



When the

CIRQUE

comes to town

Photo: Al Seib

Cirque du Soleil was created in Baie-St-Paul near Quebec City, Canada, in 1984 by a small group of street stilts performers. Almost 22 years later it is an international success story with over 3,000 employees worldwide, including more than 800 artists.

As you read this, six different Cirque du Soleil shows are touring the world, while five additional resident shows are being performed in the United States. It's a huge operation that is run by former stilt walker, fire eater, founder and now chief executive officer, Guy Laliberté.

According to the company, more than 50 million people have seen a Cirque du Soleil show since it started. In 2005 almost 7 million spectators attended one of the shows. So what is the secret of its success?

The answer lies in the title of one of the company's first shows: "We Reinvent the Circus". While the traditional circus was losing popularity in the 1980s, Cirque du Soleil managed to take the circus concept and do something new with it. There are no animals in Cirque du Soleil. Instead, it boasts some of the best acrobats,

trapeze artists, gymnasts, jugglers, dancers, clowns, musicians, singers and swimmers in the world. The shows are a dramatic mix of circus acts and street entertainment, with outrageous costumes, staged under magical lighting and choreographed to original music.

Each year, the casting team must find several hundred artists for the shows in performance as well as new shows and projects. Auditions are held in cities around the world, and talent scouts go

to major sporting events, as well as various international circus festivals, to discover new talent. Being a Cirque performer has its risks. Although security is a top priority at Cirque du Soleil in order to protect artists, injuries do still occur.

One of the other stars of a Cirque show is the Grand Chapiteau, the enormous circus tent where the shows are performed. It stands 19 metres high and requires 500 stakes to keep it firmly in the ground. The flags on top of the Grand Chapiteau, which can seat 2,500 people, represent the home countries of each of the touring employees and artists.

In 2004 Cirque du Soleil celebrated its 20th anniversary with a number of events. It published a book called "20 Years Under the Sun", and set the first Guinness World Record for the largest number of stilt walkers (544) at the same time and place. It also started preparing a new resident show inspired by the music of the Beatles, which will open in Las Vegas in 2006. Music has always been an important element in a Cirque show, and next year sees the premiere of "Delirium", a live music event featuring new versions of Cirque du Soleil songs. Cirque du Soleil musicians, singers and dancers will take centre stage in this event that features artists from 12 countries.



Photo: Al Seib

Cirque du Soleil is always looking for new artists. Do you think you could be the person they're looking for? Which of the following jobs do you think you would be best suited for? How many jobs can you match with the pictures?



Could you be a **Cirque** performer?



Photo: Veronique Vial



Photo: Al Seib



Photo: Marie-Reine Mattera



Photo: F. Rivard



Photo: Al Seib



Photo: Al Seib

1 acrobat

2 clown

3 dancer

4 fire eater

5 gymnast

6 juggler

7 musician

8 singer

9 stilt walker

10 swimmer

11 trapeze artist



Cirque du Soleil workout

a. Read and answer the following questions.

1. Where and when was Cirque du Soleil created?
2. Why has Cirque du Soleil been so successful?
3. How does the circus find new artists for the show?
4. What is the Grand Chapiteau and what do the flags on top represent?
5. What plans does the circus have for the future?

b. What do the following numbers refer to? Test your memory, and then read the article again to check.

1. 22 – the number of years Cirque du Soleil has existed
2. 3,000
3. 800
4. 6
5. 5
5. over 50 million
6. 7 million
7. 19 metres
8. 500
9. 2,500
10. 544

c. Complete the names of the artists that appear in the show.

1. st _lt_ w _lk _r
2. f _r _ _t _r
3. _cr _b _t
4. tr _p _z _ _rt _st
5. j _gg_l _r
6. cl _wn

What other artists are mentioned in the article?

d. Match the words connected with shows to their definitions.

1. artist (n)
 2. audition (n/v)
 3. casting team (n)
 4. centre stage (adj)
 5. costume (n)
 6. perform (v)
 7. premiere (n)
 8. talent scout (n)
 9. tour (n/v)
- a. to travel from place to place
b. to act before an audience
c. a person who has creative ability or skill
d. special clothes worn in a show
e. the group of people who choose the people for a show
f. a person who looks for people with special skills
g. the first public performance of a show
h. a test by a performer to show their skills
i. very important in a show

e. Put the words in order. Then translate the groups of words into your language.

1. performer / stilt / street *STREET STILT PERFORMER*
2. success / story / international
3. entertainment / street
4. sporting / event / major
5. circus / festival / international
6. music / event / live

f. Find the words that mean the same as the following.

1. all over the world (paragraph 1)
2. managed, directed (paragraph 2)
3. unusual, unconventional (paragraph 4)
4. damage or hurt suffered by a person (paragraph 5)
5. include as an important part of a show (paragraph 7)