

Curiosities unfold under the big top



Mark Pavilons

There is something magical about the way the human form can bend, move, dance, leap and fly.

Artistic interpretation aside, you have to appreciate the physical conditioning and athletic prowess displayed by performing artists. Under the Grand Chapiteau at Toronto's Port Lands, you'll find just that, and much more.

Cirque du Soleil has opened the proverbial Pandora's Box in Kurios, Cabinet of Curiosities, running through Oct. 26.

It's sort of like steampunk meets Barnum and Bailey which comes across as a visually stunning display of mystery and mayhem.

From human accordions, turn-of-the-century robots and roving vitrolas, to high-flying acrobatics, this show will leave you breathless.

It's a strangely compelling blend of fluid, biomechanics and the cold steel movements of machines. We've perfected gizmos yet the human machine has remain unchanged and never duplicated, for thousands of years.

There are a variety of distinct acts that offer something for everyone ? Chaos Syncro 1900, Russian Cradle Duo, Contortion, Invisible Circus, Upside Down World, Rola Bola (balancing act), Acro Net (wild trampoline action), Aerial Straps, Banquine and a wild masterful yo-yo demonstration. These are complemented by a nice selection of music and vocals (led by Greek singer Eirini Tornesaki).

This is not your typical circus act, but it's in keeping with Cirque's unique and over-the-top presentations. It definitely challenges the pleasure centre of your brain ? there is so much going on and so much to look at that your senses are working overtime to process it all.

The story basically takes off from an inventor who defies the laws of nature, creating a beautiful and mysterious world.

This is the first time I've seen a performance by this famous, made-in-Canada icon. It was a top item on my daughter's ?bucket list? and she was thrilled to have experienced it.

Cirque du Soleil is a Quebec-based company recognized all over the world for high-quality, artistic entertainment. Since its inception in 1984, Cirque du Soleil has constantly sought to evoke the imagination the senses and provoke the emotions of people around the world. It has grown from its roots and today has 4,000 employees worldwide, including more than 1,300 artists. More than 100 types of occupations can be found at Cirque.

The employees and artists represent more than 50 nationalities and speak 25 different languages.

Close to 150 million spectators have seen a Cirque du Soleil show since 1984 and roughly 15 million people will see a Cirque du Soleil show in 2014.

Stage productions take a massive, team effort. Here at the Port Lands you have the facility itself ? massive tents containing lounges, food and beverage stations, which carry the theme throughout. The stage, seating and various pieces of equipment used take a tremendous amount of talent to build and ensure everything works seamlessly. Some 65 trucks transported nearly 2,000 tons of equipment for Kurios. The Big Top stands 18 metres high, is 51 metres in diameter and is supported by four masts, each 25 metres tall. It seats upwards of 2,700 people and required a team of approximately 50 people to raise it.

One of the most impressive aspects of this production are the aesthetics ? the elaborate costumes. You can thank Philippe Guillotel, costume designer, for that. He's worked for many high profile French movie and theatre directors. Since 1985, he has had a long working relationship with the renowned French choreographer Philippe Decoufl  for whom he designed the astonishing costumes

seen in the opening and closing ceremonies of the 1992 Winter Olympics in Albertville, France. He also worked with Decouflé on the opening ceremonies of the 50th Cannes film festival in 1997 and Tricodex, a multimedia work for the Ballet de l'Opéra de Lyon, in 2003.

The set and props are designed by Stéphane Roy, artistic director on more than 100 productions in Montreal and abroad. While primarily active in theatre and dance, he has also worked in film, television, advertising and variety shows. Since 2011, Stéphane has been one of three artists in residence appointed by the Montreal Nature Museums group to create organic links between the city's four natural science museums. He also designed The Warrior Emperor and China's Terra Cotta Army exhibition at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 2011. His achievements have earned him many awards and honors.

And then, of course, you have the performers themselves ? a varied group from all walks of life ? each with their own unique talent and expertise. There are 46 performers from 13 countries in Kurios.

From the light-hearted ?narrator? and interesting mechanical man to undersea creatures, it's like an action-packed fruit salad that leaps 30 feet from the bowl and still lands neatly in your mouth!

This is unlike any other theatre production you've ever seen. Catch it before it leaves Toronto.