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Cirque du Soleil's 'Dralion' offers unique entertainment experience

By James Grant of The News-Sentinel
Monday, November 3, 2014 - 1:21 pm

If you've never experienced the artistry and wonder of a Cirque du Soleil production, the show "Dralion," which opens next Wednesday for a five-day run at Memorial Coliseum, is the perfect opportunity to do so.

Cirque du Soleil's unique mix of circus art and street performance with a hint of Broadway has thrilled audiences around the world since 1984, playing to over 150 million people with their various productions.

Based in Quebec, Canada, Cirque du Soleil has nearly 4,000 employees, which includes 1,300 artists from 50 different countries.

The hallmark of any Cirque du Soleil production is the acrobatics and artistry of the performers.

A typical Cirque du Soleil show features various dancers and acrobatic performers who take traditional circus staples, such as juggling and walking on stilts, and fuse them with various forms of dance and artistry from around the world.

Add music, a sophisticated production and various dramatic themes, and you have the ingredients for the majesty that is Cirque du Soleil.

Inspired by street performers from Baie-Saint-Paul, a city in the Province of Quebec, Canada, in the early 1980s, Cirque du Soleil creator Guy Laliberté has taken a local street festival for performing artists and morphed that into a well respected and well-attended entertainment juggernaut — a 21st century multimedia circus.

As of this year, 19 Cirque du Soleil shows can be seen around the world.

From the water-themed production of "O" to the opera inspired "Alegra" to the joyous music of The Beatles in "LOVE" and the dance/pop of Michael Jackson's "ONE," Cirque du Soleil covers a wide range of styles throughout its various productions.

Though some people may feel that all Cirque du Soleil shows are pretty much the same, Tara Pandeya, who plays Oceane, The Goddess of Water, in this production of "Dralion," says that's not the case.

"Each show is unique unto itself," Pandeya said in a telephone interview. "We have a different director and artistic choreographer, and the themes and the acts are all made to be unique to each show."



More Information

Unique entertainment

WHAT: Cirque du Soleil presents its touring multimedia circus show "Dralion."

WHEN: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday and Nov. 6-7; 4 and 7:30 p.m. Nov. 8; and 1:30 p.m. Nov. 9

WHERE: Memorial Coliseum, 4000 Parnell Ave.

COST: \$37; \$57; \$77; \$97; and \$127. Tickets are available at the Coliseum box office, Ticketmaster outlets, www.ticketmaster.com and 1-800-745-3000. Parking is \$5, main lot, and \$8, preferred lot.



The News-Sentinel

Interview with Tara Pandeya from Cirque du Soleil 'Dralion' show

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So although there may be some circus arts that are the similar from show to show, you're never going to find the same lineup of circus arts in each show.

"And also, this show is particularly unique because it has that fusion of both Eastern and Western circus arts, and it's based on the theme of the four elements — earth, water, air, fire," Pandeya added.

Pandeya is particularly pleased to be a part of "Dralion," as it enables her to showcase her background that includes multiple dance styles from classical South and North Indian and traditional Middle Eastern to Central Asian and ethno-contemporary dance.

And while she gets to showcase her dance talent in the show, she also marvels at the vibrancy of the production and the talents her co-performers bring to the stage.

"'Dralion' is an extremely vibrant show," Pandeya said.

"It's highly adrenaline packed, although it also has these kind of soft, subtle moments, kind of dreamy-like moments where there's a contortion act and there's also a crossed wheel where the man is kind of spinning in the center like a Da Vinci man divided by the symmetry.

"For me, as an artist in the show, I can still sit back and watch the show ... and be kind of enchanted and in awe of what my co-workers do," Pandeya added.

"Over the last four and a half years, I've definitely picked up a few things from my fellow co-workers," Pandeya said. "I've definitely expanded my vocabulary in how I use and move my body. But through and through, I'm still at the core a dancer."

Pandeya also said she enjoys playing Oceane, the Goddess of Water, who represents the ocean. The role allows Pandeya to express a wide range of emotions in her performance.

"She's a fun character to play because it's that duality of extreme fierceness of the ocean," Pandeya said.

"The ocean can be extremely full of rage, whereas in other moments, when she's not confronted by fire — she's at odds with the fire character — she can be quite serene and soft and mothering," she said. "I get to both express kind of this fierce anger and rage and then on the other side an extremely soft kind of sensuality."

Whether you've seen a Cirque du Soleil show before or not, Pandeya feels "Dralion" offers enough excitement and variety to appeal to any kind of interest or any kind of audience. She also said the multicultural cast adds a unique perspective, and the pooling of that talent is something she's eager to share with as wide an audience as possible.

"I think our show is an extremely unique show," Pandeya said. "We're made up of I think around 17 to 19 different nationalities, so it's extremely multicultural. ... It's extremely vibrant and colorful and playful and has something that I think would appeal to anyone, no matter what interest you might have."