

ARTS & LIFE

THE GAZETTE | MONTREAL | MONDAY, MARCH 5, 2007 | EDITORS: ARTS, MARK TREMBLAY ■ LIFE, MICHAEL SHENKER | 514 987 2560 | arts&life@thegazette.canwest.com



DAVE SIDAWAY THE GAZETTE

Performers rehearse for Debra Brown's show Line 1, which brings together 22 dancers, musicians and gymnasts in a succession of duets, trios and group numbers.

SONG AND DANCE, WITH A TWIST

CHOREOGRAPHER DEBRA BROWN

LIKES TO PUSH BOUNDARIES.

HER NEW SHOW IS A TUMBLING ACT
OF MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

VICTOR SWOBODA
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Dominic Dagenais plays the guitar, but he can also do full back twists on the trampoline. In a unique music-dance-circus show called Line 1, he gets to do both at the same time.

The show, which has its premiere at the Corona Theatre this week, also has a bass guitarist playing while navigating a German wheel—two large metal hoops joined together that whirl him in circles around the stage.

Line 1 brings together 22 dancers, musicians and gymnasts under the direction of Debra Brown, a woman who knows a thing or two about putting on a show. For the past 20 years, she's done choreography for all of Cirque du Soleil's productions and for big-name pop singers like Céline Dion, Shakira, Björk and Madonna.

Brown has also worked for the continent's major opera houses, including Chicago's Lyric Opera, where Wagnerian singers performed on bungee cords, and New York's Metropolitan

Opera, where she collaborated on a Luciano Pavarotti production (Pavarotti was spared the bungee cord). Hollywood's Academy Awards, Vancouver's Expo 86, Montreal's World Aquatics Championships—all had Brown's work on display.

"I like to push boundaries," Brown said in an interview last week as Line 1's 10-piece band was making a rhythmic sound check in the background. "In Line 1, everybody mixes. Musicians dance. Dancers sing. If an artist has the talent, I always ask myself, 'What would I be surprised to see them do?'"

Brown promised, for example, "a little surprise" from one of her longtime Cirque performers, contortionist Jiny Jessica Jacinto, but naturally Brown was too coy to reveal what it might be. In a show like this, one can imagine Jacinto playing the violin with her toes.

Other Line 1 performers include Mary Sanders, a one-time member of the U.S. national rhythmic gymnastics team and performer in Cirque du Soleil's Corteo show; Sara Renelik, a singer-dancer in a 1994 Céline Dion TV special; and recent National Circus School graduates Hugo Desmarais and Ruth Joyal.



FROM GAZETTE FILES

Debra Brown is renowned for her work with Cirque du Soleil.

There's also Barbara Requesens. "She's a biochemist who left her job to dance with us," Brown said, as though biochemists regularly run off to join the circus.

"We came together; you could say, out of necessity. Some of us had been working together for quite a while. Others came together after meeting Wesley."

Originally from Haiti, guitarist/com-

poser Wesley Letoussaint acts as musical director, the same role that he played last year in a Juno-nominated album by Senegalese-born Montreal songstress Senaya. The band of brass, guitar, keyboard, percussion and vocal performers plays a mix that's "part world, part soul, part funk," Brown said. "Music is an important part of the show."

The acts blend into each other as musicians, dancers and acrobats share the stage in a succession of duets, trios and group numbers. The performers often take to the air in "pretty innovative" aerial acts. But the acts have been adapted for the Corona's proscenium stage.

"In a big top, it's a house for flying. It supports all the rigging. Here you have to adapt. But life is about adapting, right?"

Certainly Brown, who was born in Brantford, Ont., has adapted her choreographic efforts to stages of all shapes and sizes.

"I'm the guide," Brown said. "I ... direct the show in a certain way. We try to be honest, stripping away so we get right to the soul of the movement. The biggest thing is fearlessness. We use nothing more than muscle, heart, bone and blood."

In other words, what you see is what the performers actually do—not like movie special effects that turn human beings into computer-generated stuntmen.

"Our theme: Embrace and kiss the sky."

Line 1 is presented tomorrow, Thursday to Saturday and March 15 to 17 at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. at the Corona Theatre, 2490 Notre Dame St. W. Tickets cost \$32 to \$38. Call 514-931-2088 or 514-790-1245, or order at www.admission.com.

Fake deaths thriving

Online tragedy can be greatly exaggerated

HOWARD SWAINS
COLUMBIA NEWS SERVICE

NEW YORK — One morning in January, members of the cozy online community TheCatSite.com received some devastating news. Their fellow cat lover Amber, known to the busy discussion forum as 4crazycats, had died during emergency surgery to deliver a baby daughter.

"I feel like I'm in some horrible nightmare and just want to wake up but I can't," wrote Amber's fiancé, John, on a board usually reserved for the light-hearted exchange of anecdotes and welfare tips on all matters feline.

As more than 150 condolence messages flooded in, some members were suspicious. People familiar with John and Amber from their five months on the site knew Amber's death was just the latest in a long series of acute misfortunes: John had been involved in a car crash; one of their cats had died; and Amber had suffered from depression and a fall during her pregnancy.

Their story was almost too tragic to be true.

After members were unable to verify the death by contacting hospitals and morgues, the site's owner, Anne Moss, grew concerned the cat lovers had fallen victim to a peculiar variety of online fraud: Amber may not have died because she may never have existed. John, it seemed, had been creating five months of disaster-filled fiction.

"I think we'll never know for sure one way or the other," Moss said. "Maybe some of it was true, maybe all of it was true, maybe none of it is true. This is the Internet, and I have no way of finding out."

The unique freedom offered by online anonymity is increasingly being abused. As people share their innermost thoughts in blogs, journals, chat rooms and discussion forums, some writers are muscling their way to the centre of attention by artificially manufacturing tragedy. When an online friend gets sick or dies, things aren't always what they seem.

Tragic online deaths have become common. After discovering a number of fabricated deaths on the LiveJournal social-networking site, a group of users established a community named "fake lj deaths" in 2004 to investigate suspicious ends to journals. Only about 10 per cent of the hundreds of deaths investigated by fake lj deaths have turned out to be real, according to the community's administrators.

Recently, more than 50 people replied to a query posted on a community bulletin board asking for examples of such fraudulent claims. While their stories cannot be verified, respondents detailed ruses of varying sophistication dating back to 1998. Some were sick jokes. Others had financial motives or malicious intent. The majority, however, fit a clear pattern designed simply to garner maximum attention: a feigned illness or brooding melancholy leads to progressive deterioration and then a family member, with surprising access to the password-protected sites, announces the tragic end.

Please see FAKE, Page D3