

Kooza: Another jaw-dropping experience from Cirque du Soleil

By Gale Horton Gay

Writing about a Cirque du Soleil show is always a struggle for me. Just about every aspect of each new show is so creative, artistic and awe-inspiring that words don't seem to do it justice.

The same is true of the new show Kooza, under the blue and yellow big top at Atlantic Station in Atlanta through March 1. It is highly imaginative combination of art and acrobatics playing out in a fanciful world.

Compared to other Cirque du Soleil shows, however, this one is more forthright in its presentations of the acts. There's not as much sensory overload from the set design and strange secondary acts taking place in the periphery as in past shows. However, the wow factor is no less diminished.

As with all Cirque shows, there are no animals in this circus and they are not missed. The 17-year-old trapeze artist who performs to blaring rock music, the trio of female contortionists whose costumes and makeup are almost as mesmerizing as their movements, the acrobats who soar through the air from a giant teeterboard and the gymnast who somehow builds a tower with eight chairs 23-feet high and balances himself upside down (sometimes with only one hand) are a few of the acts that made my pulse quicken and left me nodding my head in disbelief. One of my favorites is the Wheel of Death in which two performers leap and counter rotate in amazing ways in two giant cylinders that are suspended in mid-air.

Kooza is the story of "The Innocent, a melancholy loner in search of his place in the world," is how the back story of the show is described in the Cirque du Soleil press release. "The Innocent's journey brings him into contact with a panoply of comic character such as the King, the Trickster, the Pickpocket, and the Obnoxious Tourist and his Bad Dog."

It goes on to say that the show explores themes of fear, identity, recognition and power.

To be honest, I missed these messages, but I was completely enthralled throughout the two and a half hour show. Even the slapstick scenes between the king, the clowns and the other sidekicks are funny, delightful and are nice, grounded elements in a show in which so much takes places high above the stage.

Based in Montreal, Cirque du Soleil began in 1984, growing out of a group of 20 street performers. It now has 4,000 employees, including more than 1,000 artists from 40 countries and last year presented 17 shows simultaneously around the world.

Kooza shows that Cirque du Soleil hasn't lost its touch in presenting innovative and highly imaginative entertainment that one rarely gets to experience.

Tickets range from \$38.50 to \$125. For tickets or more information, visit www.cirquedusoleil.com or call 1-800-361-4595.

Amazing Kooza Facts:

- 125 artists and employees representing 17 nationalities
- 150 fake fur rats with crystal eyes
- More than 175 costumes and 160 hats

