

CIRQUE
ÉLOIZE **rain**

Written and directed by **DANIELE FINZI PASCA**



About the Show

Rain is a show created and performed by Cirque Éloize (SIRK el-WAZ). This Canadian company draws on the traditions of the old-fashioned “big-top” circus and weaves them into a modern theatrical experience using music, dance, drama, and storytelling. Cirque Éloize believes that this unique fusion of art forms gives the circus the power to “unsettle, shake, and move people.”

While each member of the 12-person cast specializes in one particular skill, all of them take on a variety of roles during the show. A single performer may be required to juggle, play a musical instrument, perform in a balancing routine, and perform aerial gymnastics.

The numbers you will see in the performance are:

- ⚡ Contortion:** Thanks to the extreme flexibility of their ligaments, tendons, and joints, contortionists are capable of stretching, bending and twisting their bodies into extreme positions.
- ⚡ The Suitcase:** This clowning act shows off the performers’ versatility in balancing, juggling, and manipulating objects and also making us laugh!
- ⚡ Aerial Tissue:** The artist wraps and twists him/herself along two silk streamers (called the “tissue” or “silk”) suspended from the ceiling to the stage floor.
- ⚡ Hand to Hand:** In this acrobatic routine, requiring both strength and balance, one person (the “base”) balances a partner (the “flyer”) on the hands and sometimes on the head.
- ⚡ Passing and Swinging:** This is a group juggling act that incorporates both skill and humor.
- ⚡ Aerial Hoop:** A metal hoop hangs by a pulley and cable that is attached to the ceiling. The acrobat performs various feats of contortion through and above the hoop.
- ⚡ Finale:** Traditionally, the last number features a big finish and lots of surprises. The finale of Rain is no exception!

“The beauty of “Rain” is also that even though we are taken on a journey, I couldn’t tell you exactly what the story is, but there is a sense of one. It takes place quite a while ago, in a place we can somehow all remember. Time and place are malleable—right when you think you know where something is about to go, it gets turned on its head, sometimes literally.”
— Angela Jones, *The Dance Insider*

Cirque Éloize was founded in 1993 by seven young performers from the Magdalen Islands, a largely French-speaking archipelago in the Gulf of Saint Lawrence in eastern Canada. Graduates of Montreal’s National Circus School, they named their company after the heat lightning that sometimes occurs off the Magdalen Islands.



Photo: Solomon Krueger

After the Show:

Did the performance of *Rain* “unsettle, shake, or move” you, as Cirque Éloize intended? If it did, in what way? Do you think it’s the job of a circus performance to leave the audience a little shaken up, or simply to show them a good time? Why do some people like to watch performances that are unsettling or even a little scary?

Notes From the Director

Daniele Finzi Pasca

I come from a family of photographers. My great-grandfather, my grandfather, and my father were all photographers. Later, my mom took up painting. I grew up in a world where memories were made up of moments snatched from time and frozen forever. In my shows, I simply make these images move.



The story takes place in a theater where a circus show is in rehearsal, where theater and reality blend into one another and you can't tell where one begins and the other ends. The protagonists exchange glances revealing little love stories, secret passions, flashes of intimacy. The artists are out of the past, characters from collections of old photos, handsome and strong like our grandparents. And then there is the sky, a vast sky.

When I was little, when the first summer storm came, I was allowed to go out in the garden and play in the rain and get soaked to the skin. I still love that feeling of freedom—shoes full of water, clothes drenched, hair dripping. "Let it rain," we'd say. It was as if we welcomed whatever came from the sky, sun, or rain; we didn't care.

Unexpected things can come from the sky: messages, signs, promises. On our stage, not only rain will fall. Surprises will pour down as well.

There's a certain kind of feeling in this show, almost a sense of nostalgia, like a strange need to go back to the house you came from, the house where a family once lived, where your roots are. In our house we called this kind of beautiful, sweet sadness that you feel when you look at a sunset, "rain in your eyes."

I want this show to be like a caress: simple, direct, filled with sensuality and tender hope. The protagonists in this adventure appear and gaze searchingly at the audience from the front of the stage. They begin a dialogue with the spectators, looking them straight in the eye. Then they are once again swallowed up by the surreal images of the story.

If I had to describe this show, I would say it is full of hope, joy, and a sweet longing, and that it is made of the stuff of my grandmother's stories. I dedicate it to all those who love to feel the rain pouring down on them.



Photo: Andrea Lopez

Activity: Moving Images

1. Have everyone in your class bring in at least one group photo of family or friends. Don't discuss your photos with each other. As a class, pick out five or six of the ones that seem the most interesting. Break up into groups and give each team one of the photos. (Make sure you're not in a group that's using one of your own photos.)
2. Working with your group, create a story for the people in the photo. What are their names? What are the relationships between them? What are they thinking and feeling at the moment the picture was taken? Be specific.
3. Create a performance that brings your photo to life. Some types of performance to consider:
 - a dramatic scene with dialogue
 - a dance (with or without music)
 - a series of monologues or poems presented by each character in your photo
 - a song
4. Take time to rehearse your piece before you perform it for the rest of the class.
5. After the performance, pass around the photo you used as inspiration. How well did you succeed in bringing the "frozen" image to life?



It's Not Your Grandparents' Circus!

Cirque Éloize is part of a movement known as **cirque nouveau** (SIRK noo-VOH). A French term meaning “new circus,” it describes an art form that originated in France in the 1970s. Cirque nouveau combines elements of theater and circus; it tells a story or presents a theme using traditional circus skills such as juggling, acrobatics, trapeze, feats of strength, and clowning. Music and visual design are important elements. Unlike traditional circuses, there are no animals involved. The best-known cirque nouveau troupe is undoubtedly Cirque du Soleil, but there are companies from Canada, China, West Africa, the U.S., and other countries.

Cirque Nouveau	Traditional Circus
Usually combines many different art forms to entertain and convey a story or theme. Such art forms often include juggling, trapeze, acting and music.	Most commonly a traveling company of performers that may include acrobats, clowns, trained animals, hula hoopers, and other novelty acts.
Usually performed indoors.	Usually performed in large tents outdoors.
No animals.	Animals used as a central part of the circus acts.
Live music (examples: rock, electronic, classical).	Live or recorded traditional circus music.
Musicians and circus performers interact.	Musicians and circus performers rarely interact.
Greater emphasis on acrobatics.	A variety of circus acts and performers.
Fuse traditional circus acts together to form innovative skills.	Greater definition between each individual act and skill.
The clown act sometimes has a message or purpose and can look either very traditional or very abstract.	Clowns provide entertainment throughout the circus performance and look very traditional and recognizable.

Elements of Cirque Nouveau

Acting: In the interdisciplinary world of cirque nouveau, performers use drama techniques to communicate the show's ideas more effectively to the audience.

Acts of Physical Skill and Strength: Cirque nouveau features a wide variety of acts showcasing the artists' strength, flexibility, balance, coordination, grace, and showmanship. These include acrobatics, juggling, aerial acts, balancing acts, contortion, and acts featuring special apparatus such as a bicycle or wheel.

Clowning: Clowns often play a central role in cirque nouveau, serving as a thread to connect the acts and give the show its structure.

Music: The music in a cirque nouveau performance is composed especially for the show and is integrated with the other elements in the production. The music is usually performed live.

Technology: Ever since the art form was first developed, cirque nouveau has used the very latest technology, from video projection, sound, and lighting to special rigging, fabrics, and equipment.

Visual Design: Sets, lighting, props, costumes, masks, makeup, and other visual elements are carefully designed to enhance the story or theme of the show.



Photo: Agnieszka Stalkoper

Clowning Around

Look up “clown” in the dictionary, and you’re likely to see a picture of a man wearing exaggerated makeup, a big fuzzy wig, and giant shoes. The art of clowning is much more diverse than this popular image, though. Clowns have been around for thousands of years and in every culture. Some use words, while others remain silent. They can wear outlandish makeup and costumes, or look completely ordinary. They can be bullies or victims, wise or foolish, graceful or clumsy. Some clowns are skillful acrobats and jugglers, while others touch an audience with their acting ability.

No matter their differences, ALL clowns create characters that communicate with the audience through humor.

An early type of clown was the **fool** or **jester** who was kept at court by the powerful nobility. Fools were allowed to make jokes about any subject (even about their masters) without fear of being punished. Because of this special privilege, they served an important role as social and political critics of their society. Some of Shakespeare’s plays (such as *King Lear* and *Twelfth Night*) offer examples of “wise fools” whose seemingly nonsensical comments reveal deep insights into the human condition.

Another source of clowning tradition was the *commedia dell’arte*, a type of traveling comedy that arose in Europe during the 15th century. These shows used improvisation, pantomime, masks, and physical comedy. Most importantly, they established a cast of “stock” characters (clown characters that had specific, easily-recognizable traits and personalities). The descendants of these *commedia* characters are everywhere today—just think of Beavis and Butthead, the Three Stooges, Jim Carrey, and even Elmo of *Sesame Street*!

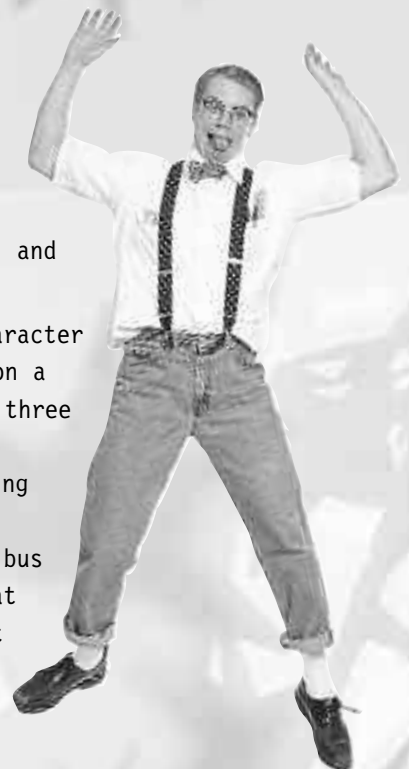
The *new vaudeville clown* describes modern clowns who have broken away from traditional clowning. They usually work alone and without make-up, and seek to establish a more sophisticated relationship with the audience in their routines.



Activity: Getting in Character

Clowns often base their characters on the behavior of ordinary, real-life people. Use your own powers of observation to create an original clown character and bring it to life.

1. Study someone you do not know (on the bus, in the street, in a public place). Observe their posture, facial expressions, the way they walk, etc.
2. Give that person a name, an occupation, and a particular problem he or she is thinking about.
3. Design a “look” for your clown character: body language, walk, costume, makeup, and props, etc.
4. Pretend your character is a passenger on a bus, along with three or four of your classmates playing their own clown characters. The bus breaks down. What happens? Act out the scene for your class.



During the Show:

Keep an eye out for the way clowning is used in the performance. Do you see the type of clowns you'd expect when you think of a circus? What role does clowning play in the show?

Do the clown characters in *Rain* remind you of any comic characters you may have seen on film or tv?

The Art of Juggling

Quite simply, juggling can be defined as skillfully handling one or more objects using balance, timing, and control. It can be as basic as a single juggler keeping two balls in the air by continually throwing and catching them—or it can involve five or six jugglers manipulating a dozen or more objects in complicated patterns.

The most common type of juggling is **toss juggling**—throwing and catching two or more objects so that one or more objects is in the air at any one time. Objects commonly used in toss juggling include balls or beanbags, clubs, rings, knives, and torches. Jugglers refer to the objects as **props**. Most props can be juggled in many different ways. Common patterns include:

- **cascade** - uses an odd number of props, each following the same sideways figure-eight pattern in the air
- **shower** - uses an even or odd number of props, one hand throwing high, the other throwing straight across
- **fountain** - uses an even number of props, objects never switch hands, each hand throws objects from the middle of the body to the outside

Working in pairs or teams, jugglers can do even more tricks with even more props than they can alone. Throwing props from one person to another is called **passing**. Passing requires lots of practice; everybody must juggle at the same speed, performing the movements at exactly the same time, so that the props can be thrown from one person to another without disrupting the pattern.

Juggling can also include other types of object manipulation, such as plate spinning and vase balancing (both classic Chinese arts), ball spinning, top balancing, yo-yo artistry, diabolo (a double-sided top that balances on a string), club or torch swinging, and devil-stick manipulation (where the person holds one stick in each hand and bounces a third in between them).



diabolo



devil sticks

Before the Show:

Juggling is often used as a metaphor for other problems of balance in life. With your class, discuss what you think juggling means in that context. What are some issues, ideas, or activities you have to juggle in your life?

After the Show:

How was juggling used in the performance of *Rain*? Did it help tell the story or give you insight into the characters?

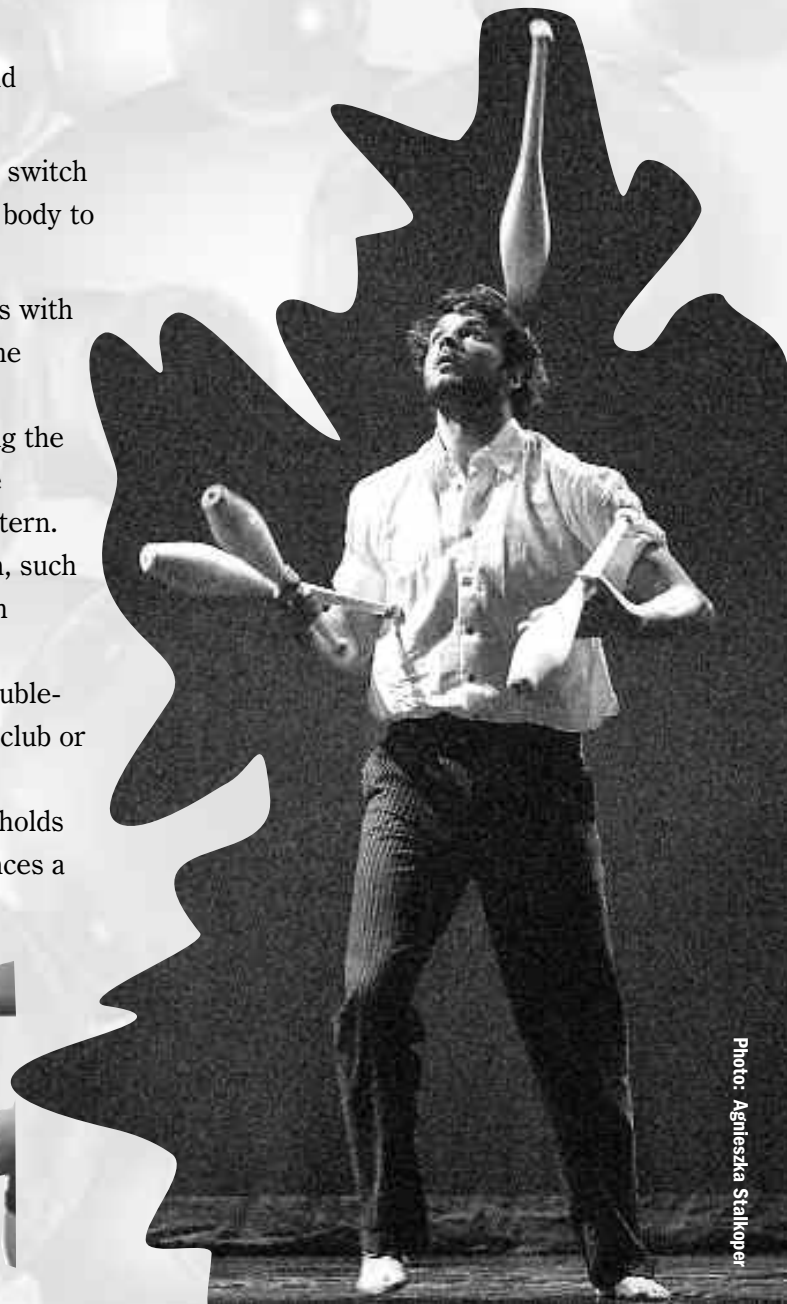


Photo: Agnieszka Stalkoper

Learn to Juggle!

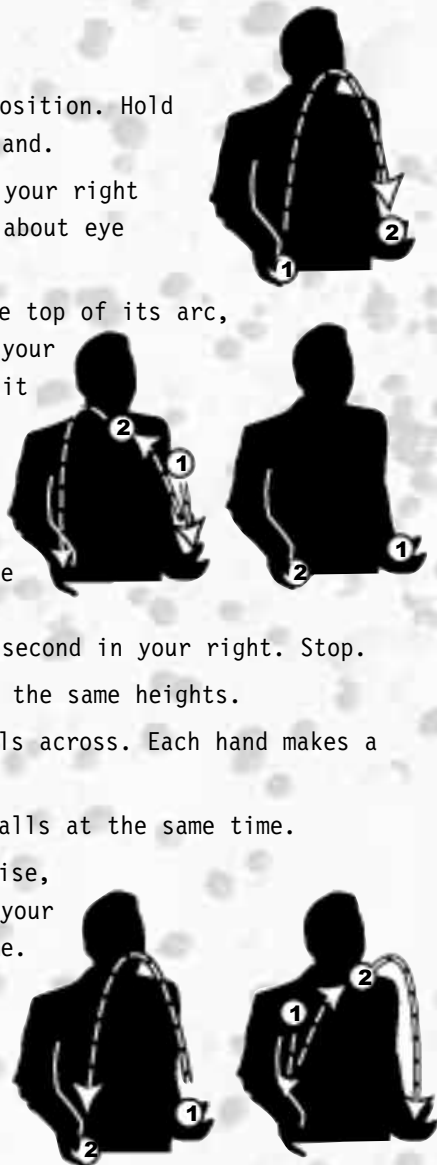
One Ball

1. Stand in a ready position: feet about shoulder-width apart, elbows in, palms up. Hold one ball in either your left or right hand.
2. Practice throwing the ball in an arc from one hand to the other at about eye level. The pattern will be an arc, not a circle.



Two Balls

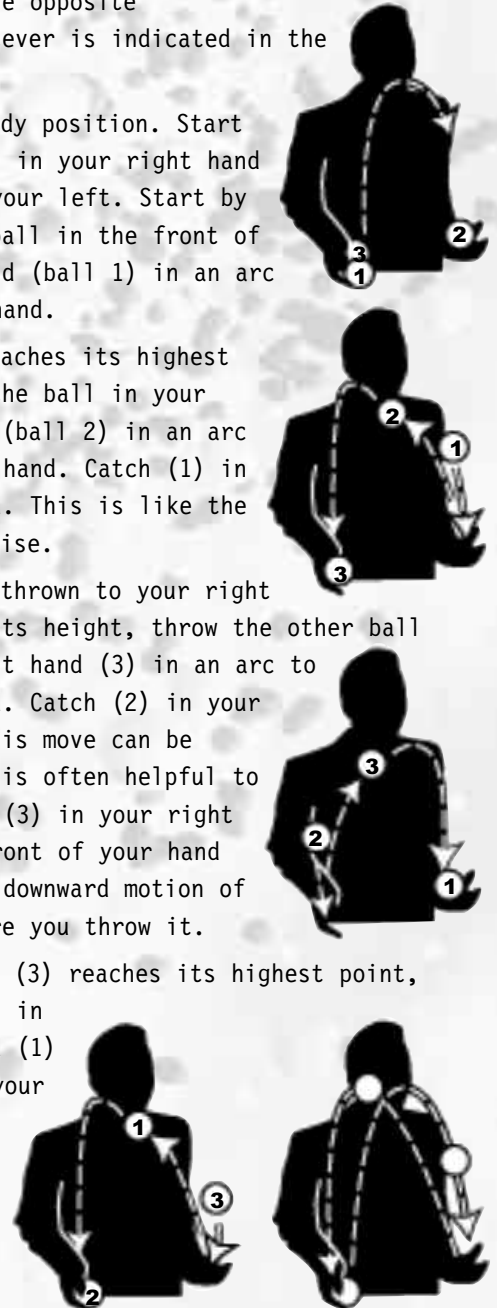
1. Stand in a ready position. Hold one ball in each hand.
2. Throw the ball in your right hand in an arc to about eye level.
3. When it reaches the top of its arc, throw the ball in your left hand so that it crosses the first one on the way up. The two throws make an "X" in the air. Caught the first ball in your left hand and the second in your right. Stop.
4. Throw the balls to the same heights.
5. Don't hand the balls across. Each hand makes a throw.
6. Don't throw both balls at the same time.
7. Do this same exercise, except start with your left hand this time. Practice until you can do this smoothly.



Three Balls

Note: If you're left-handed, use the opposite hand from whatever is indicated in the directions.

1. Stand in a ready position. Start with two balls in your right hand and one ball your left. Start by throwing the ball in the front of your right hand (ball 1) in an arc to your left hand.
2. When ball 1 reaches its highest point, throw the ball in your opposite hand (ball 2) in an arc to your right hand. Catch (1) in your left hand. This is like the two-ball exercise.
3. When the ball thrown to your right hand reaches its height, throw the other ball from your right hand (3) in an arc to your left hand. Catch (2) in your right hand. This move can be difficult. It is often helpful to roll the ball (3) in your right hand to the front of your hand with a slight downward motion of the hand before you throw it.
4. When that ball (3) reaches its highest point, throw the ball in your left hand (1) in an arc to your right hand. Catch (3) in your left hand. And so on...



Resources

Books

Circus for Everyone: Circus Learning Around the World. by Robert Sugarman. Mountainside Press, 2001

The Contemporary Circus: Art of the Spectacular, by Ernest Albrecht. Scarecrow Press, 2006

Juggling: From Start to Star, by Dave, Dorothy, and Ben Finnigan. Human Kinetics Publishers, 2001

Music

Excentricus, by Cirque Éloize

Nomade, by Cirque Éloize

Video

Cirque Éloize: *Nomade: La Nuit le Ciel Est Plus Grand.* Recall Canada, 2006. DVD

Websites

Cirque Éloize
www.cirque-eloize.com

Cirque Nouveau
www.kulturskoleradet.no/cirque

Circus Web
circusweb.com

Before the Show:

Before you arrive at the theater, make sure you know your role!

- When you enter the theater, follow an usher to your seat.
- Once the house lights (the lights in the part of the theater where the audience is sitting) go down, focus all your attention on the stage.
- Attending a live theater performance is not the same as watching television at home. At the theater, talking, eating, or moving around disturbs the performers and other members of the audience. So watch and listen carefully to the performance.
- Please—no food, beverages, or gum in the theater!
- Don't bring cameras, camcorders, tape recorders, or any other recording equipment to the performance. You will not be allowed to use them.
- After the performers have taken their bows, stay in your seat until your group gets the signal to leave the theater.

After the Show:

Make a list of words that come to mind when you think about the performance. Try to come up with at least a dozen different words and include nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Use your word list to create three or four *Rain* haiku. (A haiku is a non-rhyming poem divided into three lines of five, seven, and five syllables.) Then email your *Rain* haiku to the State Theatre; we would love to read them!

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key notes

Keynotes are produced by the Education Department of the State Theatre, New Brunswick, NJ. Wesley Brustad, *President* Lian Farrer, *Vice President for Education*

Keynotes written and designed by Lian Farrer
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The State Theatre's education program is funded in part by Bristol-Myers Squibb, Brother International Corporation, James and Diane Burke, the E & G Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, the J. Seward Johnson Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Karma Foundation, the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation, the McCrane Foundation, the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, the National Starch and Chemical Foundation, the PNC Foundation, and the Wachovia Foundation. Their support is gratefully acknowledged.



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Funding has been made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/ Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.



Continental Airlines is the official airline of the State Theatre.



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This performance is part of the Hub City Carnivale, sponsored by PSE&G.

