



QUIDAM

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL.



CirqueCon Vancouver 2004

Sponsored by the Fascination! Newsletter

Friday, May 21 - Sunday, May 23, 2004

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada





Vancouver—Proud Host of the
2010 Olympic & Paralympic Winter Games

May 10th, 2004

Dear CirqueCon Vancouver 2004 participants,

On behalf of The Greater Vancouver Convention & Visitors Bureau we would like extend our warmest welcome to you and your fellow group members. Thank you for choosing Vancouver as the venue to host your **CirqueCon Vancouver 2004** event.

Our city has much to offer and we are sure that not only will you be amazed at the performance of Cirque du Soleil's "QUIDAM" but by the variety of things to do and see in our spectacular location as well.

Enjoy your visit and we hope that we will have the pleasure of having you visit us again in the near future.

Sincerely,

Susan Graham
Convention Services Department
Tourism Vancouver

BestCities.net

Tourism Vancouver

The Greater Vancouver

Convention and

Visitors Bureau

Suite 210

200 Burrard Street

Vancouver, British Columbia

Canada V6C 3L6

Phone 604.682.2222

Fax 604.682.1717

www.tourismvancouver.com

CIRQUECON VANCOUVER 2004
The First Unofficial Gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates
Sponsored by the Fascination! Newsletter

Friday, May 21, 2004 to
Sunday, May 23, 2004

Douglas House & Cambie Lodge
Bed and Breakfasts

Vancouver,
British Columbia,
Canada

And so the journey begins. Or continues.

Traveling far across the continent we are called by some unheard, un-vocalized scream.

We come from British Columbia, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, California, Louisiana, Georgia, Virginia, Florida and even Mexico.

We stand ready for the amazements that lie before us. Yet fear what we may discover there.

At this time and this place we have chosen to gather. To find our way through the darkness to where others stand bathed in light. To be with them, and in so doing, be together.

Laugh and cry together.

Experience. Together.

And part knowing we have found our kind.

We stand together, yet we all stand alone.

We are Quidam. Yet we are all Passionates.

Welcome!

CIRQUECON VANCOUVER 2004

Program of Events

FRIDAY - MAY 21:

5:00pm-6:00pm - Douglas House B&B, Kitchen area
456 West 13th Street (directions below)
604-872-3060

"WELCOME TO CIRQUECON 'COCKTAIL HOUR'"

We invite everyone who's in town (and not attending a show) to stop by our headquarters Bed & Breakfast for a little "get to know you." We'll have a few munchies and some Cirque Du Rose wine(!) for consumption. We'll also have space for you to show off your rarest Cirque collectible. We'll have older programs, Cirque du Soleil wallpaper books(!), and other Cirque memorabilia you won't find elsewhere.

SATURDAY - MAY 22:

1:30pm-approx. 3:30pm - Cirque du Soleil Quidam Entrance (Gate 1)
Pacific Boulevard, between Carrall and Quebec Sts.
"A SPECIAL WELCOME FROM CIRQUE DU SOLEIL"

A very special event for CirqueCon Vancouver members! A tour of the Quidam site, and perhaps other things even we don't know about.

Directions to the site from the B&B's:

Head northbound into Vancouver on the Cambie Street Bridge. Take the exit for Pacific Boulevard East. Follow Pacific Boulevard past BC Place and the Plaza of Nations. The entrance to the Cirque site's parking lot is on the south side of Pacific Boulevard across from GM Place. The entrance to the Grand Chapiteau is at the east end of the parking lot, between Carrall and Quebec streets.

4:00-6:00pm - The Old Spaghetti Factory
1 Water Street (in Gastown)
604-684-1288

"CIRQUECON VANCOUVER GROUP DINNER"

We'll have seats in the same area but probably not at one big table. We'll eat and party and prepare for the show. After dinner folks are free to tour Gastown, return to the Bed & Breakfast to dress for the show, or head straight to the tent to be there when the gates open at 7:00pm.

Directions to the Restaurant from the Cirque site: Travel on Pacific Street (which heads south-east) to Quebec Street. Turn left onto Quebec Street and head north-west. Quebec turns into Columbia Street. At Powell Street take a left. Powell & Alexander merge into Water Street. On Water Street, Spaghetti Factory is one block down on the right-hand side. Free Parking (if available) is available just before the restaurant on the right-hand side. If it's full, paid parkades are down the street.

7:00pm-11:00pm - Cirque du Soleil Quidam Entrance (Gate 1)
Pacific Boulevard, between Carrall and Quebec Sts.
"CIRQUE DU SOLEIL'S QUIDAM"

At some point while on the Cirque campus we'll want to gather to take a group photo, so bring your cameras (just don't use them inside!). After the show, don't leave the tent! Cirque will have another exciting event for us at approx. 10:30pm - a special post-show Question & Answer session with Cirque artists including autographs and photographs!

CIRQUECON VANCOUVER 2004

HOW IT BEGAN:

It all began with Cirque fan Jeff “sfogviper” Tolotti proposing, on the Cirque du Soleil Yahoogroup, a gathering during Quidam’s Vancouver, BC run. His initial suggestion turned into a specific weekend - Friday, May 21 through Sunday, May 23, 2004, taking in a performance of Quidam on Saturday evening the 22nd. That weekend Cirque fans from across the country would converge on Vancouver (some even flying into Seattle and driving up).

Once the date was set, other wheels began turning. Fascination! Newsletter (the unofficial Cirque du Soleil newsletter) publisher Ricky “Richasi” Russo brought the newsletters sponsorship to the endeavor, enthusiastically lending his support along with that of writer Keith Johnson.

Keith, who has previously organized group trips from his home base of Seattle, WA to Orlando and Anaheim, had something special in mind. What if we could all room together in the same facility? He had his eyes on two Bed and Breakfast lodges that he thought would be just perfect for our gathering.

And so it came to be! Here we are, ready for a very special Cirque-ey weekend, with a wonderful city as our hosts.

Invoke, Provoke, Evoke!

Your CirqueCon Vancouver Team:

Jeff Tolotti: Instigator & Publications Coordinator – Format & production of “Program Packet” and “Gift CD”. Producer and compiler of CD #2.

Ricky Russo: Special Events Coordinator – Cirque du Soleil liaison.

Keith Johnson: Logistics – Hotel, Restaurant, Sightseeing, Member Communication. Producer and compiler of CD #1.

LouAnna Valentine: “Cocktail Hour” Organizer

Special Thanks to:

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

André Belanger and Genevieve Bastien of Cirque du Soleil for helping to make the weekend so special.
Our friends at The Old Spaghetti Factory.

Susan Graham of Tourism Vancouver.

Norwescon for the Program Book Bags.

We're off and running -- CirqueCon 2004 Begins!

Mesdames et Messieurs; friends, welcome to the inaugural gathering of Cirque du Soleil passionates -- CirqueCon 2004 -- in Vancouver! We are excited to be amongst our Canadian neighbors, as in Montreal on April 23, 1996, and we're glad you're with us!

Quidam, which comes from the Latin for "a nameless passerby", marks Cirque du Soleil's ninth production, premiering in Montreal on April 23, 1996. Since then it has been heralded as one of Cirque du Soleil's quintessential productions, showing us that we are all Quidams. "It could be anyone, anybody," the show's programme tells. "Someone coming, going, living in our anonymous society. A member of the crowd, one of the silent majority. One who cries out, sings and dreams within us all."

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

By using the archives of the Fascination! Newsletter, let us explore now this wonderful world of Quidam...

"From One Dream to Another -- Quidam"

By: T. Clay Buck

Originally Published - March 2002

Quidam marks Cirque du Soleil's ninth production and premiered in Montreal on April 23, 1996. In the words of Franco Dragone, the show's director, it "casts light on our frailty and angst at the dawn of a new century." One assumes that somewhere during the creation of Quidam the concept and preliminary planning for "O" was somewhere in the back of Dragone's mind - or even in the very forefront. But, at least for the time being, Quidam marks the last collaboration of the quintessential Cirque team on a touring production. With Franco Dragone at the helm as Director and Author, it once again brought together the talents of Choreographer Debra Brown, Costume Designer Dominique Lemieux, Lighting Designer Luc LaFortune, Composer Benoit Jutras, and Set Designer Michel Crete all led by their Guide, Guy LaLiberte and Director of Creation Gille Ste-Croix.

Quidam, too, in my mind, marks a major turning point in the realization of Cirque productions. From Le Cirque Réinventé through Alegría - and for the sake of this discussion, I refer only to touring productions - this creative team had been building up to

the perfection of its concept of combining its incredible circus arts into a complete sensory experience - the co-mingling of lights, sounds, and visuals to tell a complete story thematically unified. Of all of Cirque's productions, Quidam probably accomplishes this feat most effectively. At least in my humble opinion.

According to the shows program, the word "Quidam" comes from the Latin and signifies "a nameless passerby, a solitary figure lingering on a street corner, a person rushing past, a person who lives lost amidst the crowd in an all-too-anonymous society." And while the Quidam of the story could be interpreted as its main character, the young girl, the audience leaves believing that, even though they themselves may be the Quidam" in this Everyman story, there is hope, joy, and a world inwhich the impossible does exist.

Quidam tells the story of a young girl - initially portrayed by Audrey Brison-Jutras, daughter of composer Benoit Jutras - who lives in a drab world, completely bored, and ignored by her parents. A mystical creature enters her life and introduces her to two guides who carry her through a fantastical world of sight and sound until she is reunited with her family, realizing that the world is a beautiful, terrifying place after all.

In typical Cirque du Soleil fashion, the show begins while the audience is still gathering. Our guide for the evening, "John," greets the audience as they come through the door, playing with their hair, stealing their tickets, eating their popcorn, and generally causing a nuisance. He is followed by a troupe of characters dressed head-to-toe in white, hooded suits. Of course this group picks an unwilling volunteer from the audience, takes him backstage and brings him out dressed as one of them. John harasses him a little and sends him back to his seat. As the house lights go dim, John takes the stage and plays snippets of songs on an old transistor radio - snippets of songs from previous Cirque productions, at which he sneers and turns up his nose. He reads us our instructions for the evening - no smoking, no pictures, and the like - and then leads us through this incredible story for the next two hours.

The show opens on the young girl at home with her parents seated in typical family pose. The father reads the paper, the mother stares vacantly into space, Audrey tries to entertain herself and engage her parents. A knock at the door brings a character straight from a Magritte painting - a headless man, a Quidam, carrying an umbrella, who drops his hat in the center of this family scene. Thunder rolls, lightning flashes, and the family is carried away in one of the most amazing feats to occur under the Big Top. The entire ceiling of the tent is covered in a track that lifts characters and set pieces to the stage and carries them off. In blissful ignorance, the parents are carried off still in their chairs, seemingly unaware of what is taking place around them.

At the same time, our young heroine's guides to this fantastical world are introduced - John, who we have already met, and hilariously portrayed originally by American comedian John Gilkey, and Fritz, an always-smiling, impish character brought to life by Austrian Karl Baumann. These two cohorts carry the young girl through adventure after adventure, beginning with the phenomenal German Wheel act by Chris Lashua. The Wheel rolls into place in what was the living room, and Lashua carries it

through a series of rolls, twists, and turns that defy explanation. It flips from side to side, and returns to a straight vertical. It rolls across the stage at dizzying speeds. Lashua guides this huge apparatus through varying tricks in a display of athleticism unlike anything seen before- some even with his hands held calmly behind his back.

What is also incredibly unique and well-done in Quidam is the transitions between the acts. Each act follows one after the other, yet the interludes between each one continue the through-line of the story. Each performer in the troupe plays many different roles throughout the show, helping to tell the story and further it along. I saw the show three times during its Chicago run, and each time the acts were placed in different sequence - on some occasions a certain act would be left out completely and replaced by another, a typical occurrence during the touring shows. Each time, though, the transitions were flawless and continued the through-line in a perfect way. (For this article, I am using the order of the acts as they are presented in the video, filmed in Amsterdam, which is my memory of the first time I saw it. Some of the performers had changed, but the acts were still the same).

As the acts progress, the Quidam's world becomes more fantastical, more chaotic, and more beautiful. After the German Wheel rolls off, the troupe returns to the stage running, leaping, dancing across it with the young girl, Audrey, taking in all she can. Her parents appear, still in oblivion, her father with his head pushed through the newspaper lost in the confusion. Performers traverse the stage in a chorus of Audrey look-alikes, teasing her and John alike, while the remainder of the troupe come on with varying sizes of drums - from small, tinny snare drums to the large, thundering taiko drums, now an essential part of any Cirque production.

Through this group come the four young girls carrying their Diabolos who perform a quartet of juggling by tossing them across the revolving stage, forming pyramids and seeming-impossible uses of the ropes and spinning tops. In one of the most beautiful uses of the stage, at the end of the act, the four girls spin their tops up ropes hanging from the ceiling of the tent, from which drop in synchronization streamers of white and blue.

As they run off, again our troupe of performers comes through as we watch the Father traverse the tent suspended from the giant track, seemingly walking on air. I recently watched the video again, and while this particular segment appears there, it can't compare to what it looks like live. As our eyes gaze toward the top of the tent, a cocoon of red silk comes from behind the orchestra at the front, and the amazingly beautiful Isabelle Chassé performs the Aerial Contortion in Silk. To the best of my knowledge, this act had never been performed in a Cirque du Soleil show previously. For everyone in Chicago who had seen the show, this became the penultimate act of the evening. Not only is it an athletically astonishing act, but in context it was so hauntingly beautiful, performed to "Let Me Fall" from the soundtrack, but sung in Cirquish language. This act has been used again by Cirque in various forms, particularly in Dralion (jaded Chicagoans responded with, "Oh, we saw that three years ago"), but was particularly stunning in the red silk of Quidam.

As a trio of Mother look-alikes, all dressed in red, come to carry Isabille off after her performance, they are followed by the remainder of the troupe who begin the languid Skipping Ropes section - at first a simple display of athletic prowess, led by soloist Renee Bibaud - then morphing into an eclectic, energetic display of skill and timing as the entire troupe performs together. The video shows a nice shot from the ceiling of the tent in an almost Busby Burklee display of symmetry.

The Skipping Ropes were followed by the Aerial Hoops. I remember this being the most terrifying, dizzying act of the performance. The hoops, suspended from the overhead track, whirl in a blur as the trio of performers manipulate and climb over them. With intense synchronization and precision the performers twirl the hoops and stop them on cue, using the air and the stage to propel them around. I remember hearing after Quidam had left Chicago and moved on to Atlanta that one of the performers had fallen during the show. She was back on within two or three days.

Following the Aerial Hoops came the Handbalancing act, performed by Olga Pikhienko. Elevated on a small platform and carried by the ever-revolving stage, she tackles pose after pose on the delicate poles in an ever-increasing display of difficulty. This was one of the most typical "circus" acts in Quidam, but was also one of the most virtuoso performances.

After her leaving the stage, our guide John returns in his hilarious display of marksmanship with a set of darts. He wears a target on his head and tosses darts in the air to land on the target. Of course he misses, to our great amusement, and leaves the stage in a howl of agony as the overhead track brings a series of ropes onto the stage, each with a performer attached, high over our heads.

And thus begins the incredible Spanish Web act, with acrobats climbing up and down the ropes, tying them around their bodies and flying through the air. In the live performance, the climax of this act was the character of Fritz, constantly wanting to be involved and meeting everything with a smile, climbing the ropes as the porter on the ground begins to spin the rope. Fritz flies off, attached to the main rope only by his ankle, flying and laughing hilariously over heads. Additionally, the character of the Father was a principal soloist in the Spanish Webs act, portrayed by Daniel Touchette. He was the one who originally tied the rope in many loops around his body, ultimately letting it roll him precariously down to the ground. As a part of the story, this act began the transformation of the Father character into a more open, carefree person.

After the Spanish Webs have left the stage, our friend John returns and performs the bit that got him noticed by Cirque du Soleil in the first place. According to him, he had been begging Cirque du Soleil to hire him for years, but to no avail (More information about him is available at www.JohnGilkey.com). John performs a fun juggling act with a ball and a hat stand to the incomparable singer Yma Sumac's Gopher." It is a light-hearted moment of frivolity and fun in this crazy mixed-up world of Quidam.

A recurring element of Quidam is the nameless, faceless, ubiquitous characters dressed from head to toe in white medical-looking suits. These characters come in and out of the show, as they had participated with John at the very beginning, in various ways. After John leaves the stage they come rolling out in a group, form a clump in the middle and out of their midst come the next two performers, Yves Decoste and Marie-Laure Mesnage, to do the Statue or Vis Versa act. Reminiscent of similar acts in other Cirque shows, this duo balancing act is a Cirque trademark, particularly beautiful in Quidam as a counterpoint to some of the more frantic performances. It is slow and languid and displays the great strength and concentration it takes to perform it. It was designed by Yves Decoste especially for Cirque du Soleil. It also is one of the first times we see equal strength between male and female. In many cases, this act is performed by two men supporting each other, but the Quidam act shows equal strength between the different genders.

Another unique act to Quidam follows with the Cloud Swing performed by Petra Sprecher of Switzerland. It is essentially a trapeze of rope, there is no solid bar in the middle, and Petra uses it in much the same way. It is a much more 'violent' performance than that of the Vis-Versa, and plays an important counterpoint to the slower elements of the show. At one extended point of the swing, Petra seemingly falls off the trapeze, attached only by a small guide-wire to her leg. But from the audience's perspective it looks like she's falling off completely. She regains her balance and continues flawlessly.

The final act of Quidam is the Banquine, an incredible balancing and acrobatic act involving the whole troupe. They toss each other madly about the stage forming towers of four people high, and in daring jumps from one group to the other, landing on only the joined hands of the porter. This performance was also used in Cirque's IMAX Journey of Man film. It is, perhaps, the signature act of Quidam and features performances completely unlike anything else. It of course leads to the resolution of the show, with Audrey uniting with her joyful parents. The Quidam appears again and takes back his hat, proving that the magical world is really the world we live in and that all these fantastic experiences are part of it as well.

Quidam has undergone many changes in its six-year history - performers have come and gone, acts have been replaced time and again, clowns have left and come back and left again. John Gilkey left the European tour for a time and even did a stint in Dralion - oddly enough while the show was playing Chicago. Karl left and rumor has it may return for the new North American Tour. Many others have contributed to this phenomenal production, and it is certainly a great pleasure that North American audiences will once again get to experience Quidam.

Perhaps the show is best summed up in the words of the title song from the Soundtrack - "There's nothing left, there's nothing right, there's nothing wrong. I'm one, I'm two, I'm all yet none of you. The truth, the lies, the tear, the laughter, the hand and the empty touch. Here I am, alone, waiting for the curtain call."

"Waiting for the Curtain Call"
By: Paul Roberts
Originally Published - March 2002

When I first saw the "Quidam" video in 1999, I kicked myself for not catching this incredible show during its first North American tour but now "Quidam" has returned so I flew to Florida to witness this incredible show with fellow Fascination writer, Ricky Russo.

After entering the brand new blue and yellow swirl tent, we found the re-released "Quidam" CD (Catalog #: 74321 -91493-2) for on sale at the boutique. The CD features two bonus tracks recorded live in Amsterdam in 1999 by the same orchestra that appears on the video: Martin Egan (bandleader, guitars), Audrey Brisson-Jutras and Richard D. Price (vocals), Josée Campeau (cello), Geneviève Dubé (violin), Ali LaBelle (keyboards), Raynald Masse (drums), Yves Turgeon (saxophone, keyboards), with François Lamoureux providing additional guitars.

Bonus track "Misère" accompanies the Banquine act and is a different arrangement than both the live version from the video and the "Journey of Man" version. The first part of the song is extended and, to my disappointment, my favorite passage is only played once. In the live version, a passage that includes a melancholy violin line played over a steel drum-like keyboard sound is heard three times. On "Journey of Man" this passage is played twice, the bonus version only includes it once. The melody line is so sadly sweet that I can't understand why it gets played less with each new release.

Bonus track "Enfants d'acier" accompanies the Diabolos act and is similar to the live version. This energetic tune features a staccato keyboard line reminiscent of the Asian Koto instrument. The bridge dramatically decelerates and includes Zoë singing a lonely melody line soon joined by the male singer. Then the dynamics build back up while the Diablo girls perform their solo acts. The song fades out with an arpeggio keyboard pattern over clanging bells as the girls place the diabolos on the hanging stings to signal the climatic ending.

The balance of the CD's songs and enhanced program are identical to the original release.

I noticed something interesting in the souvenir program's cast section. There are four female singers listed with two titled as "singer/character" and two titled as just "singer." The two singer/characters are Gabrielle Cloutier (our night's Zoë) and Amélie Landry and the two (just) singers are Shiloh Sheray Gagnon and Kathy Samman. Makes me wonder if the two singer-only girls provide vocals for when Zoë is off stage or maybe they are training to be future Zoës.

The live show followed the video fairly closely with a few clown acts added. I finally experienced one of my favorite Cirque du Soleil acts: Isabelle Chassé's aerial contortion in silk accompanied by "Let Me Fall." This act, as it represents child birth,

took me back to the miracle of my daughter's birth. I tried to cover my tears but failed. Another passionate scene took place prior to intermission as the Banquine performers released their airy hearts (Red Balloons). Unfortunately, this act is eliminated from the video.

The first act after intermission included a teasing beginning. The powerful intro to the hand balancing song erupted and I thought that maybe we'd see Elena Lev's new manipulation act. When I noticed the generics bringing red balls to the stage, however, I knew that Edward Skwirsky's juggling act would take its place. The intro morphed into the growls found at the start of the song "Rivage". This song was combined with an unknown song that, like "Rivage", featured the male and female vocals sung in octave harmonies. Mr. Skwirsky's act provided some incredible juggling that should be more than just a replacement act.

The rest of the show flowed similarly to the video and when the title song awoke me from my dream state, I dreaded The End. As the orchestra played the song's climax, a voice announced the artists' names as they circled the stage. I marveled at my heroes once again. "Quidam" provoked so many emotions that afterwards I felt stunned and I had to explain my silence to Ricky: "I feel so lost and I'm numb in my Cirque du Soleil Zone."

"The Headless Man"

By: Ricky Russo

Originally Published - March 2002

"You know Mark, that was me calling your name out there."

"Oh yeah?" Mr. Ward said, as he bent down to sign my newly acquired Quidam 2002 NAT programme. "Usually everyone just calls me John, because of my character name. But when I heard my own name..."

Oh wait, I'm getting ahead of myself here!

When some Cirque fans gather, all hell can break loose. They pine over the performers, scream at the stage and clap when called upon. They are the folks every performer loves to see. So when Cirque du Soleil received two of these rabid fans in not one, but two of their shows in the span of two days... watch out!

On Thursday, February 21st, I received a visitor to my home in Orlando, Florida. It was none other than staff writer and good friend Paul Roberts. We decided to meet face to face this first time to experience Quidam in Miami. But before that milestone could be reached, we settled down for an exciting party - La Nouba.

Anticipation swept through both of us as the hours slowly dripped by (dripped, being a pun, as it rained and rained and rained all day). Once our show time finally came around on Friday the 22nd - we lit up with glee (rain or not). The two of us were blessed to have front row center seats... Yet even through we saw La Nouba, the entire weekend really centered around seeing Quidam in Miami. Paul and I had been anticipating this day for weeks -- no months, and in less than 12 hours the lights would dim, the music would come up and Karl, John and Zoë would run amok on stage. If all went to plan, it would be the first time either of us saw Quidam live. Sure, we'd watched the DVD with fascination, but with the troupe in Europe, we never thought we'd be privileged enough to actually get to see the show.

Weeks beforehand Paul ordered tickets for Quidam while I handled the front row engagement for La Nouba, so everything worked out. Our journey to Miami from Orlando that Saturday was a four hour tour. (Sing with me.. "A Four Hour Tour... a Four Hour Tour..."). It rained the whole way down but that didn't dampen our spirits. Those were kept afloat by listening to Cirque music on the entire journey - compilations from all the shows, then Mystère live. In fact, they lifted even more once we saw the new Blue and Yellow swirled big top sitting by the bayside. This image was beautifully accompanied with the final celebratory chords of Mystère's "Finale".

We pulled into a parking space not far away from the big top set up at Bicentennial Park. Since we had plenty of time, we walked across the busy street (Biscayne Boulevard) to a place called Bayside - an outdoor shopping and dining area. We had something to eat at a Hard Rock Cafe and by the time it became 7:00pm, we bore the wind that had picked up and high-tailed it over to the big-top. There Paul and I purchased hundreds in Cirque merchandise (okay, so I'm exaggerating); like new Quidam programmes, the new Quidam CD with 2 extra tracks, and a few other Quidam knickknacks.

Within a half-hour, it was finally time to enter the big-top. As we were about to enter the big top, through Door Number 1 (as it were), I stopped and turned to Paul. "Relish this moment my friend," said I, "We are about to see Quidam!" The two of us probably looked strange paused outside the big-top doorway, but we didn't care. After reflecting on the journey undertook so far, we stepped in. "Oh Yeah!" Paul exclaimed as we neared the top of the stairs that would eventually lead us down to our seats. The tracks from Quidam's ceiling were clearly visible and once we peeked over the bodies of people ahead of us, the stage came into view.

It looked just like it was supposed to. Mom and Dad's chair were there. The door that would admit Quidam, John and Karl into this realm were present. There was even a weird looking radio gleaming in the intense light provided by the stagehands above. Everything was as it should be, except for John! For a while, he didn't show up but when he did, the crowd roared. Just as for most of the European Tour, the character known as "John" was played by Mark Ward (formerly of Mystère (1993-1998)). His radiant energy filled the big-top like no other (except, perhaps, John Gilkey himself!).

And, like John Gilkey's "John", he was dressed in a purple suit and armed with comedic genius. He played with the audience, stealing their popcorn at times, and even having a few of the Generic people of Quidam come take an audience member away! During the pre-show (as many fans like to call it), Mark walked by our choice seats many times.

"Hey Mark!" I yelled as the follicly challenged character dressed in purple passed by my seat. He proceeded to pass me, but only by a couple of steps. Ah-ha! I had his attention. He turned then, upon hearing his real name, and gave me this confused looking smile and a raise of an eyebrow - kind of like Spock in Star Trek when he's surprised by something fascinating and unexpected. Little did I know that particular meeting wouldn't be our last.

After a few minutes of torture (to those not in the know), he returned on stage where he began to fiddle with the radio left there. As in history past, it played such tunes as Kumbalawé from Saltimbanco, the title track from Alegría (which "John" heaved over) and an explosive track from Nouvelle Expérience. Finally fed up with the selection, he turned and began to welcome us to the big top. The usual restraints were given: No Smoking, No Flash photography, No Filming of Any kind, and the like. Nothing new there.

And then, the big top became silent. A buzz filled the air.

"Ladies and Gentlemen... Quidam!"

The show from there went off without a hitch.

Neither Paul nor myself wanted this amazing show to come to a close, but two and a half hours later, the Generics revealed themselves and the show came to an end. The crowd gave a standing ovation, as usual, and made their way out slowly. Paul and I, however, remained in our seats. We wanted to hold on to the experience of Quidam for as long as possible. After a few long minutes, the big-top cleared out all for a group next to us. These people caught the ushers attention.

"I'm sorry ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to have to ask you to leave the bigtop."

I could see then that a few stagehands had hopped up on stage and were preparing to put the set to sleep for the night."Oh we're with Chris," one of the ladies in the group said to the usher. And the usher left.

Unbeknownst to us, Chris Lashua, who performed his amazing single German Wheel Act, was standing right next to us. We didn't even see him walk by! It was strange to see him there, actually, because he didn't have his signature stringy blond hair! It was cut short and dark!

Not wanting to hang around there, we decided to see if we couldn't get closer to the stage. Sure enough, we made it down there without anyone noticing us (I think they

thought we were with the Chris Lashua party too). After a while, he took them on a backstage tour.

I wish we could have made it backstage - I could imagine the clowns wandering about, the Banquine artists flipping in the air in practice, or even a few artists packing it up for the evening. But, as we were about to turn away, I placed my hand down on the Quidam stage. The event wasn't filled with any words or fanfare... it was simply a gesture to bring closure to the evening. La Nouba was my first Cirque du Soleil show but Quidam was the first Cirque show I had music for. I envisioned the show from the music (sometimes correctly, sometimes not) but it was always Quidam over all other shows that I had most wanted to see. Finally it had come to be.

The stage was rather cold, I remarked to myself. It brought me out of the daze I was in since the show had ended. After a few more seconds of just holding my hand there, I removed it and turned to leave when standing there next to us was Mark Ward! Neither of us had heard him come up and before long we got to chatting about the show, his turn in Mystère and the filming of Quidam (with him stuck in the Quidam suit). We asked for his autograph and he graciously accepted.

"You know Mark, that was me calling your name out there."

"Oh yeah?" Mr. Ward said, as he bent down to sign my newly acquired Quidam 2002 NAT programme. "Usually everyone just calls me John, because of my character name. But when I heard my own name I was surprised. I tried to ignore it but it just surprised me."

I was amazed he even remembered.

We shook hands, talked a bit more than parted ways. Paul and I left the confines of the bigtop in high spirits. The four- hour drive back we had planned for the evening (now being 11:15am) seemed easy. The Cirque-y Weekend came to a close with a bang, instead of a whimper. Thanks to all Cirque employees that made La Nouba and Quidam such an enjoyable experience!