

Cheers, gasps, and laughter fill Blossom as “Cirque Goes Broadway” (Aug. 31)



“Cirque Goes Broadway” will perform again on Sunday evening at Blossom Music Center. (File photo) Marc Bona, cleveland.com

This article was originally published on Cleveland.com

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ClevelandClassical.com

CUYAHOGA FALLS, Ohio — “Cirque Goes Broadway” takes its song titles literally.

Acrobats soar high above the stage during “Defying Gravity.” A vocalist belts “I must

not fall” while a contortionist carefully balances on one hand. And the opening orchestral number, “That’s Entertainment!” lets the audience know what it’s in for.

On August 31, conductor Lucas Waldin led the Akron Symphony Orchestra at Blossom Music Center in an evening of Broadway hits combined with acrobatics from the Big Top.

Despite not being a circus ringmaster, Waldin still had plenty to juggle in coordinating his orchestral musicians, the acrobats of Cirque de la Symphonie, and vocalists Morgan James and Hugh Panaro. There was a lot going on for both the eyes and the ears to take in.

Since most of the songs would have been familiar to the average musical theater fan, the novelty came from how they were paired with the circus acts. During Andrew Lloyd Weber’s “Memory” from *Cats*, a woman in a feline costume spun high off the ground in a hula hoop, the spotlight reflecting her lithe silhouette onto the wall behind the orchestra.

Some of these pairings were misses, as with Frank Wildhorn’s “This Is the Moment” from *Jekyll & Hyde* — the song’s punchy dramatics didn’t match the slowness and grace of the contortionist.

But some were absolute hits, like Stephen Schwartz’s “Defying Gravity” from *Wicked*. As the ending approached, the acrobat who had been flipping in the air while suspended

by two ropes picked up Morgan James, bridal style — and in a jaw-dropping moment, the two spun and rose into the air as James continued to belt her final note.

Maurice Ravel's Bolero may have seemed out of place at first. But the slowly building tension of the music perfectly reflected the concentration required for the feats of strength from two of the circus performers.

The Orchestra also took their turn in the spotlight during Meredith Willson's peppy "Seventy-Six Trombones" from *The Music Man*, Andrew Lloyd Weber's festive "The Jellicle Ball" from *Cats*, and two sweeping Leonard Bernstein overtures: *Candide* and *West Side Story*.

As both vocalists and hosts, Morgan James and Hugh Panaro were gracious, playful, and at ease with the audience. Referring to the acrobats that competed for attention, Panaro joked, "Do you guys have any idea how hard it is for Morgan and I to not forget our lines?"

In reality, neither singer ever seemed in danger of losing composure. Panaro delivered a delightfully charismatic performance of Meredith Willson's "Ya Got Trouble" from *The Music Man*, warning the parents of River City (and Cuyahoga Falls) about the dangers of pool tables. And his control over both his baritone and falsetto was evident during Andrew Lloyd Weber's "The Music of the Night" from *The Phantom of the Opera*.

James accentuated both the humor and the fierceness of the title song from John Kander's *Cabaret*, earning just as much applause without a circus partner as she did with one. And if you weren't already convinced of the athleticism of her high register, the fact that she could belt while literally "Defying Gravity" left no room for doubt.

Throughout the show, the crowd contributed uproarious applause and laughter as they reacted to amazing (and sometimes absurd) spinning cubes, quick costume changes, and an endless number of hula hoops. Now That's Entertainment!

"Cirque Goes Broadway" will be repeated at the Blossom Music Center on Sunday evening, September 1 at 7:00 p.m. Tickets and lawn passes can be purchased [online](#).

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Published on ClevelandClassical.com September 5, 2024

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