



plays *Washington DC*

text and photos by Pete Adams

Available just outside of the center of Washington DC at FedEx Field, the UniverSoul Circus set up its big top for a major production for about 21 days playing to active and enthusiastic audiences. The show also had a program for this year which allowed for better listing of the acts and the show. Cedric Walker who founded the show continues to manage and travel with the show. The circus is celebrating its 24th season and their goal still is to celebrate culture within generations. Cedric, as part of his planning, personally travels around the world to find talent for his productions. Based in Atlanta, Georgia, they spent their first year only in Atlanta and since have traveled up and down the East Coast. The show is not afraid of delivering a message during the show emphasizing family and, yes, even religion in its values. Often the show has asked the kids in the audience to thank their parents and grandparents and to always show appreciation and respect. There is no other show that has values that are so expressed during each performance.

Fresh the Clownsss from Detroit, Michigan travels with the show and delivers their message through song and dance. Lucky Malatsi from Pretoria, South Africa is the ringmaster. He is a very confident and clear announcer, keeping attention to the acts and the music through his own dancing, as a trapeze artist and even an acrobat. He has been with the show for



Cedric Walker

15 years. His partner is the ever popular Zeke from Charleston SC who has been on the show since its inception in 1994. Zeke is popular with the audience and plays a key role in the presentation of the acts with Lucky. "Onionhead" continues his role as a Master Clown on the show, always working the audience with his clever routines.

The production opens with the Caribbean Dynasty Dancers and thrill artists using stilt walking as a featured act. The skill of the stilt walkers is easily shown by their one foot stands and interactions with balance between each other. The dancers do the limbo with, of course, the pole set afire. The woman who goes under the pole last certainly has great moves. The performers are a team from Trinidad and Tobago and have been involved in the UniverSoul circus for many years.



Fresh the Clownsss with Ringmaster Lucky Malatsi at center



Master Clown Onionhead

From Mexico came Yosaffat Garner Morales who presented mixed animals. He worked four camels and four zebras and interwove them as they encircled the arena. The animals turned around each other and moved in pairs and later in quads. He ended with a single horse at rise as he left the arena floor.

The African Dream Team is from Gabon, Guinea, Ethiopia and South Africa. Together this high-powered group does many daredevil stunts. They showed teamwork and great confidence in 🇷🇺



Caribbean Dynasty Dancers



Limbo



African Dream Team



Shenyang Silks



Cossack horse act

each other as they raised the teeterboard jumps from a two high to a three high and eventually a four high. The team developed pyramids and multiple jumps from the teeterboard to ultimate positioning.

Definitely the most enjoyable and exciting part of the program was given by the Shenyang Silks from China on the aerial ribbons. However, it was not just the ribbons but the sword balancing within the act that brought about such wonderful excitement. Nestled together these women reminded you of an elegant chandelier, hanging from the center, each with her head and arms extended using the silks. The act itself is hard to explain due to the difficulty and the extent of the women moving around while balancing two swords with a glass on one end. They also nestled into a smaller group and actually swung with the silks in motion while still holding the multiple swords.

Following intermission, a most unique setup was completed to allow Flat-out Freestyle Motocross Daredevils to cut across the ring from the customer side to the performance entrance. Hailing from the USA, they did exotic moves literally over the audience and onto a large blown up platform. The foursome brought excitement to the show and started the second half with a bang – literally.

A Cossack horse act featuring artists from Kyrgyzstan, Gabon and Guinea sped around the ring, standing on the horse, standing upside down on the saddle and, of course, encircling the horse around the saddle.

From Havana, Cuba the Russian Bar was presented by a fearsome foursome with the balance beam, a trampoline and a parallel bar. This team has won top prize and a gold medal at circus competitions in China as well as Cuba. Their moves and jumps



Russian Bar

were controlled and looked spontaneous even though they made perfect landings.

Bone Breakers from Conakry, Guinea then presented their contortion routine with a total and unequivocal flexibility of their bodies. The team of four developed their balance, as well as the unique body movements, well outside of normal limits. They ruled and scared the audience when they move their bodies beyond recognition.

The Wheel of Death used three artists working both inside and outside the wheel, rushing and jumping around on the wheel. The team presented master moves on the wheel and provoked excitement. This double wheel allowed two artists to work at the same time but was more difficult to watch, since you never knew



Bone Breakers



Larry Carden and the Carden elephants

who was going to present a thrill next.

Since a circus is not a circus without elephants, UniverSoul presented an outstanding elephant act as its finale handled by Larry Carden. Larry has been training elephants since he was 15, having learned from his father and grandfather of the George Carden Circus. The elephants play harmonica, blast a horn and play the drums in sync with music. They balance on the front and rear feet and walk a board between two elephant tubs, still managing to keep their balance.

The show brings out the staff at the end for applause and another great performance of the 24th Edition has come to the end. I look forward to seeing the 25th Edition next year. Do not miss them when they are in your area. You will be pleased with the show and the staff is very considerate and always there to help you. 📍



at The National Mall

text and photos by Pete Adams



Shenyang Troupe

Cedric Walker, the founder and CEO of the UniverSoul Circus, brought his show to the Smithsonian Folk Life Festival in Washington with a one hour show daily in the Circus Arts Conservatory Tent. His main show was also playing at the nearby FedEx Field and most talent shown during this program was different than from his main production.

Following the introduction of the ringmaster and a dance artist, the first act shown was the Shenyang Troupe from China and included a traditional bike act with as many as 10 persons on one bike. They showed complex carries and holds as the bikes moved around the arena. It should be noted that this same team of ladies also presented a major balancing act in their main production. A web act done by a young lady with quick moves and great styling included several drops from the rigging.

A traditional act often associated with UniverSoul is the Caribbean Dancers. They came forward on stilts and provided much dancing and movement and worked the audience into a frenzy with their hype as well as their balancing tricks. The finale of this portion ended with a limbo dance under a fire rod about eight inches from the floor done by one young lady.

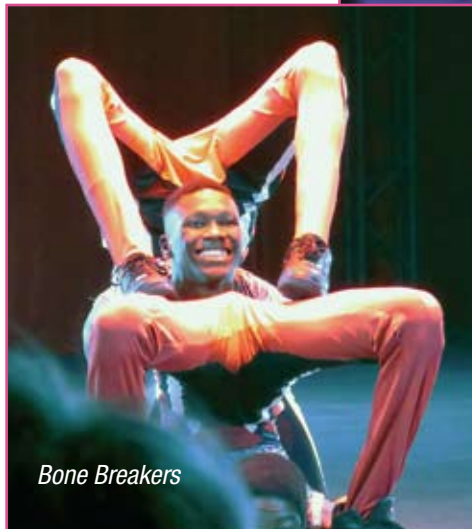
Next, three clowns presented an act about cooking which turned into a table slide act that was clever and fun.

This was followed by the Bone Breakers, contortionists who broke all rules when they moved their bodies in all directions, breaking loose every imaginable part. The four member team is from Conakry, Guinea and ranged in age from 19 to 21. They bend, twist and distort their bodies in extreme ways and have been doing this since the age of seven. Their flexibility is maintained by practicing yoga. They were both fun, exciting and downright scary in the moves made individually and as a team of performers.

The finale for the Smithsonian Show was the Wheel of Death. It



Caribbean Dancers



Bone Breakers

included a trio of performers, Carlos Pinto Morales from Peru and Mamadou Bobo Sylla and Sory Conde from Guinea. This trio performed inside and outside the wheel with flair and speed that made the finale very exciting. The action with three artists never stopped with such activity.

It was hoped that the audience also attended the show's regular production that was presented for about three weeks. 📍



Wheel of Death

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