



## ArtSmarts

2004-2005 Wells Fargo School Matinee Series

# CIRQUE ÉLOIZE

Monday, January 24, 2005      11:00am and 1:00pm  
Jackson Hall, Mondavi Center

Dear Teacher:

We hope you find this CueSheet helpful in preparing your students for what they will experience at the Cirque Éloize school matinee. This guide provides background information on the performance company and the circus performance tradition, as well as a review of audience protocol. The Cirque Éloize school matinee, which is specially designed for student audiences, will delight and amaze with its spectacles of physical mastery and theatrical fantasy!

Mondavi Center gratefully acknowledges the institutional donors supporting the Arts Education Program during the 2004-2005 Season of Performing Arts:



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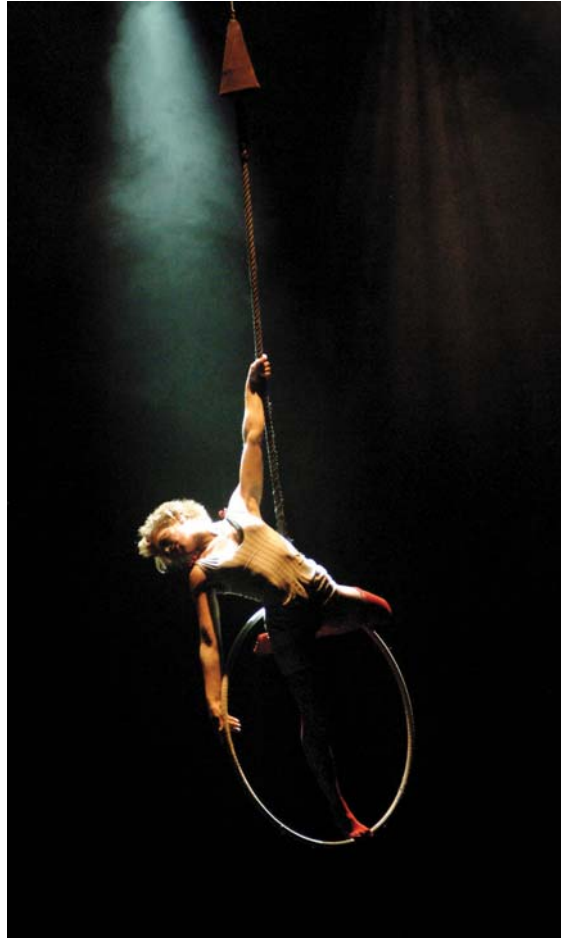


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## ***CIRQUE ÉLOIZE***

Applauded by the *San Francisco Chronicle* as a "daredevil circus with a delightfully idiosyncratic human face," CIRQUE ÉLOIZE (pronounced 'serk el-WAS') features some of Canada's most talented performers and musicians. Dedicated to expanding the famed Québécois circus tradition made famous by Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Éloize foregoes traditional animal acts to weave a breathtaking tapestry of enchantment, humor and wonder.

In 1993, seven young artists, recent graduates of Montreal's National Circus School, decided to combine their talents to create a European-style, animal-free circus. The performers, all originally from the Magdalen Islands off the coast of Quebec, named their company *Éloize*, after the local term for the bright flashes of heat lightning seen on the horizon on hot days. This crackling

energy perfectly emblemizes the company's mettle. Since its founding, the company has given nearly 2000 performances in over 200 cities worldwide. Thanks to this sweeping international success, Cirque Éloize can continue pursuing its global mission to promote circus arts, a form of expression the troupe's artists hold dear.

The school matinee performance that you will see, *Rain*, is Cirque Éloize's latest creation and it premiered in 2003. This story takes place in a theater where a circus show is in rehearsal and where theatre and reality blend together. *Rain* begins with a quiet invocation of memories of youth: how it felt to be child splashing through the rain. With most of the action taking place in a stylized past evocative of the 1920s, the performers sing, dance, and perform spectacular feats of acrobatics, juggling, and contortion, all the while engaging in comedy and exhilarating stunts. When the much-discussed, much-anticipated rain of the title finally arrives, it makes for a spectacular finale. During the performance, not only will rain fall but other surprises as well!

For more information on Cirque Éloize, visit <http://www.cirque-eloize.com/>.

## ***THE CIRCUS AS THEATER***



Cirque Éloize is a talented and artistically adventurous family. Although the members come from diverse backgrounds, they all believe in a spirit of collaboration that allows them to celebrate renewed circus arts on stage. Breaking with tradition, the “New Circus” movement blends the traditional, athletic daredevilry with atmospheric and narrative qualities of theater. As such, Cirque Éloize performs in theater venues instead of under the Big Top. In addition, alternative theater does not use animal acts in its productions. Cirque Éloize recruits young performers with an artistic background in physical theater, dance, acrobatics, music and circus arts. The company also considers athletes who excel in trampoline, gymnastics and acrobatic sports. The shows offer performers the opportunity to hone their skills as acrobats, musicians, dancers, actors and clowns. The artists' activities are divided between training, rehearsals and touring, for periods of time varying from six months to one year.

Cirque Éloize 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, Japanese *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 Cirque Éloize performance to a friend?
  
- 2) What feelings did you have while you listened to the music and watched the acrobatics?
  
- 3) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?
  
- 4) Describe the costumes and props that the performers used. How did they affect the performance?

This CueSheet was written by ANETT JESSOP, Graduate Student Researcher, Davis  
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## ***ATTENDING THE THEATER***

***What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:***

- \* Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately;
- \* 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;
- \* Please turn off cell phones and pagers.
- \* Flash photography is strictly prohibited.
- \* Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee.

***What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:***

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 possible 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, such 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.