

# Life Made Extraordinary

By David Steinberg, *Journal Staff Writer*

The setting for "Cirque Dreams Illumination" is underneath a bridge where trains pass overhead. A series of street performers show up under the trestle. They are musicians and acrobats.

A female saxophone player appears as a vagabond walking the streets.

A hip-hop artist with a boombox does popping — flexible, contorted movement.

There are ordinary folks like a middle-aged couple casually walking underneath the bridge.

They're not thrilled with what they're wearing. So they change clothes seven times in 90 seconds.

These are some of the street performers in "Cirque Dreams Illumination," which fuses European cirque, Broadway theatrics and American circus acts.

"There's a lot of urban-style things so that people in the audience will say, 'I know someone who does that or looks like that,' " Neil Goldberg, the creator and director of the two-hour show, said in a phone interview.

The show will have five performances in Popejoy Hall tonight through Sunday, Oct. 17. The performances are part of an ongoing national tour.

"The concept," Goldberg said, "is to make it very relatable to people. ... 'Illumination' is very real. My concept is to illuminate life in a way that's never been done in this genre before."

The show has ordinary people getting on a train and when they get off it, Goldberg said, there are occurrences that turn their life into something extraordinary.

According to one newspaper account, the production opens with "a black light show that features moving figures whose only illumination is strips of luminous tape that disappear and reappear to delight and confound as we wonder: How did they do that?"

"I think this show provokes the imagination, and can say to people, 'Maybe I can do something with my life with the assets and resources that I have,' " he said.

Acrobatics also is an element in the show.

In one instance, an acrobat finds a discarded bathtub and a second performer accidentally slips into it. Suddenly the sopping-wet bather and the tub are being pulled along 25 feet in the air.

The man in the tub "flies over the stage and over the front of the stage," Goldberg said.

In another instance, four Mongolian contortionists transform into the tires of an imaginary car.

The show also is interactive. A pantomime artist brings five audience members on stage, where they take found objects to create the tools of a silent movie. For example, a hubcap becomes a boombox for the music. Other objects are transformed into a camera and director chairs.

There's even a hand-balancer in one scene.

"The base chair is like a stand for the rest of the chairs that I sit on," said Andrey Moraru, who is from Kiev, Ukraine.

"Nobody holds them. I put them together chair by chair. I climb to the top, which is 25 feet in the air."

Moraru, who is appearing in his first cirque show, said he's done hand balancing like this before, but not with as many chairs. There are eight chairs in this show.

Goldberg said that while Moraru is atop the chairs he's flirting with a girl because part of the rivalry through the whole story is "who is going to get the girl?"

In other scenes, Moraru said, he acts and dances alongside professional dancers. "Not being a dancer, it was challenging to learn it fast," he said.

The sets, machines, electronics and sound system all are fashioned in such a way to allow them to expand and contract depending on the needs of just about any proscenium stage in the country, Goldberg said.

Since 1993, he has been mounting a series of cirque shows that have toured internationally. They have included "Cirque Dreams Jungle Fantasy," "Cirque Dreams Holiday" and "Cirque Dreams Pandemonia."

He said he wants the newest show's story to provoke the viewer's imagination, but the show is at its heart family entertainment, he said, so he uses that as his goal to illuminate life in a way that it's never been done in this type of presentation before.