

## Feats and forums at the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival

By HEDY WEISS Theater and Dance Critic January 6, 2014 7:20PM

The Ricochet duo is part of the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival.

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The circus has come to town in ways you might never have imagined. And along with the acrobatics, contortions, clowning and derring-do of both local and international artists, there's a veritable big top of discussions, seminars, workshops, panels and parties.

It is all part of the 2014 Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival, running through Jan. 12. The first event of its kind in this country, the festival is presenting a wide array of performances ranging from grand-scale to intimate cabaret style, all produced either on the Athenaeum Theatre mainstage and in its black box spaces at 2936 N. Southport, or at the new Links Hall space at 3111 N. Western.

Co-produced and curated by Chicago-based circus artists Shayna Swanson and Matt Roben, the festival has joined forces with Circus Now, a national organization devoted to supporting "the evolution of the circus arts in the United States," to present a four-hour seminar on Tuesday, "Speaking Circus Chicago." Featuring circus artists, scholars and producers, and designed primarily for presenters and journalists, it also is open to the public. (For information about the free seminar visit [circusnow.org](http://circusnow.org).)

In one form or another, the circus has intrigued both the masses and the avant-garde in virtually every culture for centuries. And in recent decades, Chicago artists — at the Lookingglass Theatre, the Actors Gymnasium in Evanston, Aerial Dance Chicago, Aloft Circus Arts, Redmoon and beyond — have become notable practitioners of the "nouveau cirque" tradition, helping it to flourish in ways that go well beyond that multinational behemoth, Cirque du Soleil.

Following is a brief look at the festival performances:

† Flip FabriQue presents "Attrape-Moi" for its U.S. premiere, described as "a wild party of a show in which six friends are reunited in a rainstorm and engage in some memorable acrobatics."

† Ricochet in "Smoke and Mirrors," a company of two that combines acrobatics, contemporary dance, contortion and "some serious heart-string tugging to examine the current state of America in the pursuit of happiness." (Contains partial nudity, and not recommended for those under age 17.)

† The Acrobatic Conundrum of Seattle in "The Way Out," a 90-minute work that blends the inventive use of multimedia and circus apparatus to suggest the situation of eight strangers who find themselves in a room with no exit.

† El Circo Cheapo, Chicago's long-running circus cabaret and showcase of solo acts, which features top-notch acrobats, jugglers, puppeteers, aerialists, clowns and comedians.



† Krin Haglund, in her one-woman theatrical circus show described as “a mad cocktail of aerial feats, Cyr wheel and clowning.”

† Andreane Leclerc in “Cherepaka” (“The Death of a Turtle”), a 50-minute solo contortion show in the form of “a scenographic composition that explores the duality of eternity and death, and the human desire to survive.”

† Ilona Jantii’s “Muulla-Elsewhere” from Finland, a “stunning short show that features interactive video with aerial work in a tale about bugs and beasts and overcoming fears.”

† Dean Evans’ “Honeybuns” (for audiences 18 and older), and Brian P. Dailey’s “Running in Corduroy.”

For a complete schedule and tickets (starting at \$20 for a single event and \$135 for packages), call (773) 935-6875 or visit [chicagocircusfest.com](http://chicagocircusfest.com).

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