



# A Little Bit of Everything

Cirque Dreams Illumination Lights up the Clemens Center With A One-Of-A-Kind Show

By Laura Reindl

**B**right lights, flashy costumes, and energizing live music pull you to the edge of your seat and the verge of sensory overload, then push you back from the edge again, as you sigh in wonder and pure incredulity. It's all part of the experience—and what an experience it is—of Cirque Dreams Illumination, a show that combines the European cirque-style performance with traditional American circus arts and Broadway theatrics, scheduled to perform at Elmira's Clemens Center on February 12 and 13.

Illumination, the thirteenth show created and performed by Cirque Productions since its establishment in 1993, brings the city streets to life in a blaze of color and incredible acrobatic feats. Aerial acrobats spin and twist high in the air next to high-wire walkers (although “dancers” or “gymnasts” might be more apt terms), while the imaginary streets of the cityscape below are alive with jugglers, contortionists, musicians, dancers, and tumblers, adorned in road signs, caution tape, and construction gear. We aren't just talking about your typical clowns juggling colorful balls or pins; these performers take their acts to a whole new level. An Argentinean duo performs the Risley act, a foot manipulation performance in which one performer lies on his back and juggles his partner with his feet, flipping him with the elegance of an otter spinning through the water.

Another performer brings back an old Russian circus act called the Perch act, as he travels the stage with a harness attached to his head, on top of which his wife gracefully spins twenty feet in the air above him. Everywhere you look, there is something to see and gasp at in awe.

A team of creative minds works together to create each show, under the direction of the company's creator. “All of this is the brainchild of Neil Goldberg,” says Jennifer Sierra-Grobbelaar, Director of Media Relations. “He is the creator, director, and artistic director of all of our shows.” With an educational background in business and theater arts, Goldberg created, owned, and operated numerous entertainment companies in southern Florida before starting Cirque Productions. The first American-based company to produce the European cirque-style shows, Goldberg's “brainchild” has seen great success. Their last production, Cirque Dreams Jungle Fantasy, made it to Broadway last year.

“Everything is created in our studio: the choreography, music, costumes, everything,” says Sierra-Grobbelaar. The 20,000-square-foot Dream Studios in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, serves as the headquarters for the group, as well as the main rehearsal and training complex for the company's more than 100 performers, who hail from all over the world, including the Mongolian School of Contortion, the Acrobatic Training Center of Beijing, China, the Sports Acrobatic Association of Poland, the Moscow Circus, and the Russian State College for Variety Arts.

One such performer is David Ponzanter, a California native who performs on the roue Cyr, a large metal hoop he stands in the center of and maneuvers around the stage with his body. Ponzanter plays the part of the train's engineer in Illumination, also riding a unicycle and performing stunts on rollerblades throughout the show. And in the “little bit of everything” spirit of the show, he also sings some opera as he rolls around the stage in his various contraptions. “I love that I can do everything in this show. I'm a dancer and a singer, and I

also do acrobatics. Illumination allows me to do them all at once,” says Ponzanter.

“Circus performing is very physically demanding, so you're kind of limited to what you can do at first, but after you've been touring for a while, you can expand as you get used to the physical burdens. That's probably my favorite part about it all. My act is always changing.” It is clear that Ponzanter, who has been involved in theater since he was twelve but had not done any acrobatics until he was twenty-four, truly enjoys what he does. “I really love the whole number. There are some circus skills people learn to do because they look cool, but they're hard or painful to do. I wanted to do the Cyr because it looked fun to do, and it is. I love doing it.”

And that is part of what makes Cirque Dreams Illumination so much fun for the audience. The performers are having a blast, as well. With twelve countries and a vast array of talents represented in the cast, there is a lot to enjoy about each other both on and off the stage. And the language barriers? Not a problem for Ponzanter, anyway, who speaks six languages and is in the process of learning Russian, the first language of over half of the cast. “Everyone helps each other out—I'm always learning new things from the other performers. It's a really great group of people who are all really talented,” he says. “We have a lot of fun.” 📌

**WHAT:** Cirque Dreams Illumination

**WHEN:** February 12 and 13, 7 p.m.

**WHERE:** Clemens Center, 207 Clemens Center Pkwy, Elmira, NY

**INFORMATION:** For ticket prices and reservations, call 800-724-0159 or 607-734-8191, or visit [www.clemenscenter.com/broadway/cirque](http://www.clemenscenter.com/broadway/cirque).