ///**

We all re-assembled at ON THE AVE around 2:30pm the next day for the open registration period. ON THE AVE was chosen as our headquarters hotel because of its proximity to the Beacon Theater - it was just 300 yards south! Our experience was billed as being an invite from Mr. Schmelkey, of Schmelkey Productions, inviting the entire CirqueCon Group to come to his theater and witness last-minute rehearsals for his show BANANA SHPEEL before that night's performance. In doing so we'd also get a chance to speak with a member of the creative team. Mr. Serge Roy, Director of Creation for the show?!



WOW!

He was as excited to speak about his new show as we were to sit and listen, but unfortunately we had to bid Monsieur Roy adieu an hour later - it was time for our Group Meal at Amsterdam Ale House. Just a couple of blocks from ON THE AVE, our Headquarters Hotel and from the Beacon Theater where we later assembled for BANANA SHPEEL following dinner; it was a great location! And the food was good too...

At 8:00pm we settled in our seats for Cirque du Soleil's new twist on Vaudeville, BANANA SHPEEL.

Banana Shpeel turned out to be a roller-coaster mix of styles that blended comedy with tap, hip hop, eccentric dance and slapstick, all linked by a hilarious narrative that ignited a succession of wacky adventures. It wasn't circus, or a musical or a variety show, or even vaudeville. It was Banana Shpeel, and it wasn't half bad!



Our CirqueCon adventure continued in Montréal, where he held another Meet & Greet, Group Meal, and Group Show. Much like for our CirqueCon 2005 event, we hosted our Montréal meet-and-greet from our hotel rooms at the Headquarters Hotel - Springhill Suites Vieux Port! And Passionates who joined us in Montréal for CirqueCon 2005 may remember the Restaurant du Vieux Port, a wonderful historical restaurant situated in the heart of the Old Port of Montréal and just a few moments walk to/from the Grand Chapiteau perched on the Quays at the waterfront. We loved them so much we went back! And, of course, we saw Totem... getting a behind-the-scenes tour of the site in the process!



And we still have yet one more adventure to take... CirqueCon 2011: Hollywood!

*"Lights, Camera, Cirque!"*



# CirqueCon

“The Unofficial Gatherings of Cirque du Soleil Passionates”

## Our History and Previous Events

It must be noted here that most of the activities noted below would not have been possible without the tireless assistance of many Cirquesters who devoted so much time and energy to “lifting the tent flap” so that we have been able to peek underneath. The success of our Events and the feeling they generate is largely due to their efforts.

### CirqueCon 2004: Vancouver

- **Where** -- Vancouver, BC, Canada
- **When** -- May 21, 2004 - May 23, 2004
- **Why** -- Cirque du Soleil's "*Quidam*"
- **# of Members** – 31
  - 12 women (39%)
  - 19 men (62%)
  - 10 couples accounting for 25 people total
  - British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, California, Louisiana, Georgia, Virginia, Florida and Mexico
- **Official Show** -- 8:00pm, May 22, 2004 (approx. \$75.00)
  - 31 tickets sold
- **Hotel** -- Douglas House & Cambie Lodge B&Bs (\$100.00/night)
  - 11 rooms rented
  - 4 rooms rented at other places
  - Total of 15 total hotel rooms, 33 room nights
- **Group Meal** -- Spaghetti Factory, Gastown (approx.. \$20.00)
  - 30+ people attending



#### Friday, May 21:

- 5:00pm-6:00pm - Douglas House B&B, Kitchen area  
“WELCOME TO CIRQUECON ‘COCKTAIL HOUR’”

#### Saturday, May 22:

- 11:00am-1:00pm – Several members involved in a “**Marketing Discussion**” at a downtown hotel with André Belanger and Genevieve Bastien of Cirque du Soleil, Montréal (discussion of potential product categories for CDS-branded items).
- 1:30pm-approx. 3:30pm - Cirque du Soleil Quidam Backstage Entrance  
“**A SPECIAL WELCOME FROM CIRQUE DU SOLEIL**”  
Site and backstage tour, with free access to Tapis Rouge experience.
- 4:00-6:00pm - The Old Spaghetti Factory  
“**CIRQUECON VANCOUVER GROUP DINNER**” (separate ticket)
- 7:00pm-11:00pm - Cirque du Soleil Quidam Entrance  
“**CIRQUE DU SOLEIL’S QUIDAM**” (separate ticket)
- 10:30pm-11:00pm – Cirque du Soleil Quidam tent  
“**SPECIAL Q&A/AUTOGRAPH/PHOTO SESSION**”  
Nine artists from the show answered questions, gave autographs and took pictures.

### CirqueCon 2005: Montréal





- **Where** -- Montréal, Québec, Canada
- **When** -- April 22, 2005 - April 24, 2005
- **Why** -- Premiere of "*Corteo*"
- **Total Attendees** -- 110
  - 50 women (45%)
  - 60 men (65%)
  - 35 couples/households accounting for 87 people total
  - Members from more than half the United States, all Canadian provinces that touch the US except Manitoba, three locations in Mexico, Australia and Germany
- **# of Members** -- 91 (total members and their households)
  - 60 memberships sold
- **Official Show** -- 8:00pm, April 23, 2005 (Initially \$60.88, eventually \$76.00)
  - 66 tickets purchased through us
  - 43 tickets purchased elsewhere
  - Total of 109 tickets purchased
- **Hotel** -- Marriott SpringHill Suites Vieux-Montréal (\$132.00/night)
  - 42 rooms rented
  - 144 room nights total
- **Group Meal** -- Restaurant du Vieux Port (\$30.00)
  - 61 tickets purchased
- **T-shirts** -- \$???.00

#### Friday, April 22

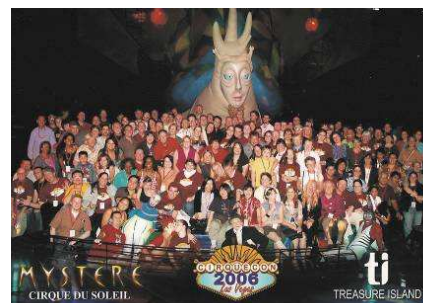
- 3:00pm-5:00pm - TOHU – La Cité Des Arts du Cirque  
"TOHU TOUR"
- 6:00pm-7:30pm - Marriott SpringHill Suites Vieux-Montréal, Rooms 524/525  
"WELCOME TO CIRQUECON 2005: MONTRÉAL – MEET AND GREET"
- 8:30pm-10:00pm - La Basilique Notre-Dame de Montréal  
"AND THEN THERE WAS LIGHT" (Field Trip – separate ticket)

#### Saturday, April 23

- 11:45am-approx. 4:00pm - Cirque du Soleil International Headquarters  
"CIRQUE DU SOLEIL INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS TOUR"  
Including an opportunity to shop in their Boutique at a 15% discount.  
Tour included speakers:
  - Bernard Petiot, Vice President, Artistic Products
  - Michel Leblanc, Chief of Rigging Equipment
  - Patrick Gélinas, Corporate Alliances Supervisor (spoke about The Bar at the Edge of the Earth)
  - Alfredo Hernandez, Senior Cruise & Vacation Consultant, Destination Cruise Center and Paul Wiggin, Sales Account Manager, Celebrity Cruises flew up from Miami, FL to give a special presentation about The Bar at the Edge of the Earth
- 5:00pm-7:00pm - Restaurant du Vieux Port  
"CIRQUECON MONTRÉAL 2005 GROUP MEAL" (separate ticket)
- 7:00pm-10:30pm - Jacques Cartier Pier  
"CIRQUE DU SOLEIL'S CORTEO" (separate ticket)
- AFTER THE SHOW - Restaurant du Vieux Port  
"TIME FOR DESSERT" (separate ticket)

### CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas!

- **Where** -- Las Vegas, Nevada, United States
- **When** -- September 21 - 24, 2006
- **Why** -- View all five Las Vegas Resident CDS shows
- **Total Attendees** -- 190
  - 105 women (55%)
  - 85 men (45%)



- 65 couples/households accounting for 155 people total
  - Members came from 26 states, Canada, four locations in Mexico, Australia, Scotland and the UK.
- **# of Memberships** -- 124
- **Official Shows** – Total of 643 tickets purchased
  - «O» - Sept 21, 2006 @ 10:30pm (\$150.00)
    - 124 tickets purchased
  - LOVE - Sept 22, 2006 @ 7:30pm (\$125.00, Cat 2)
    - 154 tickets purchased
  - *Mystère* -- Sept 22, 2006 @ 10:30pm (\$80.75, special price)
    - 140 tickets purchased
  - KÀ -- Sept 23, 2006 @ 6:30pm (\$135.00, special price)
    - 136 tickets purchased
  - *Zumanity* -- Sept 23, 2006 @ 10:30pm (\$80.75, special price)
    - 89 tickets purchased
  - Seats in Sections 102/103 (center front) for all shows, ordered through RSD ticket office. Special prices offered on *Mystère*, KÀ and *Zumanity*.
- **Hotel** – Treasure Island Hotel & Casino (T.I.) (\$108.00/night)
  - 49 rooms rented
  - 192 room nights total
- **Group Meal** – Dishes Buffet at Treasure Island (\$19.00)
  - 102 tickets purchased
- **T-Shirts** -- \$20.00

#### Thursday, September 21

- 3:00pm-5:00pm - KÀ Theater - MGM Grand Hotel and Casino  
**“KÀ SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”**  
 Watched “battle scene” rehearsal session, Q&A with Company Manager, artists, technical staff, and coaches. Watched show setup and looked into the void.
- 6:00pm-9:00pm – Cirque Du Soleil Resident Shows Division (RSD) Headquarters  
**“WELCOME TO CIRQUECON 2006: LAS VEGAS! – MEET AND GREET & CHARITY AUCTION”**  
 Catered food/drink/desserts by Cirque du Soleil. Charity auction/raffle of special Cirque-supplied memorabilia to benefit Street Teens Building Campaign (raised \$6,645.00).  
 Speeches by:
  - Jerry Nadal – General Manager, Resident Shows Division
  - Michael Bolingbroke - Senior Vice-President, Live Shows
- 10:30pm-12:30am - “O” Theater - Bellagio Hotel & Casino  
**““O” SHOW AND SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”** (separate ticket)  
 20+ artist photo opportunity/Q&A. On-stage group photograph. Members also received a special vial to retrieve water from the “O” pool.

#### Friday, September 22

- 2:00pm-4:00pm – Dishes Buffet - Treasure Island Hotel & Casino  
**“CIRQUECON 2006: LAS VEGAS! GROUP MEAL”** (separate ticket)
- 4:20pm-6:00pm – *Mystère* Theater - Treasure Island Hotel & Casino  
**“MYSTÈRE SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”**  
 Watched rehearsal & set-up with a member of the artistic staff for Q&A.
- 7:30pm-9:30pm – Love Theater - Mirage Hotel & Casino  
**“LOVE SHOW AND SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”** (separate ticket)  
 Were going to watch change-over, but last-minute emergencies prevented this.  
 Instead members provided with special LOVE caps and cast photo.
- 10:30pm-12:30am – *Mystère* Theater - Treasure Island Hotel & Casino  
**“MYSTÈRE SHOW AND SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”** (separate ticket)  
 Since we had reserved all front-row seats in Sections 102-104, one of our members was chosen to be “Papa.” Afterwards, on-stage group photograph with Alice. Also individual photo opportunities with four artists.

#### Saturday, September 23

- 3:00pm-5:00pm – *Zumanity* Theater - New York-New York Hotel & Casino

### **“ZUMANITY SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”**

Multi-media exhibit & presentation of costumes, props and make-up with representatives of wardrobe and makeup, featuring Joey Arias and Vanessa Convey. Also Q&A and photos with Joey and Vanessa.

- 6:30pm-8:00pm - KÀ Theater - MGM Grand Hotel & Casino  
    **“KÀ”** (separate ticket)
- 10:30pm-12:30am – Zumanity Theater - New York-New York Hotel & Casino  
    **“ZUMANITY SHOW AND SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”** (separate ticket)  
    Meet & Greet/photo opportunity with 10 artists in theater lobby.

### Sunday, September 24

- 10:00am-12:00 Noon - Keith Johnson/LouAnna Valentine’s Petite Suite - Treasure Island Hotel & Casino  
    **“HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND? – KAFFEEKLATSCH”**  
    Comment and farewell social with CirqueCon organizers.

## **CirqueCon 2007: Orlando**

- **Where** – Orlando, Florida, United States
- **When** – August 9, 2007 – August 12, 2007
- **Why** – Viewing of “*La Nouba*”
- **Total Attendees** -- 51
  - 27 women (53%)
  - 24 men (47%)
  - 17 couples/households accounting for 36 people total
  - Members from 15 States, two locations in Mexico, and British Columbia
- **# of Members** – 64 (total members and their households)
  - 39 memberships sold
- **Official Show** -- 9:00pm, August 11, 2007 (\$120.00/71.50)
  - 44 tickets purchased through us
  - 7 tickets purchased elsewhere
  - Total of 51 tickets purchased
- **Hotel** – Disney’s Port Orleans – French Quarter (\$141.00/night)
  - 17 rooms rented
  - 61 room nights total
- **Group Meal** – House of Blues, Downtown Disney (\$47.00)
  - 34 tickets purchased
- **T-Shirts** – none produced



### Thursday, August 9

- 8:00pm-12:00am – Downtown Disney  
    **“A LITTLE EARLY DISNEY MAGIC”** (field trip)

### Friday, August 10

- 8:30pm-9:30pm – EPCOT – United Kingdom Pavilion  
    **“EPCOT DESSERT PARTY”** (separate ticket) (\$40.00)
  - 35 attendees

### Saturday, August 11

- 11:00pm -approx. 2:00pm – Downtown Disney - Cirque du Soleil La Nouba Theater  
    **“LA NOUBA TOUR & Q&A”**
  - Richard Dennison – Company Manager (speaker, tour leader)
  - Robert Shuck – Operations Production Manager (tour leader)
- 6:30pm-8:00pm – Downtown Disney – House of Blues  
    **“CIRQUECON 2007: ORLANDO GROUP MEAL”** (separate ticket)
- 9:00pm-10:40pm – Downtown Disney – Cirque du Soleil La Nouba Theater  
    **“CIRQUE DU SOLEIL’S LA NOUBA”** (separate ticket)
- 10:45pm-1:00am – Cirque du Soleil La Nouba Theater – Green Room  
    **“GROUP PHOTO and GREEN ROOM PARTY”**

Several costumed artists joined our group for an on-stage group photograph. And over half of the artists stayed for a post-show catered party, mingling and talking with Passionates.

#### Sunday, August 12

- 10:00am-12:00 Noon – Ricky Russo’s room – Disney’s Port Orleans-French Quarter  
“**HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND? – KAFFEEKLATSCH**”  
Comment and farewell social with CirqueCon organizers.

## **CirqueCon 2008: Tokyo**



- **Where** – Tokyo Disney Resort, Tokyo, Japan
- **When** – November 6 - 9, 2008
- **Why** – Viewing of “ZED”
- **Total Attendees** -- 45
  - 21 women (46%)
  - 24 men (54%)
  - 13 couples/households accounting for 30 people total
  - Members from 10 States, Japan, Mexico, Canada, Australia, Germany and Russia.
- **# of Members** – 63 (total members and their households)
  - 46 memberships sold
- **Official Show** – 7:30pm, November 7, 2008 (\$163.00/89.00)
  - 45 tickets purchased
- **Hotel** – Hilton Tokyo Bay – Tokyo Disney Resort (\$203.50/night, \$407.00 Fri-Dat)
  - 11 rooms rented
  - 47 room nights total
- **Group Meal** – Rainforest Café, Ikspiari (\$25.00)
  - 38 tickets purchased
- **T-Shirts** -- \$23.00

#### Friday, November 7

- 10:00am-12:30am – Hilton Tokyo Bay – Keith Johnson/LouAnna Valentine’s Room  
“**CIRQUECON 2008: TOKYO MEET AND GREET**”
- 2:30pm-3:30pm – Tokyo Disney Resort – Cirque du Soleil Theater  
“**ZED SPECIAL ACTIVITIES**”  
Watched a trapeze rehearsal with guest speakers.
  - Ann-Marie Corbiel – Artistic Director
  - Gemma Segarra – Publicist
  - Ginger Ana Griep-Ruiz – Tissue
  - Matias Plaul – Chinese Poles
- 4:00pm-6:30pm – Ikspiari – Rainforest Cafe  
“**CIRQUECON 2008: TOKYO GROUP MEAL**” (separate ticket)
- 7:30pm-9:30pm – Tokyo Disney Resort – Cirque du Soleil Theater  
“**CIRQUE DU SOLEIL’S ZED**” (separate ticket)
- 9:30pm-10:30pm – Tokyo Disney Resort – Cirque du Soleil Theater  
“**ZED SPECIAL GROUP PHOTO**”  
Ten costumed artists joined our group for an on-stage group photograph and also mingled and talked with Passionates.

#### Saturday, November 8

- 8:30am-10:00pm – Tokyo Disney Resort – Tokyo DisneySea  
“**CIRQUECON 2008: TOKYO OUTING TO TOKYO DISNEYSEA**”  
(separate ticket)
- 11:00am-1:00pm – Tokyo DisneySea, Mediterranean Harbor – Magellan’s  
“**LUNCH AT MAGELLAN’S**” (separate ticket)

#### Sunday, November 9

- 9:30am-11:00am – Hilton Tokyo Bay – Starbuck’s Lobby Sitting Area  
“**HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND? – KAFFEEKLATSCH**”



Comment and farewell social with CirqueCon organizers.

## **CirqueCon 2009: Mexico**



- **Where** – Monterrey, Mexico
- **When** – September 24 - 27, 2009
- **Why** – Say goodbye to “*Dralion*”
- **Total Attendees** – 71
  - 33 women (46%)
  - 38 men (54%)
  - 21 members from 9 states: California, Colorado, Florida, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Tennessee and Washington
  - 50 members from Mexico; 23 from Monterrey & 27 from other Mexican Cities
- **# of Members** – 73 (total members and their households)
  - 40 memberships sold
- **Official Show** – 9:00pm, September 26, 2009 (\$84.00/38.00)
  - Approx. 70 tickets purchased
- **Hotel** – Holiday Inn Parque Fundidora (\$75.00/night)
  - 9 rooms rented
  - 27 room nights total
- **Group Meal** – Hacienda San Angel (\$19.00)
  - 36 tickets purchased
- **T-shirts** -- \$10.00

### **Thursday, September 24**

- 4:15pm-5:45pm – Cirque du Soleil Dralion entrance  
“**ACTIVITIES AT DRALION**”  
Watched trampo wall act rehearsal, Q&A with Bruce Mather (Artistic Director) and two artists, group photo in front of stage
- 6:30pm-9:30pm – Parque Fundidora  
“**HORNO 3 BALCONY & A LITTLE RIVERWALK**” (Field Trip)

### **Friday, September 25**

- 9:00am-9:00pm – City of Monterrey – “Magic Bus”  
“**MONTERREY CITY TOUR**” (separate ticket) (\$18.00)  
Narrated bus tour of city with lunch included.
  - 25 attendees
- 10:30pm-3:00am – Nueva Luna – via bus  
“**BOHEMIA NIGHT**” (separate ticket) (\$20.00)  
Bus transportation to area bar.
  - 22 attendees

### **Saturday, September 26**

- 1:30pm-5:15pm – Hacienda San Angel  
“**CIRQUECON 2009: MEXICO GROUP MEAL**” (separate ticket)
- 7:00pm-10:30pm – Cirque du Soleil Dralion entrance  
“**CIRQUE DU SOLEIL’S DRALION**” (separate ticket)

### **Sunday, September 27**

- 10:00am-12:00pm – Holiday Inn Parque Fundidora – Ricky Russo’s hotel room  
“**HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND? – KAFFEEKLATSCH**”  
Comment and farewell social with CirqueCon organizers.

## **CirqueCon 2010: New York City & Montréal**

- **Where** – New York City, New York and Montréal, Quebec, Canada
- **When** – April 27 – May 2, 2010



- **Why** – “*Banana Shpeel*,” “*Ovo*” and “*Totem*” – all in one weekend!
- **Total Attendees** – 50
  - 22 women (44%)
  - 28 men (56%)
  - 43 members from 10 states: California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Texas and Washington
  - 7 international members (4 Canada, 3 Mexico)
- **# of Members** – 50 (total members and their households)
  - 35 memberships sold
- **Official Shows**
  - OVO – Wednesday, April 28, 2010, 8:00pm (\$130.00/71.0)
    - 36 tickets purchased
  - Banana Shpeel – Thursday, April 29, 2010, 8:00pm (\$75.00)
    - 20 tickets purchased
  - Totem – Saturday, May 1, 2010, 8:00pm (\$100.00)
    - 34 tickets purchased
- **Hotel**
  - New York City – On The Ave Hotel (\$195.00/night)
    - 7 rooms rented
    - 24 room nights total
  - Montréal – Marriott Springhill Suites Vieux Montréal (\$191.00/night)
    - 12 rooms rented
    - 28 room nights total
- **Group Meal**
  - New York City – Amsterdam Inn (\$36.00)
    - 19 tickets purchased
  - Montréal – Restaurant du Vieux Port (\$27.00)
    - 19 tickets purchased
- **T-Shirts** -- \$14.00

#### Tuesday, April 27

- 6:30pm-10:00pm – Broadway – Minskoff Theatre  
**“BROADWAY NIGHT! – “THE LION KING””** (separate ticket)  
 A group of Passionates attended this Disney Theatrical show.

#### Wednesday, April 28

- 9:00am-11:00am – On The Ave Hotel – Lobby  
**“CIRQUECON 2010: NEW YORK CITY MEET AND GREET”**
- 7:00pm-10:30pm – Randall’s Island – Cirque du Soleil Grand Chapiteau  
**“CIRQUE DU SOLEIL’S OVO”** (separate ticket)
- 10:30pm-11:00pm – Randall’s Island – Cirque du Soleil Grand Chapiteau  
**“OVO SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”** (separate ticket)  
 Q&A session with four artists from the show & group photo.

#### Thursday, April 29

- 3:30pm-4:30pm – Upper West Side – Beacon Theatre  
**“BANANA SHPEEL SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”**  
 Watched last rehearsal prior to premiere, Q&A session with Serge Roy (Director of Creation)
- 5:00pm-7:00pm – Amsterdam Inn  
**“CIRQUECON 2010: NEW YORK CITY GROUP MEAL”** (separate ticket)
- 8:00pm-10:30pm – Beacon Theatre entrance  
**“CIRQUE DU SOLEIL’S BANANA SHPEEL”** (separate ticket)

#### Friday, April 30 – transition to Montréal

- 7:30pm-9:00pm – Marriott Springhill Suites Vieux Montréal – Room 525  
**“CIRQUECON 2010: MONTRÉAL MEET AND GREET”**

#### Saturday, May 1

- 4:30pm-6:30pm – Restaurant du Vieux Port  
**“CIRQUECON 2010: MONTRÉAL GROUP MEAL”** (separate ticket)
- 6:30pm-7:30pm – Cirque du Soleil Totem back entrance – Jacques Cartier Pier  
**“TOTEM SPECIAL ACTIVITIES”**

Q&A with David Olivier (Public Services Director) and Melanie Lalande (Artistic Director)

- 8:00pm-10:30pm – Jacques Cartier Pier  
“**CIRQUE DU SOLEIL’S TOTEM**” (separate ticket)

Sunday, May 2

- 9:00am-11:00am – Marriott Springhill Suites Vieux Montréal – Room 525  
“**HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND? – KAFFEKLATSCH**”  
Comment and farewell social with CirqueCon organizers.

## **CirqueCon 2011: Hollywood**

- **Where** – Hollywood (Los Angeles), California, USA
- **When** – December 1-3, 2011
- **Why** – “IRIS”
- **Total Attendees** – 78 as of 11/20/11
  - Currently 33 women (43%)
  - Currently 45 men (57%)
  - 70 members from 16 states: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin
  - 8 international members (6 Mexico, 2 Australia)
- **# of Members** – 78 (total members and their households)
  - 45 memberships sold
- **Official Shows**
  - IRIS – Friday, December 2, 1011, 8:00pm (\$113.00/89.00)
    - 92 tickets purchased
- **Hotel**
  - Highland Gardens Hotel
    - 10 rooms rented
    - 24 room nights total
- **Group Meal**
  - The Grill on Hollywood (\$59.00)
    - 25 tickets purchased
- **T-Shirts** – n/a



Thursday, December 1

- 6:00pm-8:00pm – Highland Gardens Hotel  
“**CIRQUECON 2011: HOLLYWOOD MEET AND GREET**”

Friday, December 2

- x:00pm-x:00pm – Kodak Theatre  
“**IRIS SPECIAL ACTIVITIES**” (Badge Required)
- 5:00pm-7:00pm – The Grill on Hollywood  
“**CIRQUECON 2010: HOLLYWOOD GROUP MEAL**” (separate ticket)
- 8:00pm-10:30pm – Kodak Theatre
- “**CIRQUE DU SOLEIL’S IRIS**” (separate ticket)
- 10:30pm-11:00pm – Kodak Theatre  
“**IRIS POST SHOW Q&A**” (Show Ticket and Badge required)

Saturday, December 3

- 10:00am-12:00Noon – Highland Gardens Hotel  
“**HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND? – KAFFEKLATSCH**”  
Comment and farewell social with CirqueCon organizers.

---

## Lagniappe - A Little Something Extra

---



Part of the fun of preparing a CirqueCon is looking for ways to make each event unique, to put the stamp of the city or show we are visiting on our weekend. While it didn't start out that way, our Event souvenirs have become an important part of what CirqueCon has become.

While we were planning our debut CirqueCon in Vancouver we developed several of the things that CirqueCon would become known for – the “official” show, the “official” hotel, the Meet & Greet, the Group Meal, and the Badge and Programme Book. The special event-specific souvenir wasn't originally on our list, but it quickly found its place.

For CirqueCon Vancouver I had an idea that I wanted to consolidate a number of pieces of “rare” Cirque du Soleil music onto one CD that would be given to our members. I wanted to include parts of Alegria Live and Saltimbanco Live that hadn't been included on the official recordings, as well as other pieces of rare audio. Unbeknownst to me Co-Chair Jeff Tolotti had the same idea as well! His concept was to share tracks from his collection of music by Cirque musicians outside of Cirque, including several tracks by Francesca Gagnon, the inimitable voice of Alegria. We decided to collaborate and created a two-CD set, working independently to compile, sequence, and master our respective CD's, with Jeff doing the final duplication and artwork for the covers and CD labels. For Montréal the next year I created a Volume Three, which collected several pieces left off the first volume.

The following year Rich Alford suggested that with Las Vegas as the destination we consider CirqueCon playing cards or a customized casino chip. After doing some research we found you actually can get both! Rich came up with designs, but they initially didn't meet Cirque's standards. They included Cirque proprietary graphics, which while they could appear in our Program Book could not be placed on what might appear to be a piece of merchandise. Cirque du Soleil fan and artist Kristi Piet created a series of drawings for the cards, five of them for the five shows – a “Royal Flush.” Beautiful though they were, they too had to be altered for copyright concerns. Eventually we came up with designs that didn't bother Cirque, so we decided to do both.

Ricky's idea for CirqueCon Orlando was an EPCOT Passport with artwork again designed by Passionate Kristi Piet. What we wanted was a unique take-away that somehow bridged our fondness for both Disney and Cirque du Soleil and be different from what had come before. Rich liked the cards and Kristi's artwork developed for Las Vegas so much that, when it came time to develop takeaway ideas for CirqueCon Orlando, Rich wanted Kristi to do more artwork. What Rich came up with to showcase this



artwork was an EPCOT Passport, whereby members who took on the challenge would be tasked to visit each country in EPCOT's World Showcase and look up the answers to questions we posed within. As a Disney Annual Passholder and huge fan of EPCOT, there were a number of questions I knew I could pose: from the easy to the very, very hard.

Collecting the "buttons", much like collecting pins at Disney, would be done by visiting each country and returning the passport to us with the answers in hand. We would then award that country's "button", featuring Kristi's artwork, to those who answered the questions correctly; incorrect answers didn't earn that country's button. And for those who had gotten all the answers correct (and thus earned all the buttons) a very special extra button was created as a reward. It was a great idea that didn't quite get executed as planned. After thinking about Passionates who wouldn't be able to complete their set of buttons because they didn't answer the questions correctly (also not wishing to hurt any feelings by doing so), we abandoned the prize part of the concept and published the answers along with the questions in the Passport, and gave a complete set of buttons to all.

Tokyo in 2008 brought forth its own ideas based on Japanese culture. Early on I had the idea to create a disk of Cirque Karaoke – Cirque music that fans could sing along to. Scouring the musical audition kits Cirque had placed on the internet I came up with several tracks for all six of the voice styles Cirque utilizes. I then created two complete CD's, one with reference tracks including singers, and another of just the musical accompaniment tracks. It was great fun to produce.

But we had another idea as well. We had thought of creating specially-printed chopsticks or Japanese hand fans but couldn't afford it in the budget. But some months prior LouAnna's father Calvin Davis (known in our Cirque fannish circle as "Dad") had passed away after a short illness. LouAnna wanted to honor our friend who had taken Cirque to heart immediately after we had introduced it to him, following us to our first two CirqueCons. So, as executrix of his estate, she gifted CirqueCon the ability to produce the fans, with special artwork by Rich honoring Japan, CirqueCon and Dad.

For Mexico, a change in graphics gurus also brought a change in giveaways; Francisco took on the original D-Ticket (Event ticket) concept that Rich and I did for CirqueCon Orlando (based on the A-B-C-D-E Ticket books that Disneyland and later Walt Disney World pioneered) and that had been used (but not similarly named) for previous events, to new heights. He created tickets for each and every event we had planned for CirqueCon 2009: Monterrey – from our initial Registration, Special Dralion Activities, and Bohemia Night to the Group Meal, Official Show and City Tour! They were fantastic keepsakes that featured a mélange of images of both Monterrey and Cirque du Soleil's Dralion.

In addition to the printed and laminated tickets, Francisco also created a series of post cards from images he intended to be teaser flyers for the event. The first series, entitled "The Elements in Monterrey" feature Dralion's four earthly elements as represented in Spanish – Aqua, Aire, Fuego, Tierra – in various poses and locations around the city. The second series, simply titled "Characters", placed

the Personages of Dralion in and around the monuments of Monterrey, all with the CirqueCon 2009: Monterrey! logo and official Cirque du Soleil tag: Invoke, Provoke, Evoke. They were excellent!

For New York, our offerings were more subdued. Francisco created a number of teaser flyers for the event - eight in all - that featured characters from the shows we were seeing amongst various monuments and locations in the city in which the shows were performing. Francisco was also responsible for creating the designs for both of our event T-Shirts, our badge, and ticket concepts for each of our event's activities. Although these were not printed due to budgetary constraints, they were wonderful artifacts all on their own. And Rich Alford found inspiration and created five buttons for us spanning two of the three shows we were seeing - Banana Shpeel and OVO - as imagery for Totem was not yet available!

And finally, Hollywood. For our last (for now) event we present two items. The postcards are thanks to artwork by Ricky and a free coupon from Staples (and free is a very good price). For the other item we were initially stymied, until Ricky suggested we look at our refrigerator and notice all the cool Cirque du Soleil magnets attached to it. A flat magnet would be nice, and could be done at a reasonable cost, but how cool would it be to have a raised magnet of a style similar to Cirque's reminding folks of their memories of CirqueCon! Cirque put us in touch with their 2-dimensional magnet supplier, Polar Magnetics out of Toronto, Ontario. They agreed to our smaller-than-minimum order and could meet our production timetable. The artwork was completed in a pinch by friends in the art department where I work. The catchphrase is by LouAnna. We hope it will always remind you of how life as a Cirque Passionate is to be lived -

Passionately!