

The Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival: A New Look At A Classic Art

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Suhde by Kate & Pasi, Chopin Theatre

When we think of the “circus,” images of elephants and funny looking clowns cloud our mind. With the [Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival](#), coming to town June 17 through the 21, the performers hope to eradicate that perception.

Acts from around the world—including Finland, Sweden, London and New York—will be putting on shows across the city in venues like the [Athenaeum Theatre](#), [Chopin Theatre](#) and [Millennium Park](#). Expect to see traditional acts done in a non-traditional manner. “Smashed,” a set by [Gandini Juggling](#), features 9 jugglers, 80 apples and 4 crockery sets, all working together, mixing in theatrics, dancing and music that generally doesn’t accompany our vision of juggling.

Pedal Punk by Cirque Mechanics, Athenaeum Theatre

"Re-shaping our ideas of circus is part of the mission behind the CCCF," says Matt Roben, co-founder and executive director of the festival. One example of an image they're trying to repair is that of the clown. When clowns are mentioned, many people might see [Bozo](#) or [Krusty](#). For Roben, clowns, in contemporary circuses, are, "a physical comedian, (they're) a character. It's much more like if you were to consider [Charlie Chaplin](#), [Buster Keaton](#), the [Marx Brothers](#), the [3 Stooges](#). They are clowns, but none of them ever had on a white face, or a red nose or big shoes."

For Roben, the contemporary clown can tell a story. They can make you laugh but they're more than giggles and colorful costumes. Storytelling, along with idea exploration, is another important aspect the CCCF hopes to show. "Suhde," an act by [Kate & Pasi](#), is a good example of this. The husband/wife duo are a pair of hand-to-hand acrobats. On the surface, one might just see a woman standing on a man's shoulders with relative ease. On a deeper level, the duo is trying to explore the idea of a relationship between a man and a woman. As mentioned on the CCCF's website, the act is trying to ask questions such as who follows, who leads? Trust is crucial to a pair of acrobats but crucial for a couple in love as well.



Educating people in the field, or people wanting to be in the field, is a goal of the festival as well. Offering classes such as [Wheel Gymnastic with Wolfgang Bientzle](#) or [Knife Throwers: Beginner To Advanced with Timtv](#), offer up opportunities for people to work with masters of the craft. Costs vary per class.

The festival will be live for five days but that doesn't give one the excuse to lollygag. There are several fantasmic acts performing, which aren't around everyday let alone under the same tent. If you're looking to step away from the mundane of life then the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival is your ticket.