

Acrobatics and music combine with Cirque de la Symphonie in Williamsburg

By John Shulson

Virginia Gazette

Oct 28, 2022 at 10:00 am



The Cirque de la Symphonie troupe will appear with the Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra Nov. 4 in a demonstration of movement merged with music. Courtesy of Cirque de la Symphonie (Brad Budd)

The circus is coming to town. Well, not exactly. But what is coming is a sense of wonder brought about by the circus when the Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra offers perhaps its most unusual event ever next month.

Cirque de la Symphonie comes to the Williamsburg Community Chapel on Nov. 4.

What makes Cirque unique is that it provides its performers the chance to show their wizardry set to live symphonic music. Reviews have called it "... an elegant fusion of 'cirque'

and orchestra, adapting stunning performances of cirque artists with the majesty of the full symphony orchestra." Internationally described as amazing, dazzling, mindboggling and all sorts of other top-drawer adjectives, one music director said, "It's like one plus one equals three — the whole is greater than the sum of the parts."

With no big top circus tent involved, Cirque performances are adapted to limited stage space — in this case, the chapel on John Tyler Highway. While the chapel's structure cannot accommodate aerial acts, it can accommodate a stage large enough to handle the orchestra and dazzling display of world-class, highly-celebrated acrobats, contortionists, mime-jugglers, balancers, hoop artists and strongmen, among them world record holders, gold medal winners and Olympians.

WSO music director Michael Butterman said that he has worked with Cirque for some 10 years with orchestras in such locales as Colorado, Pennsylvania and Arizona. "They're quite popular," he said. "You can't be in this business and not have heard of them ... plus, they offer a different kind of listening and viewing experience."



The appeal, he suggested, is that the orchestra gets to play standard, classical repertory that's not normally heard in a regular subscription concert, "... pieces that might be too short or not suitable thematically."

Internationally-acclaimed and award-winning acrobats Vitaliy Prikhodko and Pavel Korshunov perform dazzling acts of balance and coordination in Cirque de la Symphonie. Courtesy of Cirque de la Symphonie

Butterman said he felt bringing Cirque to Williamsburg would be a good idea and expand the musical experience. WSO Executive Director Carolyn Keurajian added that the WSO board has been looking for something different, a specialty program beyond the now traditionally held holiday program, Cabaret & Cocktails event or the Side-by-Side program with the Williamsburg Youth Orchestra.

“Cirque seemed to be a good fit,” Keurajian said.

To secure Cirque, some logistics were involved. There was coordination over which performers would be available, minus the aerial performers, and then which would work best in the chapel’s space.

Butterman said that Cirque is highly choreographed and quite effective. He also chose the music for the varied acts from a template list of selections each performer was accustomed to using — a merger of music and movement. He selected works drawn from Bernstein’s “Candide,” deFalla’s “Ritual Fire Dance,” Stravinsky’s “Firebird,” Bizet’s “Carmen,” Khachaturian’s “Masquerade” and Tchaikovsky’s “Swan Lake,” with a Strauss polka in for good measure.

The troupe, which includes Elena Tsarkova, Vladimir Tsarkov, Daniella Jack, and Vitaliy Prikhodko and Pavel Korshunov, is owned by Alexander Streltsov, a circus veteran from Moscow and the only aerialist to perform with the Bolshoi Ballet. In 1998, the gold medal winner at the prestigious Festival du Mondial in Paris collaborated with Erich Kunzel and the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra for a PBS special production that was immediately popular.

Home-based in Georgia, Cirque became a much sought-after attraction for people of all ages, many of whom are not, initially, symphony concert folk but quickly find it a calling. With visual and auditory delights and riveting “how do they do that?” moments, Cirque de la Symphonie leaves the audience smiling and maybe even humming a few new tunes.

The show begins at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$75 for adults and \$45 for students and are available at www.williamsburgsymphony.org/concerts.