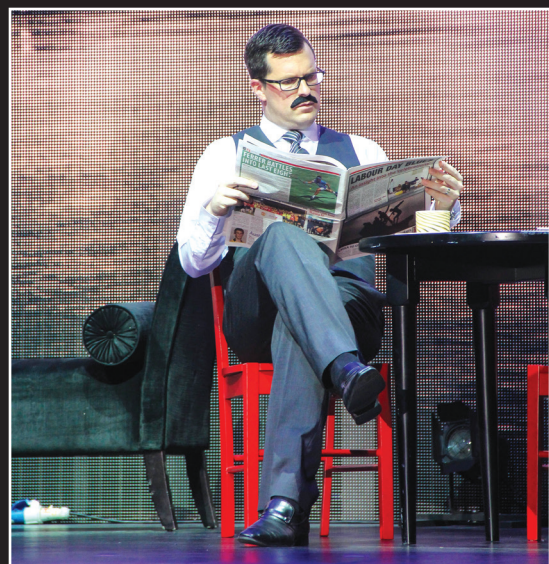


CIRQUE, An Enchanting Circus – Ballare School of Performing Arts – Cultural Hall



BURSTING with magic, Ballare School of Performing Arts brought a mesmerising circus to Bahrain's Cultural Hall at the weekend.

The ringleader, founder and director of Ballare School of Performing Arts, Hala Al Zayani, organised a show titled CIRQUE that tickled all of the senses by bringing together a dazzling fusion of dance styles, motion pictures, sounds and lights.

Although the performance started a bit later than expected, once the curtains were opened, there was no turning back. The visuals were so hypnotising, that it was quite easy to get lost in time.

The two-act dance and musical theatre show opened with a family-of-three eating at the dinner table and watching TV together. Set in 1950s New York, the story was about the daughter, a young bright-eyed girl (played by nine-year old Darcey Peters) who existed between a world of reality and fantasy. Darcey delivered a strong performance and brilliantly brought the story to life.

She dreamed of a world of enchantment and excitement and took the audience on a fairy-tale journey through her adventures.

As someone who truly enjoys the world of fanciful things and a theatre performer in my grade school days, there were many aspects that I appreciated about this show.

The story of the little girl's quest was clear even throughout all of the scene changes and musical transitions. This part of the show can be easily forgotten as sometimes the musical part can be too heavy and distract from the storyline, but it felt as though I was in the girl's dreams and I envisioned everything she did in full colour, depth and emotion.

In a cute scene called 'Cuddly Tricks' by the Twinkling Toes and Tiny Twinkling Toes, an adorable group of teeny ballerina babes who were adorned with bunny ears, cheetah spots and cat tails made their way on stage by popping out of boxes, bursting through cages, hopping into hula hoops and walking across balance beams.

The audience participation was also a great aspect of the show. It was sweet to see the darling dancers wave and blow kisses at their families and friends between scenes. One has to be a total scrooge if that didn't put a smile on the face.

At one point, a big clown pulled a gentleman out of the crowd and made him mimic his actions, making the show even more fun and interactive for the spectators.

Moving through the world of whimsy, I was also taken to a deeper level with a scene titled 'Under the Sea'. With giant motion-picture bubbles illuminated on stage, there were also real bubbles that made their way across the audience, which added a nice touch to the calm movements and relaxing music. The mermaid ballerinas smoothly moved on stage with their twinkling green and purple sequin tails.

The calmness of the sea was soon to be taken over by a sultry and bold performance by Company Class called 'Showgirls'. Full of sass, the girls



Photographs: Ryan Bayona

emerged in red and black, fearless and ready to rock the crowd. Soon after, the lights went out and a haunting group of hip hop dancers made it on stage, with outfits designed to look like skeletons in a scene called 'Dark Side.' Both acts were valiant and had me hooked with striking moves and strong musical numbers.

With dramatic performances, especially musical theatre, there are so many elements that make it successful or make it fall flat. One is music choice. The music that was chosen for each particular scene in CIRQUE triggered the right emotions at the right time and kept the audience's eyes locked on the stage.

I loved all of the performances, which included a variety of ballet numbers, acrobatics, modern jazz, tap, hip hop and street dance, it would be hard to choose just one favourite with all of the different styles.

The second act featured some memorable scenes too, including a jolting start with Company Class's

'Freak Show', which certainly had me up and running for the rest of the performance with the menacing circus freak bouncing around on the blown up screen in the back.

Company Class also had an incredible 'Shadow Dance' that featured the dancers behind panels, which showcased their silhouettes

and graceful movements.

The closing scene was marvellously grandiose, as the acts came together and danced with giant multi-coloured balls that were later thrown into the crowd to end the show in a bold fashion.

At Friday's show, despite a few technical difficulties along the way, the skilled dancers were on point and stayed to the tune of the beat and the overall performance appeared seamless. It was also nice to see that with so many different scenes, that the overarching narrative structure stayed consistent throughout and tied all the acts together in one harmonious performance.

Hala and her team exceeded many of my already great expectations as they told the magnificent tale of CIRQUE. With its elegant, high-end production and fantastic talent, I highly recommend attending any future extravaganza put on by the Ballare School of Performing Arts. It was truly a dream performance.

– Nawaar Farooq

