

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



Press Kit

20170614

Show Overview

Written and directed by Robert Lepage

A fascinating journey into the evolution of mankind

On an island evoking the shape of a giant turtle, TOTEM™ traces humankind's incredible journey – from our original amphibian state to our ultimate quest for flight. Along the way, it also explores our dreams and infinite potential, and the ties that bind us both to our collective animal origins and to the species that share the planet with us.

With scenes from the story of evolution randomly linked together in a chain, TOTEM returns to the beginnings of organic life in the primordial ooze. Featuring Neanderthals, Cro-Magnons, primates and men in suits, among others, the show depicts a world of archetypal characters who, in their own way, witness and act out the perennial, existential, questions of life.

Alternating between primitive and modern myths, and peppered with aboriginal stories of creation, TOTEM echoes and explores the evolutionary process of species, our ongoing search for balance, and the curiosity that propels us ever further, faster, and higher...

TOTEM

The word “totem” contains the idea of the order of species. We carry in our bodies the potential of all species, all the way to our desire to fly—like the thunderbird at the top of the totem pole.



A few interesting facts



- TOTEM marks the second collaboration of world-renown Director Robert Lepage with *Cirque du Soleil*, following *KÀ* presented at the MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, NV since 2004.
- Since its Montreal World Premiere on April 22, 2010, TOTEM has been performed more than 2,400 times in 43 cities including Japan.
- To date, more than 5 million audience members have been mesmerized by a performance of TOTEM.
- TOTEM is the winner of the 2013 New York City Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Unique Theatrical Experience.
- The production features a cast of 46 acrobats, actors, musicians and singers from 18 countries: Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, France, Poland, China, Czech Republic, Finland, Italy, Germany, Japan, Moldova, Mongolia, Russia, Spain, Ukraine and United States).
- The cast is supported by a dedicated team of 42 technicians and employees from 6 countries (Australia, Canada, China, Russia, United Kingdom and United States).
- From a technical standpoint, TOTEM is considered *Cirque du Soleil's* first hybrid production as it can be performed in both indoor amphitheaters and under the blue-and-yellow big top, without requiring significant changes to the set and equipment.

What the critics say about TOTEM

"This is one very sharp show. TOTEM is thrilling." – **The New York Times**

"This celebration of sheer human achievement and audience appreciation is simply thrilling. It's why we love Cirque du Soleil, and always will." – **Los Angeles Times**

"Spectacular, artful. Breathtaking and deliciously ironic." - **The Toronto Star**

"TOTEM is visually ravishing" - **The Boston Globe**

"TOTEM is whimsically seductive and the most enjoyable show to come along from Cirque du Soleil in quite a while." - **The San Francisco Chronicle**

"TOTEM strikes the perfect balance with a dazzling display of cutting edge technology blending into the timeless mystique of the circus...a lavish serving of the wow factor." - **The New Zealand Herald**

About Robert Lepage — Writer and Director



“What is it about the circus that so captivates us? It’s a discipline in which the performers must always go beyond. We witness the transfiguration of the human being. In the short time they are in the air, or performing acrobatic feats, circus artists become more than men and women – they are demigods, and we are transported into a world of mythology.”

– Robert Lepage

The multidisciplinary artist Robert Lepage is equally talented as a theatre director, playwright, actor and film director. Lauded by critics the world over, his modern and unusual work transcends all boundaries between disciplines.

In 1975, Lepage entered the Conservatoire d’art dramatique de Québec and, following a study period in France, he took part in several productions in which he combined the roles of actor, writer and director. In 1985, he created *The Dragons’ Trilogy*, a show that earned him international recognition. He followed this with *Vinci* (1986), *Polygraph* (1987), *Tectonic Plates* (1988), *Needles and Opium* (1991). With *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in 1992, he became the first North American to direct a Shakespeare play at the Royal National Theatre in London.

From 1989 to 1993 Lepage was Artistic Director of the Théâtre français at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa. In 1994 he founded his own company Ex Machina and directed *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* (1994), *Le Songe d’une nuit d’été* (1995) and a solo production, *Elsinore* (1995).

Also in 1994, Robert Lepage made his début in the world of cinema. He wrote and directed his first feature film, *Le Confessionnel*, which was screened the following year at the Cannes Festival Directors’ Fortnight. He went on to direct *Polygraph* in 1996, *Nô* in 1997, *Possible Worlds* in 2000 (his first feature film written in English), and finally, in 2003, a film adaptation of his play *The Far Side of the Moon*.

La Caserne, a multidisciplinary production centre in Quebec City, opened in 1997 under Robert Lepage’s leadership. There, he created and produced *Geometry of Miracles* (1998), *Zulu Time* (1999), *The Far Side of The Moon* (2000), a new version of *The Dragons’ Trilogy* with a new cast (2003) and *The Busker’s Opera* (2004). This was followed by *The Andersen Project* (2005), *Lipsynch* (2007), *The Blue Dragon* (2008) and *Eonnagata* (2009).

Lepage made a grand entrance in the opera world when he staged the successful double bill of *Bluebeard’s Castle* and *Erwartung* (1993). He followed this with *La Damnation de Faust* presented for the first time in the Saito Kinen Festival Matsumoto, Japan (1999), 1984 in London (2005), *The Rake’s Progress* in Brussels (2007) and *The Nightingale and Other Short Fables* in Toronto (2009).

Robert Lepage created and directed Peter Gabriel’s *Secret World Tour* (1993) and his *Growing Up Tour* (2002). As part of the festivities surrounding the 400th anniversary of Quebec City in 2008, he created *Le Moulin à images™* – the largest architectural projection ever produced – on the walls of the Bunge, a massive grain silo. In 2009 he and his Ex Machina team created *Aurora Borealis*, a permanent light show for the structure, inspired by the colours of the northern lights.

Winner of many prestigious awards, in 2009 Lepage received the Governor General’s Performing Arts Award for his outstanding contribution to Canada’s cultural life throughout his career.

TOTEM is Robert Lepage’s second *Cirque du Soleil* show following *KÂ* (2004). “Inspired by the foundation narratives of the first peoples, TOTEM explores the birth and evolution of the world, the relentless curiosity of human beings and their constant desire to excel,” he says. “The word totem suggests that human beings carry in their bodies the full potential of all living species, even the Thunderbird’s desire to fly to the top of the totem.”

Robert Lepage was born in Quebec City in 1957.

The Main Characters



The Tracker

Environmentally conscious, a friend of the animals, he guides and assists the Scientist in his explorations.



The Scientist

A Darwinesque explorer who visits the different worlds of the show. In his advanced laboratory, aided by his assistants and a monkey, he dazzles us with his amazing physics experiments.



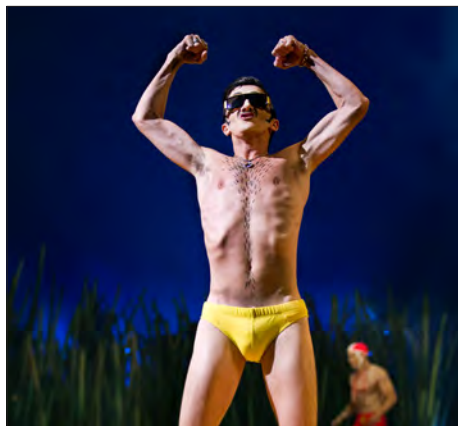
The Amerindian Dancer

The young Amerindian dancer takes us into a magical world, tracing the history of the evolution of species with his rings.



The Crystal Man

He comes from space to spark life on Earth. Early in the show, we see him animate the turtle's skeleton and at the end he closes the show by diving into a lagoon.



Valentino

Valentino, the macho, is a chatty, boastful provocateur. With his camera in hand, he is a lively, arrogant tourist who litters and disturbs.



Clown Fisherman

The Fisherman, a practical man, is wary of fuss and extravagance. He finds a silver lining (or a steel pot) for every situation life throws his way.

The Scenes/Acts

(in the show's running order)



Bars (Carapace)

A giant turtle at centre stage represents the origins of life on earth. As the Crystal Man descends from the sky to spark life on Earth, the creature's shell is whisked away to reveal an effervescent community of amphibians and fish that lives beneath its carapace. They burst into a playful parallel bars number, with artists embodying frogs launching themselves into the air from a power track and leaping from one bar to the next, criss-crossing in mid-air with inches to spare.



Hoops Dancers (Part 1)

An Amerindian artist performs a narrative dance, using hoops to create static and dynamic shapes to evoke various animals and images in a ritual that symbolizes the endless circle of life.



Rings Trio

Bollywood-inspired music accompanies two men as they compete against each other on the rings — until a woman arrives and shows them how it's done. Their graceful movements, sheer physical strength and superb physiques take to the skies above a summer beach. This modern day acrobatic take on the mating game describes our innate desire to attract and impress, an ageold dance that ensures the forward motion of our species.



Unicycles with Bowls

The abundance of fall is represented by the harvest colours and details of the costumes as five unicyclists juggle metal bowls in an astounding display of agility, balance, synchronized control and physical grace, tossing the bowls with their feet—sometimes over their shoulders—and catching them on their heads without using their hands.



Hand Balancing

With astounding strength, the agile performer contorts his body in different positions while balancing on his hands atop a platform shaped as an hourglass. The act explores a man's struggle outside of his contacts with other human beings. The strength that he gets from this journey refers to all challenges one must face in order to grow.



Diabolo

Angered by the thoughtless, polluting actions of Valentino, The Tracker transforms before our eyes into a Toreador. He spins, juggles and tosses his diabolo to a sizzling flamenco-inspired beat.



Fixed Trapeze Duo

Like two lovebirds, a young man and woman tease, play and sulk in an innocent game of seduction and eventually intertwine their bodies in a light-hearted vertical dance of fresh, unusual movements and lifts.



Manipulation

The Scientist represents reason and the quest to understand the universe in ways that can be quantified, measured and put into boxes. His "laboratory" features an orchestra of glass containers filled with mysterious fluorescent fluids as he steps into a transparent cone and juggles with luminous balls that might represent planets or molecules—or both—making them chase after each other in spiral orbits.



Hoops Dancers (Part 2)

Surrounded by members of numerous tribes, two Amerindian dancers now take the stage to create new figures with their hoops, finishing with two globes representing unity and eternity.



Roller Skates

In a scene that evokes a wedding ceremony, a pair of roller skaters spins and whirls at heart-stopping speeds atop a tiny platform—just 1.8 metres in diameter—shaped like a drum.



Russian Bars

Wearing colourful costumes inspired in part by the lost civilizations of South America, ten artists perform feats of strength, balance and acrobatic movements. The jumpers are launched into the air and fly weightlessly across the sky like cosmonauts, leaping from one bar to the next with astonishing agility in a thrilling evocation of the human desire to escape the Earth's gravity.



Contortion

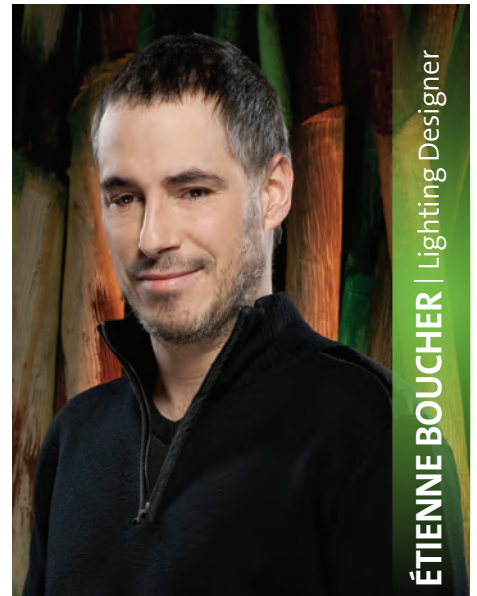
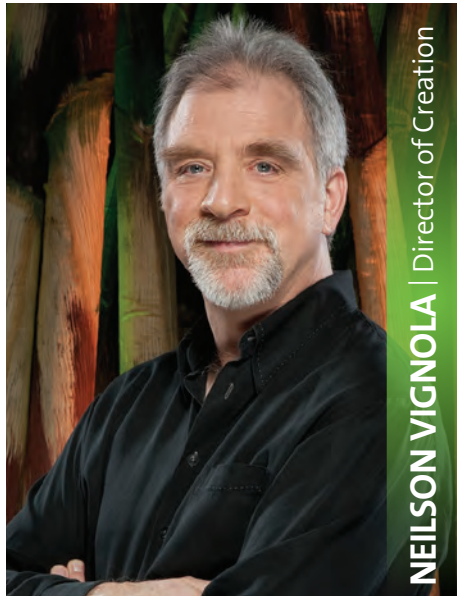
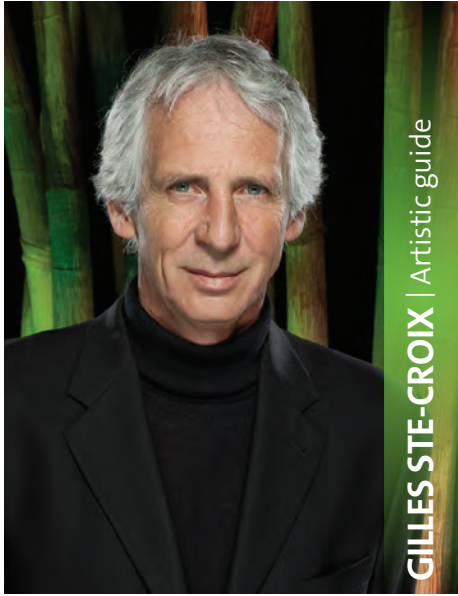
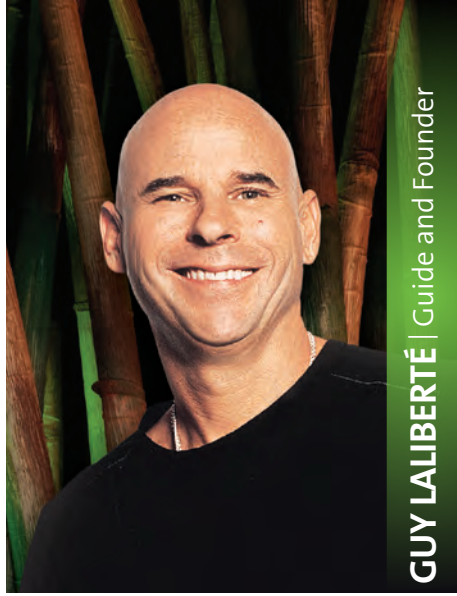
Two industrious creatures emerge from the sea, to play, crawl, twist and build complex pyramids on the seashore. Their incredible figures seem to defy both gravity and physics.

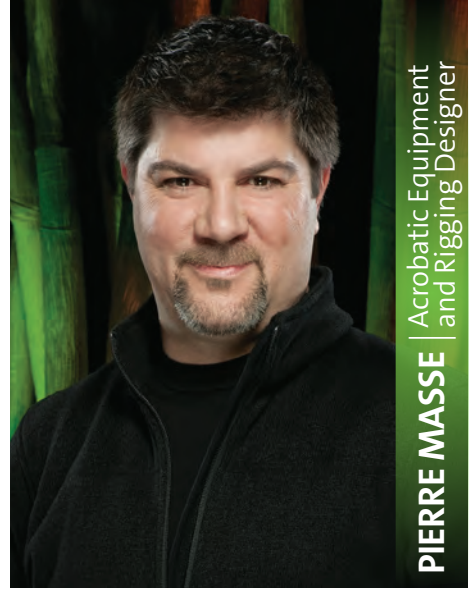


Escalade

The businessman is stripped bare and flung into the heart of the jungle. Atop a tree-like structure and performing disciplines related to Chinese pole and Parkour, man and primate circle and climb in a battle for dominance.

The Creators





Costumes

Kym Barrett's initial approach to the TOTEM costume designs was rooted in documentary-based reality. This process entailed research into real animals, plants and birds as well as traditional cultural and tribal designs to source her fanciful, inventive concoctions.

Her other major preoccupation was the show's theme of evolution, which led her to emphasize the importance of the human body at every opportunity. She points to the example of a forest populated by butterflies and frogs, saying it was important to her to show the human body as part of the overall visual mosaic of the scene.

The third show theme reflected in the costumes is the cycle of the seasons, which underscores the importance of nature to the show. Neon-bright colours, vivid, shiny fabrics and playful details lend a summer atmosphere to the Bollywood-inspired beach scene. To suggest a time of harvest and the abundance of fall, the unicyclists' costumes feature seed pods, flowers, trees and leaves. And the two roller-skaters are dressed in white and silver to help create a winter tableau.

To recreate such a broad range of textures, colours and markings found in nature, Kym concentrated on the treatment of fabrics rather than on the fabrics themselves: advanced printing techniques, fluorescent pigments, mirror fragments and crystals allowed her to "paint" on canvases as varied as Lycra and leather, with results that constantly interact with and adapt to the show's ever-changing lighting.

Costume Closeups

- The Crystal Man—a recurring character—represents the life force. His dazzling costume (literally) is entirely covered of small mirrors and crystals. The glittering mobile mosaic is made up of about 4,500 reflective components on a stretch velvet leotard.
- The Hoop Dancer's costume is inspired by the traditional, ceremonial clothing of a number of North American Indian tribes, rather than an accurate portrayal of any one culture. It includes a Hopi cross and a headdress, and features extensive use of leather.
- In the opening scene the marsh is populated by fish and frogs. Their patterns and colours came from real fish and frogs—including the most poisonous frog in the Amazon jungle—and are replicated by the pixelation of the image in the screen printing process. The textures of the fabrics are also a close match to the skin of fish and frogs found in nature. The end result resembles a community of human amphibians.
- Each unicyclist has her own look, but together they form an integrated unit. The base costumes are printed in earth tones, with small details sewn onto them—including bolts and screws as well as feathers and insects. The line of the costumes and the stylized tutus create flirty ballerina silhouettes.
- The Cosmonauts are wearing two costumes in one: when they first appear (under black light), their body-hugging Lycra suits glow dramatically in the dark, but as soon as the stage lights kick in, their look is completely transformed. Some of the printed motifs recall Mayan drawings, and each artist is wearing an individual variation on the theme.



Set Design and Projections

The Turtle - Support of the World

At the heart of many founding myths that live on in a variety of legends and oral traditions, the turtle represents the earth and carries the entire weight of the world on its shell. This totemic animal is also omnipresent in the scenic environment of TOTEM.

The large oval framework on stage represents the skeletal substructure of a huge turtle shell that serves both as a decorative set element and as acrobatic equipment. At the start of the show it is covered with a cloth printed with the shell markings of a forest turtle, reproduced through macro photography. Depending on the artistic needs, the skeleton is raised to the top of the tent or opened at an angle like an enormous shell.

An organic world of multiple transformations

The visual environment of TOTEM is an organic world, a marsh lined with reeds near an island (the stage), on which images are projected. Set Designer Carl Fillion gave it curves and non-linear forms to reflect the natural world.

Tilted slightly forward, the image marsh acts both as a stage entrance and as a projection surface. Through the magic of moving images it becomes a virtual swamp, a river source, a marsh, a lake, an ocean, a volcanic island, a pond and a starry sky.

The images in the projections are drawn from nature and were shot for the production in various parts of the world, including Iceland, Hawaii and Guatemala. Even the images of boiling lava were filmed by Image Content Designer Pedro Pires.

The “Scorpion Bridge” serving as a mobile platform connects the marsh to the scene features variable geometry, allowing it to adapt to each tableau. In one of the clown numbers, for example, it becomes the prow of a boat then rises to become a plane in flight, and finally a rocket taking off. In another scene, the bridge is configured to look like a vertical totem pole.

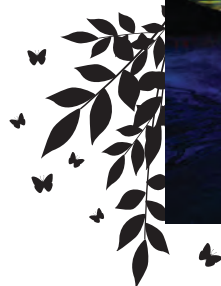
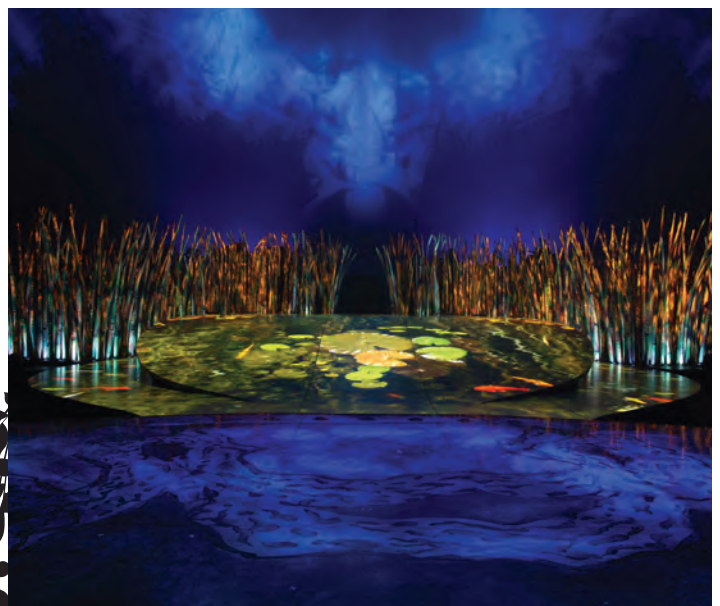
The concept of the Scorpion Bridge was loosely based on a retractable pedestrian bridge in London. Built of steel and weighing 10,000 lbs, its 8 powerful mineral oil hydraulic motors allow it to rise, descend, extend, retract and curl in on itself like a scorpion’s tail. Its reflective surfaces, which shine like mirrors, are made of stainless steel plates. The base of the bridge houses lighting equipment, a laser, speakers and cameras. During the show, the bridge is monitored by an operator using four infrared cameras.

Set and Projection Closeups

- The border of the stage recalls the plastron (underside) of a turtle. The motifs on the surface of the stage itself are a collage of hand-drawn images inspired by the patterns on the plastrons of several turtle species.
- Bordering the marsh upstage, the reeds conceal the artists and some set elements before they enter, as well as serving as a projection surface. To save weight and facilitate storage on tour, the reeds are inflatable.
- During the rings trio number, the Scorpion Bridge turns into an Indian carpet that unrolls on the beach in a reference to the Bollywood aesthetic that inspired the overall look of this scene.
- Some of the projections on the marsh interact with the movements of the artists in real time. Infrared cameras positioned above the stage and around the marsh detect their movement and produce kinetic effects such as ripples, splashes and reflections in the water and the flames.
- Photographs taken by Guy Laliberté during his 2009 Poetic Social Mission aboard the International Space Station are integrated in the show.

Acrobatic Equipment

- The turtle skeleton weighs 2,700 lbs (1,225 kg), includes 2 horizontal bars and is completely covered in a non-slip finish.
- The unicycles are 7 ft (2 m) tall but very light, which makes them easier to manoeuvre down the ramp at the beginning of the act.



Support to the performance

Unlike musicals or theatre plays, *Cirque du Soleil* productions keep evolving and changing even years after their Grand Opening. The Artistic and Technical teams on tour have the dual mandate of maintaining the original artistic and technical components of TOTEM, while supporting their evolution through time. Under the guidance of the Artistic Director, slight changes are constantly being incorporated into the performance to keep it fresh and alive for the cast, the crew and the audience who experiences it for the very first time.

Artistic Direction

Neelanthi Vadivel, the Artistic Director of TOTEM, is in charge of the quality of the performance, ensuring the well-being of the artists and making sure all artistic elements of the production (choreography, costumes, lighting, set design, sound design, music, etc.) respect the original concepts developed during the creation process.

Part of her mandate is to keep the motivation of the cast alive by giving artistic notes and feedback, support the integration of new elements into the artists' routines and offer classes and workshops to stimulate the cast's creativity. Neelanthi is also in charge of the integration of new cast members; identifying the right candidates with the *Cirque du Soleil* Casting department, working closely with the Head Coach in monitoring and supporting the acrobatic evolution of the artists, and fine-tuning the artistic elements of the performance. The Artistic Director can count on the support of a team of stage managers, an Assistant Artistic Director, a Head Coach, a Wardrobe department and two Performance Medicine Therapists to fulfill her extensive mandate.

Wardrobe

The 750 costume pieces seen on stage in TOTEM (and the exact same amount of back-up pieces traveling with the show) are being carefully looked after by a team of three permanent wardrobe staff members and three local employees. The daily tasks of the team include repairing and maintaining all pieces, double-checking all elements impacting the performance (falling sequins, loose beans, etc.), helping artists get into costume and washing/hand washing all pieces touching the human skin. Each costume is custom fitted to the bodies of the artists and handcrafted at the *Cirque du Soleil* International Head Quarters in Montreal. The average lifespan of the TOTEM costume pieces is 6 months.

Performance Medicine

Two Performance Medicine Specialists travel with TOTEM to monitor the physical condition of the artists on a daily basis. Their mandate is to assess condition, procure treatment, develop targeted training programs when needed, and suggest alterations in the performance to prevent injuries. A Massage Therapist and a Pilates Coach are hired locally in each city to support the artists in performing 8 to 10 times a week.

Technical Department

A team of 27 show technicians are required to operate the show and perform the daily maintenance on all technical pieces. The team is divided in six departments: lighting, sound, rigging, automation, props and stage carpentry.

Tour Services

An array of services is offered to artists and employees as they bring TOTEM on the road around the world. The Tour Services department takes care of the travel and lodging of all individuals, the working visas, the insurances and provides supporting accounting services. Three permanent chefs and a Kitchen Manager also tour with TOTEM and serve an average of 250 complimentary meals a day to the cast and crew.





CIRQUE DU SOLEIL AT A GLANCE

From a group of 20 street performers at its beginnings in 1984, *Cirque du Soleil* is a major Québec-based organization providing high-quality artistic entertainment. The company has close to 4,000 employees, including 1,300 artists from more than 50 different countries.

Cirque du Soleil has brought wonder and delight to more than 180 million spectators in more than 450 cities in over sixty countries on six continents.

For more information about *Cirque du Soleil*, visit www.cirquedusoleil.com.

THE MISSION

The mission of *Cirque du Soleil* is to **invoke the imagination, provoke the senses and evoke the emotions** of people around the world.

THE CREATION OF CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

It all started in Baie-Saint-Paul, a small town near Québec City in Canada. There, in the early eighties, a band of colourful characters roamed the streets, striding on stilts, juggling, dancing, breathing fire, and playing music. They were Les Échassiers de Baie-Saint-Paul (the Baie-Saint-Paul Stiltwalkers), a street theatre group founded by Gilles Ste-Croix. Already, the townsfolk were impressed and intrigued by the young performers – including Guy Laliberté who founded *Cirque du Soleil*.

The troupe went on to found Le Club des talons hauts (the High Heels Club), and then, in 1982, organized La Fête foraine de Baie-Saint-Paul, a cultural event in which street performers from all over met to exchange ideas and enliven the streets of the town for a few days. La Fête foraine was repeated in 1983 and 1984. Le Club des talons hauts attracted notice, and Guy Laliberté, Gilles Ste-Croix and their cronies began to cherish a crazy dream: to create a Québec circus and take the troupe travelling around the world.

In 1984, Québec City was celebrating the 450th anniversary of Canada's discovery by Jacques Cartier, and they needed a show that would carry the festivities out across the province. Guy Laliberté presented a proposal for a show called *Cirque du Soleil* (Circus of the Sun), and succeeded in convincing the organizers. And *Cirque du Soleil* hasn't stopped since!

A Few statistics

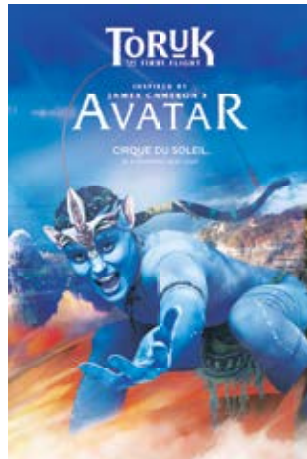
- In 1984, 73 people worked for *Cirque du Soleil*. Today, the company hires close to 4,000 employees worldwide, including 1,300 artists.
- At the Montreal International Headquarters alone, there are close to 1,500 employees.
- More than 100 types of occupations can be found at Cirque.
- The company's employees and artists represent more than 50 nationalities and speak 25 different languages.
- More than 180 million spectators have seen a *Cirque du Soleil* show since 1984.
- Close to 15 million have seen a *Cirque du Soleil* show in 2017.
- *Cirque du Soleil* hasn't received any grants from the public or private sectors since 1992.

IN 2018, *CIRQUE DU SOLEIL* WILL PRESENT 19 DIFFERENT SHOWS AROUND THE WORLD.

ARENA SHOWS



North America



Asia



Europe



North America

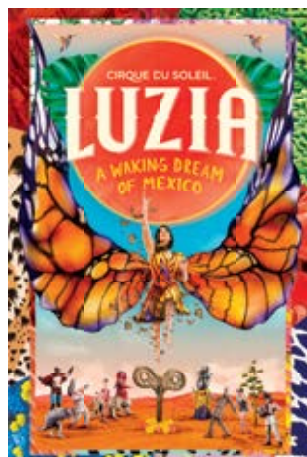


South & North America

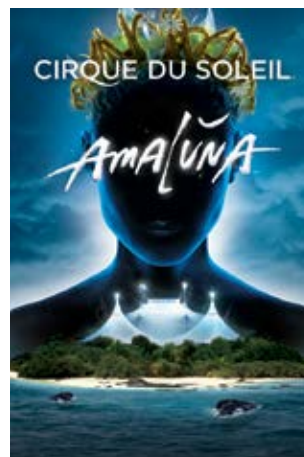
TOURING SHOWS UNDER THE BIG TOP



North America



North America



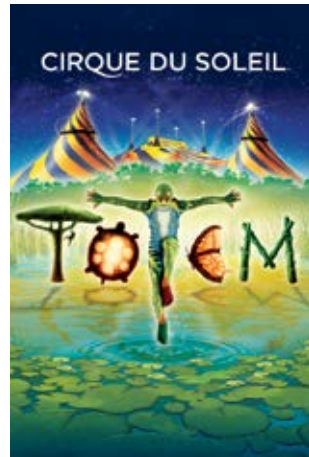
South America



Asia



Japan



Europe

RESIDENT SHOWS



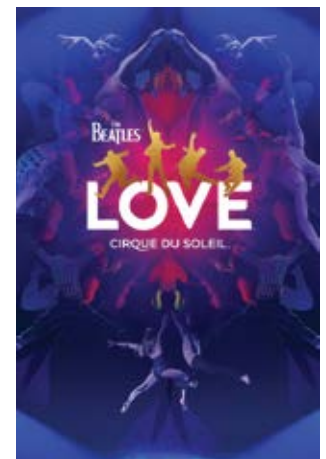
Riviera Maya
Mexico



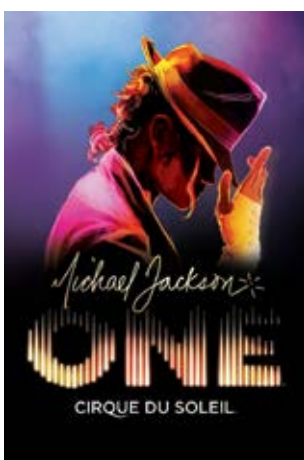
Luxor
in Las Vegas



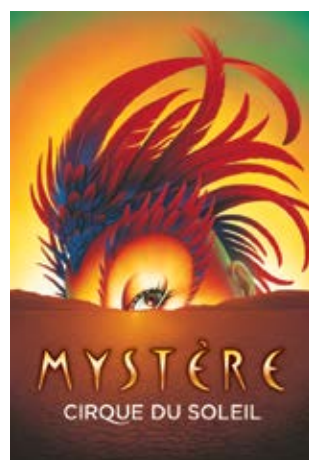
MGM Grand
in Las Vegas



The Mirage
in Las Vegas



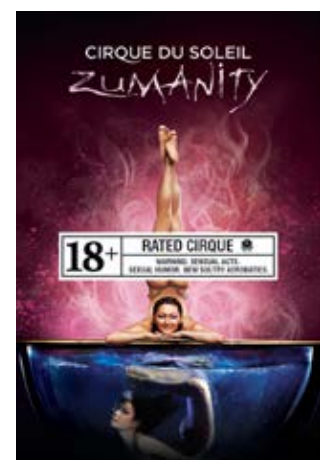
Mandalay Bay
in Las Vegas



Treasure Island
in Las Vegas



Bellagio
in Las Vegas



New York-New York
Hotel & Casino
in Las Vegas