

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The Goliath Cirque du Soleil

Eric Trules · Wednesday, January 22nd, 2020

The “fabulous” 2017 Cirque du Soleil spectacle called *Volta* opened January 18, 2020 at Dodger Stadium, right here in my hood, Echo Park. Been there, done that, except as one of Cirque’s MANY touring shows, this is its first stop in insatiable-for-Cirque, LA. We neighbors were given free tix to the night-before dress rehearsal by the Dodgers PR department. Truly amazing for the formerly neighbor-averse, now neighbor nee-r-do-well, Dodgers! Many thanks to Patrica Sanders!



I remember seeing the very first Cirque du Soleil show here in LA at the 1987 Los Angeles Festival on 1st Street and San Pedro. It was under a small blue and yellow tent pitched in a sketchy parking lot on the east side of Little Tokyo, but the show...rocked LA. It rocked so much that it came back to the Santa Monica Pier the very same year, and...it rocked me too, who had been a professional clown for many years, and seen more than my share...of circuses:

- Barnum & Bailey's Ringling Brothers 3 ring circus at Madison Square Garden in New York in the early 1950s – where Emmett Kelly kept trying to sweep a moving, uncatchable spotlight with his sad, pathetic broom.



- A brilliant 1 ring Russian circus that featured a cast of highly trained acrobats, tumblers, aerialists, trapeze acts, and other one of a kind circus acts, mostly from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe — that passed on its unique skills from family to family, when kids learned circus skills directly from their parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, and kept those highly-renowned skills exclusively in the family.
- I saw David Shiner (who teamed with Bill Irwin in their future 1993 Broadway 2 hander, “Fool Moon”) when he was still the opening improvising clown in the 1987 Cirque du Soleil show under the slightly expanded blue and yellow tent on the Santa Monica Pier. Shiner was brilliant and risky and risqué, all at the same time, climbing over rows of seats under the plastic big top, grabbing unsuspecting audience members out of their seats to good-naturedly embarrass them — in the aisle, on stage, still in their seats... but never forgetting to ask fellow audience members to give each of them — his patsies — a big empathetic cheer.



- The best clown act I ever saw was the clown, whose name I sadly can't remember or find, in the 1987 Cirque show in Little Tokyo – who conducted a mock symphony orchestra from a high wooden podium that miraculously held his ankles and feet in cemented place as he rocketed forward and back to the music, perfectly choreographed, as all Cirque shows unfailingly are, in his wildly-hilarious and jaw-dropping display of physical prowess and comic timing. A performance that I remember and cherish to this day. What was that man's name??!!

NOW, of course, Cirque is a world-wide industry and franchise, not only offering 5 different nightly shows in humongously high-priced, and interchangeable Las Vegas hotels and casinos, but also touring the world — with mass-produced, super-slick silicon tents being thrown up and down beaches and piers in Tel Aviv, Kuwait City, Singapore, London, and Pareeee — each and all offering beautifully-precise, high tech mastery of nouveau circus stagecraft, technique, choreography and lighting, but also cloning legions of animal-less and super-human casts of perfectly-muscled, immaculately-trained, and multi-dimensional moderne circus artistes... no longer learning their skills from parents and extended families like the Flying Wallendas of old, but no doubt training in sweating gyms and studios around the world with Cirque's first class corps of ballet masters, genius tumblers, flying acrobats, and uniquely-original circus acts like the woman last night who hung from her tightly-bound hair on the top of her head – and was swung by a cable and harness from the very top of the big top, all the while, manipulating her perfectly-muscled body in a sublime ballet of inner and outer beauty!



Yes, I'm impressed with the juggernaut, with the mastery, the stagecraft, the perfect execution, but... I miss the intimacy... of the old circuses... even Ringling's now wildly, politically-incorrect "side show" or even worse in today's parlance, "freak show" — garishly displaying the "Tallest" man in the world, the "Smallest", the "Strongest", the "Siamese Twins", the "Bearded Lady"... who, no doubt these days, would be more aptly called "The Transgender Lady", or perhaps "follickly-challenged", or maybe even the "Genderless Person". What about the old European circuses? Anthony Quinn's Zampano, the strong man in Federico Fellini's wondrous 1954 film, "La Strada"? His 1970 flim, "The Clowns"?



What about all the individual circus performers I remember... before Cirque developed its steel-strength casts of chess-piece performers? What about Emmett Kelly, pathetically and hopelessly chasing that moving spotlight in my 6 year old childhood eyes? What about Bill Irwin and David Shiner... evoking side-splitting laughter with their sad sack skills, vulnerability, and personal relationship? What about that nameless clown who conducted the 1987 invisible Cirque orchestra,

zigging and zagging and rocketing out of his wooden podium to a tent full of belly laughs, amazement, and cheers.

Last night's VOLTA show was spectacular. Awe-inspiring. No doubt making each of us in the audience wonder about the capacity of the human body to train and perform in such seemingly in-human ways. The show was utterly and mesmerizingly... watchable. Enjoyable. I hope it sells out... as it undoubtedly will.



I'm fine with the pyrotechniques and perfection of Cirque's electrifying execution. Fine with another hardcore and high-tech Cirque du Soleil "success" in Dodger Stadium, right here in my hood... for free!

But actually? Take me back to the "real circus"... where I was genuinely and personally amazed... bright-eyed and bushy-tailed... at the newness and wonder of it all... with the sawdust and cotton candy, with 15 clowns packed into a tiny yellow VW bug, with the ringmaster in an Uncle Sam top hat snapping a black snake-like whip in his hand, with the lions, and tigers, and bears, oh my! Not to mention, the now-banned, 1 foot balancing pachyderms and two ton elephants!

Or maybe that's not just possible anymore. At least with... Cirque du Soliel... the former penny-pinching company of Montreal street performers, busquers, stilt walkers, and clowns... who maybe... are just now... too damn big... for their own brilliantly-colored leotards, and world-wide, money-clinking... britches.



More about Trules on his [Website](#)

Listen to his podcast, “e-travels with e. trules” [HERE](#)

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