



***The Third Unofficial Gathering Of
Cirque du Soleil Passionates***

**September 21st to 24th, 2006
Treasure Island Casino and Resort**

Guide De Programme

***Live Passionately!
Vivez Passionnément!***



CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas!

CIRQUECON 2006: LAS VEGAS!

The Third Unofficial Gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates
Sponsored by the Fascination! Newsletter

Thursday, September 21, 2006 to
Sunday, September 24, 2006

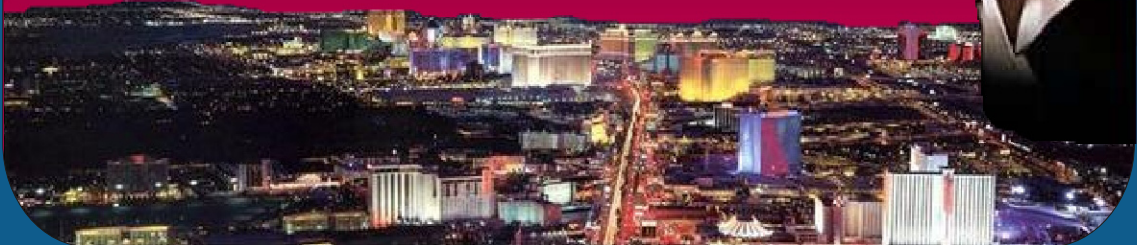
Treasure Island Hotel and Casino
Las Vegas, Nevada, United States



**The loudest call comes from far away.
Echoing across the desert, rebounding off the canyons.
But crystal clear.
Once again we heed the voice.
Gathering with fellow Passionates in our greatest number.
Bearing witness. Together.
A flower in the desert. A liquid oasis.
The lure of the sensual. A glimpse into the void.
Universal love.
With our hosts revealing more of the mystery.
What happens here...
Living. Passionately.
...Will be remembered forever.
And we will experience it. Together.
Welcome!**



Bienvenue À Tous



CIRQUECON 2006: LAS VEGAS!

Schedule of Events

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 21, 2006

10:00am 2:00pm

T.I. SECOND FLOOR (MEETING ROOMS) LOBBY

Treasure Island Hotel & Casino

"REGISTRATION TABLE OPEN"

Your first opportunity to pick up your badge and registration packet. Come sign our posters and visit. Also purchase your voucher for our Group Meal at the T.I. on Friday afternoon!

3:00pm 5:00pm

KÀ THEATER

MGM Grand Hotel and Casino

"KÀ SPECIAL ACTIVITIES"

NO video cameras allowed!!

NO flash photography allowed except during Q&A/photo op!!

Join us as we watch a rehearsal session. There will also be a Q&A and photo opportunity with artists, technical staff, and coaches, as we hear about what it takes to bring this larger-than-life story to larger-than-life. We will then watch show set-up as it begins. Attendees will also be given the rare opportunity to look into the void!

6:00pm 9:00pm

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL RESIDENT SHOWS DIVISION (RSD) HEADQUARTERS

980 Kelly Johnson Drive, Suite 200

(corner of East Sunset Road & Paradise Road)

Las Vegas, NV 89119

"WELCOME TO CIRQUECON 2006: LAS VEGAS!"

MEET AND GREET & CHARITY AUCTION"

Early evening is the perfect time for our "Meet and Greet." It's the place where members meet old (and new) friends, receive their membership packets, and sample local foods as well as tidbits brought by other members. Staff from the RSD will be on hand to answer questions and we'll have the food and drink you've come to expect from our Meet & Greets, but with additional flair.

But that's only the beginning! Cirque du Soleil Senior VP of Live Shows, Michael Bolingbroke, will be visiting and talking with us (his department oversees all resident and touring shows and marketing)! And there will be a free raffle for Cirque stuff, which everybody can enter!

And be there for our AUCTION of special Cirque du Soleil memorabilia gathered specifically for us (and appealing to our Cirque collector sensibilities) to benefit the Street Teens Building Campaign. Be ready to bid with proceeds going to a great cause.

10:30pm 12:00am (doors open at 9:30pm)

"O" THEATER

Bellagio Hotel & Casino

"O"

Our first "official" Cirque show is considered by many to be their finest. What some call "the ultimate Cirque experience" will awe us with its beauty and elegance.

12:00am 1:00am (after the show)

"O" THEATER

Bellagio Hotel & Casino

"O" SPECIAL ACTIVITIES"

SHOW TICKETS REQUIRED FOR THIS ACTIVITY!

Following the show stay in your seats. Artists will come out for photo opportunities and Q&A's. Then, step onto the "O" stage (yes, we said **on the stage**!) for a group photo opportunity! Finally, each attendee will be able to retrieve water from the "O" pool in a specially-provided vial. How cool is that?!?

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 22, 2006

10:00am 2:00pm

T.I. SECOND FLOOR (MEETING ROOMS) LOBBY

Treasure Island Hotel & Casino

"REGISTRATION TABLE OPEN"

Your second opportunity to pick up your badge and registration packet. Come sign our posters and visit. Also purchase your voucher for our Group Meal at the T.I. on Friday afternoon (your last chance)!

2:00pm 4:00pm

DISHES BUFFET

Treasure Island Hotel & Casino

\$19.00 per person, Children under 2: Free

"CIRQUECON 2006: LAS VEGAS! GROUP MEAL"

VOUCHER REQUIRED FOR SPECIAL SEATING (available at Registration Table)

Gather with other Cirque Passionates (in an especially reserved area) to eat, drink, and talk of our shared "passion." A perfect way to prepare for the continuing wonders to come, and just steps away from our activities at the Mystère Theater. Dishes features Barbecue, Asian, Pasta, Pizza, Salad, and Bakery/Dessert stations, with something for everyone.

4:20pm 6:00pm

MYSTÈRE THEATER

Treasure Island Hotel & Casino

"MYSTÈRE SPECIAL ACTIVITIES"

NO video cameras allowed!!

NO flash photography allowed except for watching set-up!!

We will watch a rehearsal with a member from the artistic staff to explain what's happening and to answer questions. After the rehearsal, watch set-up as it begins with a member from the technical staff available to answer our questions.

7:30pm 9:00pm (doors open at 6:30pm)

LOVE THEATER

Mirage Hotel & Casino

"LOVE"

The newest Cirque du Soleil show, and the one not surprisingly attended by the most CirqueCon members. The power of the words and music of the Beatles combined with the artistry of Cirque du Soleil in a brand-new production.

9:00pm 9:30pm (after the show)

LOVE THEATER

Mirage Hotel & Casino

"LOVE SPECIAL ACTIVITIES"

SHOW TICKETS REQUIRED FOR THIS ACTIVITY!

NO video cameras or photography allowed!!

Following the show, stay in your seats. We will meet in Section 200 to watch the change-over

between shows. Some members of the artistic staff will be available for a brief Q&A. A cast photograph will also be provided to each attendee.

10:30pm 12:00am (doors open at 9:30pm)
MYSTÈRE THEATER
Treasure Island Hotel & Casino
"MYSTÈRE"

Catch a free tram next door to our "headquarters" hotel, the Treasure Island (T.I.), to take in Mystère, Cirque's first (and some still say best) Vegas resident show.

12:00am 12:30am (after the show)
MYSTÈRE THEATER
Treasure Island Hotel & Casino
"MYSTÈRE SPECIAL ACTIVITIES"
SHOW TICKETS REQUIRED FOR THIS ACTIVITY!

Following the show, stay in your seats. Again we will step onto a Cirque stage for an exclusive group photograph of CirqueCon members with Alice! This photo will be taken by a professional photographer and will be provided to each attendee on Saturday.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2006

10:00am 2:00pm
T.I. SECOND FLOOR (MEETING ROOMS) LOBBY
Treasure Island Hotel & Casino
"REGISTRATION TABLE OPEN"

Your final opportunity to pick up your badge and registration packet. Come sign our posters and visit.

3:00pm 5:00pm
ZUMANITY THEATER
New York-New York Hotel & Casino
"ZUMANITY SPECIAL ACTIVITIES"

We start our afternoon with activities at the ZUMANITY Theater. Learn some of the secrets of what it takes to turn these special artists into denizens of the Human Zoo.

6:30pm 8:00pm (doors open at 5:30pm)
KÀ THEATER
MGM Grand Hotel & Casino
"KÀ"

The power of the story mixed with the power of Cirque du Soleil. This powerful spectacle dazzles with its high-tech storytelling.

10:30pm 12:00am (doors open at 9:30pm)
ZUMANITY THEATER
New York-New York Hotel & Casino
"ZUMANITY ANOTHER SIDE OF CIRQUE DU SOLEIL"

We wind up our weekend with a visit to the sensual. Be prepared to be provoked! Or, if you're lucky, evoked!

12:00am 1:00am (after the show)
ZUMANITY Theater
New York-New York Hotel & Casino

"ZUMANITY SPECIAL ACTIVITIES"

SHOW TICKETS REQUIRED FOR THIS ACTIVITY!

After the show, stay in your seats. We'll be treated to a Meet and Greet with ZUMANITY artists in the theater Lobby!

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2006

10:00am 12:00 Noon

Keith Johnson/LouAnna Valentine's Petite Suite (Room number TBA)

Treasure Island Hotel & Casino

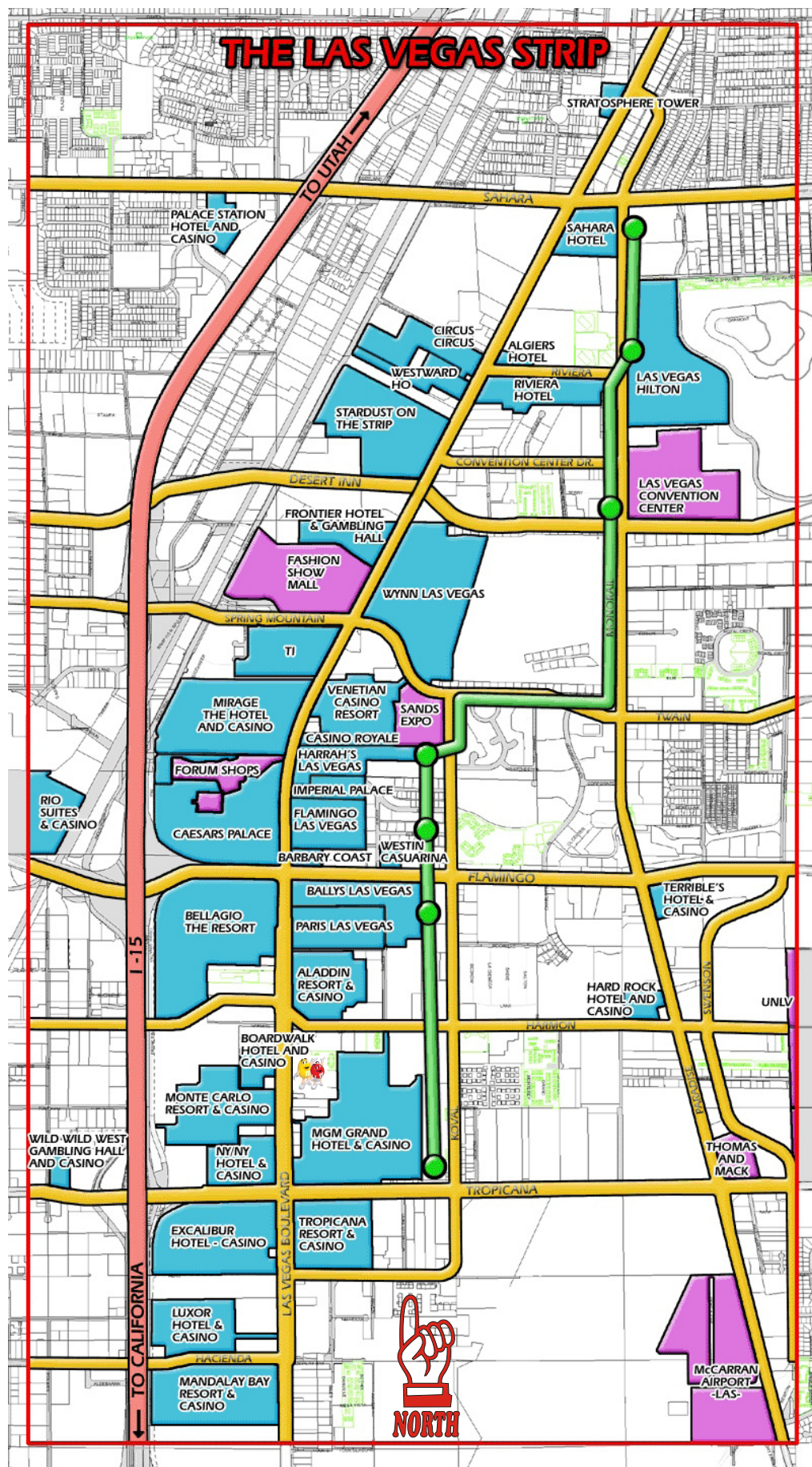
"HOW WAS YOUR WEEKEND? KAFFEEKLATSCH"

Many conventions have some version of an "Onions and Roses" panel where members are encouraged to give their compliments and suggestions. This is ours! Come have a cup of coffee or tea with us, let us know how we did and what can be improved. Or just stop by to say "good-bye"!

Rest of the Day

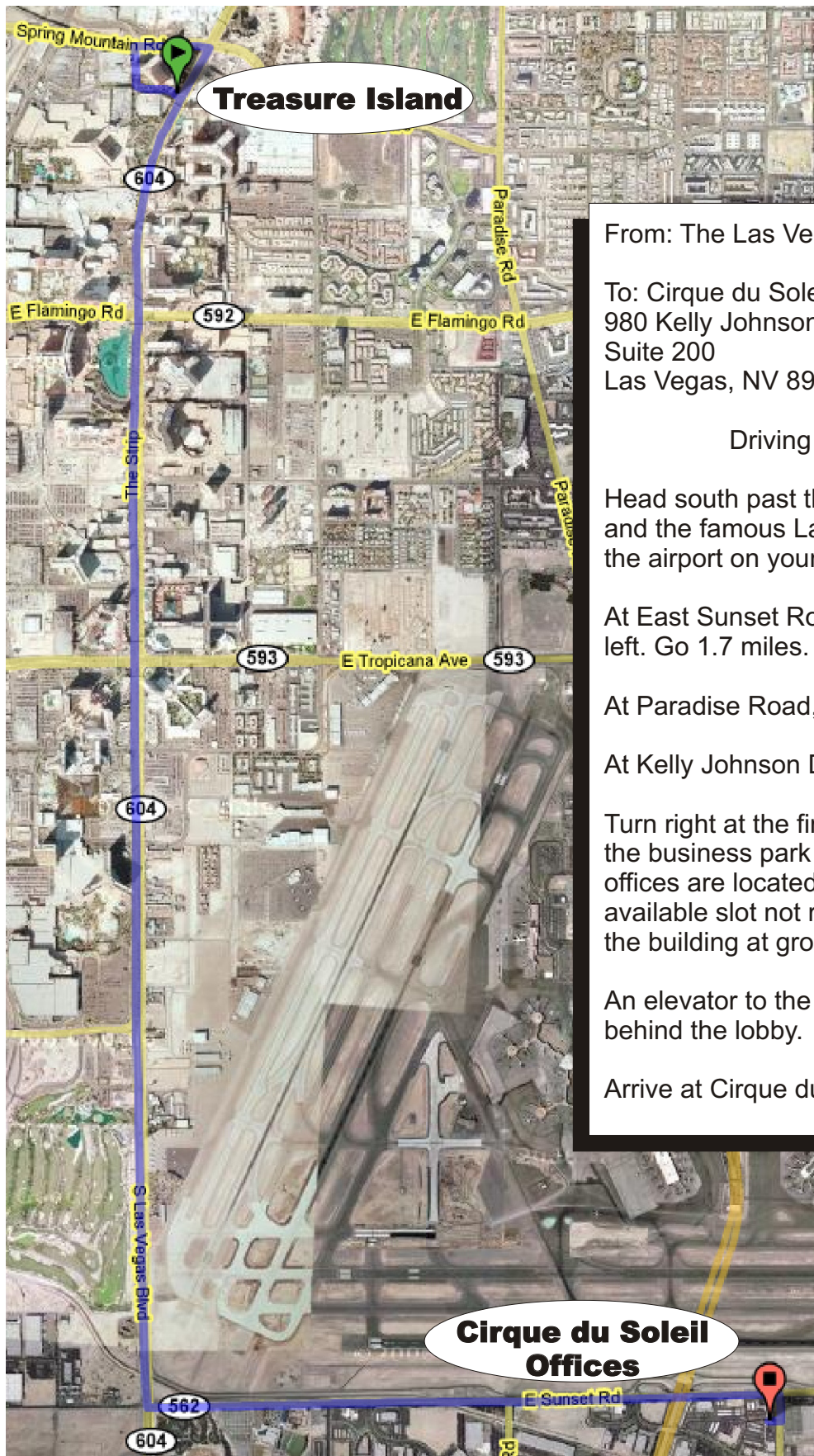
"NOTHING"

Sunday the 24th is our relaxing day. Shop, explore other facets of this incredible city, or just hang out by the pool, by yourself or with some new Cirque Passionate friends!



How To Get To...

Cirque du Soleil Offices from the Treasure Island



From: The Las Vegas Strip

To: Cirque du Soleil Offices
980 Kelly Johnson Drive
Suite 200
Las Vegas, NV 89119

Driving Directions

Head south past the Mandalay Bay and the famous Las Vegas sign, with the airport on your left.

At East Sunset Road (HWY 562), turn left. Go 1.7 miles.

At Paradise Road, turn right.

At Kelly Johnson Drive, turn right.

Turn right at the first entrance, which is the business park where the Cirque offices are located. Park in an available slot not reserved and enter the building at ground level.

An elevator to the second floor is behind the lobby.

Arrive at Cirque du Soleil Offices

CIRQUECON 2006: LAS VEGAS

ACTIVITY LOCATIONS

Bellagio Hotel and Casino

3600 South Las Vegas Boulevard, 89109

800-987-6667

702-693-7111

www.bellagio.com

"O" Special Activities:

(Show ticket required for below)

Thursday, September 21

12:00am-1:00am

"O" Official Show:

Thursday, September 21, 2006

10:30pm-12:00am (Doors open at 9:30pm)

Directions:

"O" Theater:

From the Strip: The best way to enter is from the elevated crosswalks above Las Vegas Boulevard. Proceeding into the resort, walk past the shops on Via Bellagio. Keep the casino on your left and head to the back. The Theater will be at the back of the casino on your right.

From the self-parking garage: This is probably the longest walk of the whole weekend! Exiting the elevators from the parking garage, proceed to your right into the lobby (with the Chihuly ceiling). In the middle of the lobby, proceed left through the casino. The Theater is in the northwest corner (up and to the left), next to the Buffet.

Cirque du Soleil Resident Shows Division

980 Kelly Johnson Drive, Suite 200

(cross streets East Sunset Road & Paradise Road)

Las Vegas, NV 89119

The CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas! Meet & Greet / Charity Auction:

Thursday, September 21, 2006

6:00-9:00pm

Private bus pickup for trip to Bellagio (bus passengers only)

Thursday, September 21

9:00-9:15pm

Directions:

From the Strip: Head south past the Mandalay Bay (and the famous "Welcome to Las Vegas" sign), with McCarran Airport on your left. At East Sunset Road (Highway 562) take a left. Proceed east 1.7 miles to Paradise Road. At Paradise Road take a right, then another right onto Kelly Johnson Drive. Take a right at the first entrance, which is the business park in which Cirque is housed. Park in an available slot not reserved and enter the building at ground level. An elevator to the second floor is behind the lobby.

MGM Grand Hotel and Casino

3799 Las Vegas Boulevard South, 89109

877-880-0880

702-891-7777

www.mgmgrand.com

KÀ Special Activities:

Thursday, September 21

3:00pm 5:00pm

Private Bus Pickup for Meet & Greet (bus passengers only)

Thursday, September 21

5:30pm 5:45pm

KÀ Official Show:

Saturday, September 23, 2006

6:30pm-8:00pm (Doors open at 5:30pm)

Directions:

KÀ Theater:

From the Strip: Enter from the elevated crosswalks above Las Vegas Boulevard, proceeding straight through the casino. Stay to the left at the La Femme Theater and take a left around that corner. The KÀ Theater will be ahead of you.

From the self-parking garage: Entering from the garage will take you through the Star Lane Shops and up an escalator, depositing you at the main entrance with the front desk to your right. Walk straight through the front entrance and casino until the Studio Café is in front of you. Take a right and the KÀ Theater will be ahead of you.

Mirage Hotel and Casino

3400 South Las Vegas Boulevard, 89109

800-374-9000

702-791-7111

www.mirage.com

LOVE Special Activities:

(Show ticket required for below)

Friday, September 22

9:00pm 9:30pm

LOVE official show:

Friday, September 22, 2006

7:30pm-9:00pm (doors open at 6:30pm)

Directions:

LOVE Theater:

From the Strip: Entering the resort from the moving walkway south of the volcano, you will pass the White Tiger Habitat. Halfway into the casino, look for the Cage on your left. Take a left and proceed straight ahead to the LOVE theater.

From the self-parking garage: Proceed over the overhead walkway and down the escalator to ground level. Walk ahead to the right and past the front desk. Take a right and go through the jungle atrium. Upon exiting the atrium you will be in the casino. Proceed straight ahead, passing the Cage on your right, to the LOVE theater.

New York-New York Hotel and Casino

3790 Las Vegas Boulevard South, 89109

888-696-9887

702-740-6969

www.nynyhotelcasino.com

ZUMANITY Special Activities:

Saturday, September 23

3:00pm 5:00pm

(Show ticket required for below)

Saturday, September 23

12:00am-1:00am

ZUMANITY Official Show:

Saturday, September 23, 2006

10:30pm-12:00am (Doors open at 9:30pm)

Directions:

ZUMANITY Theater:

From the Strip: Though it may seem best to enter from the overhead walkway, that is actually more confusing. There is another entrance at ground level, behind the Brooklyn Bridge (next to ESPN Zone). Entering there, proceed to the right, the ZUMANITY Box Office and Gift Shop will be ahead and slightly to your left.

From the self-parking garage: Hoo boy, here is another hike! The easiest way we've found is to take the overhead walkway on the north end of the parking garage (the one leading to the Arcade). Proceed straight through the Arcade, staying to the left. After a gentle left turn, the elevators for the "New Yorker" tower should be in view. Take these elevators to the Casino Floor. Upon exiting the elevators, stay to the left. Gallaghers will be on your left, as will a Box Office, restrooms, and the Mango Hut. The ZUMANITY Box Office will be straight ahead.

Treasure Island Hotel and Casino

3300 South Las Vegas Boulevard, 89109

800-288-7206

702-894-7111

www.treasureisland.com

CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas! Registration Table

Thursday, September 21: 10:00am 2:00pm

Friday, September 22: 10:00am 2:00pm

Saturday, September 23: 10:00am 2:00pm

The CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas! Group Meal:

Dishes Buffet

Friday, September 22, 2006

2:00pm-4:00pm

\$19.00 per person (coupons on sale at Registration Table)

Children under 2: Free

Mystère Special Activities:

Friday, September 22

4:20pm 6:00pm

(Show ticket required for below)

Friday, September 22

12:00am-12:30am

Mystère official show:

Friday, September 22

10:30pm-12:00am (Doors open at 9:30pm)

How was your weekend? Kaffeeklatsch (comment session)

Keith Johnson/LouAnna Valentine's Petite Suite (Room number TBA)

Sunday, September 24

10:00am 12:00 Noon

Directions:

CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas! Registration Table:

From the Strip: Proceed over the "Sirens of TI" walkway and straight through the casino. At the end of the casino (the TI Gift Shop), take a left, the elevators will be on your right. Take an elevator to the second floor, our Registration Table will be in the lobby of the meeting room area.

From the self-parking garage: Entering the casino from the back, you'll proceed over an elevated walkway populated with shops. At the end of the walkway is an escalator. Go past the Mystère Theater down the hallway, taking a right after the T.I. Gift Shop. The elevators will be on your right. Take an elevator to the second floor, our Registration Table will be in the lobby of the meeting room area.

From a T.I. Hotel Room: Take the elevator to the second floor, our Registration Table will be in the lobby of the meeting room area.

Dishes Buffet:

From the Strip: Proceed over the "Sirens of TI" walkway and straight through the casino. At the end of the casino, Dishes will be on your right.

From the self-parking lot: Entering the casino from the back, you'll proceed over an elevated walkway populated with shops. At the end of the walkway is an escalator. Go past the Mystère Theater down the hallway, Dishes will be on your left just past the T.I. Gift Shop at the beginning of the casino.

From a T.I. Hotel Room: Take the elevator to the ground level, and take a left out of the elevator lobby. At the main walkway look slightly to your right, Dishes will be on your left just past the T.I. Gift Shop.

Mystère Theater:

From the Strip: Proceed over the "Sirens of TI" walkway and straight through the casino. At the end of a hallway of shops past the casino, the Mystère Theater will be on your right.

From the self-parking garage: Entering the casino from the back, you'll proceed over an elevated walkway populated with shops. At the end of the walkway is an escalator, the Theater is on your left immediately at the bottom.

From a T.I. Hotel Room: Take the elevator to the ground level, and take a left out of the elevator lobby. At the main walkway take a left, the Mystère Theater will be on your right at the end of a hallway of shops past the casino.

From Dishes Buffet: Exit out the front of Dishes and keep right. At the end of a hallway of shops the Mystère Theater will be on your right.

How was your weekend? Kaffeeklatsch (comment session)

From the Strip: Proceed over the “Sirens of TI” walkway and straight through the casino. At the end of the casino (the TI Gift Shop), take a left, the elevators will be on your right. Take an elevator to the floor of the suite (to be announced), the room door will be open and should be right off the elevator lobby.

From the self-parking garage: Entering the casino from the back, you'll proceed over an elevated walkway populated with shops. At the end of the walkway is an escalator. Go past the Mystère Theater down the hallway, taking a right after the T.I. Gift Shop. The elevators will be on your right. Take an elevator to the floor of the suite (to be announced), the room door will be open and should be right off the elevator lobby.

From a T.I. Hotel Room: Take an elevator to the floor of the suite (to be announced), the room door will be open and should be right off the elevator lobby.

GOOD LUCK!



July 31, 2006

Dear 2006 CirqueCon Las Vegas participants,

On behalf of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, I would like to welcome you to the most exciting and electric destination on the planet! Thank you so much for selecting our city to host your group in 2006.

With five dedicated productions (Mystere, O, Zumanity, Ka, and Beatles' Love), like you, Las Vegas has a passion for Cirque du Soleil. Each night, these five shows transport thousands of Las Vegas visitors into the magical and mysterious world of their Montréal-based creators.

In addition to enjoying our fine entertainment, I invite you to experience one of Las Vegas' many fine dining restaurants, relax in one of over 30 world-class spas, take a swing on one of our over 60 professionally designed golf courses, or explore some of the many wonders of the surrounding Mojave desert.

Enjoy your visit, and come back again soon.

Sincerely,

Nancy Murphy, Vice President Sales
Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



September 2006

CirqueCon Las Vegas 2006

WELCOME TO FABULOUS LAS VEGAS!

And thank you for choosing Sin City to be the host of your 3rd CirqueCon Convention.

Cirque made Las Vegas their first permanent home with *Mystère*, the flower in the desert, 14 years ago. Since then, the city has become the home of our resident shows like "O", *Zumanity*, *KÀ* and most recently, *LOVE*. All the shows have different flavors and will appeal to everyone in different ways. We are very proud of them.

The city has much to offer in terms of outdoor and indoor activities. I am very sure that your visit here will be entertaining in more ways than one.

On behalf of all of us at Cirque's Resident Shows Division, we welcome you to Las Vegas.

Thank you for your continued and ongoing support.

Best regards,

Jerry Nadal
General Manager
Resident Shows Division



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

For the third time we gather, in a city of glitter and neon, for our quintessential event (quint = five get it?). Our friends at Cirque du Soleil have truly gone out of their way to provide us with extraordinary access. And it holds the promise of many surprises, both big and small. It will be a delight to finally meet you all!

We grew 300% percent between our Vancouver and Montréal events. So a simple doubling of our numbers between Montréal and Vegas might not seem like much, until you consider the increase is from more than 100 to more than 200 people! We are truly humbled by the faith you have put in our small committee.

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

31 members total, all of whom attended Quidam,

15 total hotel rooms, 33 room nights total.

Quite impressive for a first-time ad-hoc fan event!

For CirqueCon 2005: Montréal we had:

130 members total,

60 purchased our Standard membership, representing 90 people,

109 total tickets purchased for Corteo,

42 total hotel rooms, 144 room nights total.

Compare that with our numbers for CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas! (as of press time):

221 members total, with 151 paid memberships,

600+ tickets purchased amongst the five shows:

154 for LOVE

140 for Mystère

135 for KA

124 for "O"

87 for ZUMANITY

53 total hotel rooms taken at the Treasure Island, 205 room nights total.

Our members come from half the United States, Puerto Rico, four locations in Mexico, two Canadian provinces, two locations in Australia, the United Kingdom, and Scotland. WOW!

The sheer numbers this year have amazed us. They have also impressed our friends at Cirque du Soleil, and our special activities have been tailored to our numbers. We can look forward to a weekend of wonder, beauty, mystery, education and, above all, camaraderie. We hope at the end of your journey you find yourself welcome amongst fellow Cirque Passionates. We are not alone...

In this Program Book you will find extensive information about the five Las Vegas resident shows we will be seeing, compiled from information courtesy of Cirque du Soleil as well as the archives of the Fascination! Newsletter. We also include members sharing their personal stories and connection to Cirque du Soleil. We also present a brief summary of our previous events.

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

Invoke! Provoke! Evoke!



CIRQUECON 2006: LAS VEGAS!

OUR FRIENDS ARE HELPING OUT

CirqueCon is strictly volunteer-run, fan-based and fan-centered. We take no remuneration except for recovering our expenses. It is done out of our passion for Cirque du Soleil and the desire to bond with others like us.

We have talked to so many kind people this year we can't even begin to count them all. Many have offered help, either in planning or in on-site volunteering. We appreciate all the help we can get! While we don't know in advance who will be helping us on-site this year, there are many people we know about already (see below).

YOUR CIRQUECON 2006: LAS VEGAS! TEAM (in alphabetical order):

Rich Alford Our "graphics guy." Responsible for this Program Book, our badges, and other graphic elements. His graphic sense is evident throughout this book, our badges, and other things.

Ricky Russo - Lent the support of the Fascination! Newsletter to efforts early on. Has compiled and edited collections of articles from Fascination! for all our Program Books. Helped guide us through the budgeting process with his advanced Excel skills.

LouAnna Valentine - Played a vital role in decision-making with daily conversations, input and debate. In addition to being a lovely and supportive spouse, also developed the concept of our Meet and Greet. Came up with several inspired ideas, including our motto, "Live Passionately!"

Keith Johnson - Whatever else needed to be done. Tons of writing, member communication, database management, research/phone calls, hotel and meal booking, being an overly detail-conscious jerk... you get the picture.

LEGAL AND OTHER NECESSARY STUFF:

Limitation of Liability: Each CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas! Member, or member of a Member's traveling group, assumes the entire responsibility and liability for losses, damages, and claims arriving out of injury or damage to themselves, members of their party, belongings, or other property occurring during CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas!, and shall indemnify and hold harmless CirqueCon, its agents, Committee, service providers, and employees from any and all such losses, damages and claims.

The CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas! Committee is: Keith Johnson, LouAnna Valentine, Ricky Russo, and Rich Alford.

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THANK YOU'S AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

CirqueCon cannot happen without help from many different places. The list of those who have helped us this year, especially, is long. We've tried to remember everyone in the list below. But even with this list we're sure we're missing somebody. Know that we humbly thank you all!!

Cirque du Soleil:

- **Meredith Delay**, Sales & Ticketing Manager, our main point of contact and the person who spearheaded efforts on our behalf.
- **Lisa Hearting**, Ticketing Agent, who took on the headache of 100+ orders from members and handled them with aplomb.
- The Marketing & PR Team at the Resident Shows Division including:
 - The Ticketing Team Meredith Delay, Carrie Farina, Lisa Hearting, Carol Pettus, Serena Villamor and Radley Griego.
 - The Marketing Team Stacy Spahle, Callie de Quevedo, and Jeffrey Wu.
 - The PR Team Anita Nelving, Ann Paladie, Cara Luttrell, John McCoy, Merri Hagan, Karin Tomcik, and Jessica Berlin.
 - Lance Taylor, Assistant Director, PR/Marketing.
 - Casey McClure, Admin Assistant, PR/Marketing.
 - General Manager's Office Jerry Nadal, May Leng Yuen, Julie Loewen and Aimee Wade.
 - The Sales Team Michelle Sharples, Pamela Devine, Lauren Zaricki and Amber Moore.
- Michael Bolingbroke, Senior VP of Live Shows.
- The Social, Cultural and Public Affairs Team Karen Gay, Meggan Riley, Danielle Rodenkirchen, and Dawn Coraci.
- Cirque du Soleil International Headquarters in Montréal Joanne Fillion, André Belanger, Anne-Josée Dionne, Lisa Willet, John-Pierre Beeks, Roxane Prince.
- KÀ Calum Pearson, Company Manager; Victoria Webb, Asst. Company Manager; Stacey Myers, Stage Manager; Bill Wendlandt and the rest of the cast & crew.
- LOVE Alan Hills, Company Manager; Lynne Bodamer, Asst. Company Manager; Christina Petras, Production Asst; Mike Anderson, OPM; David Dovell, OTD; and the rest of the cast & crew.
- Mystère - Bob MacDonald, Company Manager; Jeff Lund, Asst. Company Manager; Tommy Starkey, OPM; and the rest of the cast & crew.
- "O" - Tony Ricotta, Company Manager; Russ Petroni, Asst. Company Manager; Carrie DeSantis, Production Asst; Dawn Bradley, Theatre Manager; and the rest of the cast & crew.
- ZUMANITY Kathy Merachnik, Company Manager; Tim Robinson, Asst. Company Manager; Sharean McVay, Production Asst; Gene Lubas, Artistic Coordinator; John Barnett, OPM; and the rest of the cast & crew.
- Cili at Bali Hai for proving the great food for the Meet & Greet at RSD.

There are also numerous people throughout Cirque du Soleil who have given their time and energy to help make the activities at CirqueCon happen. Their names may be unknown to us, but our deepest thanks to them is not. We sincerely appreciate you all!!!

- **Treasure Island Kevin Oyabu**, Jennifer Gill, Sarah Tejada, Michelle Jenkins, Mel Bradley, Barb Billmyer, Monica Habart, Jennifer Prideaux, Omri Karo (Dishes).
- Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority Gina Mann and Luke Puschnit, for providing guidance and opinion.
- MGM Vacations Beth Nelson, for starting us on the journey.
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A "Cirquey" Thank You!

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Street Teens, the recipient of funds generated at our Meet & Greet Auction, is a 501(c)(3) corporation founded in January 2000 by Rosario and David Mereaux. It was established as a volunteer organization to serve Las Vegas' homeless and at-risk teens. Originally offering resources through street outreach, the organization has now grown to provide a safe haven seven days per week. The Sanctuary, their drop-in center, opened on October 1, 2001, serving homeless youth from 4:00-8:00 p.m. daily.

Street Teens is a volunteer based, non-profit organization dedicated to assisting homeless, abandoned, and at risk youth, both male and female, between the ages of 12-21, in the Las Vegas Valley (Las Vegas, Henderson, Boulder City, and North Las Vegas). On average, they provide services to 15- 20 teens per day. To date they have provided services to over 975 homeless and at-risk teenagers.

Their primary goal is to meet the survival needs of youth by providing basic necessities in a safe, compassionate environment. They are able to provide access to educational, health care, and employment resource services through their drop-in center and by actively collaborating with community partners. Street Teens does not discriminate on the basis of gender, religious affiliation, national origin, ethnicity, or sexual orientation.

Street Teens Building Campaign: In June, 2005 their building landlord presented an opportunity to purchase the building they occupy for \$650,000. The Executive Director was both thrilled and rather overwhelmed at the prospect of raising the funds necessary to do so. However, they know that the benefits to the youth they serve and the community will be immeasurable.

The goal for 2006 is to raise the necessary funds to purchase and expand the building and services. Their vision includes the expansion of a classroom where GED & High School classes are offered through Clark County Adult Education, to build a medical office where teens can be treated for illnesses on site, to build a small indoor gymnasium for kids to play in, offer a comfortable space for Cirque du Monde workshops, provided through Cirque du Soleil, and to include office space for other non-profit organizations in the community to share resources and to prevent duplication of services.

CirqueCon is honored to work with Cirque du Soleil to benefit such a worthy cause.

For more information on Street Teens, please visit: www.streetteens.org.



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"A Flower in the Desert, Mystère"

By: Ricky "Richasi" Russo Orlando, Florida (USA)

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

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

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

Mystère.

What follows is a special new essay comprising elements from the "Fascination! Newsletter" archives of an article written for its first ever issue (published on September 2001) entitled "Mystère - A Mountain Tale"; and an excerpt of a three-part series (published on February, June and November 2003) exploring "The Houses of Cirque," both originally written by Ricky "Richasi" Russo. These articles, much like what appears below, examine the show's initial development, personages, performance space and surrealistic theme. Since these pieces provide a wonderful insight into the concept of Mystère, we couldn't help but include them here for your enjoyment. If you are interested in reading the original articles, or in learning more about "Fascination! - the unofficial Cirque du Soleil newsletter" - please visit us at www.CirqueFascination.com.

Genesis

Like the new productions of today, we must ask ourselves what brought Cirque du Soleil to this place in time? And what are they about to give birth to?

For Mystère, we look to the history of Cirque du Soleil to provide those answers, and in doing so revisit the innovative and imaginative "Nouvelle Expérience." After hearing a rumor that Cirque was talking to (and later rebuffed by) Caesar's Palace to stage a show at that property, then Mirage Resorts (now MGM-Mirage)

Chairman Steve Wynn flew to Toronto to catch a performance. It is said that after seeing the evening's performance he knew the acrobats, contortionists, and dancers he had seen on stage must be showcased at his new resort. He signed them immediately.

In 1992, following a successful North American tour, "Nouvelle Expérience" rolled into Las Vegas and set up stakes in a special white-and-gold striped tent on the ground of The Mirage. While the show was less-than-well received at first the yearlong extravaganza proved one thing: Las Vegas could handle a sophisticated production (remember, at the time cabaret-style Showgirl shows and headliners were the rage).

And thus, when Steve Wynn decided to build an extension to his hotel property (called "Treasure Island at the Mirage"), he turned to Cirque du Soleil to provide the entertainment. He would build them a theater, complete to their specifications (designed by Scéno Plus and envisioned by Michel Crête.) He would also do something quite unheard of for a production of this type: Mr. Wynn allowed Cirque complete control over their creation.



It wasn't without reservations, however.

The story goes that when the show was still in its conception stage, where nothing was yet final, Steve Wynn decided to take a gander at his gamble, and watched a rehearsal. When the house lights returned, the expression on his face was that of controlled terror - he was not enthused. He thought the show was too operatic, and he wanted it changed. The creators - Franco Dragone (Director) and Gilles Ste-Croix (Creation) - jumped to the defense of the show, and thankfully, Steve Wynn allowed the two to continue uninhibited and in full control. That decision was a fateful one, because who could guess at this day and age, what Mystère would have been... or if it would have been at all!

Their visions coalesced with the juices of creation. The result: a unique story - a blend of circus and theater; of dance and darkness; and, of life and death. Their vision consisted of a mountain and a bird -- a story so bold and yet so fragile, exploring the human condition in a sense that had not been done before.

That vision brought forth Mystère.

An Esoteric Narrative

The multi-million dollar production of Mystère tells a story -- It is an amazing story of time, beauty and memory; a ballet without gravity and a theater performance without actors. "Mystère is a voyage to the very heart of life where past, present and future merge and all our



emotions converge," Franco Dragone says within the pages of the show's program book. "Mystère is the enigma of time, the bearer of hopes and dreams, but also of tragedy. It is above all the remembrance of time past, memories of life unfolding, following its course and ultimately surviving against all odds."

Mystère is the story of the universe - a rich voyage from the dawn of time to the end of the millennium. Mystère is also man's journey from infancy to adulthood - his desire to understand the universe, his search for answers and his ultimate discovery that life itself is a mystery.

Mystère is also a celebration of life. From the genesis of the first life forms to the rise of human civilizations, the driving force has always been the vital spark of life, throbbing, struggling, reproducing, and weaving through death and rebirth. From the infinitesimally microscopic to the infinitely vast, from the most majestic to the most terrifying, from the most fragile to the most powerful, all is the making of life.

And how is this mysterious narrative projected on stage?

To once again quote the show's program: "A thousand years from now, the sun sets for the billionth time in the Nevada desert. The Ancient Bird stands witness, standing on a single gnarled leg. As the warmth of the day ebbs away, he turns his sand-scarred beak to the Ancient Mountain and croaks mischievously, 'Do you remember, friend?' The wind sighs down the slopes, whispering a fond memory..."

The Mountain and the Ancient Bird tell us a story of humanity that is on the brink of a new Century. It is December 31st, 1999 and the universe is filled with the cries of three enormous babies. In thirteen brief seconds it will either be the dawn of a new millennium "fraught with the hopes and fears of humanity", or the beginning of the apocalypse doomsayers of the world had predicted. And still, as all eyes watch the desert skies, time seems to stand still, never moving forward. And, in these briefest of moments, time actually becomes circular, setting the stage...

Taiko

The adventure begins with The Big Bang symbolizing primitive man embarking on a never-ending journey. The opening also juxtaposes the characters and contexts in a way that creates the universal life cycles of Mystère®: the primitives on the drums, the renaissance Archangels and the technical scenography coexist seamlessly. The Taiko's reappearance in the conclusion is a reminder that the future is built on the memory of the past.

The Aerial Cube

Soaring with drama and deep concentration, Paul Bowler conquers the universe through his cube. He effortlessly turns and spins the cube while nonchalantly performing an exhilarating ballet of jaw-dropping aerial maneuvers. Fascinated observers hold their breath wondering who is in control: the cube or the artist? The mystery continues.



Chinese Poles

Squirring up and down the poles, like sprouting vines, they are a symbol of organic life, which feeds on itself and grows.

Hand to Hand

Their appearance signifies the interdependence of the first humans who build on their solidarity until a whole tribe emerges. Two mighty physiques connect in gentle, fluid movements, exuding a strength that mystifies the audience.

Bungee

Like graceful birds in flight, they dive fearlessly in unison, creating a fantastically organized chaos. As they drop from their trapezes in turn or as a group, stopped only by the elastic around their waists, the bewitched spectators sit spellbound.

Korean Plank

Showcasing the amazing agility of the human body through spectacular sequences of aero-gymnastics and human pyramids, this act signifies organized human society: productivity, play and brotherhood with the entire team working as a unit.

Trampoline and Fast Track

The comic chorus is always present, always jolly, and always laughing in the face of the pain of humanity. With their frivolous energy, these bouncing characters are like a virus contaminating the world of Mystère with an infectious folly. Perhaps they possess the true wisdom...

Aerial High Bar

Human dreams take flight, borne by the hopes of a new millennium. The pendulum movement of the high bar flyers emphasize that time continues but never stops passing. The benefits outweigh the risks, for the adventure is the reward.

The Personages of Mystère

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

Moha-Samedi (The Man in Pink)

Named after the first day of the new millennium, he is the narrator no one listens to yet he and his puppet contain all the accumulated knowledge of humanity since the beginning of time.

Les Épouvantables (The Babies)

Two enormous babies on a quest for nourishment embark on an odyssey of discovery. They are the carriers of the world's hopes and aspirations; they quest for nourishment and understanding. By journeying through Mystère, they relive the history of the universe. They are icons of every human ready to embark on a new adventure: the 21st century.

The Mountain

A geological oddity of trembling flesh that craves to be human.

The Firebird

A jewel sailing through the sky on a stream of song.

The Tribe

They are the primitive, tragic ghosts of modern humanity.

Deus Ex Machina

It is the machine which regulates the existence of everything, living or inanimate. Inevitably it tyrannizes and grinds down the independent.

Vache A Lait

Bearer of every illusion, he always stays just beyond reach. He is a metaphoric, androgynous figure, to bear the hopes and dreams of men. The Vache à Lait tantalizes and attracts the babies with the purpose of fulfillment.

La Belle

Through her fear of ugliness she seeks to avoid pain at all costs.

The Pets

Birds who have forgotten how to fly, they are la Belle's constant companions.

The Black Virgin

The Virgin is a praying mantis that destroys the illusions and dreams of her victims.

The Birds of Prey

These birds are the Virgin's coven of lost souls, seeking revenge for their fall from the sky.

The Asticots (Double-Face)

Each one is a segment of the whole and would die if alone. Their double-face hides the corruption of their state.

Stas (La Puce)

La Puce is a mischievous imp, a thousand years old.

Archangels (Les Laquais)

They are the terrestrial guardians of the happiness and safety of others, even at the cost of their own lives; a tragic chorus. Gabriel: The finest of the Archangels, he is ready to sacrifice everything, including the love of the one he secretly adores.

Init X & Y (Spermatites & Spermatos)

The Female & Male viruses, a cosmic chorus, ready to contaminate everybody.

Mephisto

Mephisto is a dark, thwarted, twisted creature from the deepest of nightmares.

The Giants (La Mouche and La Plumé)

The Giants are a gentle frivolous race of futile feathers and long legs.

Le Prince

The Prince is a man of noble birth who hides a terrible secret.

Monsieur Brian Le Petit

He is the grain of sand in the gears of the well-oiled machine.

Escargot

"Alice" was born from a spring rain, carrier of the souls of the ancestors and herald of the future.

The Mystère Theater, at Treasure Island

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

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

In 1992, Michel Crête left the world of fabric behind and designed the sets for the mega-production known as Fascination (a combination of Le Cirque Réinventé and Nouvelle Expérience) that appeared as a special limited engagement in Japan. He went on to design the sets for Saltimbanco (1992), Mystère (1993), Alegria (1994), Quidam (1996), "O" and La Nouba (1998). Through it all, Michel has worked closely with Scéno Plus, a Canadian company founded in 1985 with the quest to be innovative in their design and construction solutions, for the realization of his visions.

The first vision of this partnership was the Treasure Island showroom, a beautiful 1541-seat theater within the \$430 million expansion of the Mirage Casino-Hotel in Las Vegas. Rumored to cost approximately \$20 million, the theater comes complete with comfortable seats, a wonderful view for all, and an interesting story of compromise with its design. You'll find the theater in the back of Treasure Island through a couple of sets of white and red wooden doors, but you won't mistake their purpose; for beyond the ornamented doors lies Mystère.

The theater has several interesting points about it, many of which are too technical to discuss here. However, one of the first things people notice upon entering is its openness. The Treasure Island Theater lacks a divider, or curtain, between stage and audience that is usually



found in most theaters. Thus the stage is completely open to the audience, allowing the action to be thrust upon them. This was the goal from the initial meetings between the Mirage staff and Cirque/Scéno. The idea was to make the environment feel as if you were in the intimate setting of a Big Top. Did they do a good job, or what?

In fact, upon further study you'll find that there's also no Proscenium Arch, the technical name for that division. The lack of this arch is what gives Mystère its life, but it almost wasn't to be. The Mirage staff feared that without this arch (i.e. a more "standard" design) they would have to shut the entire space down for costly modifications if the show had failed. Because of this, the theater almost didn't get built. Thankfully, quick thinking came up with a series of catwalks built into the ceiling of the theater that allow for quick (and relatively cheap) modification to a normal theater. Without the arch, however, there also would be no "fire curtain," a fire-retardant cloth made to help contain smoke, heat and flame in case of a fire. This absence meant that the theater would not adhere to the fire code, which the Fire Marshals could not understand. Cirque/Scéno had to haul in a scale model of the theater to the fire marshal's office just to get approval!

There were other problems to overcome as well. In the original plans, Cirque/Scéno envisioned a series of lifts that would raise and lower the performers at will. In order to incorporate the lifts, they would have to be buried in the ground. But Las Vegas sits on a crust of what is called "caliche," soil particles that have been fused with lime. This fusion created a substance that is as hard as (if not harder than) cement, which made burrowing into it quite difficult and costly. Since they couldn't dig down in the bedrock without elevating the costs of the theater prohibitively, the solution is actually one of the most ingenious and visible parts of the Mystère experience - the Deux Machina.

The stage floor sits on specially designed spiral-shaped lifts called "Spiralifts". The Spiralifts were designed by Gala, a division of Montreal's Paco Corp., and employ a "coiled, flexible, flat steel spring that expands with the insertion of a thin, vertically-oriented spiral steel band." This allows for big savings in space while providing a rock-solid system for lifting and lowering stages. The use of the Spiralifts also meant that they wouldn't have to spend a lot of money digging through the tough, solid ground, which greatly pleased the Mirage developers.

I find once I'm in the theater I can't help but look at the set and ceiling. A simple thing the ceiling is, but here too Cirque/Scéno provided something beautiful and interesting. The ceiling is a cloth mural specially crafted by Sky Art out of Colorado. The print on the cloth is just as fanciful as the production below it - a fantasy map of the world with ships at sea! And hidden up in that sea of ships is the O-Daiko drum, the heartbeat of Mystère! The set is also an interesting piece of mechanics, consisting of a hunk of metal as a backdrop that can be rotated by a simple flip of a switch.



The 10 musicians are housed on either side

of the stage, with drums and percussion on the left and everyone else on the right. A sophisticated communications computer allows the musical director to speak with all the musicians and a monotone "click track" keeps everyone in sync. Underneath the stage is a round turntable that can revolve at 10rpm, and of course those slinky-lifts. Believe it or not, the Mystère set still retains some of the elements that were part of the theme first presented to Caesar's Palace back in 1991 (Caesar's turned them down, but Mirage called soon afterward). For example, Crête says that the set "suggests Ulysses, and the mythical obstacles he had to overcome on his own journey. The two towers represent Scylla and Charybdis, two of the perils Ulysses faced". All the trappings of Rome (although Scylla and Charybdis are the names of sea monsters in Greek mythology.)

Many challenges faced the design team for Cirque du Soleil's first theater, but one by one everyone worked to resolve these issues no matter how heated the debates became. The addition to The Mirage, Treasure Island, opened on October 26, 1993. Though the public had to wait another two months to have a seat in the theater, patrons were lined up on Christmas Eve to bear witness to a unique event in Cirque du Soleil's history. In 1994, Scéno Plus was awarded the Las Vegas Best Theater of the Year award for their ingenuity. Not bad for their first Cirque outing, wouldn't you say?

As with all things, we must bring this peek into Mystère to a close. But fret not; soon you may be one of the witnesses to the same bizarre creatures, the mind-blowing agility of its performers and sheer awesome power of its presentation just like our spectators did on that cool December evening.

And when you do you may call it art.

You may call it theatre.

But we call it Mystère.

{Fin}

"The Wind Doth Blow, O"**By: Ricky "Richasi" Russo Orlando, Florida (USA)**

What immediately comes to mind when you hear someone exclaim "Oh!?" Do you wait for some kind of follow-up; a signal that the person who expressed it will tell you something he or she just discovered? Or do you let your mind wander to a place where dreams become reality and where anything is possible?

Most will be the former... but if you are a fan of Cirque du Soleil, you then are the latter and your mind will have wandered to Cirque du Soleil's production of «O», at the Bellagio. And for you the mere utterance of the show's title conjures up a barrage of chaotic images, spectacular performances, and heart wrenching melodies.

This is the world Cirque du Soleil has created for us, a world born especially for the Bellagio hotel. A world shaped to equal the beauty and elegance of the hotel that surrounded it. A world that when unleashed would up-the-ante in the Las Vegas entertainment arena and leapfrog *Mystère* to lay claim to the title of mega-production.

It proved to be harder than they ever imagined.

What follows is a special new essay comprising elements from the "Fascination! Newsletter" archives of an article published in November 2001 entitled "The Wind Doth Blow"; and an excerpt of a three-part series (published on February, June and November 2003) exploring "The Houses of Cirque," both originally written by Ricky "Richasi" Russo. These articles, much like what appears below, examine the show's initial beginnings, its operatic setting, personages, and the performances within. Since these pieces provide a wonderful insight into the concept of «O», we couldn't help but include them here for your enjoyment. If you are interested in reading the original articles, or in learning more about "Fascination! - the unofficial Cirque du Soleil newsletter" - please visit us at www.CirqueFascination.com.

An Intr"O"duction

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

which you would think.

Believe it or not, in the early stages of the Bellagio's development, it wasn't quite clear exactly how Cirque du Soleil would contribute to its entertainment offerings. There were two schools of thought, and two questions surrounding them: would there be a theater show similar to what was already featured down the road at Treasure Island or would there be a show on the lake that was to be built? Both ideas were heavily considered (plans were drawn for Cirque du Soleil on the Bellagio lake), but in the end Steve Wynn decided on having his like and elegant fountains, and Cirque, well, they went on to create the most remarkable theater show seen.

On October 19, 1998, Cirque du Soleil beat the odds; the red curtain whisked away for the first time and 1800 patrons watched in awe as the stresses of every-day life ebbed away and were replaced with the dreamlike world of "O".

Let us dive now into this watery world and learn exactly how this show is pulled off night after night after night.

The "O" Theater, at Bellagio

"O", a phonetic play on the French word for water - "eau", is a baroque world filled with disturbing images, impressive acrobatics and

amazing technical design. The theater built for the show, Cirque's first aquatic show, is also a revolutionary conceptual space. Taking approximately two years to build (February 1996 to January 1998) and reportedly costing \$70 million US, it sports an innovative theatrical design making the 1800-seat space the first of its kind. What makes the theater so special? At the heart of the 155,300 square-foot show space is a 1.5 million gallon (6-million liter) pool used for its stage. And that is pretty innovative, if you ask me!

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

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



While the ceiling itself is a wonder to behold, how many of you have sat with mouths agape as the curtain is drawn back into the depths of the theater for the show's explosive beginning? If so, you're not alone. The curtain impresses many who have seen the show. So, how does it work? That amazing feat is done by another winch by Fisher, a 20-horsepower F200 model that draws back at a speed of 14-feet per second! At that velocity one would imagine the curtain would flutter noticeably. But believe it or not, Cirque keeps the curtain from fluttering with a series of weights that hold it in place timed to release with the curtain's upward motion. This keeps the curtain taught throughout the entire drawback sequence.

It moves away to reveal another innovation of the theater, the pool itself.

The stage consists of a 150-foot by 100-foot pool reaching a depth of 25 feet. While the pool itself is an interesting marvel, haven't you ever wondered how the pool becomes a stage? Below that liquid surface lies a series of hydraulic lifts built specifically by Handling Specialty of Grimsby, Ontario. There are four of these lifts, each with a 1-million pound capacity. What's in them? Vegetable Oil! The lifts can quietly rise, thanks to special sonic probes, and lower the pieces of the stage in mere seconds (5 to 25-feet per second). Those pieces are made out of a resilient rubber-like material in a series of 4-foot by 8-foot panels. Each panel contains 5,000 plus holes to allow water to pass as the stage is raised or lowered. But the speed of their disappearance and sudden reappearance can fool you into thinking that the lifts and the stage are quite light. In fact, the combined weight of the system is a hefty 460,000 pounds!

But the lifts are only part of the innovation. Many of the problems with the show's development came because of the water itself. Ask yourself a couple of questions: How would the noise of the splashes be contained? How could the temperatures between the water and the air be comfortable for both the performers and the patrons? How could the smell of chorine be contained? They are all important questions to solve, because, even with all the technology surrounding the theater and the pool, the answers would determine if the two could be fused together.

The solutions are novel in their own right. First, the noise of the water is absorbed by a series of rocks scattered around the ring of the pool. The rocks, used in conjunction with special matting from 3M called Nomad, help absorb the sound of the water as it splashes about. Second, the 87-degree Fahrenheit water is counter-balanced with a special HVAC (Heating, Ventilating and Air Conditioning) system design that pumps 55-degree Fahrenheit air directly under each seat. This mixture of air keeps the humidity down while resulting in a comfortable 72-degree temperature. Thirdly, using Bromide in the water averts the chlorine smell.

There are many other technical advances of Cirque du Soleil's theater at the Bellagio that remain secret behind Cirque's closed doors. And perhaps that's the way it should be.



Giving away too much takes away from the marvel of the show, does it not?

But as we move on in our understanding of this aquatic habitat, permit me one more fact about the theater: for their collaboration, Cirque du Soleil and Scéno Plus were awarded New York's prestigious Eddy Entertainment Design Award in 1998, the Canadian Institute for Technology's Award of Technical Merit in 1999, and the Las Vegas Best Theater of the Year Award for their ingenuity.

The Characters of "O"

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

Eugen

He is our guide and the guardian of the theater. Eugen is strong, yet vulnerable. He knows all and provokes us to see the dark side of "O". His ghostly orchestrations take us on a timeless journey through different worlds as he makes his own transformation from dark to white. His is the cyclonical part of life where everything becomes new again.

Guifà

He is the young Sicilian boy we see at the very beginning of the show, and throughout its creation. He is a curious fellow and it's that curiosity and a quest for adventure that transports him (and us) to a magical realm where all his hopes, fears and dreams come true.

Aurora

She is a trapeze artist who turns Guifà's head.

Les Comètes

Dressed in red, they belong to the theater, universe, and cosmos. They are everywhere and yet they are no where.

Le Travesti (The Transvestite)

He wears the clothes of a wicked woman; coos, hisses and murmurs. You won't be able to miss his primal cries.

La Petite Danseuse

She dances to the music of the Barbary organ, and has always danced.

Le Voleur

He is a masked character with many faces. Sometimes a clown, sometimes a body guard; he plays with fire.

L'Allumé

He is a pyromaniac who enjoys pleasing the crowd.

The Zebras

They are playful and bright; constantly realigning themselves to maintain balance in a stormy universe.

A Watery World

When I originally sat down to begin writing this piece I decided it would be a more traditional look at the program: from its music, its acts and all the fanfare surrounding it. I must admit though, it wasn't working. I found that I could not convey the imagery of the show to you - the reader - as I hoped I could. What did that say to me as a writer? Was I not a good enough writer to express my feelings and thoughts? No. It is that the world of "O" is too enriched with dreamlike images and floating operatic music that it is up to the spectator to experience and interpret for his or herself. I simply cannot convey the true meaning of the production in mere words. And as the trade line of *Mystère* reads: "Words simply don't do it justice", well, that seemed to fit here. The show has to be experienced. "O" is much more than the sum of its acts; it's the subtle nuances that give birth to the uniqueness of the show. That's what I decided to explore here instead, the subtle nuances and the acts I particularly enjoyed that strike a chord within me.

At first glance, "O" is nothing more than another Cirque du Soleil production inside a fancy theater built to specifications for a hotel project on the Las Vegas strip. When you take a second glance, "O" becomes much, much more. Every aspect surrounding it is finely tuned; detailed to exactness. Take the theater for example; a remarkable feat it is! Tucked away in a seemingly normal looking hallway on the casino floor, you'll find the entrance to the theater for "O", Cirque du Soleil's first aquatic production. One would never guess that beyond those plain, white painted doors was the whimsical world of Cirque du Soleil. It seems inconceivable that within a \$1.6 billion dollar hotel resides a production never before attempted, never before imagined even.

"O" is the brainchild of Franco Dragone and Gilles Ste-Croix, the backbone of every Cirque du Soleil show from its earliest beginnings. It is their guidance and determination that we have "O" and the beautiful theater it plays in. Sitting within the theater is also a treat in itself. The redness of the seats contrasts with the beautiful colors of blue, green and white plastered on the ceiling above you. Its silk-like fabric never wavers against the blown air of the theater, and that contrasts with the bright red fabric of the shows curtain, draped across the entire stage.

And it is the stage that grabs our eyes immediately, and to our first introduction of the characters that will play out their hopes and dreams before us. The first person we see is Guifà, a young Sicilian boy. His curiosity about what lies ahead and his never-ending quest for adventure become the center point of the journey we, as spectators, are about to undertake. There's something about the red curtain that draws us to it; and him. It covers the entire stage, shutting us out from a wondrous world we know nothing about. But as curious as Guifà is, we are as well.

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

Look! Out from the red curtain that has been draped

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

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

And doth the winds blow...

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

*O, to sing with all my heart
caress you with my soul, my art
embrace you as my counterpart
until you turn away
O.*

Turn away we shall not. After the amazing opening curtain, the senses are overloaded with a horde of different acts. They range from the classic circus performance to interesting one-of-a-kind creations, made special for this production. The acts include: Nage (Synchronized Swimming), Duo Trapeze, La Barge (Banquine), Cadre (Suspended Cradle), Cerceaux (Aerial Hoops), Bateau (Aerial Cradle and Parallel Bars), Washington Trapeze, High Dive, Russian Swing, Fire and a Contortion performance. Each of these acts blends the real world with the fantasy world using water as their lifeblood. To help blend reality and fantasy, each act has its own musical accompaniment.

For those who have the «O» CD, you will find: Nage, or Synchronized Swimming, performs to a conjunction of "Jeux d'eau" (which is translated into "Dancing Waters" and "Désert", as do the amazing Duo Trapeze



Trapeze performers; the Washington Trapeze performs to an amazing melody entitled "Journey of Man" which is not on the CD, but you can find it on the CD of the IMAX Movie "Journey of Man"; the Contortion performs to "Gamelan", the Barge, which is a Banquine act, performs to "Mer Noire" (which translates into Black Sea) and the Cerceaux, or Aerial Hoops, twists to "Svecounia". Every act in «O» is extraordinary and by no means to I wish to single any out as better than the rest, however, besides the acts already mentioned, there are 4 that I absolutely adore, and it is here I wish to examine them further.

Reflections

One of the first acts I would like to examine further is the Russian Swing number. Performed to an infectious tune: "Simcha" (and usually "Tzelma" is mistakenly identified here), the tune is a happy one, calling all to come and celebrate! The performance that accompanies the music is a great Cirque du Soleil favorite. The Russian Swing can be made of wood or metal (but in this case, it is metal) and has the ability to catapult a performer 30 plus feet in the air. The apparatus swings in a pendulum-like motion and is powered by one, two or more spotters riding "in the back". The apparatus acquired its name due to its appearance: it looks like a simple playground swing! When you add water, mist and more than one of these contraptions to the mixture of this performance, a very interesting performance ensues. And it is one I look forward to seeing every time.

The Bateau is another favorite amongst patrons, and happens to be one of mine as well. I can't really say what draws me to it. Perhaps it is the melding of two different disciplines - the Parallel Bars and Aerial Cradle. And, let's be honest here, it is something I know virtually nothing about. That having been said, these two disciplines meld together fantastically in this surreal world of «O». The Bateau is aptly named, literally a ghost ship suspended in air, this steel framed ship charts the course of life and the pursuit of dreams. Behind the delicate balance between air and water lie the chants of "Remous" (which translates into "Movement"). And together, the 10 performers of flyers and catchers, they create an amazing display of timing, strength and agility.

*O, the all-consuming fire
licking, lapping like desire
exalting, rising even higher
until the wind blows in
O.*

Naturally, air and water must meet fire and it does so in an act named Feu. Set to "Terre Aride" (which translates into "Arid Ground") from the «O» soundtrack, this act contrasts the watery world we've found ourselves in. The way the theater glows during this act is what allures me to it - reflected in the huge circular mirror above the stage. The theater seems to turn into flame itself as the performance wields itself onstage. But when one, two and even three men get into the performance and fight amongst themselves; well... it is simply amazing how they pulse to the rhythm around them. In the end, the water encompasses the fire, snuffing it out; however, we are left with one last poignant image; that of an everyday man sitting in his chair nonchalantly reading the newspaper



while set aflame. Just thinking about that gives me gooseflesh.

One of the last performances I like to point out is the unique act called Cadre. The name of the act simply means Cradle, or Suspended Cradle, and it is the cradle that supports an amazing assortment of characters. The Zebra, donned in black and white striped skins, take to the air trying to maintain their balance as a storm thunders around them. The real treat comes while as it rains around them, the zebra move from grid to grid, and the spectators move closer and closer to the edge of their seats wondering if one will slip and fall. Whose to really say why this act is a favorite of mine... is it the ingenious creation of the apparatus itself? Perhaps it is "Ephra", the musical track accompanying the performance. Whatever the reason, the pulse pounding music in conjunction with the costumes makes for one of my favorite performances of "O".

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

Unfortunately, all good things must come to an end, and "O" is not exempt from this rule. The ending of the show is probably one of the most unique endings I have ever seen, even for Cirque du Soleil! In the beginning, we were shocked into the world of "O" when the red curtain closing us off from this surreal world was quickly and suddenly yanked from us. In the end, we are cut off from this world just as suddenly. Two musical numbers fill the air during the final moments of the show: "Désert" and the title track "O".

We see Eugen, our grotesque theater guide, who serenades a beautiful young woman from his piano. As he plays the theme to this realm, "O", he and his love slowly disappear beneath the waters of the stage -- his stage. This gesture by Eugen and the movement of the music that accompanies his disappearance is so powerful that it draws the most stern of people to tears. Me included. Eugen has changed so much from the beginning of the show, literally from dark to light (you can see this in his costuming - a black suit in the beginning to a completely white gown seen at the end).

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

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

*To the scores of silent alchemists
who wreak their joy in darkness
and the light
bringing magic to life
we bow most humbly
O.*

{Fin}

"A Romp in the Garden of Delights" By: Wayne Leung - Ottawa, Ontario (Canada)

When you step through the doors of the *Zumanity* Theatre at the New York-New York Hotel and Casino it's as if you're being transported into another time and place. Part of the allure of Cirque du Soleil's shows is their escapist fantasy element. Integral to the experience is the setting of the show; the theatre itself provides a milieu in which the esoteric characters and exotic happenings of the show occur. In order to properly convey that otherworldly feel and elicit the Alice in Wonderland reaction in its audiences, Cirque du Soleil meticulously fashions every element of its theatres, and their attention to detail with the *Zumanity* theatre is astounding.

Tucked away in a cozy corner of the bustling New York-New York Casino, just around the corner from "Greenwich Village" lays the *Zumanity* Theatre entrance, box office and gift shop. The elegant art nouveau style of the theatre contrasts sharply with the campy Disney-does-New York City look of the casino. The box office windows, gift shop gates and theatre doorway are all ornamented with curvaceous metal trimmings. Once inside, you're immersed in a playfully exotic environment.

What follows is an excerpt from the "Fascination! Newsletter" archives of an article entitled "A Romp in the Garden of Delights: *Zumanity* Review." The article was first published on October 2003 and peeks at *Zumanity* during its first public performances. As such, the review of the show as written here will not accurately reflect the current stage production; however, since this piece provides a wonderful insight into this "human zoo," we couldn't help but include it here for your enjoyment.

If you are interested in reading the original article, or in learning more about "Fascination!" - the unofficial Cirque du Soleil newsletter - please visit us at www.CirqueFascination.com.

Oh, the *Zumanity*

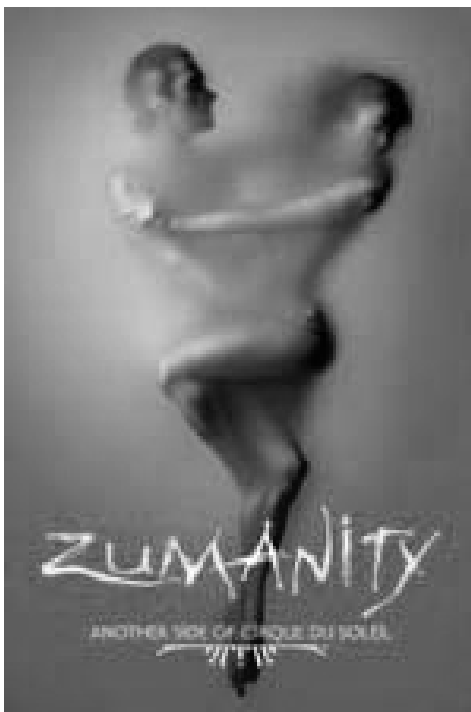
I've been an avid fan of Cirque du Soleil for years. I've seen almost every current production live and own practically the entire audio-visual collection. Just when I thought I had seen it all and nothing Cirque could do would surprise me, along comes *Zumanity*.

For those of you in the dark, *Zumanity* is the daring, provocative and sexy "other side of Cirque du Soleil" which opened to the public on August 15, 2003 at the New York-New York Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

From Cirque du Soleil's humble beginnings on the streets of Baie St. Paul, Quebec, the company has

created 14 spectacular live productions while meticulously honing its style and technique with each subsequent show. The past few shows especially exhibit a new and different style (a necessary result of the introduction of new creative teams).

Zumanity continues the trend of trying new styles and themes and takes its concept of an erotic cabaret version of Cirque du Soleil to bold new levels. If the past few shows were about the coming-of-age of Cirque du Soleil, *Zumanity* is about being of age at Cirque du Soleil.



Zumanity is a show, which celebrates sex and human sexuality. On a deeper level the show explores themes of love and life and celebrates both as a physical manifestation by the human body and its interaction with other humans. It is very risqué and definitely not recommended for the faint-of-heart or narrow-of-mind. Firstly, it is NOT a circus. Don't go in expecting one or you'll be disappointed. What *Zumanity* is is an erotic cabaret incorporating some circus elements with music, dance (much are more prominent in this show than in any other previous Cirque production), costumes/fashion and comedy.

And, to answer the question on everyone's mind; no, there is no actual full-frontal nudity in the show, however some of the costumes are very revealing and

most of the female cast members perform topless (as do the males for that matter). *Zumanity* obviously shows a lot more skin than before, but the baring of flesh is done in an artistic context, the performers' bodies are shown so the audience can admire their beauty. In my opinion the show succeeds in being sexy without being sleazy.

Immediately after I saw the show I was completely floored and dumbfounded. It was a complete sensory overload, which is typical of Cirque shows, but *Zumanity* seemed to overload different senses than the other shows. The performance I attended was nearly 2 hours long (the show ran over time) yet it is one of the most thoroughly engrossing and intense shows I have ever seen from Cirque du Soleil or otherwise. Having just opened (I attended the first public performance), the show does have some rough edges; not all the performers are entirely into their characters yet and not all the scene transitions are seamless. However, this roughness gave the performance a raw quality that didn't entirely detract.

The imagery presented on stage continually evolves, one scene melts into the next and each tableau is more provocative than the previous one. *Zumanity* is a huge departure from what we've come to expect from Cirque. It's not what I would describe as whimsical or magical, but the show



definitely has its sublime moments and I thought it was spectacular for altogether different reasons.

Admittedly, at first I wasn't too sure how I felt about it, I was just so surprised at how different it was. But when I started describing the show to others I would get very excited and I realized how much I really enjoyed *Zumanity* precisely because it is so different.

Let me share with you my show experience with these tiny caveats; the usual song and dance about spoilers (the following review is replete with them so skip over to the next part if you want to be surprised), and the fact that *Zumanity* has not yet officially premiered (it will on September 20th). The performances from August 15 until the premiere are part of the show's "soft opening", they are preview-performances and the show is still in a state of flux, the creation process continues so the performance I saw will not be the same as the performances you will see.

Those warnings aside I invite you to "sit back and relax, open your mind and your soul and let your senses feast on this garden of delights."

Ambience

As I made my way down the Las Vegas Strip to the New York-New York Hotel and Casino I walked past the faux Statue of Liberty, under a crowd of screaming thrill-seekers riding the looping "Manhattan Express Roller Coaster", over a scaled-down, ad-covered, pedestrian-only version of the Brooklyn Bridge and into a hotel/casino just as campy and over-the-top as any other on the infamous Las Vegas Strip.

Yet this pseudo New York City had a distinctively vibrant atmosphere pervading from its young (20-something) clientele. This place hardly seemed like the host for the latest Cirque du Soleil show, but as I would soon discover, the choice of venue was not the only different aspect of *Zumanity*; a very different form of entertainment which serves as both antithesis and complement to the traditional Cirque shows.

Discreetly tucked away in a quiet corner of the otherwise bustling casino complex lies the petite and elegant *Zumanity* theatre, box office and gift shop. The lush European décor is more than a hint of the sensuality within the theatre. By 7:00PM a long line had formed outside the lobby for the first public performance after the "soft-opening" of the show the previous night. The first thing that struck me about the crowd was how utterly ordinary it looked. It was the typical cross-section of middle-America that usually attends Cirque du Soleil shows, not a dominatrix or drag queen in site. There was no distinguishing this crowd from the ones I watched *Mystère*, *Quidam* or *Varekai* with... with one important exception of course, the absence of children.

Shortly after 7:00PM the theatre ushers, dressed in black t-shirts or dresses airbrushed with bikinied male and female torsos respectively (actually not as ridiculous looking as it sounds), escorted us into the elegant theatre lobby adorned with red upholstery and a crepe-paper ceiling which allowed the dim ambient lighting to filter through, creating a dark but sensuous atmosphere. There were small

were small display areas with little video monitors, the requisite concession stand and a grand staircase leading to the balcony. Every element of the theatre was meticulously designed and crafted by Cirque du Soleil. The theatre itself becomes a character; sleek, feminine and beautiful. The *Zumanity* theatre also has a bar where you can order small finger foods such as sushi (although I doubt its freshness since it comes pre-packaged in boxes). I ordered the show's signature drink, the "Zumanitini". It came in a red sugar crystal rimmed plastic martini glass that you can keep (although it doesn't bear the logo of the show or company on it, those glasses are available in the gift shop for an additional \$10 each). The Zumanitini had a sweet fruit punch taste to it although for a \$9 drink it wasn't very strong. Real martinis (even stylized variations of them) are supposed to be all liquor; this one had way too much bar mix and was served pre-prepared out of a pitcher (the proper way to serve martinis is to mix them per-order).

But if the refreshments were unimpressive the showroom was anything but. The theatre has an elegant European (French) Art Nouveau style. It is very curvaceous and feminine, simply ornamented and highly stylized. The auditorium is intimate though not quite as intimate as the Grand Chapiteau (if you've ever sat beside a stranger in the tiny armrest-less seats in the Big Top you know how "intimate" it can get). The *Zumanity* theatre is comfortable and is interestingly laid out with rows of barstools, traditional theatre seats as well as couches and love seats for couples dispersed throughout.

The thrust stage used in the performance features a turntable and a platform that can raise or descend into the stage. The stage is slightly smaller than the ones used in the touring shows and is framed by a winding metal sculpture proscenium and staircases on either side that evoke images of intertwining tree branches and strands of DNA. The top of the proscenium arch is the bandstand; it can be lowered and raised to showcase the musicians.

When you walk in, the theatre is dimly lit and there is a baby grand piano on stage with a candelabra sitting on top. A patterned red velvet curtain closes off the rear of the stage hiding the large rotating screens/sculptures used to display photographic projections during the show.

From the moment you enter the theatre you're enveloped in its sensual atmosphere, the setting for the show is perfectly established before the show even begins. Slowly, the theatre starts to come alive, a pianist walks onstage, lights the candles and starts to serenade us with soft piano melodies, and characters slowly trickle down the spiraling staircases and into the crowd. The svelte Venezuelan dancer Antonio Drija wades through the crowd as viewers are being seated and flirts with the women, posing for Polaroid pictures with them. "Call me Papito," he says and the audience obliges every time he walks by.

The full-bodied identical twins, the Botero sisters, Luciene and Licemar of Brazil, walk deep into the audience. Dressed in French maid outfits they bear



large trays of strawberries to serve to the guests. Unfortunately while bending over to serve one guest the sisters inevitable give a neighboring guest a face full of posterior. A dark and mysterious character (played by Spanish actor Almukatab) watches the audience from centre stage with a snake draped around his neck. The piano music continues, there are faint whispers throughout the theatre, characters slowly emerge. The scene is very similar to the Varekai pre-show, if you were to replace the Varekai forest with a burlesque house. The sensuous atmosphere envelops the viewer and sets the tone perfectly. The impeccable establishment of a show's setting is one of Co-director Domenic Champagne's signatures.

Le Show

Amidst the bustle of the pre-show Madame makes her way onstage. Our hostess for the evening is played by famed New York drag queen Joey Arias. She carries a microphone ornamented with a long ponytail of hair and croons into it with a sultry voice reminiscent of Billie Holiday. Madame wears a long bottom-baring dress, she greets the crowd and welcomes them to open their minds and discard their inhibitions; "Sit back, relax, have a cocktail, because the more you drink the more beautiful I look. . .and the more f**ked up you get!"

No sooner has Madame welcomed us to *Zumanity* than the theatre is invaded by Puritans who are opposed to such wanton displays of carnal sin. Dressed in pilgrim costumes the show's resident "clowns" of the British comedy troupe Spymonkey wield pitchforks with protest placards attached and plead with the audience to leave, "you can still save your souls. . ." The crowd has a good laugh at the vaguely Monty Pythonesque antics of the Puritans.

As the prudes are escorted out of the theatre by security the show begins. The theatre rules are sung to the audience by the powerfully voiced Lonnie Gordon who shares the shows singing duties with Joey Arias and Canadian Kinnie Starr. The show begins with a flourish, as thundering house music fills the theatre we are treated to a fashion show of characters, but this is no ordinary fashion show. Each character to come down the catwalk is more strange and exotic than the last. We meet a centaur character named Jésus, two Las Vegas showboys, an alien/robot, a slim masked girl and a host of other fascinating characters.

The fashion show evolves into a dance sequence. Dance is infused throughout the entire show, not only are the majority of the acts dance oriented but dance is also used in all transitions and, in choreographer Debra Brown's signature style, the show flows like a ballet, each image fading into the next, the show continuously evolving. One by one, a flamenco dancer, an African dancer (similar to Dralion's Gaia), and the Dark Lord character (who wears a long flowing cape) all take the stage. A beautiful contortionist named Olga rises and descends on a Spanish web apparatus.

As we start to take everything in Madame returns and invites us to quench our thirst with a drink of water, motioning to the center of the stage where a clear glass pool rises out of the stage with two beautiful and slim women swimming inside like sirens in a fishbowl. The act that ensues is gorgeous and sensual. Our sirens are Zorigtkhuyag Bolormaa and Gyulnara Karaeva, contortionists from Mongolia and Russia respectively. They emerge from their small pool to perform balances and contortion on the edge eventually diving back in to frolic in the water. While the caliber of the contortion is not as high as in other Cirque shows what makes this act strikingly beautiful is the flowing choreography. Characters sit on stage during the act as if to frame it. The water adds a fascinating element to the art of contortion.

Next, a deep male voice from the rear of the stage asks, "Who wants some roses?" The Rose Boy (buff Cuban Alex Castro) struts on stage and starts stripping to a brassy jazz tune. Bikini-clad female dancers surround Rose Boy as he strips and tosses roses to ladies in the audience. The extraordinary physique of the Rose Boy is contrasted by the absolutely ordinary appearance of the next performer.

Russian Moukhtar Gusengadzhiev appears wearing boxers, socks and garter belts. His ordinary appearance gives no hint of his extraordinary talents. Moukhtar is a dislocation artist. To an upbeat brass-heavy jazz accompaniment Moukhtar performs an act I describe as extreme contortion, not only do his bones bend in ways they're not supposed to but the performer has a unique ability to dislocate some bones altogether to shocked amazement of the audience, which gasped audibly throughout this act. Moukhtar turns himself into a human pretzel before our very eyes. This is quite literally the most twisted act of the show and I couldn't shake the feeling that this performance would be more suitable for Ripley's Believe it or Not instead of Cirque du Soleil.

Following the extreme contortion comes another dance act, this one a pas de deux performed by two men to a Spanish tango. Johan King Silverhult of Sweden and Ugo Mazin of the UK perform an aggressive and violent dance. Underlying the machismo is a strong homoerotic undercurrent and the building sexual tension between the dancers crescendos at the end of the act when the two men share a kiss. This daring and provocative act is a prime example of *Zumanity's* use of dance and movement to convey powerful images and develop a strong sense of visual lyricism.

This visual lyricism and narrative of movement continues in the next act. The stage fills with men seated on chairs intently watching a football game on a television. A female dancer in a red bikini intensely and passionately dances to attract their attention but the men ignore her. As Kinnie Starr sings a soft yet edgy rock ballad, the dancer thrashes on top of the TV and eventually lunges towards the men who are still oblivious to her creating a lyrical, poetic and intense dance performance.

When the dust settles, a man and a woman



emerge (Americans Stéphan Choinière and Sara Joel) wearing skimpy costumes so that they appear to be naked. The two perform an acrobatic dance/hand-to-hand act called body2body. This act reminded me of the Statue act in Quidam but with more fluid choreography and an intense sexual passion expressed in the movement. As Joey Arias sings a love ballad to a soft brass arrangement, the two dancers intertwine in a beautiful expression of love.

Up to this point, the show is very intense. For some comic relief the Puritans return and slowly shed their sexual apprehensions. One of them carries a blow-up doll on stage. When the others chastise him for it he runs off, returns carrying a larger doll and takes a seat in the audience. The doll then comes to life and starts to chase the puritan around the theatre. The others briefly emerge on stage to quickly spoof some of the preceding acts with visual gags (much like a short version of the Dralion clown act).

When all of the silliness subsides it is time to turn up the heat, literally. As trance-techno music plays, the sado-masochism tableau begins. A flame erupts from the stage and two sexy leather bikini-clad fire artists; Americans Jila Alaghamandan and Heidi Good cavort on stage with fire batons and perform a dangerously seductive dance where they literally light themselves on fire and eat flame. Following the dance a cage lowers from the rafters and a man and woman inside dance violently as masked characters descend from the ceiling and flail about in chains. This intense scene gives way to the re-emergence of the Puritans.

This time they are nude carrying only cheerleader style pom-poms placed to strategically conceal their nudity. In a Vaudeville style comedy act the four Spymonkeys line up in a row and march to the music while quickly switching the positions of the pom poms; at times not quick enough to seamlessly hide their (prosthetic) genitals. The number elicited a good deal of laughter from a crowd grateful for a brief repose from the intense show.

The next act is perhaps the greatest Cirque du Soleil aerial act I have ever seen bar none. It is a romantic aerial dance between a woman (the strikingly beautiful Russian Olga Vershinina) and a dwarf (Brazilian Alan Jones Silva). This is the one act that will make your jaw drop and elicit gasps of awe. The apparatus is a combination of the Aerial Silks and the Cloud Swing. Olga begins by performing aerial contortion in the flowing white fabric while incorporating some extremely dangerous looking Spanish Web style drops on the silk and the Cloud Swing. Alan performs an Aerial Silk solo with the same skills as the performers in La Nouba and Dralion. And, to a beautiful piano melody the pair flies over the heads of the audience in a touching and romantic moment. This act is by far my favourite of the entire show.

Then, in a change of pace, the couple from the cage in the S&M sequence are now in a bathtub and, while they perform a dance/pantomime the entire cast files onto the stage and sprawls across the floor. The turntable spins to show the cast in a variety of seductive poses. Madame then sends two

two characters to invite a man and a woman up on stage to join in the "Garden of Delights". Joey Arias' sharp wit is apparent when speaking to the guests. When the 30-something man pulled up on stage told her that he was a screenwriter Joey replies, "Oh, so you're a waiter," to the laughter of all.

The young girls invited on stage (both students) seemed thrilled to be there. As Madame continues to work the crowd she stumbles upon an elderly couple (in their 70s) seated on one of the couches in the front row. She congratulates them for not being scared away by the content of the show and encourages them to come on stage to slow-dance. Just when the frail old couple start to dance they pull off the top layer of their clothes to reveal costumes; they are audience plants. The crowd cheers with delight as Danes Flemming and Brigit Thomsen, known as "The Pacemakers" perform an acrobatic dance routine, which would be impressive for a couple a fraction of their age. Their dance is a touching reminder of the endurance of love.

As The Pacemakers wind down their dance the cast of *Zumanity* joins them on stage for their curtain call. The audience cheers enthusiastically. The journey through the Garden of Delights is over but what a memorable journey it was.

Seeing *Zumanity* is like making love for the first time. You go in curious, excited, maybe even a little nervous not really knowing what to expect. The experience itself is intense on many different levels, there are surprises and things that are not necessarily what you had expected or imagined. Then afterwards you're left exhilarated and wanting more. . .enjoy your stay in the Garden of Delights!

{Fin}



"New Kid on the Block: KÀ"

By: Wayne Leung - Ottawa, Ontario (Canada)

After staging preview performances since November 26, 2004, Cirque du Soleil officially premiered its fourth resident show in a casino resort on the Las Vegas Strip on February 3, 2005. Joining the ranks of *Mystère* at T.I., *"O"* at Bellagio and *Zumanity* at the New York, New York, Cirque du Soleil's newest creation, entitled *KÀ*, is housed at the MGM Grand. *KÀ* is Cirque du Soleil's biggest and most ambitious production to date, both in terms of physical size and budget.

Directed by Canadian theatre and film vanguard Robert Lepage, and ringing in with a purported price tag of \$220 million USD, an alleged weekly running cost of \$1 million USD, a cast of 75 performers and a crew of 158 stage technicians, *KÀ* aims to reinvent and revolutionize the world of live theatre and in many ways the Cirque du Soleil itself.

What follows is an excerpt from the "Fascination! Newsletter" archives of an article series entitled "New Kid on the Block: KÀ, Cirque du Soleil's Fourth resident show in Las Vegas," that was published in three parts on February, March and April 2005. As such, the review excerpt here reflects the concept of the show at the time of its publishing; characters, scenes and actors may have been changed or removed. However, since this piece provides a wonderful insight into *KÀ* we couldn't help but include it here for your enjoyment.

If you are interested in reading the original article, or in learning more about "Fascination!" - the unofficial Cirque du Soleil newsletter - please visit us at www.CirqueFascination.com.

Being the fourth production performing on one street, Cirque had to ensure that *KÀ*, its new kid on the block, would be entirely original and able to offer something different to an audience with so many competing choices for entertainment. The challenge was to not only surpass what the company has achieved in the past but also to differentiate this show enough to find entirely new audiences. For *KÀ* the approach was to create a show with a linear narrative, an "easy to follow" storyline in which physical performances would be presented in a firm context and the acrobatic elements, choreography, and set would drive the story forward, as Lepage describes it, to give audiences "the impression they're within some kind of cinematic event."

KÀ deals with the theme of duality and is the epic story of a set of twins, separated at childhood, who must

voyage through a series of adventures while relentlessly pursued by enemies, in order to fulfill their destinies in a classic battle between good and evil.

As a result of this linear storyline model, *KÀ* is the most original concept Cirque du Soleil has ever developed. It is the most different of all shows in the company's repertoire and strays most from the existing conventions that the company has established with its shows to date. The end result, however, is decidedly mixed. Being such a different concept *KÀ* must struggle against audiences' preconceived notions of what a Cirque du Soleil show entails. Since *KÀ*, like

its predecessor, Cirque du Soleil's erotic cabaret, *Zumanity*, is branching out from the company's core disciplines and breaking new ground, the audiences' response has been largely polarized. While some absolutely adore the show, others find it lacking.

The major difference between *KÀ* and the other Cirque shows is that *KÀ* is NOT a circus, not by a long shot. Those expecting the usual Cirque du Soleil format of acrobatic acts interlaced with clown interludes may be disappointed. While there are a few stand-alone acrobatic acts, much of the

performance is fully integrated into the story. It more closely resembles a narrative ballet like *The Nutcracker* or *Swan Lake*, where a literal story is told through movement and images.

In this article I will take you through an exploration of the technological accomplishments of the *KÀ* design team in creating the show's incredible theatre, sets and stages, provide a complete description of the show itself including a list of characters and a scene-by-scene synopsis.

Now, I invite you to explore the world of *KÀ*!

The KÀ Theatre, Sets and Stages

Above every other aspect of *KÀ*, the technology used in this production represents a revolution for live theatre. The unprecedented use of technology at an incredible scale often leaves the spectator breathless. *KÀ*'s production values are immense. Several emerging theatrical technologies are brought together in this show, with the overall effect of making the staging as fluid as possible, enabling scenes to shift quickly in and out like a movie. Director Robert Lepage's goal is to tell the story on stage using the "language of cinema" and he aims to achieve this goal through inventive use of technology.

For *KÀ*, set designer Mark Fisher (known for his big, flashy rock concert sets) made a conscious decision to design the stage, set and auditorium



together as an integrated concept. The thematic journey extends right into the lobby and the spectator's journey begins at the transition from the casino to the theatre lobby. The dimly lit themed lobby suggests the hull of a large wooden ship, inside which the concessions counter and bar are located. Across the ceiling the strings of a large harp cross the lobby.

As the spectators enter the showroom via one of two doors on either side of the lobby they pass under a crisscrossing, multi-level system of catwalks. The 1,951-seat showroom is immense and cavernous; suggestive of an underground cave or mine. The entire theatre is inhabited by characters and throughout the performance characters roam the theatre and catwalks.

But the most striking feature of the performance space is not something in the showroom but something missing; a stage. At the front of the auditorium where a proscenium arch and stage would traditionally reside, there is instead a raised ledge overhanging an immense, smoke-filled void. There is not even a vague hint at what the performance will entail as all scenery, acrobatic equipment and props are hidden. The show's intricate scene-changes are made possible by a series of lifts that fly up and out from the void.

A set of five irregular shaped hydraulic lifts line the front of the void, raising and lowering at different points in the show to create; a storm-tossed boat, a balcony overlooking the mines, a forest of tree stumps for a dramatic chase scene, and a performance space for a dance.

A 9-meter by 9-meter (30' x 30'), 34-ton "Tatami Deck" is stowed at the back of the space and can slide out over the void like a drawer.

But the star of the show and the most dramatic lift is the pragmatically named "Sand-Cliff Deck". This deck measures 15 meters (50') in length, 7.6 meters (25') in width and 2 meters (6') in depth, weighs 159 tons. It houses three trap-door/elevators and 80 individually controlled pegs that pop out from surface and allow performers to climb and perform on the deck while it is near vertical. The Sand-Cliff Deck is attached to a large gantry crane that allows the deck an enormous range of dynamic movement. The crane can simultaneously lift (at speeds up to 2 feet per second), tilt (to an angle of 100° from horizontal) and rotate (one full 360° revolution) at various speeds to create stunning effects.

Additional set elements, like a mass of large columns and hanging scenery representing a forest canopy, are flown in from the wings, and rigging equipment for the climactic aerial battle is stored in the flies of the theatre. For the battle, twenty or so "vertical" performers are rigged to automated flying winches, which they control themselves via small joysticks concealed in their hands. For example, when a performer "walks up" the wall he commands the winch to pull him up at a certain rate, and he "mimes" walking at a speed that matches his upward motion.



Safety is a big issue when dealing with such

immense heights and large moving platforms. During the performance, there is a system of retractable safety nets and inflatable airbags hidden in the void. The safety system is quickly flown in place during the more dangerous sequences of the show where performers jump from the decks.

While the Sand-Cliff Deck is in its vertical orientation it is often used as a projection screen to further complete the imagery. Throughout the show an innovative interactive projection system, developed by Holger Förterer, produces images that move with the performers. For example: when the performers leap onto the deck in the final battle scene their landing causes a ripple like a pebble in a pond. The projection system utilizes an infrared (heat sensitive) camera situated beside the projector to sense the position of the performers and feeds this information to a computer that adjusts the projection accordingly, in real-time. The effect is quite unique and produces a fantastic illusion.

To further extend the action "on stage" to the audience, sound designer Jonathan Deans has worked meticulously to fill the massive theatre and create a very exact sound environment where specific sound cues are focused and add effects to the action in the performance. Each seat in the KÅ is fitted with a set of stereo speakers that are used at different times to accentuate the music, produce ambient sound effects or to heighten the sound environment. The sound design is revolutionary in the way it completely envelops each individual spectator.

Dramatis Personae

The Tribes and Peoples of KÅ

The characters of KÅ inhabit a world of many tribes and factions. These tribes are largely segregated from each other and some tribes are in conflict with others. The story of KÅ brings together the different peoples of this world to meet their collective destiny.

The Empire: A noble, proud and peaceful society which represents the pinnacle of civilization in the world of KÅ. The Empire is the height of art, culture, and education. They have developed a graceful and majestic form of martial arts which its combatants practice.

The Twins - A boy (Cheri Tabushi Haight) and a girl (Jennifer Kimberly Haight), they represent the hope for the future of the Empire. Heirs to the throne, they are raised to be educated and noble but also skilled in combat. The story of KÅ is the story of the twins as they fulfill their respective destinies.

The Emperor (Valentin Ganey) - He is the monarch of the Empire and father of the Twins. Dressed in luminous robes, the Emperor has a regal air.

The Empress (Ekatarina Bogdanova) - She rules by the side of her husband, the Emperor, and is the mother of the Twins. Her elaborate dress references the Peking Opera, and the weeping tree design embroidered on her sleeves suggests a slight melancholy to her character.

The Nursemaid (Teuda Bara) - The Twins' guardian, she is charged with watching over and caring for the Twins in their young age. Somewhat of a surrogate mother, her relationship with the Twins is one of mutual loyalty and love.

The Court Jester (Kleber Conrado Berto) - The Fool of the court, he shares a special bond with the Twins. He dances and entertains but is also an agile acrobat and possesses strength and courage beyond his role as a jester.

The Valets (Anatoli Akerman, William Ferreira Amaral, Cbastien Tardif) - Servants of the Imperial Court, the Valets are a mischievous and bumbling trio who constantly get into trouble. They play off each others' stupidities like the Three Stooges.

The Imperial Guards - Practitioners of the graceful and noble form of martial arts developed by the Empire, the Imperial Guards ceremoniously protect the Emperor and his Court. The guards are dressed in Asian-inspired robes with the Empire's tree insignia across the open chest for the men, and long flowing robes hanging from the upper-body for the women.

The Archers - A malevolent underground society. Comprised of factions of archers and spearmen living deep beneath the surface of the Earth in caves, the bottoms of their faces are obscured with muzzles, and they have emblazoned intricate tattoos all over their bodies. The Archers mine a rare element that can be processed into powerful explosives for weapons. They have mastered the art of aerial combat and fly from scaffold to scaffold in their underground mines. Their society is built on war, destruction and dominion by force. They will stop at nothing to conquer the world of KÀ and enslave its inhabitants.

The Evil Counselor (Jörg Lemke) - Leader of the Archer Tribe, architect of its deadly arsenal of destruction and strategist behind the Archers' plans for domination. He is the brains of the Archer Tribe.

The Counselor's Son (Miro Lacasse) - A brilliant designer of weapons and war machines and practitioner of the Tribe's Aerial combat techniques, the malignant, jealous and petty son of the Counselor is being reared to succeed his father at the helm of the Archer Tribe.

The Chief Archer (Viken Kayabalian) - The stone-cold and imposing General of the Archers' forces, he directs the archers and spearmen during their strategic attacks. He commands the respect and loyalty of his troops. If the Counselor is the brains of the Archers, the Chief Archer is the brawn. The only glimpse of his heart is shown in his love for his daughter.

The Chief Archer's Daughter (Noriko Takahashi) - A femme-fatale, the irresistibly beautiful, tough-as-nails daughter of the Head Archer is desired by all of the men of the Archer tribe. She continually spurns their affection but knows how to use her sexuality to get what she wants from them. The many spider-like references in her costume suggest she is a black widow, although underneath her brazen exterior she

secretly yearns for a virtuous life and the love of one who is pure of heart.

The Mountain Tribe: A tribe of white fur-clad mountain-dwellers who descend from the heights to fish and scavenge for food. They are agile climbers and mountaineers. Their deceptively primitive appearance gives no hint of the fact that they are actually brilliant engineers and inventors.

The Forest Tribe: An ancient, mysterious and mystical airborne people who inhabit the treetops of the forest. A majestic tribe gifted with the ability of flight, and masters of aerial combat, they are a peaceful society but will fight to free those enslaved and oppressed by the Archers.

Firefly Boy (Igor Zaripov) - The young, handsome leader of the Forest Tribe; he swings from the treetops like Tarzan. His heart of gold compels him to fight to uphold the good in the world.

The Animals: The animals in the world of KÀ are sentient, possessing human-like characteristics and are a benevolent presence. Some of the animals we meet in KÀ include a pair of crabs, a starfish, a turtle, a giant grass-hopper, a snake and a caterpillar.

Synopsis

Pre-show animation:

The ushers who greet the audience are part of the pre-show animation; they are courtiers in the Imperial court, and are "in character", chatting and interacting with the guests while they seat them. The cavernous showroom suggests that we are in an underground cave or mine. Large fireballs periodically leap from the abyss at the front of the theatre. Atmospheric sound effects, dissonant chords of music and guttural whispers can be heard throughout the theatre (played through the personal sound system embedded in each theatre seat).

Slowly, the Archers creep out onto the catwalks. They have a fearsome demeanor as they jump from catwalk to catwalk flying from level to level and set about their work in the mine. The theatre is aflutter with activity with Archers flying about when the Evil Counselor emerges and slinks across the ledge of the pit where he is joined by his son. They are about to discuss the rare element which the workers are mining when some hapless audience member flashes a camera in their faces. The Counselor's Son pulls the inconsiderate guest from the audience onto the ledge of the abyss, confiscates his camera and tosses it into the void where it erupts in a fiery flash. The same fate befalls the guest's cell phone when it starts to ring and, when he is about to light a cigarette, the guest himself is thrown into the void!

With a tap from the Evil Counselor's percussive sticks, the Archers on the catwalks erupt into a series of battle cries, the lights dim and the show begins.

Scene 1: The Journey Home/The Pageant/Siege of the Archers

Angelic vocalizations fill the air as rays of light



emanate from the abyss. We hear the distinct sound of children laughing and playing. Suddenly we catch our first glimpse of the magnificent Sand-Cliff Deck which rises from the deep as a ship. Imperial Guards flank either side of the ship and row. The Twins are happily play-fighting on the deck. The ship's deck raises above the audience's eye level and several key characters are revealed within as the massive deck revolves; the Valets, the Chief Archer's Daughter and the Twins' Nursemaid who is busily finishing the ceremonial robes that the Twins will don for the reception that awaits their homecoming.

The ship docks. The Emperor, Empress, Court Jester and other members of the Imperial Court appear at the back of the stage on the Tatami deck which slides forward to meet the ship. The Court celebrates the return of the Twins by staging a magnificent pageant. The Imperial Guards engage in a graceful and synchronized martial arts demonstration as the Sand-Cliff deck revolves, showing the group from different angles. The spectacular effect mimics a panning camera move in a film. The Imperial Guard's Lady Officer takes centre stage to perform a solo martial-arts routine where she dances with the Court Jester and juggles flower sticks.

It is time for the Twins to resume their studies. A Valet brings a large pile of books but instead of reading them he juggles them to the amusement of the court. Finally, the Twins serenade the court by playing a sweet, evocative melody on their flutes.

As the orchestra strikes an ominous chord Archers invade the aisles of the theatre and the catwalks. They draw their bows and poise to strike. An arrow hits the stage; the Archers' siege of the Empire begins. Pandemonium engulfs the Imperial court. The Emperor is fatally wounded. The Twins scream in terror as they witness the assassination of their mother, the Empress.

Scene 2: Parting of the Twins/The Storm

The surviving members of the Court desperately flee as the palace burns to the ground. The Court hopes to escape by means of a small sailboat, but in the confusion that ensues the Twins are separated. The Girl sets sail on the boat with the Nursemaid, the Valets and several Imperial Guards. The Boy and the Jester flee by land with the Archers in pursuit.

We follow the Girl and watch as her boat sails into a fierce storm. We hear the choir singing ominously. The small boat rocks violently as the Girl, the Nursemaid, the Valets and other occupants hold on for dear life. The waves aggressively toss the boat about as if it were a toy. Several Imperial Guards are dramatically tossed overboard. The ferocious winds rip off the boat's sail. Finally, the boat capsizes. The Twin Girl desperately climbs to the top of the mast as the boat sinks into the deep.

Scene 3: Underwater

As a soft piano and cello duet plays we hear a splash and see the Nursemaid drowning in the water. A trail of projected bubbles follows her body as it sinks into the deep. With another splash we see the



Girl determinedly swimming downward. She rescues her Nursemaid and pulls her back up toward the surface.

Scene 4: The Archers' Den

The scene changes and we are now inside the den of the Archers. A battalion of spearmen in ranks perform a synchronized dance to demonstrate their deadly prowess. We meet the Chief Archer and begin to sense the uneasy power balance that he shares with the Evil Counselor. We are also introduced to the Chief Archer's daughter who is the object of every Archer's desire, including the Counselor's Son. She spurns the attention of the men and relishes the role of "daddy's little girl". Meanwhile, the Counselor's Son demonstrates a model of the Death Machine that he has designed to refine the rare mineral that the Archers mine into a powerful explosive compound that can be used to kill and destroy all that stand in the Archers' path to conquest of the world.

Scene 5: The Beach

The Sand-Cliff Deck rises from the void and its entire upper surface is now covered in sand (actually ground cork). We see the Girl and Nursemaid lying unconscious on the beach. Suddenly two large puppet crabs (flexible performers in full-body puppet costumes actually crab-walking to animate the crabs) emerge from the sand and wake the Girl and her Nursemaid. The Imperial Court's three valets swim up to the storm-tossed beach. The group reunites and proceeds to explore the beach discovering and interacting with an array of whimsical creatures; a starfish, a sea-turtle and a spiny caterpillar. The exiles eventually leave the beach and continue on their journey.

Scene 6: Lantern (Shadow Puppets)

Once the group leaves the stage, the Sand-Cliff Deck tilts toward the audience and all of the sand from the beach is dumped into the void. When the deck reaches full-vertical we see the Boy and Jester emerge from the wings and venture across the front ledge of the void. They have been fleeing the Archers and are in need of rest. The Boy's hand was injured in the melee of the palace siege and the Jester sets down the lantern he is carrying to examine the Boy's injured hand. The shadows created by the characters' hands are projected by the lantern onto the vertical deck behind them. The Jester notices this and proceeds to comfort the Boy by coaching him into creating an elaborate series of shadow puppets on the wall; a dog, a dove and a cat. This sequence pays tribute to the first ever form of technology-based storytelling and the fact that the actors perform a simple shadow-puppet show in a multi-million dollar theatre is somewhat ironic. Though simple, the sequence is one of the most touching in the show and serves to illustrate the strong bond and relationship the Boy shares with the Jester.

However, the moment of respite is short-lived as Archers soon appear and the pursuit begins anew. The Boy and Jester flee.

Scene 7: The Mountainside/Attack of the Archers/Ice-slide

The Sand-Cliff Deck tilts to an angle; a projection

suggests that it is now an icy slope. The Girl and her entourage arrive at the foot of the mountain and cautiously proceed to climb the dangerously slippery slope. Suddenly, the group is ambushed by Archers who fire arrows onto the icy cliff and proceed to pursue our heroes. The Ice slope begins to rotate while the Archers continue to embed arrows into its face. The characters use the arrows as holding points for acrobatic maneuvers as they slip and slide about the face of the rapidly rotating deck. During the course of the thrilling sequence the Nursemaid slides off the edge of the deck into the abyss, the three valets are captured by the Archers and the Girl is rescued by a couple of fur-clad Mountain men. The pursuing Archers all eventually slide off the wildly spinning deck and drop into the void. At the end of the scene the deck tilts to full vertical becoming a "cliff," and the final Archer drops to his death in the void.

Scene 8: The Blizzard/Treetop Chase

Snow falls gently from the sky as we see the Nursemaid unconscious on the Tatami deck which slides in underneath the vertical cliff. She is discovered by two Mountain men who help lift her (and their cargo of freshly-caught fish) up the cliff in a large sling. The Nursemaid is reunited with the Girl. The two Mountain men scale the vertical wall.

At the front of the void, a large palisade of wooden posts, suggesting treetops, rises and we see the Chief Archer's Daughter playing in the snow. Several Archers join her, brazenly leaping from post to post. As always, the Archers flirt with the Chief's daughter, continuously vying for her affection, and as always she spurns their attention. When the Archers sense the approach of the Boy and the Jester, they crouch behind the posts and hide. The Archers ambush the Boy and Jester and a battle ensues. The Boy and Jester valiantly battle the Archers but are outnumbered. The Jester falls into the void, and the boy is captured. The Chief Archer's Daughter watches as the Boy is carried away.

Scene 9: Mountaintop Refuge/Archers Attack

Still vertical, the cliff descends half-way into the void and we see the encampment of the Mountain men perched on top of the cliff. The camp consists of a teepee and small fire. The Nursemaid and Girl emerge from the teepee and interact with the Mountain men in a brief moment of levity.

However, the group's rest is short-lived; the Archers once again fill the aisles of the theatre and fire on the group. The Girl and her Nursemaid are frightened but the Mountain men have a clever plan for escape.

Scene 10: Flight of the Bird

The Mountain men usher the Nursemaid and Girl into the teepee and, surprisingly, the sides of the tent fly up and the teepee turns into a large Leonardo Davinci-esque flying machine. With a Mountain man on either side flapping the wings the Bird takes flight and the group sails directly over the heads of the audience, venturing as far as half way to the back of the auditorium. The Girl dangles precariously underneath the bird and performs a series of aerial cradle skills. The Bird sails into the wings of the theatre and away

from the attacking Archers.

Scene 11: Captivity/Lovers/Dance of the Magic Flute

Back inside the lair of the Archers, the Counselor's son oversees construction of the massive Death Machine that will process the mined ore into deadly weapons. Lifts rise at the front of the void to reveal the captives from the Empire, now slaves housed in round hamster wheel-like cages. The Boy is brought into the lair and thrown into one of these cages. The Chief Archer's Daughter comes to see the Boy. She reveals the flutes given to her by her father as a souvenir of the raid on the Empire. They are the Twins' flutes. The Archer's Daughter gives the Boy a flute and he plays a sweet, evocative melody for her. She is enchanted by the Boy's song and leans toward him. The Boy sneaks a kiss. The Archer's daughter is smitten; she has fallen in love with the Boy but is conflicted. Their love is forbidden and she has a duty to uphold to the Archers. After a moment of hesitation she opens the cage and allows the Boy to escape. He leaves her with a kiss and gives her his flute as a token of his love for her.

Love fills the Archer's Daughter's heart for the first time and she performs a beautiful dance with the flute (an intricate baton manipulation routine).

The Counselor's son has secretly witnessed the entire scene. He collapses to his knees in anguish; his heartbreak galvanizes his resolve to destroy the Twins and the last remaining hope for the Empire.

Scene 12: The Forest

Hanging vine-like structures and columns fly into place from the wings. They evoke the lush foliage of a dense forest canopy. The Firefly Boy swings in the air and performs an aerial straps routine. Meanwhile Forest men are swaying and jumping from large swinging Chinese poles and creatures descend on the large columns, among them a giant winding snake. Singer Beth Quist is perched on a hanging vine and sings an exotic melody while playing a small hand drum.

The Twin Girl appears to have fallen from the Mountain men's Bird and we see her falling through the forest canopy. She is rescued by the Firefly Boy.

Scene 13: The Slave Cage

We return to the Archers' Den where the Death Machine has been completed and the enslaved former citizens of the Empire (including the captured Nursemaid and Valets) toil away in the mines.

The jealous and vengeful Counselor's son, designer of the Death Machine, now senses he has enough support and admiration amongst the Archers' forces to stage a coup. Having had his heart broken by the Chief Archers' Daughter he captures the Chief Archer and assumes command of the Archers' forces.

The Counselor's Son's fiendish Death Machine (Wheel of Death) is powered by slaves running in hamster-wheel cages on both ends of a long rotating pendulum arm. We recognize the two slaves in



the Wheel of Death as former members of the Imperial Court. While operating the machine, the slaves escape out of the cage and brazenly taunt their captives by performing elaborate and dangerous stunts on the moving Death Machine.

The enslaved Empire is inspired by the courage of the two slaves and while the Archers are distracted by the events, the Empire rises up and revolts against its captors. The bravery of the two slaves in the Wheel of Death begins to turn the tide in the war. In the confusion, the Chief Archer's daughter is able to rescue her father from captivity.

Meanwhile, in the course of their separate adventures the Twins reunite and joyously celebrate their reunion. Together they will fight for the freedom of the Empire.

Scene 14: Drums of War/The Final Battle

The Girl has enlisted the help of the Firefly Boy who rallies the Forest people to the aid of the Empire. As the drums of war echo throughout the theatre the Twins, the Firefly Boy and the Forest people suit up and prepare for the final battle.

Our heroes stand on the ledge of the void. The Sand-Cliff deck, now serving as a battlefield, rises and on the opposite end we see the forces of the Archers, now under the command of the Counselor's Son, in attack formation.

The deck tilts to near-vertical (approximately 80° from horizontal). We will watch the battle from an overhead view. The approximately twenty combatants are all rigged to harnesses and suspended from individual flying winches. As they jump, fly and land on the battlefield, projected patterns radiate outward from their landing spots. The forces launch into their attack. A chaotic battle ensues with combatants making flying leaps through the air. When it looks like our heroes are on the verge of winning the Archers unleash flash-bombs and push their line forward. Our heroes reform their ranks and resolvedly fight through with all of their might and, despite their disadvantage; they are able to defeat the Archers' forces by sheer determination.

As the battle ends we see the Evil Counselor rushing to the aid of his wounded son who is lying on the battlefield.

Scene 15: Epilogue/Finale

The lights fade up and the Tatami Deck slides forward. We get the sense that some time has passed and we relish in the resolution of the story. The Twins are reunited with each other, their Nursemaid and their Valets. The Empire is restored with the Twins as the rulers. The Boy has wed the Chief Archer's Daughter. The Girl has married the Firefly Boy and is now pregnant. The Chief Archer, now dressed in a ceremonial Imperial robe, presents his bow and breaks it over his knee signifying his new dedication to peace.

A moment of tension arises as the Counselor and his son arrive at the celebration. The Son bears what looks like an explosive device. However, the device is not a weapon but rather a firework. In a glorious gesture of peace and reconciliation the

Counselor's son illuminates the skies over the Empire with a magnificent pyrotechnic display. The Counselor and his son have realized the error of their ways and are determined to act now in the name of peace. The Death Machine rises from the void, except it has been converted to a beautiful spinning windmill of fire. The Court Jester emerges from behind the machine.

The peoples of the world of KÀ have been united, peace pervades the land and the civilization can live in peace and harmony.

{Fin}



**The Beatles™ LOVE™
by Cirque du Soleil®**

**Director - Dominic Champagne, Music Directors
Sir George Martin & Giles Martin**

Las Vegas, NV May 24, 2006 Media from around the world experienced the first 'sneak preview' of the latest Cirque du Soleil show, LOVE, a co-production with Apple Corps Ltd., which celebrates the musical legacy of The Beatles. A press conference was held today in the custom-built theatre at The Mirage in Las Vegas.

Music Directors Sir George Martin and his son Giles Martin have been working with the entire archive of Beatles recordings to create the musical component for LOVE. They were present at the press conference today to describe their unprecedented approach to the music for a stage production. "I think we will achieve a real sense of drama with the music, the audience will feel as though they are actually in the theatre with the band. People are going to be knocked out by what they are hearing!" said Giles Martin.



Using the master tapes at Abbey Road Studios, Sir George and Giles have created a unique soundscape of Beatles music for LOVE. "We wanted to make sure there are enough good, solid hit songs in the show, but we don't want it to be a catalog of 'best of's'," said Sir George Martin. "We also wanted to put in some interesting and not well-known Beatles music and use fragments of songs. The show will be a unique and magical experience."

Dominic Champagne, who directed and wrote the original concept for the show, explained his vision for LOVE. "I wanted to create a Beatles experience rather than a Beatles story, taking the audience on an emotional journey rather than a chronological one," said Dominic Champagne.

LOVE brings the magic of Cirque du Soleil together with the spirit and passion of The Beatles to create a vivid, intimate and powerful entertainment experience. It captures the essence of love that John, Paul, George and Ringo inspired during their astonishing adventure together.

LOVE evokes the exuberant and irreverent spirit of The Beatles. "When we embarked on this extraordinary adventure in 2002," said Gilles Ste-Croix, Show Concept Creator and Director of Creation, "we set out to create a timeless, three-dimensional evocation of The Beatles music. Drawn from the poetry of the lyrics, we developed a preliminary concept that explored the content of the songs in a

series of scenes inhabited by real and imaginary people." The international cast of 60 channels a raw, youthful energy underscored by aerial performance, extreme sports and urban, freestyle dance.

LOVE will be presented in a custom-built theatre at The Mirage featuring 360° seating and advanced high definition video projections with 100-foot digital, moving images. The panoramic surround sound system will envelop the audience who will experience The Beatles music like never before...

Apple Corps Ltd. is planning to release The LOVE album through EMI Music later this year.

Preview performances for LOVE begin June 2. The Gala Premiere will be held Friday, June 30, 2006. LOVE will be presented exclusively at The Mirage in Las Vegas. This joint artistic venture marks the first time that The Beatles company, Apple Corps Ltd., has agreed to a major theatrical partnership. The project was born out of a personal friendship and mutual admiration between the late George Harrison and Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberté.

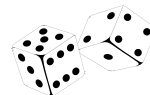
**TECHNICAL STORY
THE MUSIC**

As Music Directors for LOVE, Sir George Martin and his son Giles Martin are at the epicenter of a revolution in the musical legacy of The Beatles. The result is an unprecedented approach to the music for a stage production. "After spending more than 40 years of my life working with The Beatles and their wonderful music, I am thrilled to be working with it once again, on this exciting project with Cirque du Soleil," said Sir George Martin, "The show will be a unique and magical experience."

Using the techniques that Sir George Martin pioneered in the sixties, linked to the best technology today, Sir George and Giles have created a unique, groundbreaking soundscape of original Beatles music for the show. Each listener will be immersed in the world of The Beatles.

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

The Martins have spent the last two years constructing the music for LOVE by combining every facet of The Beatles o



recordings. The panoramic sound experience in the custom built theatre will be the closest anyone will get to hearing the band play live again and the closest anyone can get to actually being in the studios with them.

"Our mission was to try and achieve the same intimacy we get when listening to the master tapes at the studio," says Giles Martin. "The songs sound so alive. The last thing we wanted to create was a retrospective or a tribute show. The Beatles, above all else, were a great rock band. A lot of people listen to The Beatles in a conventional way (radio, MP3 player or car, for example) but never in such a space. With the huge amount of speakers in the theatre, I think we will achieve a real sense of drama with the music, the audience will feel as though they are actually in the room with the band. People are going to be knocked out by what they are hearing!

THEATRE AND SET DESIGN

"There are only good seats, no bad ones, but you could come and see LOVE three or four times and see something quite different each time."

--JEAN RABASSE

Set Designer

Acclaimed designer Jean Rabasse does not distinguish between the interior of the theatre and the set design of LOVE. In his view the two are so intertwined that it's impossible to say where the interior of the building ends and the décor begins.

The core concept of the design grew from the idea of surrounding the Beatles in a "bubble." Rabasse started with the interior of the existing theatre and gutted the classical 1,500-seat proscenium layout to place the action in the center, with 2,013 seats surrounding the stage in a 360-degree configuration. There are six entrance and exit points to the stage with four tracks to carry the artists and four control booths, one at each corner of the theatre.

One vital objective of the design was to situate the audience in the intimacy of the experience by putting them as close to the performers as possible, hence the furthest row from the stage is only 98 feet from all the action. "I set myself the goal of giving the audience the opportunity to connect with the performance at a childlike emotional level through simple stage techniques and transcendent music," says Rabasse. In a sense, he was also recreating the atmosphere and sensations of the big top within a permanent structure.

While the set elements are certainly attractive to look at, few things on stage are there for purely decorative purposes. Everything has a function. The greatest challenge for Jean Rabasse was to allow for seamless transitions between scenes with complex decors. For example, the show opens in the sky and then the scene dissolves to the rooftops of London for the Beatles' last concert atop their building in Savile Row, and from there it travels to the gritty ruins of wartime Liverpool.

panoramic screens, plus four 832-square-foot semi-transparent screens that are moved by eight motors and served by four 16,000-lumen projectors.

While this is the most technologically advanced theatre ever built, most of the technology is not on display and therefore does not come between the audience and their enjoyment of the show.

In addition to the visible elements there is a highly sophisticated infrastructure at work behind the scenes and above the auditorium. There are nine lifts and eight automated tracks and trolleys that can simultaneously move 24 props, set elements or performers, and they provide the production with 140 different ways to put a performer into the air.

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

COSTUMES

"I wanted to pay tribute to the creativity of the Beatles with my designs and to accomplish that, I've tried to be as creative as they were."

--PHILIPPE GUILLLOT

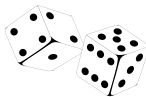
Costume Designer

For LOVE, Costume Designer Philippe Guillotel set himself the tough challenge of evoking a sense of time and place to fit the various eras of the Beatles' career as a group. To achieve that goal he has used Victorian and traditional designs juxtaposed with fanciful, youthful, colorful fashions to reflect the inventiveness of the Beatles' visionary and revolutionary creative energy in all its moods.

A team of experts has been working around the clock to craft Guillotel's 331 multi-layered costumes, using highly textural fabrics and incorporating everyday materials such as foam, plastic, industrial objects, inflatable inserts and lights. His designs also called for the creation of custom-designed textiles, including netting that fluidly takes on different shapes as the artists move on stage.

"I don't really have a signature style," says Philippe Guillotel. "But I don't like to put in costume elements that are merely decorative. I want things to work, to be functional. If I include a button, it's not there for show. It's there because it has a job to do. And although they have their uses, I don't really like the so-called 'noble' fabrics as much as more modest, everyday materials."

Many of the LOVE costumes are exceptionally large and highly crafted, almost like outsized puppets or mascots. Some, as in the Mr. Kite scene, are imbued with fantasy and whimsy, featuring concepts such as



The theatre has ten 12,000-lumen projectors for each of the two huge 2,000-square-foot

an oversized accordion or a fog effect concealed within the costume (which exemplifies the significant crossover between props and costumes on this show). For the Sgt. Pepper Parade Guillotel took a fresh approach to the Savile Row tailoring tradition by turning suits inside out to expose their colorful linings and create a punchy, expressive visual statement.

The key characters in the show are directly inspired by individuals mentioned by name in the Beatles' songs, and Guillotel has rendered their costumes in a stylized form that recalls a comic-book graphic approach to the clothing worn in wartime Liverpool. Her Majesty usually appears in a large, ornate picture frame. Mr. Piggy and his inflatable costume represent the excesses of the establishment. The character Julia (who represents motherhood) appears in a ball gown, and in one of the most spectacular costumes in the show, as a jellyfish "flying" through the Octopus's Garden in the sea.

There is also a chorus of Groupies and Lovers populating LOVE, and their costumes are informed by the 1960s and 1970s. But Guillotel is quick to point out these designs are interpretations, not reproductions, of actual fashions of the time. "That would have been the easy way to go," he points out. "But it would have been far less well suited to the intentions of the show."

SOUND DESIGN

"With the Beatles' music, the audience arrives forearmed with a deep knowledge of the music and the sound has to meet and exceed their expectations."

--JONATHAN DEANS
Sound Designer

Jonathan Deans says the fact that LOVE is based on the music of the Beatles posed a huge challenge above and beyond the regular demands of designing the sound for any other Cirque du Soleil show.

"The difference is that in other shows the music is written specifically for the show, and it can be developed in any way we like, to suit us," he says. "The technology isn't there to impress, but to make sure the experience is moving. It doesn't matter that there are 12,000 speakers, what's important is that each seat is fitted with six speakers in order to hear the Beatles' music like it's never been heard before." To achieve that objective, Deans has assembled and deployed an audiophile's dream wish list of equipment.

There are eight sound system zones in the theatre, each with dedicated Meyer M1D Stereo Line Arrays capable of functioning independently of one another. Each zone provides the listener with fully immersive 360-degree surround sound that can be precisely placed one foot in front of the listener or up to 80 feet away in most directions and moved in any direction.

LIGHTING DESIGN

"The challenge with lighting LOVE was to focus the spectators' attention on one highlight or one artist specifically on this in-the-round stage."

--Yves Aucoin
Lighting Designer

Yves aimed to recreate the mood of the 1960s, with the lighting design he created for LOVE. He wished to preserve the warmth, color and tones of that decade, from rock'n'roll to psychedelic. He was very much inspired by album covers, photographic news reports from the 1960s as well as the separation of photos in different colors and the stretching of images, which are trends that the Beatles themselves initiated with some of their album covers.

Yves created a very distinct world for each of the songs of LOVE. His biggest challenge was to work with a 360-degree stage, on which the front light shining on the action is actually also the back light for half of the spectators.

The lighting style that characterizes Yves can be identified through his use of new technologies such as automated lights. His preferred color palette is a warm one, although the feeling on stage usually guides his choice of colors. "I am influenced by the music and the work of the Artists. I am usually the last Creator to make final adjustments to my work during the creation of a production," says Yves.

PROJECTION

"LOVE evokes the world of the Beatles, and therefore connects with the imagination of the audience. So I tried to find ways to make the connection timeless, by recalling time-honored techniques such as watercolor, which I used like a painter."

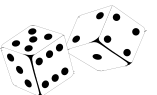
--FRANCIS LAPORTE
Video Projection Designer

Francis Laporte's projections for LOVE blur, bend and extend the definitions of theatre design. They evoke time, place and mood through a picture-perfect succession of moving images in a state of constant flux. Laporte's work seamlessly integrates digital video production and projection technology with the interior structure of the theatre, the show's lighting design and the more traditional three-dimensional set elements featured in the production.

Above all, however, the projections must work in perfect synch with the music and the actions of the artists as they explore the journey of the characters inside the Beatles' songs and immerse the audience in the emotion of each scene. That is why Laporte deliberately avoided a high-tech look. Instead, he opted for a fluid mélange of shadows and silhouettes, archive footage, natural elements and pigmentation, photographic collage design, time-honored techniques such as watercolor and composite video images.

To reflect the different eras in the story of the Beatles, the projections transform from sepia tones to kaleidoscopic design, and from black and white images to a psychedelic parade of color. To achieve all this, Francis Laporte combined the latest technologies with a more established approach, using advanced high-definition digital technology to reinterpret the graphic techniques of the 60s.

Custom software directs the flow of crystal-clear panoramic moving images projected onto 100-ft-wide screens. A key element of



the programming is the time-coded system that ensures the projections' programmed cues are synched up flawlessly with the recorded music used in the show. The system can respond in real time should that become necessary at any point during a show. The real-time authoring system also gave the show's creators the ability to mix and change multiple layers of images on the fly during rehearsals to create the exact mood and precise effect they were seeking for each act.

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

PROPS

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

--PATRICIA RUEL

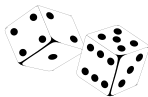
Props Designer

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

Designer Patricia Ruel says a prop is more than a mere object or costume element, "A prop can play a decisive part in defining a character and evoking a time or a place. It can also help establish mood and atmosphere."

The props in LOVE are a blend of antiques, junkyard discoveries, off-the-shelf hardware and custom-designed handcrafted pieces. One item can appear in many guises throughout the show. A perfect example is her use of umbrellas. An umbrella can be used to symbolize the broken wings of Blackbirds and in an instant it is transformed into fish floating through the Octopus's Garden only to reappear as psychedelic images in the universe of Mr. Kite. Later in the show, umbrellas reveal swirls of red petals in Hey Jude.

"A great deal of work has gone into the creation of the characters," Ruel notes, "Each of them owns objects that help in that process." Character development is reflected in the evolution of certain props such as Eleanor Rigby's train of belongings. Drawn from the lyrics of the song, Eleanor Rigby's story is carried with her on a train lit by candles; each carriage represents a specific era in her past. Charred and fragile from the war, the train grows throughout the show as she collects memories.



memories.

Sgt. Pepper's story is reflected in his collection of eclectic musical instruments. After his marching band is destroyed in the war, he collects the debris of everyday items. Teapots and pipes, pots and pans, whatever he manages to recover in the wreckage of war, is assembled to become his instruments. These 'restored' instruments are actually constructed of lightweight PVC and vacuform and feature detailed patina work which gives them their antique, destroyed appearance.

In addition to Ruel's creations, renowned puppet designer Michael Curry has assisted in the development of three Volkswagen beetles: the smoking car, the rolling car and the crash car. The crash car is constructed out of puppet components, which allows the artists to break the car apart in choreographed movements. Curry also developed a quirky device made from yellow rubber boots, and two large-scale paper-puppets for the lyrical While My Guitar Gently Weeps sequence.

LOVE SCENES: THE DIRECTOR'S VISION

Dominic Champagne, who directed and wrote the original concept for the show, explained his vision for LOVE: "I wanted to create a Beatles experience rather than a Beatles story, taking the audience on an emotional journey rather than a chronological one, exploring the landscapes and experiences that have marked the group's history." Here's his vision for each scene in the show:

Nowhere Land

The four Nowhere Men, Sgt. Pepper and The Fool take the stage and cross the metaphoric threshold into The Beatles world.

Because

Creating a portrait reminiscent of the ports of Liverpool, sailors climb dramatically on ropes toward the Heavens. The a cappella voices of John, Paul and George pave their ascent. Each pull of the rope elevates the intensity of anticipation, foreshadowing The Beatles revival. Anchored at the other end of their lifelines is a scene from Savile Row. In an instant the sailors descend from their summits and raise the set, taking us from the place where it all began to The Beatles' final performance in 1969 atop the roofs of London.

Get Back

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

Glass Onion

Marked by the ending strings from "Glass Onion," the festivities are brought to a startling finish and we flash back still further to the war years of The Beatles youth.

The vibrancy and levity become shrouded by the grim realities of WWII that shaped the four boys' revolutionary attitudes and musical tastes. Sgt Pepper's band is symbolically destroyed amid the chaos and devastation, and the grim landscape soon becomes a setting for change and renewal.

Eleanor Rigby

Depicting the resurrection and resilience of a post-war nation, Eleanor Rigby pulls the weight of her past through the rubble. Interpretation of key characters from The Beatles musical and historical narratives emerge including Father McKenzie, The Queen, Mr. Piggy, the Children of Liverpool and The Fool. Interwoven in this homage to The Beatles tragic heroine are hints of "Julia," "Strawberry Fields Forever" and "A Day in the Life."

I Am the Walrus

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

Rock 'n' Roll Run (I Want to Hold Your Hand / Drive My Car)

An upbeat "I Want to Hold Your Hand" followed by a medley of "Drive My Car", "What You're Doing" and "The Word" signal the euphoric onslaught of Beatlemania. Crazy fans and screaming groupies bombard the stage in flurry of acrobatic activity. Teeter boards and trampoline beds launch the ensemble to new heights just as these early hits launched The Beatles to astronomical fame.

Abbey Road

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

Gnik Nus/ Something

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

Being for the benefit of Mr. Kite

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

Help!

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

Blackbird

In this comedic interpretation of The Beatles poetic lullaby "Black Bird," Dr. Robert vainly attempts to help four mangled, disenchanted black birds find their wings and take flight again.

Yesterday

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

JAM Session

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

Strawberry Fields

Assembled around a mysterious piano, Dr. Robert introduces the Nowhere Men to an unusual tea drinking ritual. This euphemistic stimulant launches them and the show itself on a psychedelic trip. The surreal "Strawberry Fields" is underscored in the closing stages by "Penny Lane," "In My Life," "Piggies" and "Hello Goodbye."

Parade

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

Within You, Without You

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

Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds

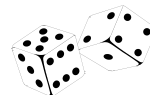
The trip continues with the glittering daughter of the heavens, Lucy, soaring through the air in this aerial contortion number. Connecting with the earthy Fireman who keeps her aloft, Lucy lets her hair down and rejoices in this moment of exaltation.

Octopus's Garden

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

Lady Madonna

Celebrating the strength, beauty and courage of motherhood, Lady Madonna dances with children at her feet. The dance ensemble performs high-energy "Gumboot" choreography. Accompanied by her rock 'n' roll lover, Sugar Plum Fairy, they celebrate love in all its joys and hardships.



Here Comes the Sun

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

Come Together

Led by a Krishna-like figure, this sensual dance is an unbridled release of sexual energy, wrapped in a political statement of the times. It's an exhibition of free love in rebellion of the accepted conventions of order.

Revolution / Back in the U.S.S.R.

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

While My Guitar Gently Weeps

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

A Day in the Life

This somber yet whimsical tale features a dramatic aerial straps act and a poetic recounting of personal loss and eternal love.

Hey Jude

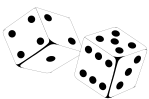
Red poppy petals swirl as a symbol of remembrance. The consoling lyrics and soothing melody are a chant of reconciliation.

Sgt. Pepper (reprise)

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

All You Need is Love

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



“Methods of Magic”

The inspiration behind the art...

By: Kristina A Piet

My involvement with CirqueCon began when I stumbled upon a discussion that mentioned it on the official Cirque-club website. I was able to convince my parents that going to Montreal for the 2005 convention would be a once-in-a-lifetime chance... and, indeed, that is what it was. From Montreal, I gained invaluable contacts, new friends, and an outlet for my artistic side. Shortly after CirqueCon 2005 Montreal, Rich Alford, the 'graphics-guy', and I started collaborating on ideas for the 2006 convention. From show characters playing craps, to nametags with characters posing as playing cards, to a blackjack table where everyone wins, we went through many ideas to tie Cirque du Soleil together with the buzzing excitement of Las Vegas, Nevada. Over the summer of 2005, I worked myself into a corner, unable to complete any of the ideas Rich and I had discussed. Suddenly, while researching the artists of Corteo on the Internet, I came upon website after website dedicated to rhythmic gymnastics. The pictures of these talented men and women sparked a whole new strain of drawings for CirqueCon 2006 Las Vegas, and these are the works which made the deadline, after almost a year of work. I proudly present them to you now, with a few words on my inspiration for each piece.

“From the Depths” - “O”

This was the first piece I started and completed for the convention. I visualized a rhythmic gymnast's hoop being the portal to the world of Cirque du Soleil, and the logo of “O” submerged from the depths of the gymnast's imagination. Eventually, I decided to tie the gymnast into the show by making her resemble the contortionists who gracefully reign over the waterscape. This drawing led to the rhythmic gymnastics concept being integrated into the other pieces.

“Spellbound” - *ZUMANITY, Another Side of Cirque du Soleil*

This piece was inspired by a photo of a ball performance by Mary Sanders, a rhythmic gymnast who is now a performer in Cirque du Soleil's Corteo. Pulling in elements of sensuality from the glamour-bondage theme in *Zumanity*, I pushed the limits of the character in the drawing to that point where the pleasure of performance meets the pain of physical exertion. The show of strength and beauty leaves her audience spellbound, and none can resist her charms.

“All Together Now” - LOVE™

When I began this drawing, no information was available on the new show Cirque du Soleil had created. Knowing the Beatles to be Cirque's inspiration, I drew my own from the time period where hippies would weave magic through their voices, guitars, and ribbon-bedecked tambourines. The Beatles were the voice of a generation that strived to bring us all together in love and peace. I thank my mother, Karen Piet, for her priceless input on this particular drawing and the age that inspired it.

“Fuchi” - KÂ

The process for this drawing held many challenges, including the most daunting task in my artistic career so far: integrating fire in a complex spiral around the character. Fire is a powerful theme in this Cirque du Soleil show, and I incorporated it with the lost female twin of the show. I also based the concept behind the drawing on Fuchi, the Ainu goddess of fire, whose protection is said to rain over Fujiyama (Mt. Fuji) in Japan. Thus the dancer in my drawing has the capability to manipulate the immortal flames that encircle and burn within life itself.

“Rêve Intemporel” *Mystère*

This drawing was made last-minute, right at the deadline. My original drawing for *Mystère* never turned out, but this replacement exceeded all expectations! I drew my inspiration from Taiko and the 'Black Widow' and 'Bébé' characters in Cirque du Soleil's show. The female drummer is a creator, whose beats resonate, forming a timeless dream of life, death, and rebirth. She combines the wisdom and experience of an elder with the childlike innocence of one experiencing life for the first time.

My hope is that my work sparks the imagination hidden within all who look upon art and see something more than lines on a page or movements on a stage. Enjoy this gathering of friends and may the magic that is Cirque du Soleil ignite the flame of imagination within you.

~Kristina A. Piet

For more of Kris' artwork, please visit <http://groups.msn.com/cirque-club/>

Special Thanks: To Cirque du Soleil, the Beatles, Marvin Moore, Sing Lo, Patrick Tower, and the rhythmic gymnasts of the world for inspiring these pieces. To CirqueCon for giving me the opportunity to display my artwork. To Rich Alford, for working with me this past year and giving me suggestions, positive feedback, and criticism with compassion. To my family, for always taking interest and supporting my love of all things cirque. Most importantly, to my God, who instilled these abilities within me and who is to be honored through my work.



CIRQUE CON
2006
Las Vegas!

**Interpretations of
Las Vegas Cirque du Soleil Shows
by Kris Piet,
Cirque Passionate Extra ordinaire**

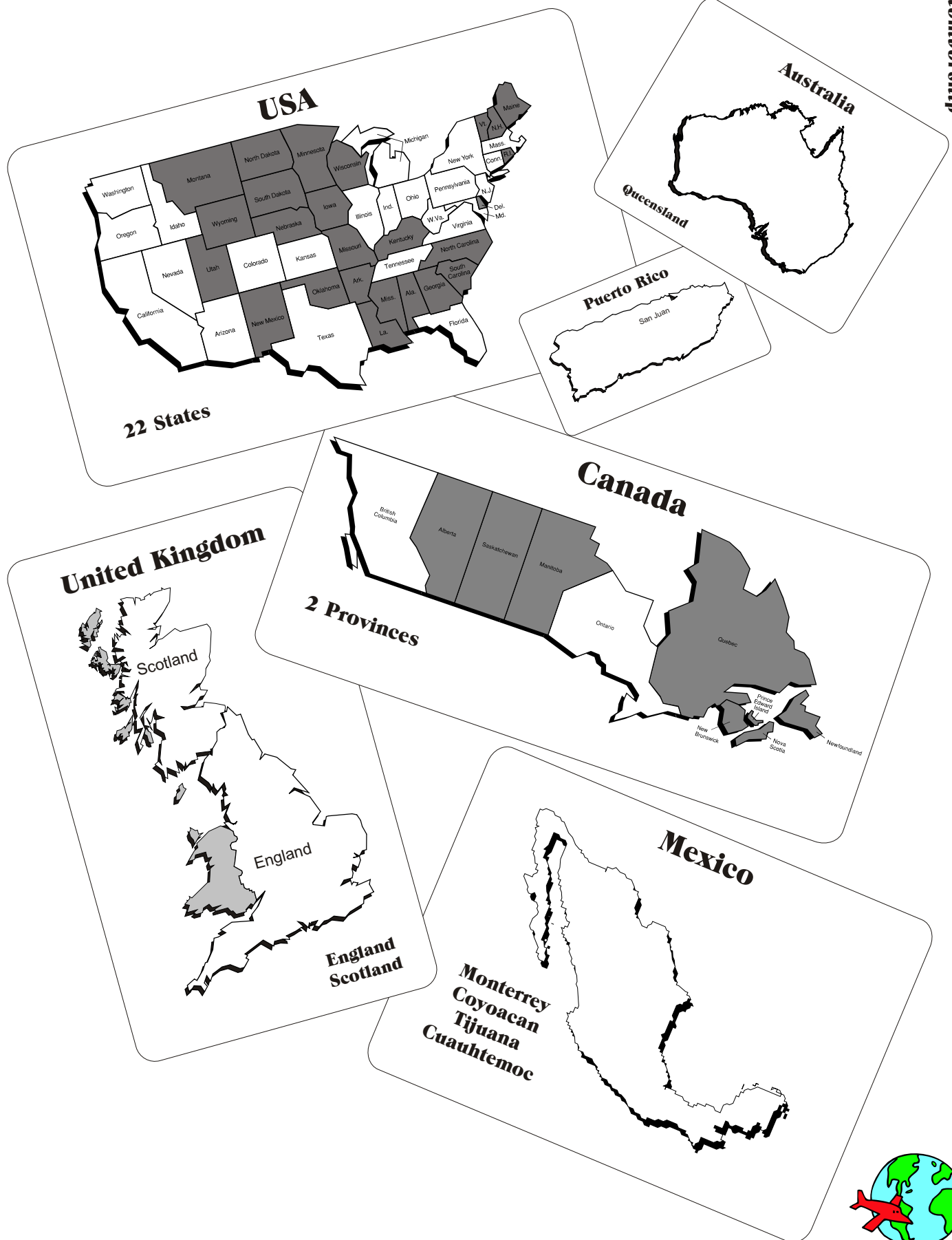


CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas!

The third unofficial gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates

Where are we gathering from?

World Wide Membership



CirqueCon 2006: Las Vegas!

Member Stories

We asked for your stories telling us how Cirque du Soleil plays a part in your life... Here are some amazing stories from some of our members, you're new friends...

Bill Preece

Ever since Teri and I saw Mystere in Las Vegas during a visit in March 1998, we have both enjoyed watching Cirque du Soleil expand it's touring and permanent shows since then. A couple years earlier we began collecting glass ornaments and have since accumulated over 2,000 ornaments that we use to decorate about 10 trees at our home for the holidays. And for the last 2 years we have decorated a Cirque du Soleil themed tree. This past year we found a 7' purple artificial tree that we used and decorated with the various ornaments and masks we have collected. In the center of the tree, I put a portable dvd player and had Alegria playing non-stop when guests came to visit. And at the base of the tree were other memorabilia on display.



My Journey to CirqueCon 2006

by Michelle Matteson

The mysteries of the universe played a hand in this journey. Looking back at the events leading to Keith placing a small card in my hand connecting us to Cirque Passionate, to me is truly amazing. This journey really began a few years ago when John and I attended a Cirque performance in Renton, WA. John bought me a Cirque du Soleil shirt as a memento.

Late last fall I did one of my 'spring cleaning' of cloths and thought, 'this shirt is too small for me now' so I decided to pass it on. My mother does a great job of collecting and recycling clothing. Some go to my many cousins in North Dakota and Minneapolis. Sometime during this past winter, we received a CD promoting Varekai coming to Redmond.

When I finally remembered to order tickets, I had waited to long and didn't like my choices. After much agonizing, we decided not to go. I was definitely bummed! A while later, two weeks were added to the schedule and I managed to get good tickets for June 10, just a few days before my birthday. I was so excited and thought how fun it would be to wear my Cirque shirt, only to feel down when I realized I had given it away months before. On June 2, I flew to Minneapolis to attend a 50th Wedding Anniversary.

My folks drove to Minneapolis from Renton and Mom had packed the trunk with bags of cloths. Angela, one of my cousins, grabbed one of the bags from the garage and took it to her room. She was so happy with all her finds and showed me, one by one. A tee shirt she picked out had been mine. She grabs the next, 'I

bet this one way yours as well.' It was my Cirque shirt! I tried it on and it fit perfectly. After telling her my story, she told me to take it back. I was so excited that next weekend I would get to wear my shirt to the show.

Finally, Saturday evening arrives and we drive to Marymoore Park to see Varekai. Cirque employees are commenting on my shirt as we walked along. Two entrances, ODD or EVEN. We entered on the ODD side and I am admiring the shirts when a man (turns out to be Keith) starts a conversation with John and I. I moan about how we had tried to see "O" in Las Vegas a couple of times and couldn't get tickets. This fellow hands me a business card about CirqueCon 2006. After the performance, we walked back to the car under a full moon and dreamt about a trip to Vegas.

First thing Sunday morning I got on the internet and checked out the website. I printed out everything and added up the cost. John wanted to know, "How much?" We had already booked a Hawaii Cruise during the Christmas holiday. This was a dilemma. I held out my hands and lifted the right one, "Hawaii Cruise", then the left one, "CirqueCon in Vegas"? I asked John, "Which would you prefer?" Deal or No Deal? I bet you can guess which hand won!

See everyone in Las Vegas!

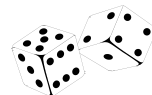
Jennifer J. Colbert,

Cirque Passionate

For me, "Cirque du Soliel and Me" means "O", and "O" means so very many things to me: First, and certainly by no means least, "O" is the phonetic pronunciation for the elemental symbol for the precious metal gold (Au), which is so apropos, for my first "O" experience was truly a golden moment I shall always treasure most fondly. It was among those rare, life altering experiences which I've come to recall in later years, as a moment The Forces of Fate, or Karma, or yes, I dare say, God conjured to provide me with a special gift so vital, that life from that time forward would be lacking something sacred and essential were it not for it's exalted place among the most magnificent of my memories. It was the first time I had the good graces of The "O" Theatre surrounding and enveloping me, and -- for a short while -- making me one of it's own!

Just a few short hours before, I had no idea I would even enter this grand, alchemical playhouse, let alone become one of it's own: I was down several thousands of dollars after nearly a full day's gambling in the MGM Grand's High-Limit Slot Lounge, when my good friend and Slot Host, Gerry Green, suggested I change my course of luck by getting away for awhile and enjoying this terrific show he "just had the good fortune to see this week at the Bellagio. Let me call to see if I can get you tickets to tonight's second show." He returned with a grin, but not before I left several hundred more dollars in the slot machine I'd been plying. "You're luck just changed girl!" Yeah, sure it did! "What did you call it, Gerry, 'Oh' , 'Oh what ?' ", I asked. "Go!", he said. " 'Oh go?' ", I chided. "No, just 'O', now go! Be at the Limo Desk, out front, by Valet, in forty-five minutes -- your chariot awaits!"

In less than an hour, dressed in my finest 'Vegas attire -- a black Rat Pack silk fantasy



'Vegas attire -- a black Rat Pack silk fantasy number I had always brought with me here, but somehow, despite all the numerous gambling visits prior, never before got the chance to actually wear in Las Vegas -- I arrived in the back of a green stretch-limo to the sight of the dancing water fountains, in front of the Bellagio Hotel and Casino. "Wow, these people really know how to make a show out of HTO", I said to myself. I had no idea...

Once seated in the "O" Theatre, I began to feel as if this surreal Italian opera house was a living, breathing entity, drawing me into its embrace. Then it interrupted that feeling, just as I was really beginning to loll in The "O" Theatre warmth. It were thoughts from clinical depression now drowning me in self-doubt, in self-pity, and in isolation from... from what? Some semblance of fulfillment? Love? At least the absence of loss? It was at that precise moment, that I thought I'd begin to cry, that I both felt and heard the first drop of water upon my head, tracing the path that first tear would most likely have taken down the side of my face, and on to my beautiful silk dress, followed by more drops, at an increasing pace. My rhetorical parade, or rather, my head, was being rained upon! Before I could fully comprehend the meaning of the amplified sound of these drops echoing throughout the expanse of this wondrous theatre, The Clowns were upon the seats surrounding mine, one thrusting a bucket into the hands of my next-seat-neighbor, the other one roping us off with brightly yellow "CAUTION" tape, and unfurling an umbrella! It was then I realized my fellow seat-mates and I are part of the show's opening! We are actually in the show!! The feelings within me immediately dissipated as the program began to unfold with the stories-high curtain's parting, and then magically flying away.

As it turned out, the show, with its stories and symbols of deep psycho-spiritual significance about love, about fear, and about death, but most importantly, about life, offered me a kind of baptism by both fire and water, like something I once expected from church, but never received, until finding myself in The "O" Theatre, which has now become a sort of church for me. Yes, that's right, the place I come to drink from the deepest of spiritual waters is located in the Nevada desert, inside a casino of all places, on the famous Las Vegas strip. It's living, changing acts mediate powerful emotions, and its many essential art forms harbor great potential for healing and transcendence through experiential immersion into the archetypal worlds of its oceanic stage. Perhaps you, too, will be profoundly changed by its powers for reclamation. I would like to suggest after taking your seat, that you open your hymnal, eh, I mean, open your program, and following Eugen's hand gesturing from the inside cover, read the statement to which he points on page one: "Travel far enough away my friend, and you'll discover something of great beauty: your self."

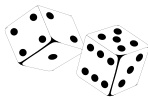
In closing, I offer you my most sincere prayer: "As you dwell in The House of "O", may you, too, be granted the blessing of a Wet Seat." Amen.

It all started in January when I went to see Saltimbanco at the Trafford Centre. It was the first Cirque show I'd seen live and at that time wasn't even my favourite show on dvd (that was Varekai) but I couldn't miss out on a chance to see a Cirque show live. Well, it just blew me away and I was completely hooked! My friend & I had seats 1 & 2 on row AA Block 103 so we were really up close & personal with the action! And I just fell in love with Darin Good - he just sparkles with joy. So after that first show I went straight to the booking office & booked to go again with another friend, then a 3rd time with my sister and we were sat on row AA block 103 again, which is when Haku started stealing my handbag - all part of his act but I entered into the spirit of things by fighting him for it (which was more than some audience members did, I later observed). After seeing it 3 times with company I just couldn't resist going back a further 3 times on my own, the final time in Manchester being February 13th - the day before Valentines Day. A friend of mine suggested that I give Darin a rose - so that is what I did, as well as giving him a card for all the performers. I knew I would be sitting close to where he stands at the end of the show so it was quite easy to do. I just wanted to thank all the performers, and particularly Darin, for the joy they had brought into my life.

When the show moved on to Birmingham, I decided to go and see it again. Due to ill health & other circumstances I had not been away for a holiday for about 3 years & to be quite honest I had lost my confidence & any motivation to travel, so deciding to stay in Stratford for a few days on my own was quite a big challenge for me. I saw the show another 4 times that week. As I knew I would be sitting near Haku at one of the performances, I decided to give him a flower too - this time a gerbera & an easter card for everyone.

I thought that would be the end of it, but then my confidence started to build & I began to believe that maybe I could cope with a weekend trip to Paris, which I arranged for late May - at the time I booked tickets for the show it hadn't officially been extended into July, so I thought that this trip would be my last chance to see it. On the Saturday afternoon I wandered down to the chapiteau about 2 hours early, but the security guard wouldn't let me into the compound so I turned round & started to wander back towards my hotel. It was then that I saw Darin and one of the crew walking to "work". I was just so gobsmacked that I was rooted to the spot & although I wanted to speak to him I couldn't speak! I felt like a nervous teenager (& believe me it's a very long time since I felt like that!).

Anyway, it occurred to me later on that if I went down early on Sunday morning I might see him again, so I took my programme & waited until I saw him. This time I was able to go up to him & introduced myself as the lady from Manchester who gave him a rose. He remembered me & offered to take my programme backstage for everyone to sign, then between the 2 shows he took me backstage. It was then that I also met Lee Brearley, who came over & chatted to me while I was waiting for Darin to finish re-erecting the Chinese poles. I am so privileged to have been taken backstage, I know, because quite often on the website



people ask how to arrange it (& are usually told its not possible unless you're a friend or family member of someone).

That weekend was just beyond my wildest dreams, but more was yet to come! Having returned home I struggled briefly about whether to go back one last time, for the last shows but it didn't take long for me to decide to go - after all it would probably be my last opportunity to see it before it headed off to Mexico. At this point I was also in contact with another fan from York, Nicola, & between us we organised the same hotel & even got seats on the front row, together, again right where Darin stands at the end. I also wrote a letter to Darin, thanking him for the backstage tour & telling him a little about myself & why the show - & his performance - had become so special to me. I mentioned that I was coming to Paris for the final shows & hoped he wouldn't mind if I said hello.

At the Saturday matinee, I was about 2 rows back & exactly where Lee was taking his bow still dressed in bungee costume, so I managed to catch his eye & wave to him. At the evening show, Darin came right off the stage to greet me & asked me to wait behind. Darin & Lee had written me a lovely card which I will treasure & also gave me some photos. As Nicola was with me at this point, we had our cameras & Michael (backstage manger?) took some photos of us all. Lee suggested he take our cameras backstage & get more photos for us, which was absolutely brilliant, as we couldn't go backstage because of tear-down. I had brought the t-shirts with me as a gift, but didn't have them with me at the time because I didn't know whether I would have the chance to talk to either of them, so we arranged to meet early on Sunday before the matinee. When I gave them both these t-shirts, they seemed quite pleased with them! Again, we arranged to meet after the matinee so that we could get our cameras back, and this time Nicola got to meet her favourite performer, Vitalii Redoun, so she was feeling like I did when I met Darin.

I thought that would be the last chance we had to meet them, but during the last performance Darin & Lee actually wore my t-shirts on stage (during the dance number in Eddie's spot in the 2nd half of the show) which blew me away all over again. Then, at the end of the last performance & after umpteen curtain calls, the front-of-house staff started giving roses to the performers. (I wonder where they got that idea from?!) Darin came straight off the stage & gave me his rose (we were once again seated in exactly the right place, this time on 101 AA). Needless to say, all this was completely beyond beyond my wildest dreams!

Since then, I've also seen Dralion in Ostende, Alegria in London & Varekai in Seattle, where I got to meet the Atherton twins. Also, I now have tickets for the final shows of Saltimbanco in Rio de Janero.



Cirque Passionate E-Mail

Laura Jones

From: Laura Jones

Subject: did you ever have your life change in a moment?

so....here I am.... in las vegas... thinking "AND.... ?????" It's just not hitting me, what's the big deal? The city is a gigantic shopping mall whoopy-poop.

Several shows were good but not life changing. My expectations are always so high I didn't dislike the shows but, "eh....", was the most enthusiasm i could muster but tonight... tonight I saw *ZUMANITY*! Right away, LOVE the whole vegas + cirque combo. A very unique show THIS is what I've been looking for men... HOT, women.. HOT! I'm on the border of worshipping the transvestite "ring leader" and the girls on the other side of the aisle from me (I'm front row, dead center) are getting lots of "play" from the hot male performers, I'm totally envious!!

sooooooooooooo... about half way through the show the "lead" hot male ("the gigolo") goes to grab one of the girls and they won't go up, none of them will move and I'm cheering the girls on "go... go... go!!!.... this is a once in a lifetime opportunity!!!" but none of them move and the gigolo apparently hearing my hoops & chants turns to ME and INVITES ME ONSTAGE and 'F' if I'm going to let this go by!! I GO!!!!!! I may have no one with me to record this 15 min of fame but I'm all over it! so... I basically get encouraged to "dry hump" the gigolo character onstage in front of the entire audience and, as all of you can imagine it took NO encouragement for me to play along and they had fun at my expense and I could not have cared less all I could think was "I COULD DIE RIGHT NOW AND MY LIFE WOULD BE GRAND!!" it was GREAT so.. play, play, play... DUDE, IT'S FREAKIN' CIRQUE DU SOLEIL AND I'M ONSTAGE!!!!!! MY LIFE ROCKS!!! it seemed like seconds but I'm sure it was minutes I got to grab the cutie man's legs, butt, chest... SO MUCH FUN!! audience watching? Hey, that's great!! The more the merrier!!!

Eventually, sadly (i always wanted to be part of Cirque) I'm sent back to my seat.

After the show, I had a bunch of people ask me (in the cirque store and the closest bar) if I was pre-"planted" but no.... just dumb luck!! My life peaked in one fiiiiine moment

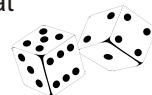
I was a Cirque fanatic before, you can imagine how I am now!!

Seriously, your dreams can come true, your life can change in a moment, seize it while you can!

Cirque and me (and we)

By: Olivia Neece

I first experienced Cirque du Soleil at the Santa Monica Pier in Los Angeles. One day a girlfriend of mine and I we were out near the pier and saw a tent going up.... We walked down and asked what it was all about. The workers told us it was Cirque du Soleil ...a circus without animals,



but with lots of acrobats and performers, and very different, very French. That was just right for us. We bought tickets for one of the performances. We saw a preview of one of the acts on Jay Leno (I think it was that time, but I'm not sure). By the time we bought tickets, they were not very good, up at the top and kind of behind a pole. But we were enthralled by the performance. I have not seen her in years, but I am sure that she still loves Cirque too.

The next time Cirque came to town, I knew in advance and was ready to purchase tickets earlier... My husband Tony and I went with another couple. We all had a wonderful time and were enthralled by the magnificent gymnastics, costumes, acrobatics, and music. We became loyal attendees of the tent shows in Santa Monica. I think we have attended all of them (maybe we missed one).

Then Tony and I finally came to Las Vegas to experience the super shows. We had been told to see "O", but it was on a hiatus. So we got tickets for KA. KA had just opened. It was in the first month or two. We were so blown away that we could not leave the theatre for a very long time after the show was over. We kept marveling at the technicality of the machinery of the stage and the rigging and the lighting and the sound. We continued to be mesmerized by the outstanding capabilities of the cast and their talents in gymnastics, dance and their daredevil tricks on the stage and up above us on the rigging.

It didn't take us long to return to Las Vegas to experience "O" & "Le Reve". Although Le Reve is a nice show, it does not hold a candle to "O". We loved "O", but KA is our favorite to date.

On returning to LA, we still had the Cirque junkie stuff in our blood, so when Cirque moved to Long Beach we purchased tickets. Boy, were we sorry. The Long Beach sojourn is a story and a half. We started out about an hour too late by LA standards and it took us about 4 ½ hours to drive less than 90 miles to the show. By the time we got there, it was intermission and we missed half the show. We had tickets with another couple, but could not find them during the intermission. Their seats were not next to ours and we got there so late. Fortunately we got together later for dinner and enjoyed talking about some of the amazing talent of the performers. However, once you get spoiled by the shows in Las Vegas, it is hard to go back to the tent shows. If the shows don't come back to Santa Monica, I don't think we will plan to go down to Long Beach to see them on a weeknight!

Tony and I have been excited about our upcoming trip to Las Vegas and the Cirque Con. I am hoping it will be all that we expect. We are seeing 4 shows this time, Mystere, LOVE, Zumanity (the three we have not seen) and KA....we need to see it again!! We have had a peek at the backstage technical equipment, but are really looking forward to a more in depth tour with Cirque-con.

be another great Cirque experience too!

We look forward to this experience with Cirque du Soleil and are grateful to Guy Laliberte' and all of the people in his company for their talent and vision.

Living The Dream

Joan Mosier

My first vision of Cirque was on some TV show. Suddenly, the festoons of bright cloth fell from the sky. But, there were also intriguing bodies intertwining with the fabric. My eyes were glued, I was hooked, and I set out to discover who these bodies were. I discovered Cirque and finally began my journey of experiencing it all in person last year. In 2005, I experienced Quidam in Baltimore. In 2006, I was enchanted with Varekai in Philadelphia and Delirium in Atlantic City. For some time, I noted that my dream vacation was to go to Las Vegas and see all of the Cirque resident shows. Holding me back was my distaste of flying. In just the nick of time, I found Cirquecon and will get on that plane to do the dream!

9 shows, 4 continents, and 10 weeks.

Alex Rogers

This could be said to be a very succinct summary of our adventure last year, which included CirqueCon 2005: Montreal!

The story started over two years ago. After hearing of all the fun and games of CirqueCon 2004: Vancouver!, when CirqueCon 2005: Montreal was announced, Mesha & I were very tempted to attend. The only hiccup? We lived in Perth, Australia, almost exactly on the other side of the world from Montreal!

Initially we purchased tickets to the as yet unnamed Cirque show (in July 2004) through the Cirque Club release. At that stage, we hadn't yet fully decided to go, or if we did, how long the trip would be.

In the meantime, Quidam had arrived in Sydney, and we flew over to see twice with friends. Skipping ropes had a huge amount of energy injected by Norihisa Taguchi, and I really enjoyed this act. Spanish webs was great, with one artist tumbling directly above us at one point. Statue was impressive, and Banquine as wonderful as ever. All this was great inspiration!

Once we decided to go, it was a matter sorting out finances and leave from work. At one point we were looking at doing a whirlwind trip of four weeks. In the end, we thought that this might be a once in a lifetime trip, so we thought, why stop at just North America? Corteo was already on the agenda, and La Nouba, Mystere, O, Zumanity and Ka were all fairly easy to arrange. How about the others? Luckily, Mesha's cousin works in Tokyo and speaks Japanese, so he was able to book tickets to Alegria 2 in Nagoya. Eventually the Paris run of Saltimbanco was extended to include the window where we would be in Europe, and I put my school French to test booking tickets on the Fnac ticketing website. And up on return to Perth, Quidam would be arriving within 6 weeks. The only show that remained elusive was Dralion the dates we would be in Europe were when Dralion was between cities leaving Barcelona and setting up in Rotterdam (I



What will happen when we get back, the let down? Well, we do have tickets for Delirium at the Staples Center and hope that it will

think). Still, nine out of ten isn't bad!

As can be imagined, organizing to see a large number of shows, on different continents, with a tight timetable was problematic at best! The Vegas shows caused problems, with several shows having dark weeks in early April, which led us to do an almost complete circuit of the North American continent, flying from Orlando to Vegas, and then flying out from Vegas back across the country and on to Paris!

On 2 April 2005 we set out on our adventure! Luckily the bank had come to the party, and my employer was very generous, letting me have 5 weeks leave without pay (along with 5 weeks paid). Ten weeks, 15 airports, and an awful lot of time at 30,000 feet!

First stop was San Francisco, where we had 6 days to recover from jet lag (I think it was 24 hours in the air...). Cable cars, Alcatraz, Golden Gate Bridge, seafood chowder, Pier 39 all followed (with a lot more of course). Great city, loved the place, would go back in a trice!

Next, we caught the train up the coast to Seattle which was a great trip 24 hours, through several mountain ranges. I really enjoy rail travel, which is why we'd booked a month long North American railpass. It's a great way to see a lot of countryside in comfortable surroundings!

In Seattle we met up with CirqueCon organizers Keith, Lou-Anne and Rich to see Teatro Zinzanni, a really great dinner show with everything, Great acts, great food, great company! I still marvel at what the acrobats were able to do within the confines of the aisles between the tables! Only three days in Seattle unfortunately, but we saw the Museum of Flight, Pike Place Market, the Seattle Center, the waterfront and a trip across Puget Sound. We also caught up again with Keith and Lou-Anne for dinner at Ivar's Acres of Clams!

Off again by train, this time north along Puget Sound, and across the border to Vancouver. This trip is certainly very beautiful, most of time metres away from the waters edge.

Vancouver was a great place to visit. The location of the city, looking across the river to the mountains beyond, was just wonderful! Spent four days looking around Gastown, Yaletown, the City center, walking along the Coal Harbour seawalk, exploring Stanley Park, shopping and dining in the west end and visiting Science World. We also caught the ferry across the harbour and a bus and chair lift up to Grouse Mountain. Now, we come from Perth, which has a warm to hot climate, where summer daytime temperatures usually average 37 Celsius (100 F) and 45 C (113 F) is not uncommon. If we get a frost on a winters morning, it will make the front page of the paper. We have to fly across 3000 km (2000 miles) of desert to get to the snowfields on the east coast. So, we haven't come across snow before. And it was actively snowing up on the mountain, so as you can imagine, we had a great time! Snowballs and angels came into the equation, and Mesha spent 2 hours

building a 2m tall snow-woman (while stayed under shelter and took photos!). All while we had a constant flow of people heading out with skis and snowboards. Hard to believe all this only an hour from the city centre!

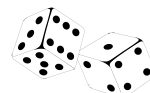
Our next leg of the journey was to Montreal this time on ViaRail for a four day rail trip across the continent! Up and over the Canadian Rockies and through so much varied scenery. Truly a worthwhile trip and highly recommended!

Montreal, was of course, for CirqueCon! We stayed at the "official" hotel, and there was of course the tours of Cirque HQ and TOHU, the meet and greet, the "And Then There Was Light" at La Basilique Notre-Dame de Montreal, late night suppers at Restaurant du Vieux Port with CirqueCon attendees, as well as the group dinner at the same Restaurant. And then of course Corteo! We followed up the Saturday night show with the matinee on Sunday. A truly great show in our opinion. The ambience, music, costuming and whole feel of the show appealed to our tastes. This of course combined to some great acts. The juggling group was one of the best I'd seen, Cyr wheel a great show of strength and balance, and I loved teeterboard! On the matinee show we were front row and the energy was amazing! I think I may have been one of the few to love the "Not so Serious" act, just loved the randomness of the chickens! Paradise was great, though we missed the trampoline part on Saturday night show due to the technical difficulties. Chandeliers was a highlight, and the music was wonderful. Bouncing beds was very playful, and was holding my breath a number of times during Tournik!

We stayed several days more in Montreal, browsing the shops and wandering around the Quartier Latin and further a field trying to track down a particular circus shop. Next stop after Montreal was Toronto, where we visited the Museums of Shoes and Textiles. We also spent some time trying to track down Bloch jazz ankle boots. In the 2005 CirqueCon program I described the impact Cirque has had on my life and my training to become a circus performer. These Bloch boots are perfect for trapeze and performing work, but sadly, discontinued. Our quest was to find some. In Toronto, we struck gold, at a shop called Malabar. Lots of pairs, especially for men, at 25% cost price. Apparently they didn't sell well, except to a few trapeze artists (what a coincidence...).

Following Toronto was a trip to the "Vegas of the North", Niagara Falls, which in late April was in good flow! A trip under the falls in the Maid of the Mist ensured a good soaking!

Next up was Pittsburgh. Most frequently asked question? "Why Pittsburgh?" (mostly by residents). Why? Varekai of course!! Great location on the banks of the Allegheny River next to Heinz Field. The show was great as expected, saw all the acts (as shown on the DVD). Icarian games, Trip Trap, Russian Swing, the Athertons and handbalancing were all highlights. A big thanks also to Cirque's security manager for helping us get a taxi!



After a very brief stop in Boston, it was on to New York! We had four days to try and see as much as possible. After booking into hotel, we saw a flyer for Slava's Snow Show. I had seen it previously at home in Perth several years ago, but Mesha hadn't, so we went down to the theatre on 17th Street near Union Square and indeed it was still showing, so we saw the show that night. Smaller crowd than in Perth, but the show was still the same and still as good as ever! We really like this style of clowning, we can't help but laugh! And I'd have to say, the snowstorm sequence Slava does uses much more snow than the incarnation in Alegria! We went back and saw it again before we left NY. We had also invested in a bus tour around NY for 3 days. We found that was a good way to see a lot of things around Manhattan in a short period of time. Did all the usual touristy things like Empire State Building, Statue of Liberty, Times Square, Broadway, shopping, museums and art galleries, and Central Park.

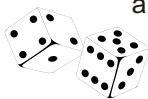
We then escaped the cold of the north and arrived in sunny Orlando, for three days of Disney World and La Nouba! We both had a ball in the Magical Kingdom on the rides and photos with various characters. Less so on the incredibly slow Disney buses. After our first experience, we decided taxi's were the way to go. La Nouba was magical, one of my favourites. I love the whole party atmosphere of the show. Les Cons were great and I could spend the whole show just watching them. The same has to be said of the other characters too. The tightwire act is easily the best Cirque has. Diablo's were flawless, silks were very powerful, balancing on chairs very fun, and the powertrack / trampoline one of the best endings Cirque has. And last, but certainly not least, wonderful music! Straight after the show we went back to the box office and got tickets for the next night! Also have to say the House of Blues was a great place to eat - friendly, helpful staff and great atmosphere!

Our last stop on the North American continent was a place by the name of Las Vegas maybe you might have heard of it? It has a few Cirque shows there. We thought we might see one or two as we were there (ha!). We paced ourselves to one a night (seeing Mystere twice).

First up was Mystere. Highlights for me were the bungee trapeze, hand to hand, taiko and the trampoline, fast track and Korean plank, Also liked the clown segments. Bungee was the first circus discipline I trained in, and still love it.

Second of the shows was Zumanity. Have to say that it was one that I had my doubts about, and it was better than expected. Liked the music best of all. Aerial hula hoop was interesting as was water bowl. Disappointed to miss dislocation, and also Alan on silks.

Ka was next, and we really loved it! The martial arts, baton, acrobatic jumping were all great! Costuming and makeup were a lot most elaborate. Music was a definite highlight.



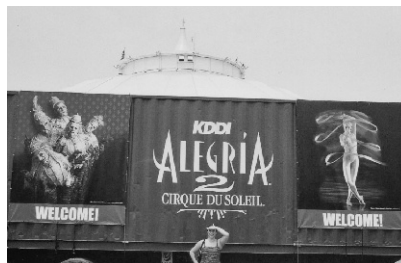
Last up was O. What a spectacle! A feast for the eyes! And loved the music! We were sitting on the right and could see the girls in the booth singing quite often distracted watching them! Loved the show. Russian swing, bateau, synchronized swimming, duo trapeze and the clowns were all highlights for us. A very stylish show!

Then it was a long flight to Paris, France! Several days of visiting museums, art galleries, the Eiffel Tower or just roaming the city! So much to do there, and so little time!! But one thing we had to fit in was a trip out to the site of Saltimbanco, on the western section of the city. I had seen

Saltimbanco three times before, but Mesha had never seen it, so it was well worth a trip out there. The Baroques are just so much fun and there's always so much playing going on even if you keep your eyes open you'll still miss something! Russian swing was a definite highlight, as is bungee. I've always liked Boleadoras (perhaps as I've done a couple of years of flamenco) and the clowning was good as usual!

It was then onto the UK for a week to visit relatives, before flying out to Japan. What a place it is! Hard to know where to begin! Staying with Mesha's cousin and wife made things much easier for us, as we had accommodation, guides and interpreters!

We caught the bullet train down to Nagoya. At Nagoya station we were helped out for the local train to the Big Top by aerial cube artist Nicolas Roche, who was on his way back. I was wearing my Varekai shirt and he asked if we were also Cirque performers (I wish!!) visiting the show, but sadly we had to say we were just visiting.



Then, it was a bullet train back to Tokyo, and then, after a brief stopover in Hong Kong, back to Perth!

After not too long though, Quidam arrived and the Big Top was up, alongside the Swan River. We saw Quidam twice while it was in Perth, and were fortunate to see the duo straps act (on in place for German Wheel), which was marvelous. We also got to see Marina do the hand balancing act. Our last show was also noteworthy as in Banquine, the flyer didn't manage to stick the landing on the four-high at the end not just one, or twice, but three times! In all my previous Quidam shows, Banquine has always been flawless, and so I was very surprised. What made it interesting as well was that the performers themselves seemed a little surprised. After the third attempt, they

seemed unsure whether to try again a fourth time, but then the musicians signaled an end. So, an interesting end, but certainly a great display of spotting of the falling acrobats!

So, there we go! Sixteen Cirque performances of nine shows on four continents! Best experience? CirqueCon 2005!! Best show that we saw? Very close, but I'd have to say Corteo. Money spent on Cirque merchandise? A lot. Fun? You bet!

Unfortunately we can't make it this time round to CirqueCon 2006 in Las Vegas, sounds like there'll be lots of fun and games for all we'll miss you!

A "Cirque-O-Holic's" Story **The Austill Family**

The Austill's have evolved into a family of Cirque fans, but none so great as our daughter, Erin. After seeing "Dralion" on a TV special, she became instantly hooked. We have seen 6 different shows as a family ("Dralion" in Seattle in August 2002, "Mystere" and "O" in Vegas in August 2003, "Alegria" in Seattle in August 2003, "Quidam" in Calgary in July 2004, and "Varekai" in February 2006 in Portland, Oregon). This passion has led her to research careers and job notices with Cirque du Soleil. She even planned her High School course work to include French because there was a time when employees were required to be bilingual in French. Her high school letterman's jacket proudly displays that she is a "Cirque -o-holic." She plans to get her college degree in business with the ultimate goal of working behind the scenes with Cirque du Soleil.

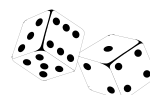
Our DVD, CD, and book collections are full of Cirque materials. The only missing are two documentaries ("Full Circle" and "Truth of Illusion). I have many times teased Erin that she should have a job as a historian with Cirque du Soleil since she is so knowledgeable!

Our most interesting Cirque story involves our trip to Calgary in July of 2004. We had our tickets for over 6 months and looked forward to the trip out of country. Erin was beside herself with the excitement of seeing another show. I knew our tickets were for July 4th and somehow just kept the number 4 in my head as the performance time too. We took a taxi and arrived about 90 minutes early for the show. Mind you we had our a-tickets printed out and stored in an envelope for over 6 months. When we walked closer to the big blue tent, we thought it odd that the parking lot was so quiet since we expected the other Tapis Rouge folks to be milling about. Low and behold, when we actually took our tickets out and inspected them for the first time in months, the show had actually started at 1:00!!! I thought I was going to vomit, Erin was almost hysterical, and my husband was trying to keep us both from flipping out.

We will never forget the kindness and understanding of the Cirque staff who were able to arrange for us to have tickets to the next show that evening at 5 pm. Granted we were a few rows back from the 3rd row seats we originally had, but we were thrilled they would even consider substituting. We were able to wait in the tents where souvenirs and refreshments were

being sold and we could even hear bits and pieces of the show that was going on at the time. The staff was so friendly and hospitable and we became a bit "famous" as the Americans who came at the wrong time.

Cirque du Soleil has become an important bonding point in our family and something we can share. We celebrate Erin's devotion and desire to carve out a career with Cirque.



CIRQUECON 2004: VANCOUVER

The First Unofficial Gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates

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!

It began with Cirque fan Jeff "sfogviper" Tolotti proposing, on the Cirque du Soleil Yahooogroup, a gathering during Quidam's Vancouver, BC run. Seattle fan Keith Johnson, who was already planning a gathering for his family and friends, suggested combining groups. This turned into a specific weekend when Cirque fans from across the country would converge on Vancouver. Fascination! (the unofficial Cirque du Soleil newsletter) publisher Ricky "Richasi" Russo brought the newsletters' sponsorship to the endeavor, enthusiastically lending his support.

Jeff created a website to announce the weekend. It read in part:

Who: Any Cirque du Soleil fan, as well as friends and family.

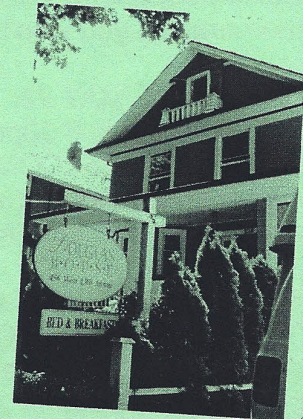
What: A weekend of Cirque du Soleil fun and socializing with friends, including a performance of the touring production Quidam.

Where: Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

When: Friday 21 May - Sunday 23 May 2004, including the Quidam show on Saturday 22 May at 8pm

Why: After being gone for all of 2003, Quidam's only North American stops in 2004 are Vancouver and Calgary. Quidam is one of the finest theatrical productions in the world. This is the perfect opportunity to see it again - or for the first time - and have some fun as a group!

THE BED AND BREAKFASTS - Keith, who had previously organized group trips from his home base of Seattle, WA to Orlando and Anaheim, had something special in mind; two Bed and Breakfast lodges that he thought would be just perfect. What if we all roomed together in the same facility? The Douglas House and Cambie Lodge (www.dougwin.com / www.cambielodge.com), cozy turn-of-the-century houses,



were right next to each other in a quiet residential neighborhood about a mile south of the Grand Chapiteau, very close to the cosmopolitan downtown of Vancouver. The intimacy, character and charm of these two homes-turned-inns and their closeness to the Cirque tent-grounds (not to mention reasonable rates and free on-site parking) made them perfect choices!

With attendees making their own airfare arrangements (many flying into Seattle and carpooling up), and also buying their own tickets to Quidam, having nearly everyone stay together created a sense of community. It was also our combined numbers that lead Cirque to take notice and contact us.

THE PROGRAM PACKETS In addition to the special weekend we experienced, we put together small packets of information and mementos as gifts for our attendees. Each person received:

- * A Program Book to keep as a memento, with articles and information,
- * Two CD's chock full of rare music by Cirque and its musicians, (a third was made for Montréal)
- * A full-color name badge with lanyard,
- * A spread of food and wine at our Friday "Cocktail Hour,"
- * And all the planning, research and communication, both on-line and via phone and email, necessary to make the trip happen and answer questions.

OUR SCHEDULE - What did we do during our weekend? Many folks planned small trips throughout Vancouver to see that fabulous city or took in multiple performances of Quidam. The "official" CirqueCon activities were detailed in a page from our Program Book:

FRIDAY - MAY 21:

5:00pm-6:00pm - Douglas House B&B, Kitchen area
"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 Backstage Entrance
"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.

4:00-6:00pm - The Old Spaghetti Factory
"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.

7:00pm-11:00pm - Cirque du Soleil Quidam Entrance

"CIRQUE DU SOLEIL'S QUIDAM"

At some point while on the Cirque grounds 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 photos!



It was an incredible weekend for our 30 members which spurred us on to consider other trips. For more details on how CirqueCon was created, a fun history of our trip, and some local press we got check out the "Imprints" section of the CirqueCon.com website. You can also see photos from the weekend in our "Images" section.

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

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

CIRQUECON 2005: MONTRÉAL

The Second Unofficial Gathering of Cirque du Soleil Passionates

Friday, April 22, 2005 to Sunday, April 24, 2005
Marriott SpringHill Suites Vieux-Montréal
Montréal, Québec, Canada

*And so the journey continues. Or begins anew.
We heed the call, that whisper on the wind. Louder this time, reaching farther.
So again we gather. Together.
Old friends. New friends. Faces never before seen, yet souls familiar.
Again we bond with fellow Passionates.
Bearing witness to that which is newly created, still forming, unexplored.
Wrapping ourselves in its warmth. Together.
And the creators welcome us. Inviting us to peek behind their mask.
What mysteries will be revealed?
We come from far away. But we know where we are.
We are home.
Together.
Bienvenue!*

During the group dinner at CirqueCon 2004: Vancouver, André Belanger, Internet Marketing Manager for Cirque du Soleil in Montréal, (who had made the trip from Cirque International Headquarters to be with us that weekend) made the very vocal suggestion that the following year we should gather again for the premiere of the newest Cirque traveling show in Montréal!. With such an open invitation, who were we to say no?

But it came with many new challenges. With expanded publicity efforts and a longer lead time, the exponential increase in attendance we expected was daunting. Finding the right facility and a nice place to have a group meal, in a city we weren't intimately familiar with, took time. But in the end we think we came up with solutions that satisfied nearly all.

Our numbers for Montréal were impressive, considering our first year we had a bit more than 30 people:

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

Our members came from more than half of the United States, all the Canadian provinces that touch the US except Manitoba (what's with them Manitobans, anyway?), three locations in Mexico, as well as Australia and Germany. WOW!

Our website, set up by Ricky Russo, explained the basics:

WHAT! - CirqueCon - The Unofficial Gatherings of Cirque du Soleil Passionates, is exactly what it says a fan-organized gathering of like-minded Cirque du Soleil fans.

For the second time we'll be gathering for a 3-day weekend in a city where a Cirque show is playing, to see the show and meet with other fans.

WHY! - To see the new touring show, called "Cirque du Soleil 2005" (later called "Corteo") in Cirque's home town of Montreal, during its World Premiere Weekend! Also to see the sights of this wonderful city and meet with other Cirque fans.

WHERE! - Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

WHEN! Friday, April 22, 2005 through Sunday, April 24, 2005. Our "official" show will be the 8pm show on Saturday, April 23, 2005.

WHO! - Any Cirque fan that wants to come!

THE BEGINNING OF MEMBERSHIPS Our attendees in Vancouver enjoyed the packets of stuff they received (Program Book, CD's, Badge, etc.). We had a lot of fun doing the planning, research and producing the items, but the costs were borne solely by the organizing committee.

We wanted to continue some of those "traditions." In talking with our attendees afterward, we found there were some that felt the "extras" (especially research) weren't what they needed or wanted from us. Others suggested it might be fairer to spread the financial burden amongst members who are the beneficiaries of our efforts, while keeping a close eye on costs. So we created a two-tier "membership" structure we felt would please both groups.

Standard Membership For our "Full Meal Deal" we asked for a nominal "Membership Fee" of \$10.00 per member/address to help us cover planning, research expenses and "extras." That \$10.00 "bought" basically what folks got for Vancouver:

- *One program packet per membership.
- *Planning and help with our headquarters hotel.
- *Periodic emails and status reports. (Which you can opt out of if you wish.)
- *Help with attractions & sightseeing, questions, and research.

For those that needed only the smallest amount of help we also offered Basic Membership, which was absolutely free. Everyone who contacted us was automatically put on our mailing list and given a free Basic Membership. We advised them of any plans Cirque has for us, and that was it! As it turned out, the vast majority (85%) of attendees and their "households" became paid Standard members.

SPECIAL TICKET OFFER - Cirque du Soleil graciously offered an exclusive block of tickets for our "official" show at 8pm on Saturday, April 23, in Section 205 near the soundboard (very good seats). But, in the first of our many challenges, they wanted *us* to handle getting the money. So we set up a system for taking either check or PayPal, with an extra "shipping charge" to account for mailing the tickets Certified Mail (we were also challenged by fluctuating exchange rates). We ended up selling 66 tickets this way, and with more than 40 folks purchasing tickets on their own, we knew we would have more than 100 people in Montréal!

BUT WHERE TO STAY? What did our members consider important in a hotel? Location! They wanted to be as close to Cirque as possible. Working with Tourisme Montréal, we worked to find a hotel in Old Montréal's Vieux Port area that could accommodate us, a challenge since the area is filled with cute (but expensive) small

boutique hotels.

After much searching, we were able to secure rooms with a hotel that offered plenty of rooms, all the creature comforts of a large international chain, a central location, and a specially negotiated rate. The Marriott SpringHill Suites Vieux-Montreal on rue St-Jean-Baptiste (www.springhillmontreal.com), was less than one-quarter mile from the Cirque tent site on Jacques Cartier Pier! The Hotel rooms had quite a list of amenities: A mini-refrigerator, microwave, coffee maker and kitchen counter with sink, a sofa sleeper bed in addition to the regular bed(s), free high-speed Internet access, free hot breakfast including eggs, sausage and waffles, underground parking garage, Indoor pool, whirlpool, and exercise room, and Gibson Spa on-site offering massage and treatments.

While the hotel already had plenty of things going for it, we were able to negotiate a special low rate just for our paid Standard members. While they were more than the typical "Motel 6" type rates (and certainly higher than the Bed and Breakfasts we had used in Vancouver), we pointed out that this was the oldest part of downtown Montreal, a high-rent part of town. The standard suites went for approx. \$145.00 USD per night, with roomier deluxe suites going for approx. \$165.00 USD per night, with all taxes included. When we were looking for hotels close to the Cirque show tent, there were no other facilities that were so willing to work with us, with enough rooms to house us all at a rate even approaching what we negotiated with the SpringHill Suites.

EATING TOGETHER - One of the highlights of CirqueCon 2004: Vancouver was 30+ Cirque fans from all over North America gathered at the Spaghetti Factory in Gastown, enjoying a spaghetti dinner and getting to know each other. It was something we thought was worth repeating. But could we find a reasonably-priced restaurant able to hold a large number of diners and still be close to the hotel? After some searching we found one, but, again, they wanted only one payment.



We scheduled the meal for Saturday from 4:00pm-6:00pm. Our venue, the Restaurant du Vieux Port (www.restaurantduvieuxport.com), was just down the block from our hotel, less than one minutes walking distance! The restaurant offered us a "group menu" of: Choice of soup or salad, Choice of Beef Striploin, Grilled Chicken Breast, or Filet of Soul Provencale entrée, and Dessert, along with Coffee, Tea, or soft drink. The total cost per person, including all taxes and gratuity, was \$31.00 USD.

The dinner was very successful, with more than 60 Cirque Passionates spread amongst several tables in a large room, enjoying their meals and talking animatedly.

WHAT DID WE DO? - Again, many folks planned trips throughout Montréal to take in its cosmopolitan flair, or take in multiple performances of Corteo. The "official" CirqueCon activities were detailed in pages from our Program Book:

FRIDAY APRIL 22, 2005

3:00pm-5:00pm

TOHU La Cité Des Arts du Cirque
"TOHU TOUR"

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

6:00pm-7:30pm

Marriott SpringHill Suites Vieux-Montréal,
Rooms 524/525

"WELCOME TO CIRQUECON 2005:
MONTRÉAL MEET AND GREET"

OPEN TO EVERYONE! We invite you to our room for a little "get to know you." We'll have munchies and such for consumption (hopefully some from *your* area of the country!). Have a Cirque collectible you'd like people to see? Show it here!



8:30pm-10:00pm

La Basilique Notre-Dame de Montréal

"AND THEN THERE WAS LIGHT" (Field Trip)



Some may wish to take in this interesting presentation on the history of Montréal and the Basilica in words, lights, projections and sounds. Images are played across large screens and canvas sails strung throughout the sanctuary.

SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2005

11:45am-approx. 4:00pm

Cirque du Soleil International Headquarters
"CIRQUE DU SOLEIL INTERNATIONAL
HEADQUARTERS TOUR"

Where all the magic and wonder is created! Cirque du Soleil opens its doors to CirqueCon 2005: Montréal members. Cirque has also offered us the opportunity to shop at their Headquarters Boutique! This is the first time the IHQ Boutique has been open to non-employees ever! It is similar in "style" to the boutiques on tour, with everything out and available for handling, and at a 15% discount!

5:00pm-7:00pm

Restaurant du Vieux Port

"CIRQUECON 2005: MONTRÉAL GROUP MEAL"

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

7:00pm-10:30pm

Jacques Cartier Pier

"CIRQUE DU SOLEIL'S CORTEO"

On its World Premiere Weekend, the new touring show in only its fourth public performance. With many of us together in our special seats (purchased oh, so long ago) we will watch as Cirque "combines the passion of the actor with the grace and power of the acrobat to plunge the audience into a world of playfulness and spontaneity situated in a mysterious area between heaven and earth."

AFTER THE SHOW

Restaurant du Vieux Port

"TIME FOR DESSERT"

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

It turned out to be another once-in-a-lifetime weekend for over 100 "Passionates." For pictures from the weekend, check out the Images page on the CirqueCon.com website. A history of the planning for our Montréal event and a write-up from Cirque's Internal Media can be seen in our "Imprints" section.

