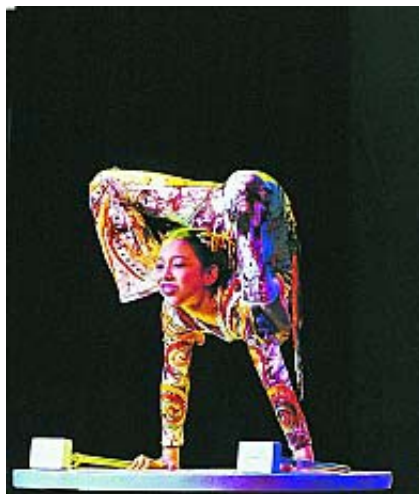


## Cirque ...'Il Circo' rooted in ethnic tradition

By ROBERT DiGIACOMO For At The Shore, (609) 272-7017

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*A performer from 'Il Circo' at Bally's Atlantic City shows her flexibility.*

*Staff Photo by Danny Drake*

"Il Circo: Viaggio" can best be summed up as cirque-Italian style. The lavish cirque-style production, which runs through April 5 at Bally's, takes its inspiration from the 15th and 16th century Italian commedia dell'arte tradition, according to Sam Trego, the show's producer-director.

This centuries-old theatrical form incorporates juggling, acrobatics, masked characters and improvisational humor, all built around a broad storyline.

"I think the Italian influence on this show more than anything distinguishes us from 'Cirque du Soleil' or other cirque shows," Trego says. "It is the absolute basis on which the show is created."

"Il Circo" adds its own modern-day spin on the proceedings with a storyline intended to elicit an emotional response from the audience.

Reminiscent of "The Wizard of Oz," the show follows the journey of a 12-year-old girl (played by Sasha Pivaral), who gets separated from her parents and meets all kinds of unusual characters as she tries to find her way home.

"It's really a quite inspiring storyline — I think it is very motivating," Trego says. "You leave the theater feeling good about yourself and life. That's what good theater does — it makes you laugh, it makes you cry, it makes you question things and wonder.

"There's enough variety that makes it a good theater piece in itself."

This being a cirque-style production, said variety includes all manner of specialty acts, from clowns and jugglers to acrobats and contortionists. The 20-member cast is drawn from a pool of more than 100 performers who appear in Imagine Entertainment's flagship show, "Cirque de La Mer," at SeaWorld San Diego, and other touring productions.

Among the most memorable characters is the 12-foot-tall Marionetta (played by Marisol Miller-Wave), whose elaborate costume conceals a proscenium stage with a puppet show that draws the young girl into the world of make-believe.

"The costume is more I (like) wearable art than a costume because it's so intricate, because the beauty of it is in the details," says Trego, who puts the costume's value at \$20,000.

Also helping to create this otherworldly experience is the show's original score, which was co-written by Trego, and includes material sung in English and Italian.

"My background is Broadway shows and theater," he says. "I believe ... what makes any great musical on Broadway successful is the score. It's the score that really moves you ... that philosophy is ingrained in the show."

Ultimately, though, Trego believes it is "Il Circo's" emotional journey that will resonate most with audiences.

"It's really a journey of the heart and finding oneself," he says. "There isn't a person on earth who can't relate to that on some level."

'Il Circo: Viaggio'

WHEN: 3:30 and 7 p.m. Sunday through Thursday; 7 and 10 p.m. Saturday through April 5.

WHERE: Palace Theater, the Claridge at Bally's Atlantic City

HOW MUCH: Tickets, priced at \$25, can be purchased at Bally's box office or Ticketmaster at (800) 736-1420 or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com).

WEB SITE: [www.ilcirco.com](http://www.ilcirco.com)

Solo Balance Act, left

In this audience favorite, Vladimir displays unusual strength performing atop a single pedestal. "It's really fluid and silky in the way it's presented," Trego says. "It's a beautiful and poetic dance. He does tricks and contortions of his body ... it's quite a sensation."

Chinese Poles

This act, which involves eight acrobats performing various feats on three vertical poles, is that much more challenging at Bally's, due to the ceiling's height of 13 feet, vs. the usual 40 to 50 feet in an arena, according to Sam Trego, Il Circo's producer/director.

Reflection, right

This signature number features two female acrobats (Alyssa McCraw and Heather Collins) perched on a three-dimensional diamond suspended in the air. "They look like twins, but they're not, but they're moving in perfect synchronization," Trego says. "Their elegant manner, along with this unique apparatus, makes it a real showstopper."