

Review: Cirque du Soleil's Amaluna is poetry in acrobatic motion (with video)

BY PAT DONNELLY, THE GAZETTE APRIL 26, 2012



Artists perform Cirque du Soleil's Amaluna at the Cirque du Soleil tent in Old Montreal on Tuesday, April 24, 2012.

Photograph by: Dario Ayala/THE GAZETTE

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MONTREAL - Yes, a circus can be more than just a circus.

Director Diane Paulus has created an isle of enchantment under the Cirque du Soleil big top with her richly theatrical, hauntingly poetic Amaluna. We're invited to wonder, like Miranda does in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: "How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world that has such people in't."

A winsome Miranda (Ikhertsetseg Bayarsaikhan) spends much of her time gazing in awe at the acrobatic feats which are being performed before her eyes, when she's not balancing on one hand or diving into a gigantic bowl of water herself. Within the course of the show she develops, as a character, maturing into a woman.

Cali (or Caliban) her pet lizard turns homicidal when he senses a rival. (He's played by master juggler Viktor Kee who can roll balls along his arms, down his back and over his head, with panache.)

In addition to assembling many delightfully original, often fiercely feminine acts for the first Cirque ever dedicated to women, Paulus has given them meaning within a narrative loosely based on *The Tempest*.

When Miranda is spirited away upwards, her lover Romeo (Why not Ferdinand?), played by Édouard Doye, climbs a pole, arms only, in hot pursuit, proving his devotion as well as his muscle.

Prospera (Julie McInnes) hovers over her mini-kingdom, singing and playing cello. Her fairy Ariel is represented by a pair of unicyclists, glistening gold, one of whom had a slight mishap on opening night. As did a male member of the tightrope foursome that danced lightly upon the ropes. But graceful recoveries happened quickly, and the show flowed on.

Aerial acts, whether on straps or a hoop (the Marilyn Monroe-sexy, singing moon goddess), dominate in *Amaluna*. There are flying bats (actually a god and goddess of the wind in the tumultuous storm scene) and turquoise-clad amazons doing daredevil flyovers that make Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark antics pale in comparison.

A fast-paced icarian (foot-tossing) number creates a firefly (or flying meteor) illusion when the objects being swung at the end of belts are lit up in the dark. Peacocks with fan tails preen in the background. (Mérédith Caron's costumes are ravishing, a steady parade of glamour, wit, gossamer and bold colours.)

There are only two clowns (the adorable Pepa Plana and her blustering suitor, Nathalie Claude), a mock-romantic duo. They do a wacky birthing number that turns into a lullaby hum-a-long, making sentimental fools of us all.

In pre-show interviews, Paulus cited non-Shakespearean influences for *Amaluna*, such as Ancient Greek myths and *The Magic Flute*. She failed to mention *Swan Lake*.

During the first half, there's an exquisite balletic moment, smoothly performed by a peacock goddess (Amy McClendon) in swan white. It's a sensual, meditative turn, after much frenetic activity, plenty of percussion and many assertive electrical guitar riffs.

But the most stunning act of *Amaluna* (the one which drew a sudden standing ovation on opening night) is even quieter. Lara Jacob Rigolo's ritualistic bone-balancing number in the second act elicits a hush in the tent, as she slowly builds a treelike structure, lifting each piece into place with her foot.

Within the Cirque du Soleil canon, the closest comparable to *Amaluna* is Robert Lepage's *Totem*. Like Lepage, Paulus uses her theatrical cards brilliantly while playing the circus game. Bravo!

The Cirque du Soleil's Amaluna continues at Montreal's Old Port until July 15, then moves on to Quebec City from July 26 to August 19. More details at www.cirquedusoleil.com.