



ArtSmarts

2003-2004 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

Neil Goldberg's *Cirque*

December 16, 2003

11:00am

Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for the school matinee performance of Neil Goldberg's *Cirque*. This guide provides background information about the performance and the circus performance tradition as well as some topics for discussion. Also included in the guide is a review of theatre conventions and audience protocol.

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Neil Goldberg's *Cirque*

"It terrified...It amazed...It dazzled...And it stunned."

Arizona Daily Star



No wonder the performing artists in *Cirque* leave an indelible mark upon their audiences. They fly effortlessly overhead like graceful birds. Some romp around the theater on four-legged stilts. Others bend like pretzels and juggle with machine precision. Like human Legos, some turn themselves into pyramids. As clowns, they mingle and joke with the audience. They glow under kaleidoscope light, dress up in color and glitz, and are surrounded by dramatic music.

Cirque draws from the world's greatest show people. Talent scouts travel the globe attending festivals, shows, and competitions to hire artists for the performance. The result is a synergy of 25 of exciting acrobats, gymnasts, singers, jugglers, and dancers who give another meaning to the term, "The Greatest Show on Earth."

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The origins of Neil Goldberg's *Cirque* (pronounced "sirk") are in the European entertainment culture. In 1874, Jules Verne, the famous author, built, designed and operated the largest circus in France called Cirque Municipal. Also during that time, many eastern block countries combined novelty and variety acts with circus artistry into a single performance. These shows were presented on stages, in theaters and single-ring tents.

The concept has evolved. Since 1985, inventive theatrics, imagination, and the European circus tradition have become the hallmark of Neil Goldberg's productions. Goldberg, a Florida special events businessman, has created and directed original productions for hundreds of events worldwide, including two Super Bowls, two Miss Universe pageants, and a variety of shows for the Walt Disney Company. *Cirque* was created for the casino theater in 1995, and has performed in Atlantic City, Lake Tahoe and Toronto showrooms. *Cirque* performances have also been televised on ABC, CNN, NBC, PBS, and the E! Entertainment Network.

Comparisons to Cirque du Soleil, the theme circus, are inevitable. But *Cirque* carves out its own niche on the theatrical scene, notes the Los Angeles Times. "Rest assured," says critic Kathleen Foley, "...this is no knockoff. A class act all the way..." And says the Dallas Morning News,

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“The show owes an unquestionable debt to its highly successful predecessors...but manages to add emotional layers to the format with an emphasis on acting as well as feat-performing. It’s also ravishingly beautiful to look at.”

Beautiful, indeed. Mesmerizing, yes. Unforgettable, absolutely. It’s big-top gaiety and stage spectacular rolled into one. And it captivates audiences of all ages.

The Circus as Theater



Neil Goldberg’s *Cirque* offers its unique stamp to a type of public spectacle termed “nondramatic theater.” The more common form of theater is *dramatic*, that is, most typically,

the presentation of a scripted play in which the actions of the performers depict a narrative. Performers of such works consist of actors portraying characters, although Sicilian Paladin puppets, Javanese *wayang* shadow puppets, and Japanese *bunraku* puppets are examples of nonliving representations of characters, manipulated by living performers. **Nondramatic** productions include oral and musical presentations, circus and vaudeville acts, gymnastic displays, and ceremonial occasions such as the coronation of a monarch. There is no narrative line, or story, in such productions, but the technical skill of the performers or the ritual significance of the event becomes the focus of audience attention.

As a form of presentation, the **circus** encompasses a wide range of different types of performances, including feats of daring, illusion, and skill. The type of circus performance that comes closest to dramatic theater is that of clowns. The clown engages in simplified dramatic activity, sometimes a ridiculous parody of other forms of performance, but one that follows established conventions of dress, gesture, and behavior. The word ‘circus’ has the same root as circle and circumference and therefore also recalls the distinctive environment in which such entertainment is presented—the ring, a circular performance area usually bounded by a short fence (or “curb”) and surrounded by tiers of seats for spectators, which may itself be enclosed in a circular building or tent.

In the latter part of the 20th century, boundaries between types of theatrical production have been increasingly eroded. As circuses have declined in popularity, circus techniques have been incorporated into other forms of theater. So-called “third theater” companies often use circus training techniques, and actors employ juggling and acrobatic skills in their dramatic performances. The British Footsbarn company, which travels the world in a manner reminiscent

of the medieval and Renaissance players, uses circus imagery and techniques in its productions of Shakespeare. Samuel Beckett used the image of the clown in *Waiting for Godot* to create a parable on the absurdity of the human predicament.

Additional reading: For studies of the circus in the United States, see Stuart Thayer, Annals of the American Circus, 2 vol. (1976–86); Charles Philip Fox and Tom Parkinson, The Circus in America (1969); David Lewis Hammarstrom, Behind the Big Top (1980); John Burke, Buffalo Bill: The Noblest Whiteskin (1973); and Don Russell, The Wild West: or, A History of the Wild West Shows (1970). Noteworthy: Henry Ringling North and Alden Hatch, The Circus Kings: Our Ringling Family Story (1960); P.T. Barnum, Struggles and Triumphs: or, The Life of P.T. Barnum Written by Himself, ed. by George S. Bryan, 2 vol. (1927), the best edition of the famous autobiography; and Neil Harris, Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum (1973, reprinted 1981).

Think About It!

Dear Students:

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas, ask questions and find out how to learn even more.

Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) How would you describe the Neil Goldberg's *Cirque* performance to a friend?
- 2) What kind of music accompanied the artists?
- 3) What feelings did you have while you listened to the music and watched the acrobatics?
- 4) What did you like best about the performance and why?
- 5) What did you like least about the performance and why?
- 6) Write a critique about the performance for your classmates. Be sure to describe the costumes, props, lighting and gestures.
- 7) What do you think your life would be like if you were a part of the circus?

Attending a Performance at Mondavi Center

What is expected of student audiences at the school matinee:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees now have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee;
- Please do not use flash photography.

What you can expect of your experience in the Mondavi Center:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performance invite audience participation.

By Merlyn Potters, Undergraduate Coordinator, UC Davis Department of English
and Anett Jessop, Graduate Coordinator, UC Davis Department of English