



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

all you need is

By Angelina Rotman

From the moment you step foot into the theater of Cirque du Soleil's new show, the Beatles' *LOVE*, you know you're in for something completely new and different. Plaques on the restrooms read "Lads" and "Lasses." The enormous arena is quartered by large, curtain-like screens. Ushers dressed as palace guards and '60s-era police help navigate audience members to their seats.

Based in Montreal, Cirque du Soleil currently runs 23 different shows, each a spectacle with its own themes and motifs. The 27-year-old circus prides itself on its avant-garde, 21st century approach to circus arts. So what distinguishes Cirque du Soleil from circuses of the past?

"The most banal answer that everyone gives is that we don't feature animals," Shevchenko said. "But there's more to it. In the 80s, this company took commedia dell'arte elements, applied it to the physical craft of the circus, added modern music and extravagant make-up and costumes, and this is the basic explanation that can be given for the creation of what is now known as the Cirque du Soleil style."

LOVE is a stunning example of what distinguishes Cirque du Soleil from other circuses.

When the lights dim on the *LOVE* audience, the languid melody of the Beatles' "Because" accompanies the dancers as they shiver their way onto stage, soon to be replaced by an up-tempo beat and the first strains of "Get Back." From there, the show is breathtaking and thrilling by turns, each act set to a well-known Beatles song. But Shevchenko, a self-proclaimed fan of the Beatles, says there is more to the show than its music.

"Many people think the show is just set to the Beatles' music, but it's much more complicated than that."

Beatles producer Sir George Martin and his son Giles Martin created the show's

LOVE

ARTS

The Observer runs away with an acrobat [to cirque du soleil]

soundscape using the master tapes from Abbey Road Studios. Garnering praise from living Beatles Sir Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, the father and son approached the band's music in a unique way, experimenting with and remixing some of the most famous songs of the twentieth century.

"The drumbeat that leads into 'Get Back' isn't from 'Get Back,'" Shevchenko said. "The song that in actuality contains the opening drum solo is called 'The End.' So they combined two different songs into one, because it works greatly with the concept of the show."

Along with an interest in music and cinematography, Shevchenko is a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to the circus arts. He is an acrobat and an aerialist, a strongman and an actor. In a show like LOVE, it's difficult to give his job a label.

"People ask me if I do aerial work. For the most part, I perform in the air, but I'm not a stereotypical trapeze flyer. In addition, I do back-up work for other acts that perform on the ground, as well. You can't just do one thing," he said.

Like many circus performers, Shevchenko's road to the circus and to Cirque du Soleil began with familial roots. Shevchenko says his father, currently a performer in Cirque du Soleil's KÀ, was instrumental in building his career toward Cirque du Soleil.

"My father raised me, or maybe trained would be a better word, the way most people involved in the circus grow up," Shevchenko said. "I learned acrobatic tricks growing up. When I worked in a bank, I would get bored and just do hand stands when there were no customers. My co-workers would look at me like I was insane, and I realized I needed to do something, work somewhere where I could get that energy out."

Ultimately, Shevchenko says, it was family ties that brought him into the business.

"I made my audition tape, but I really think they saw the last name and that decided them. There was definitely pressure," Shevchenko said. "I had to be especially good, because if I wasn't, it'd be an embarrassment to the family."

Now on his eighth year with Cirque du Soleil, Shevchenko has been in LOVE long enough to feel like a part of the show's creation.

"When you're working on a movie, you film it, you release it, it's done," Shevchenko said. "But with a show like this, it's a living organism. You see the idea, its creation, how it slowly gets on its feet, and then how it slowly changes through the years. You see the show once, but the next time you see it, it may already be different in some way."

While the show may be different from what it was at its opening in 2006, LOVE remains a brilliant synthesis of the most exciting aspects of circus, theater, and, of course, the Beatles. ☺

