

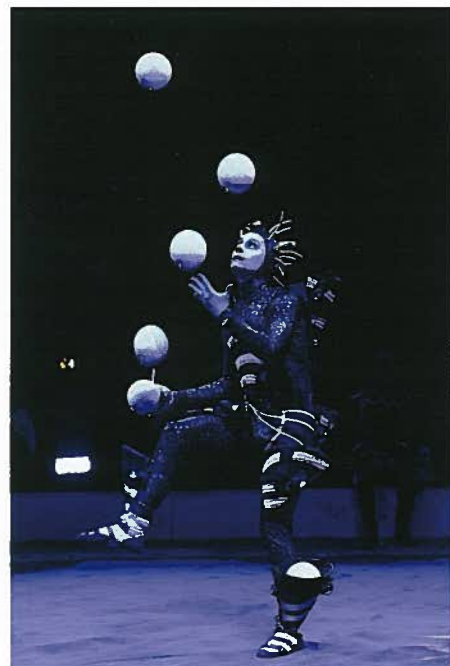
# Dream Big: The Big Apple Circus takes its Audience into a Dream World

The Big Apple Circus from New York takes us into a dream world during its season 2011/12. The theme of the show is "Dream Big" and stage director and choreographer Renaud Doucet did a great job to convert the theme during the entire show. Somehow, all of the acts have to do something with dreaming: the dream of an artist, the dreams of children picked from the audience etc. The show is a complete masterpiece, with strong acts, very strong comedy, great music (composed by Mathias Rüegg), a fantastic set and costumes (by André Barbe). Artistic director Guillaume Dufresnoy put together a wonderful experience for families, with ingredients for children and adults alike.

So, what makes the show so great? Maybe it's the fantastic comedy magicians Scott & Muriel, from the USA and the Netherlands. They do two longer routines and a couple of run-ins and they are really funny. Scott appears from four boxes, put on top of each other, but in an upside down position. Afterwards, Scott puts a live size doll in a box and Grandma comes to assist him to saw it into two halves. This

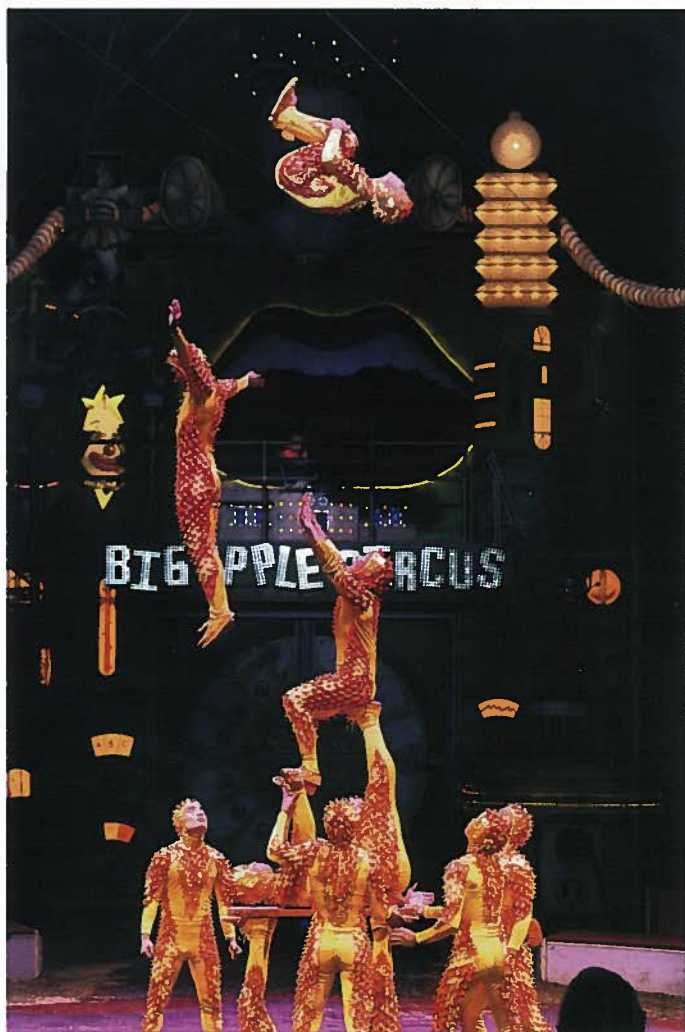
is the moment of appearance of Muriel. In the second half of the show, the duo performs another sword box routine, with a parody of Scott as the Dutch magician Hans Klok. Maybe, the American audience more compares him with a blond Elvis version... Muriel also plays the violin and a singing saw and in the second half, the two come back as cowboys and hunt Grandma, in a cow costume, with their lassos. Talking about Grandma, this 25th season of her with the circus is the final one for Barry Lubin, who has always been an important character of the Big Apple shows. During this show, Grandma has a few run-ins on her own, like water-spitting and a playback routine ("Unforgettable"), both with audience participation. But most of her entrees are in combination with the acts of Scott & Muriel.

Or maybe, it's the set? It's a dream machine, with all kinds of clues and gimmicks. As always, the bandstand is integrated into the set. But of course, it's also the combi-



"Juggler Shaman" Dmitry Chernov.

nation of very fine, well chosen acts, with troupe numbers and solo artists and animals. Jenny Vidbel presents a beautiful liberty routine, with three black Arabian stallions, in the style of "Cavalia," with also riding on one of the horses while presenting the other two. This is the dream of the driver (played by house artist Andrey Mantchev), who accompanies entertainer and singer Jenna Robinson throughout the show. Jenna is not in the role of a ringmaster, but plays a funny scientist who wants to do experiments with her dream machine. She takes us from one dream to the other, in a very gentle way. The artists and some spectators are her candidates. To come back to the animals, there is also dog Daisy, Jenna's canine friend, and Jenny and Andrey present some very interesting circus animals in Daisy's dream: Percy, the porcupine,



Icarian Games by the Shandong Acrobatic Troupe.



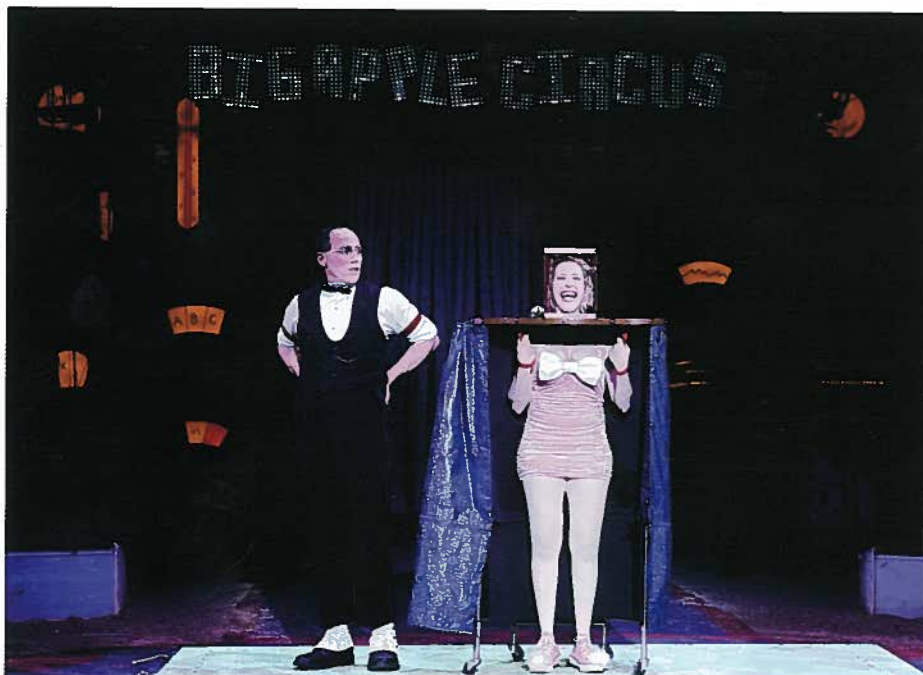
Newman, the pig, and Bob, the beaver. Also, some bigger dogs play a role in Daisy's dream.

The Shandong Acrobatic Troupe shows two acts with eleven boys at the beginning and the end of the first half. Their rope jumping routine is mixed with floor acrobatics and pyramids and their Icarian Games, Chinese style, with the catchers lying on their backs (with cushions underneath), are presented in high speed. It's a pity there were too many mistakes in the show we attended. The costumes for the Risley act are especially dream-like, coming out of the wall socket; they wear orange costumes with lots of small spines.

A young couple from Russia performs two great acts. First, there is Anna Volodko on the Spanish web. Her act to rocky music is presented like a dream from a boy out of the audience. With her long blond hair and difficult tricks upon the web, she is really an eye catcher. Her partner, Dmitry Chernov, created an act called "Juggler Shaman," together with his father. The seven balls he juggles with at the end are all integrated into and coming out of his mystic costume. His moves are mysterious alike. Dmitry appears like a creature from a machine and in the end, goes back into it.

Melanie Chy, who was on tour with Big Apple in 2005 (Picturesque) and just comes back from a contract in Singapore, is always a great enrichment for any show, with her beautiful appearance and great handstand routine. Her walk from the dream machine to her props is very diva like, coming out of a dream world.

Last but not least, there are the Flying Cortes, with three women and two men, originally from Columbia, who have been prolonged from the last season, and added new elements into their flying trapeze act. As a running gag throughout the show, a shy girl was picked from the audience by Jenna, who went on tour with her in the dream machine, and finally shows her dream of flying (she stays downstairs though). The Cortes added a smaller trapeze and a horizontal bar to their normal flying one. One of the ladies performs a triple.



Comedy magic by Scott & Muriel and liberty horses presented by Jenny Vidbel.

Especially, the opening of the show is always important at the Big Apple Circus, the finale (under the net) is short but neat, and Jenna introduces all the artists in a traditional way. During the opening, Jenna explains her experiment and introduces the Chinese acrobats. So this year, there is no charivari, but the beginning of the storyline.

We attended the Big Apple Circus in Bridgewater. From there, the show moves on to Boston and to Queens. The end of the season will be on 17 June. Congratulations to this fantastic show, Guillaume and your team!

For more information:  
[www.bigapplecircus.org](http://www.bigapplecircus.org)





## PERFORMANCE REVIEW

# 'Dream Big' at this imaginative circus

BY JANE HORWITZ

There's a lived-in feel to Big Apple Circus, and that's a good thing. Its newest show, "Dream Big," unfolds as a human-size entertainment and not a shiny-perfect extravaganza a la Cirque du Soleil.

It's an ideal, non-threatening way to introduce the littlest kids to the circus, yet designed to please parents and older kids as well.

Big Apple has launched "Dream Big" at Dulles Town Center, where its run continues through Oct. 10. Then the company will head to its fall-winter venue at Lincoln Center's Damrosch Park.

The large, painted set piece at the back of the ring has a picture-book look that's totally kid-friendly. Performers enter and exit through it, and above, there's a giant, red-lipped mouth that provides a hideout for the band, led by music director Rob Slowik.

Amiable ringmistress Jenna Robinson, sporting a turreted flaming hair and rhinestone glasses, is a welcoming rather than an imposing presence.

Big Apple's tent seats 1,723, and it advertises that no one is more than 50 feet from the ring. It does feel like an intimate space. At the 4:30 performance on Sunday, kids as young as 2 and 3 seemed transfixed by the acrobats, jugglers, trapeze artists and animals, and amused, if not convulsed with laughter, at the clowning.

Which brings us to Barry Lubin as the deliciously anarchic Grandma — a Big Apple Circus icon — in red dress, clown makeup, pearls and wig. Grandma enlists audience members in water-spitting contests (doing a pinwheel spit looks hard) and uses a giant wrench to repair a Rube Goldberg-esque machine, out of which pops a terrific juggler (Dmitry Chernov). She engages in a rodeo routine with fellow clowns Scott Nelson and Muriel Brugman as an apologetically inept magician and his nutty assistant.

Lubin's grandmotherly presence — he's never gone for long — lends the whole show a benign blessing. This is Lubin's farewell tour after 25 seasons with Big Apple. He's not retiring but will

be based in Europe, where he'll keep clowning. He'll also teach.

The most spine-chilling act must be the Flying Cortes troupe, whose trapeze act, even above a net, literally takes your breath away. The 10-year-old Ysabella Wallenda-Cortes proves her mettle astonishingly well and is billed as the world's youngest professional flying trapeze artist. She is indeed descended on both sides from circus greats.

Scenic and costume designer Andre Barbe has created a wild array of costumes in candy colors. The impressive Shandong acrobats from China perform in a succession of unitards that blend the styles of "Teletubbies" with various aliens on "Dr. Who."

The animal species range from the sublime to the funky. A gorgeous trio of black Arabian horses canter and side-step for treats under the guidance of Jenny Vidbel, who also works with a couple of "sheep-a-doodles" (sheepdog/poodle mixes) and a Great Dane. Then there's a mini-parade of creatures kids will love — an African crested porcupine, a Vietnamese potbellied pig and "the world's largest rodent," a capybara from South America. Even ringmistress Robinson's plucky terrier mix Daisy has time on her hindlegs in the spotlight.

The central idea behind "Dream Big" hinges on the thrill of using one's imagination. Part of the gimmick involves large, helmety things out of "Bride of Frankenstein" under which performers, and occasionally audience volunteers, sit. These contraptions then transform images from one's imagination into live performances. At least that's the idea.

As ringmistress, Robinson is supposed to set all those ideas up in her opening speech and song. But at Sunday's 4:30 show, from this reviewer's second-row seat, she was nearly unintelligible thanks to over-amplification of her microphone. So the animating idea behind the production didn't come across in the opening moments as it should have. It does, however grow clear as the show continues.

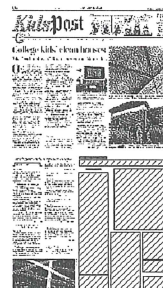
Lighting designer Guy Simard deserves a nod for his elegant illumination of the show, as does composer Mathias

Ruegg for his jaunty score.

Despite its few glitches, Big Apple Circus's new "Dream Big" comes up a family-friendly treat.

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## Grand artistry and a farewell to Grandma

### Big Apple Circus a magical 'Dream' come true

By Terry Byrne  
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

The Big Apple Circus never fails to delight, but as my 10-year-old companion noted, "this one is really focused." Although the subtitle to this year's installment notes that this is "Grandma's Farewell Tour," Barry Lubin's beloved clown doesn't dominate the proceedings. Instead, she is one more piece of a beautifully integrated production that pulls together terrific production values, especially the stunning costume designs that help to reinforce the theme, "Dream Big."

Designer-directors Andre Barbe and Renaud Doucet have created a look for the single ring's backdrop that combines old-school science fiction imagery with colorful fun, sort of "Metropolis" blended with "Meet the Robinsons," the movie based on William Joyce's children's book. Rather than a traditional ringmaster, actress-singer Jenna Robinson, in a wild red tornado hairdo and a half-black, half-white dress, ably assisted by acrobat Andrey Mantchev, a longtime company member, introduces an imagination machine that connects to a helmet to tap into an individual's dreams.

The dreams that emerge include Anna Volodko spinning through the air in the aerial rope act "Soaring High"; juggler Dmitry Chernov, whose act features glow-in-the-dark balls and a

costume complete with pockets to hold them; balancer and contortionist Melanie Chy; and the Flying Cortes, trapeze artists whose costumes incorporate unfurling ribbons, and whose act includes the world's youngest professional flying trapeze artist.

"Dream Big" showstoppers come from unexpected places. The Shandong Acrobatic Troupe performs a jaw-dropping routine jumping rope while stacked in a seven-man pyramid, and then returns to close the first act juggling each other in increasingly complicated formations wearing costumes inspired by electric sparks. At the other end of the spectrum is magician Scott Nelson and Muriel Brugman, who put a comic spin on a magic act that should feel old-timey but because Nelson and Brugman are so funny and so adept, they never fail to surprise. This duo also turns up in a comedy routine with Grandma that boasts hilarious costumes that build on the animal act that came before.

Trainer Jenny Vidbel arrives in the first act with two gorgeous Arabian horses that perform "Gallop and Graces" and remind the audience why the intimacy of this one-ring circus is so special. Vidbel returns in the second act with the astonishing Percy (an African porcupine), Newman (a hog), and Bob (a capybara who likes to sing), while Mantchev teams up with Daisy the dog for a tumbling routine.

Grandma draws in a member of the audience to train in her

classic water-spitting routine and then pulls in another to join her in a duet of "Unforgettable."

A giant "imagination machine" appears several times, pulled by company members dressed as scientists wearing brightly colored lab coats, goggles, and propeller hats, and creates opportunities for seamless transitions between acts. In addition, composer Mathias Rugg has created some toe-tapping music, played by the always incomparable seven-piece Big Apple Circus Band, led by Rob Slowik. The score includes strands of familiar pop music while also creating its own unique sound.

The focus of this year's Big Apple Circus is on the power of the imagination and the performances and production values in the show inspire big dreams.

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#### CIRCUS REVIEW

##### BIG APPLE CIRCUS

Artistic director,  
Guillaume Dufresnoy.

Directors, choreographers, set designers, Andre Barbe and Renaud Doucet. Lights, Guy Simard. Sound, JP Perreux. Composer, Mathias Rugg. Music director, Rob Slowik. At City Hall Plaza through May 13. Tickets: \$15-\$100. 888-541-3750, [www.bigapplecircus.org](http://www.bigapplecircus.org)

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