

Chinese Aerialists a Double Treat.

Judith van Praag

When you go to Teatro Zinzanni you're in for a real treat, from starter to dessert. Expect an expertly put together menu of intrigue, lust and politics, all delivered in good jest. And all jokes aside, local restaurateur, Tom Douglas designed the delectable menu that will sustain you during your "Quest for Queendom" in "Zinzannia", the realm of Queen Wilma and her court.

By the time you're ready for dessert, you can sit back and enjoy the supreme act of Chinese Strap Aerialists Rui and Ming.

While their act may look like "no sweat", it is highly demanding. Their connection is intense, and shows the essence of collaboration. Alternatively they invite, reject, and wrestle; challenging each other with their eyes, while showing a complete trust and total comprehension of the other person's every move.

Fifteen years ago, then 11-year-old Ling Rui, and 9-year-old Fang Ming started their education as acrobats. Together with 23 other boys, and 25 girls, they attended the boarding school of the renowned Flag Circus in Kunming in Southeastern China.

After two years, they started traveling all over the world with the Flag Circus; "Hoop Diving" for government dignitaries, for spectators at "Euro Disney", as well as for private events. In 2000, they joined the cast of Cirque du Soleil's "Dralion", a show in which 46 Chinese artists perform.

In 2003, Rui became interested in working on a solo act, as an aerialist. He talked to a technician (who manipulates the rope from the ground) about his intentions, and this friend presented Rui's wish to Li Xining, the President and Artistic Director of the Flag Circus. Li liked the idea, but she suggested Rui consider performing with a partner, since that would allow him to create a more interesting choreography. When Rui agreed, Li said he could choose any of the artists in his peer group as his partner.

"After working together with a troupe for such a long time, you know who will be the best," Rui said.

Three years after they started working on their aerial strap act, the duo was ready to present their "Ming and Rui" act within "Cirque du Soleil's 'Delirium'". Since then they've toured throughout North America and Europe. They also performed at international circus festivals in China, winning prestigious awards, including the Golden medal at the Wuhan International Acrobatic Arts Festival.

Working with the zany Teatro Zinzanni troupe has presented the duo with new perspectives. Used to great distance between artists

and audience, performing in the more intimate "Spiegel tent" (Mirror tent) is: "Very cool!" they both said.

Until their engagement with Zinzanni the duo used only body language, not a word came across their lips.

"Between acts in 'Quest for a Queendom', we get to say things to the audience," Rui said, and Ming agreed with a smile, they clearly enjoy the opportunity.

Teaching a one-day acrobats class to children age 8-15 at this summer's Camp Zinzanni made them realize they might want to have their own school some day.

But, the duo's present dream is to find more permanence in their work so they can have a home of their own. Their wishes coincide with Cirque du Soleil's future plans to have a base in Los Angeles, Dubai, and Macao. Making a home in China enchants the performers most. For now however, until October 19, they'll call Seattle their temporary home.

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