

Cultural Daily

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Women Rule the World in Cirque du Soleil's Latest Offering

Steve Gottfried · Wednesday, May 22nd, 2019

I think we can all agree that women have taken a back seat to men for far too long. The election was stolen from Hillary. Beyonce may have preordained it in her song "Rule the World," but real change comes unevenly. Women like AOC and Katie Porter are shaking up the House of Representatives like never before, but abortion rights protected by *Roe v. Wade* are under assault. Cirque du Soleil's latest offering, *Amaluna*, creates a fantastical world of kick-ass female warriors which takes it to the next level. Set on a mysterious island ruled by women, *Amaluna* (a fictitious word derived from the root "ama" which translates as mother in several languages and "luna" which translates as "moon") celebrates the power and the mystique of women.

But if you're worried that shirtless, ripped men don't get their due, fret no more. There's enough chiseled beefcake on display worthy of an Abercrombie and Fitch commercial. But the men are clearly interlopers in a woman's world. While Cirque shows aren't known for their narrative story, the Cirque du Soleil web site provides a more detailed explanation to fill in the gaps of the drama unfolding on stage amidst a spectacular display of visual and sonic wizardry. The creative team drew their inspiration from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as well as Elizabethan sources, but at its core, it's your basic boy meets girl paradigm where [spoiler alert] love triumphs in the end. Romeo and Miranda are our two star-crossed young lovers who are brought together by Miranda's mother, the powerful rock goddess warrior Prospera. But their love is threatened by Miranda's protective (and jealous) pet Cali, a half lizard, half human. True to Cirque fashion, Lizard Man starts the pre-show off with some comical antics with the audience, helping himself to audience members' popcorn, climbing every which way throughout the enclosed tent/arena and working his tail in a way that's hard to take your eyes off him.



Romeo and his friends demonstrate their physical prowess on the Teeterboard.

One of the most striking set pieces of *Amaluna* is the giant glass water-bowl which sits center stage. And nowhere is it used more tantalizingly than when Romeo first lays eyes on Miranda. Miranda is performing some stunning aerial work when she suddenly plunges into the water. Romeo watches from afar, transfixed by her beauty. Romeo makes his presence known and there is a tender playful moment when she kicks water on him. His shirt gets wet, leaving our hero no choice but to take it off, revealing his enviable torso. The audience gasps in approval. But their tender romance is short-lived. It's not long before the Warrior Queen intervenes and separates the young lovers. But don't despair, true to Cirque tradition, there are plenty of gravity-defying spectacular gymnastic feats to keep you on the edge of your seat while wondering if Romeo and Miranda will be reunited.

The beauty of Cirque du Soleil is its unique ability to delight and overwhelm the senses. From an audience perspective, there's so much going on visually and sonically that it requires your full attention. Which of course is part of the magic. For a brief two hours, the audience is transported to a mythical place and plunged into a state of childlike wonder. And from my point of view, it's an infinitely better alternative than artificial stimulants or an hour in a therapist's office.

Internationally celebrated costume designer, Mèrèdith Caron, has created stunning costumes to match the fantastical feats of acrobatics. Anyone who's been to a Cirque show knows that there's a humorous subplot to offset the main story. This time around, the comedic portion of the show was scaled down, ostensibly at the discretion of the creative team. This was an aspect that I would have liked to have been more developed and integrated into the show, as it has in other Cirque shows. During intermission, I spoke to two members of the audience who became unwitting volunteers in the comedic subplot, another standard feature of most cirque shows. It turns out these two have performed in Cirque shows themselves but were here to enjoy the show as audience members. They mentioned that while these performers make the impossible look easy, that is all part of the illusion. They attested that it's extremely challenging work and that while precautions are always taken to protect their artists, there is always a level of risk.

There was another segment of the show involving a woman surrounded by what appeared to be a skeleton of large bones. She painstakingly assembled the bones using mostly her feet while balancing them on her body. The audience seemed spellbound, but I found this part of the show somewhat unsatisfying, reminding me of assembling furniture from IKEA. Or in Shakespearean terms, "much ado about nothing." Fortunately, the more fast-paced, action-oriented acrobatics resumed for the remainder of the show, more in keeping with Cirque du Soleil theatrics. In the end, in case you were wondering, Romeo manages to subdue the Lizard Man, allowing his and Miranda's relationship to blossom, unfettered. I suppose it might've been more appropriate in a world celebrating women for Miranda to emerge as the hero, but as they say, all's well that ends well.

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