

Cirque Shanghai debuts 'Bai Xi' on Navy Pier Skyline Stage

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By Eloise Marie Valadez Staff writer

An Asian wonderland of magical tricks, acrobatic feats, colorful costumes and alluring music has descended on Navy Pier's Skyline Stage in "Cirque Shanghai: Bai Xi."

The theatrical extravaganza, running through Sept. 3, stars Chinese acrobats, magicians and other entertainers in a 1½-hour show.

"Bai Xi," which means "100 Stunning Acts," was popular during the Han Dynasty more than 2,000 years ago, when performers entertained Chinese emperors and other royalty.

"These entertainers are definitely exciting. We're loosely calling this a show of '100 wonders,' said executive producer Michael Wilson, who is vice president of International Special Attractions Ltd.

"It's amazing what phenomenal things the human body can do," he said.

Wilson said the troupe, which performed an entirely different show at Navy Pier last summer, is debuting "Bai Xi" in Chicago.

"We've had tremendous success with the 'Cirque Shanghai' production. More than 130,000 people saw the show here last year," Wilson said.

This season, audiences can expect much more excitement and many more spectacles.

"We like to bring something new to the table and make it better each year," he said.

Among notable acts will be aerial acrobats, balancing and trapeze artists, contortionists, dancers, musicians and a "face-changing" magician in the Peking Opera tradition.

The troupe is made up of 30 performers ranging in age from 13 to 45.

Various vignettes in the show feature traditional Chinese folkloric scenes, as well as updated, contemporary acts done to "Blues Brothers" and "Mission: Impossible" themes.

Wilson, son of magician Mark Wilson of television's "The Magic Land of Allakazam" fame, became interested in presenting Chinese acrobatic shows and Asian-inspired revues in the early 1980s when he accompanied his father on a tour through China.

"We thought it would be a wonderful thing to bring to the United States," he said.

They produced their first Chinese acrobatic show at theme parks across the United States in the mid-1980s, and later launched tours of Chinese artists throughout the country.

Wilson said new artists are continually being sought for different shows. Artists are chosen from acrobatic and performing academies throughout China.

"We look for the best of the best," Wilson said. "These acts never cease to amaze me."

Wilson said the show's appeal is universal.

"It appeals to a broad audience of different ages, backgrounds and interests."

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If you go ...

What: "Cirque Shanghai: Bai Xi"

When: 2 and 8 p.m. Wednesdays and Thursdays, and 2, 4 and 8 p.m. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays, through Sept. 3

Where: Navy Pier's Skyline Stage, 600 E. Grand Ave., Chicago

Tickets: \$14.50 to \$29.50 for adults, \$12.50 to \$29.50 for children ages 3 to 11 and free for children 2 and younger

Information: Call Ticketmaster at (312) 902-1500 or visit www.navy Pier.com