

Arts Review: Cirque de la Symphonie was pure joy to experience

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Sharing the stage with the Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra were Cirque de la Symphonie's Vitaliy Prikhodko and Pavel Korshunov in dazzling displays of balance and strength. Courtesy of Kim Kiely Photography

Here's a happy equation: Cirque de la Symphonie plus Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra equals joy. A-plus joy. Top drawer joy. Joyful joy. You get the idea. This special event was needed in a world needing serious uplifting.

Because the event was held in the Williamsburg Community Chapel, it's appropriate to paraphrase proverbs: "a merry heart really does a spirit, soul and body good like medicine." And Cirque and WSO did just that.

A nearly packed-to-capacity chapel experienced this first-of-its-kind happening in the Williamsburg area, a clever merger of cirque artistry with fine art.

The Nov. 4 event offered 12 acts — four for orchestra only, the rest carefully choreographed exhibits of awesome skills. Music director Michael Buttermann, who is skilled at narrative, told the audience what to expect and encouraged the crowd to clap, whistle and show appreciation at any time during the acts — to have a good time and enjoy.

With that, the WSO launched into a zippy performance of the overture to “Candide,” one of the most joyful overtures to a musical ever penned, followed by Elena Tsarkova’s mind-boggling display of quick-change costumes. Wearing a full-length, high-neck frilly dress and hat, she stepped into a round device on the floor, at which time the mime, Vladimir Tsarkov, raised it over her head. When he lowered it within seconds, she had changed into an entirely different outfit. And did it again and again and again. Numerous changes into all sorts of styles, colors, fabrics and glam, all while the WSO played the samba “Tico, Tico.”

Later, Tsarkova enlisted Buttermann in another moment of amazement when she had him, assisted by the mime, tie her arms behind her in complicated rope patterns while the conductor-less WSO played the “Pas de Quatre” from “Swan Lake.” She then stepped into a curtained device with Buttermann standing in front of her. The mime held the curtain and then dropped it to find her wearing Buttermann’s jacket beneath the complicated rope pattern. Buttermann’s facial reaction was to be cherished. So was ours.

Then, there was Daniella Jack, the “Lady in White,” whose form-fitting costume glittered with sparkly diamond-like objects that would have been the envy of Marlene Dietrich. With Khachaturian’s waltz from “Masquerade” playing behind her, she began a remarkable display of flexibility and contortions gracefully done on a tiny raised circular stand. Spectacular.

She later dazzled with hula hoops, lots of them. She wiggled and rotated through De Falla’s “Ritual Fire Dance,” masterfully twirling some eight hoops on her entire body, closing with a mound of hoops that looked like a giant slinky which she whirled around to abundant applause.

Tsarkov proved to be more than just a clever, commedia dell'arte-dressed mime when he juggled six rings to “Danse Bohème” from “Carmen” and again when he juggled four glowing batons to the “Tarantella” from “La Boutique Fantasque,” drawing the audience to participate in the fun.

The finale was really a finale. With the initial sounds from Stravinsky’s “Firebird Suite” against a red backlit stage, acro-duo Vitaliy Prikhodko and Pavel Korshunov, dressed head-to-toe in silver tights and silver body paint, slowly walked from both sides of the stage, meeting in the middle where they began to move into extraordinary sculptured displays of balance and strength, every movement defining slow motion.

Whether standing or positioned on his back, Prikhodko maneuvered his partner into positions that were astonishing. At one time, he held Korshunov above his head by a single outstretched arm while both men moved into varied positions. In another move, Prikhodko balanced Korshunov upside down on his neck. Gravity-defying movements throughout, both poetic and powerful.

There was no cotton candy or popcorn with this Cirque, but Butterman and the WSO passed out musical bon-bons in between acts, among them Chabrier’s “España,” Glinka’s energetic Overture to “Ruslan and Lyudmila” and Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Danse des Bouffons” from “Snow Maiden,” rounding off a really swell evening of music and endless smiles of awe and appreciation.