

# Cirque Éloize takes circus to higher ground, where “the sky is bigger”

Canadian company's show 'Nomade' blends traditional acts with newer, stranger forms

J. V. / S. U., Madrid  
Canada's Cirque Éloize made its Madrid debut Wednesday with *Nomade*, a show directed by Daniele Finzi Pasca, who has choreographed the closing ceremony for the Turin Winter Olympics.

Cirque Éloize was created in 1993 by seven graduates of Montreal's National Circus School who hail from the Magdalen Islands, part of the French Canadian province of Quebec. The name *éloize* (pronounced el-waz) is a regional word used on the islands to describe the light rays produced by the heat on the horizon — and, these performers say, it is also the symbolic source of their high-energy shows.

Although the troupe has performed more than 3,000 times in 20 countries to great acclaim, Cirque Éloize often labors in the shadow of its big-budget “brother,” the Cirque du Soleil, which performed in Spain last year with huge success. Éloize's performers admit that everywhere they go they are asked how the two Canadian circuses differ. Their reply comes straight back, as if they've explained this many times before.

“Cirque du Soleil's style is much more Broadway, more American, more explosive,” says Bartłomiej Soroczynski, a Polish-Canadian who is one of the two clowns in the show. “We have a more European feel, and our music has Gypsy and Jewish influences. Also, we're not hiding behind masks or make-up — people see our faces, and we call each other by our real names. This makes our shows more about the individual, rather than about the machine.”

Pablo Gershanik, an affable Argentine who is the other clown in *Nomade*, is even more emphatic. “It's industry versus craftsmanship. It's surprise versus emotion. In Cirque Éloize, our main tool is emotion.”

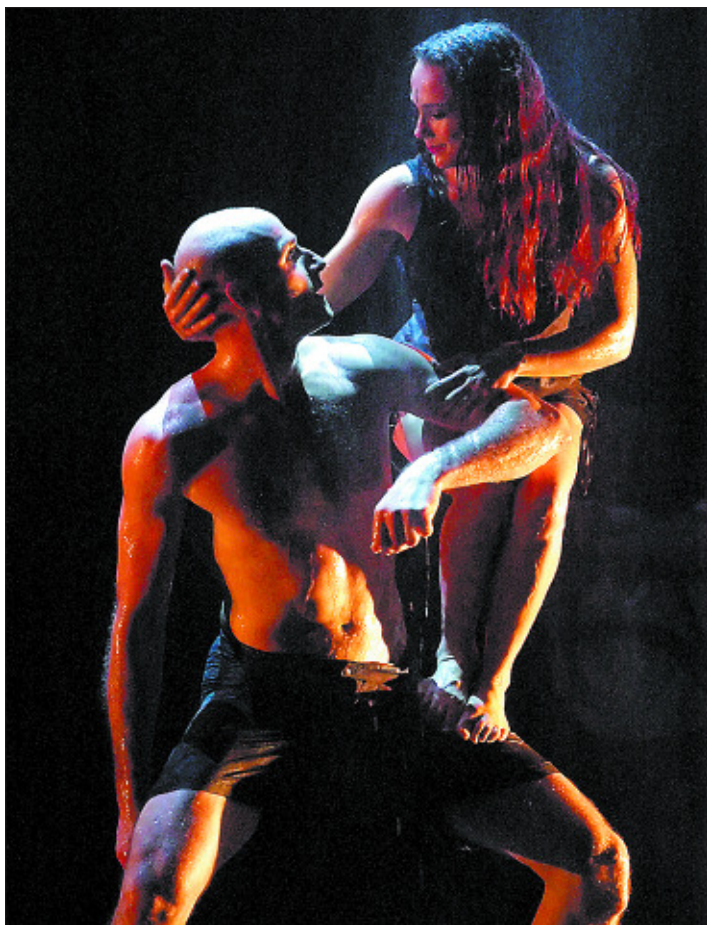
## A cultural mish-mash

Despite the differences, there is a similarity in both circuses' multicultural approach to performance, in part a reflection of Canada's own ethnic makeup. Éloize's performers not only come from very different backgrounds, they also incorporate these differences into their shows. The dominant language in *Nomade* is a mish-mash of Spanish (in its various accents), Italian, Polish, French and English.

The show, which opened at Teatro Gran Vía Wednesday with Canadian ambassador Marc Lortie in attendance, was created by Daniele Finzi Pasca, who found fame with a clown show he used to perform at hospitals for one single spectator at a time. Éloize's directors, Jeannot Painchaud and Julie Hamelin, asked him to create a show about the nomadic life of Gypsies.



Cirque Éloize pays tribute to traditional acts like levitation...



...while incorporating a contemporary edge.

“My starting point was a sentence I overheard a child say: At night, the sky is bigger,” says Finzi Pasca. “This allegorical idea cuts across the entire show.”

It is this notion of a dominating theme that sets Cirque Éloize, and other new circus companies, apart from traditional shows where nothing links the different acts.

“We have traditional circus

acts, but revisited,” explains Pablo the clown. “We pay tribute to old-fashioned circus, but it's not just a number, a number, a number...we clowns help weave the story behind them.”

Although there is no clear separation between “old circus” and “new circus,” as it is currently called, new circus has a more elaborate and theatrical staging, and its performers are multifaceted, taking part in dif-

ferent numbers throughout the show (although this already happened in the old family circuses).

*Nomade* and *Rain*, the latest two shows by Cirque Éloize, are good examples of a new take on the art: for one thing, they take place not inside a tent, but in an Italian-style “stage box.”

Set against a full moon, in *Nomade* 18 artists blend old favorites such as contortionism, levitation, juggling and trapeze, with newer acts like web rope and the Cyr wheel.

“The Cyr Wheel is the next evolutionary step from the German wheel: the artist gets inside a simple metal ring and spins with it. Visually, it's like the famous Vitruvian Man drawing by Leonardo Da Vinci showing human proportions,” said Finzi Pasca.

Throughout, a live band performs klezmer-style music on stage, blending in with the other performers.

“In musical terms, *Nomade* would be a rhapsody, a series of interlocking dances,” explains Finzi Pasca. Each of the numbers carefully segues into the next; the performers seem to multiply, disappear and reappear with different personalities.

Another climactic moment in *Nomade* features the trapeze artist Suzanne Soler. “The stage perspective is cut by curtains, so that the balancing trapeze seems to appear and disappear,” says Finzi Pasca.

**Nomade.** Until March 19 at Teatro Gran Vía, Gran Vía 66, Madrid. Tel: 91 541 55 69.