

Mother Africa: New Theatre



By [Pete Hughes](#) »

THREE STARS



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The house lights went down, then a flurry of chuckling guitar notes, the plinking of a marimba and the bouncing bombardment of djembe and congas — and I know I am in the right place. I love all things African, from Morocco to the Cape of Good Hope, so a show which was billed as the African Cirque du Soleil was, for me, a must.

What it turned out to be was a turn-of-the-century-style variety show.

The substance was traditional circus: a contortionist who did eye-popping things with his body, including lighting and smoking a cigarette entirely with his feet, two strong-men who balanced each other in various dangerous angles, including a headstand on the other's head, and a pair of girls who did baffling things with hats.

One of the most entertaining performers was the unicyclist. He came onstage with his unicycle in hand, jumped on it in a devil-may-care fashion, then did some incredible spins, twirls, and backwards-cycling, looking at many points as if he was about to fall off, then just managing to pull it back. He brought onstage a three-storey unicycle, followed by a 10-foot unicycle with one wheel, and finally, the world's smallest unicycle — one of the funniest things I have seen.

The climax of the evening was easily the most bizarre act: a man and a small boy of about 10 both came on stage in black and gold leotards. The man lay down on his back, legs in the air, and the child ran and leapt on to the extended limbs.

What followed was juggling, but really, you wouldn't believe it was possible to toss a human being in so many contortions if you hadn't seen it yourself. Gratifyingly, it seemed to defy all health and safety legislation, and the child fell off at several points to cries of alarm from the cheering crowd but, undaunted, he grinned at us before leaping back into action.

If you like the circus, and you like Africa, then this was a great show, but probably not if you only like one or the other.