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## 'Cirque' it isn't, but 'iL CiRCo' entertains

The use of upper- and lower-case letters in its title isn't the only thing that sets apart iL CiRCo from similar Cirque du Soleil knockoffs.

The show, which runs through April 5 at the Palace Theater at Bally's Atlantic City, is that rare Cirque-ish production that doesn't portray itself as anything more than what it is -- 70 minutes' of family-friendly fun.

iL CiRCo makes it easy to understand the "plot": A young girl at a 1920s circus separates from her parents and embarks on a magical, mystical journey designed to inspire her to follow her dream of being a contortionist.

There is nothing in iL CiRCo that fans haven't seen before. While there is plenty of vivid costuming, the staging is bare bones; here, the focus is on the cast.

Thankfully, all of the performers operate at a high level of proficiency.

A few are exceptional and all earned prolonged applause from the sold-out opening-night audience.

Four gents who work on three "Chinese" poles get the show off to a strong start. They defied gravity as they shimmied vertically -- often upside-down -- on and jump effortlessly between the ultra-thin, floor-to-ceiling rods.

Likewise wowing the crowd were two female trapeze artists and a male contortionist-hand balancer. The former amazed as they maneuvered while suspended from a trapezoidal frame. The latter offered an astounding exhibition of balancing, strength, concentration, coordination and muscle control.

Not surprisingly, the youngster, who appears to be in her early teens, won the hearts of all with her show-closing contortion routine.

Less successful was the pair of clowns whose shtick was more silly-silly than silly-funny, although that seemed fine with the audience.

The iL CiRCo soundtrack is not just generic and uninteresting, but shrill and over-amped. Still, the strength of its top performers easily overrides the few drawbacks and makes iL CiRCo a fine effort.

Show times are 7 and 10 p.m. Saturdays and 3:30 and 7 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays. Admission is \$25.

Call (609) 340-2709 or visit [www.harrahs.com](http://www.harrahs.com) "Best' is back

It's billed as Best of Broadway II, but Tropicana's current revusical really doesn't need the Roman numeral in its title.

That's because the program, which runs through March 1, is virtually identical to last year's presentation, with only a few new numbers. So it's not surprising that II is a solid, well-paced casino showroom affair.

The troupe of singers and dancers does fine work on a couple dozen Broadway classics. Cats, Grease, Chicago, Phantom of the Opera and Les Miserables are among the smash hits paid tribute.

A significantly altered set list would have been more welcome, but those who didn't see Best of Broadway last year or who simply can't get enough from the Great White Way should like it.

Show times are 9 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays; 5 p.m. Sundays; 8 p.m. Mondays and Thursdays and 3:30 and 8 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Admission is \$25 (Saturdays and Sundays) and \$20. Call (609) 340-4020 or visit [www.tropicana.net](http://www.tropicana.net)

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