

## **PROGRAM 1. WHAT IS ART?**

### **Overview**

Throughout history, ideas about art have varied widely — from the strict definitions of formal academies and stylistic schools to the more inclusive umbrellas of folk art, found art, and street art. Within this diversity, are there universal elements that distinguish what we call art from other objects or experiences? How can we recognize art when we see it?

In this section of the unit of study, learners explore the nature of art by examining each of four art forms — theatre, music, dance, and visual art. They begin to develop a definition for each of the art forms and consider how they might determine whether or not a particular item *is* art. Then they view an excerpt from *Quidam*, a surrealistic performance piece created by Cirque de Soleil, that combines the four art forms in unusual ways to explore the connections between fantasy and reality that exist onstage and in life.

### **The Lessons**

- Introduction: What Are the Arts?
- Lesson 1: What Is Theatre?
- Lesson 2: What Is Music?
- Lesson 3: What Is Dance?
- Lesson 4: What Is Visual Art?
- Lesson 5: Combining the Art Forms

## **PROGRAM 1**

### ***Introduction: What Are the Arts?***

#### **Overview**

Learners begin to think about the diversity of art that exists in the world.

#### **Objective**

Identify various things that might be thought of as “art”

#### **Materials and Resources**

- “What Are the Arts?” interviews on Classroom Demonstration Materials videotape (on-screen time counter at 01:41)
- Television and videocassette player

#### **Instruction**

Engage students in discussion of the question “What is art?” Opinions should be supported by rationale. View the “What Are the Arts?” footage, in which various people respond to the question asked by an interviewer. Talk about surprising statements, explanations you disagree with, and definitions that you really like.

## **PROGRAM 1**

### ***Lesson 1: What Is Theatre?***

#### **Overview**

Through discussion and activities, learners explore their perceptions about theatre and deepen their understanding of the art form. They use a game called “Hunter and Hunted” to demonstrate how theatre uses plot, characters, and imagery to involve an audience.

#### **Objective**

Engage in discussion and activities leading to the discovery of some basic characteristics of theatre

#### **Materials and Resources**

- “What Is Theatre?” footage found on the Classroom Demonstration Materials videotape (on-screen time counter at 05:18), including the following:
  - 05:18 Couple in Restaurant
  - 06:55 Miss Muffet and Jack Horner
  - 08:06 *Hamlet* Soliloquy
  - 09:10 Man on Cell Phone
  - 09:42 Two Musicians
  - 10:23 Circus Clowns
  - 11:31 Performance Artists
- Television and videocassette player
- Two blindfolds

#### **Planning and Preparation**

Read through the entire lesson for content and process and preview the footage. Pay attention to any new vocabulary.

#### **Background Information for Teachers**

Theatre takes many forms — from a formal production on a stage before an audience to group improvisations conducted in school classrooms. There are, however, some commonly accepted characteristics of theatre. For example, all theatre includes actors (whether trained or not) attempting to communicate an idea to an audience. In Western cultures, the idea being communicated often represents some sort of conflict for the actors or audience. As you work through this lesson with students, lead them to this basic understanding.

“Hunter and Hunted” is a theatre game that can be used to help students experience the elements of theatre. The hunt creates a dramatic conflict with an antagonist and a protagonist. Their objectives are to hunt and to remain free, respectively. How the characters behave is the dramatic action. Tension is created as they approach each other, and release comes if they pass each other without making contact. The climax is reached at the moment of contact. By engaged participation, students build relevant understanding, and new vocabulary becomes meaningful.

### **Vocabulary**

There are many different definitions of theatre that include everything from a formal production on a stage before an audience to group improvisations conducted in school classrooms. However, there are three essential elements present in all forms of theatre: an actor, a story with a conflict, and an audience.

- *Acting*: the process of creating roles and characters in dramatic context
- *Audience*: one or more persons who observe actors in a scene or play
- *Conflict*: when the desires of two or more characters are opposed to each other
- *Costume*: an actor's stage clothing
- *Dialogue*: words spoken by the characters in a play to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and actions
- *Elements of drama*: According to Aristotle, the elements are plot, character, theme, dialogue, music, and spectacle
- *Plot*: the structure of the action of the play
- *Script*: the written dialogue, description, and directions provided by the playwright
- *Setting*: the time and place in which the dramatic action occurs
- *Theatre*: the imitation or representation of life, performed for other people; the performance of dramatic literature

### **Instruction**

#### ***Warm-Up/Motivation***

Ask the class to brainstorm answers to the following question, recording the ideas for future use: "What are the various elements and characteristics of theatre?"

#### ***Lesson***

Explain that the class is going to engage in an activity and that you would like them to think about whether the activity is theatre.

The "Hunter and Hunted" activity is a simple game that can be used to introduce the elements of theatre and demonstrate how those elements can be manipulated for greater dramatic impact. The game works this way:

- The group forms a large circle.
- Two volunteers enter the circle. One will be the Hunter and one will be the Hunted.
- The volunteers are blindfolded and led to different places in the circle.
- The goal of the activity is for the Hunter to "get" the Hunted by tagging him or her.

The rest of the class must be very quiet so the players inside the circle can use their sense of hearing to find or avoid one another. Members of the large group will act as spotters, gently using their hands to make sure the Hunter and the Hunted don't leave the circle.

After playing, discuss the following questions:

- Is this activity theatre? Why?
- Which elements from your brainstormed list are a part of the activity?
- Which elements are missing?
- Which elements from the list are needed for something to be considered theatre? In other words, what are the essential elements of theatre?

Guide students to realize that the essential elements of theatre are an actor, a story with conflict, and an audience. In this sense, “Hunter and Hunted” is a simple form of theatre appropriate for the classroom.

Replay “Hunter and Hunted” with different volunteers. This time, enhance the playing by adding story elements of character, plot, and setting. For example, one of the players might be a sports hunter stalking another player who takes the role of a deer that is hiding in the forest.

Talk about what happened, using these questions:

- How was this second playing of the activity different from the first?
- Is this theatre? Why?
- Which elements from your brainstormed list are a part of the activity?
- Which elements are missing?

View the “What Is Theatre?” footage and ask students to think about whether what they see is theatre. Stop the tape after each example and discuss these questions:

- Is this theatre? Why?
- Which elements from your brainstormed list are a part of the footage?
- Which elements are missing?
- Is there a difference between classroom theatre (like “Hunter and Hunted”) and a theatrical production like some of the footage?

Based on this work, ask the class to collaboratively write a definition for theatre.

### ***Assessment***

Review the collaborative definition of theatre to be sure it includes the essential elements of actor, story with conflict, and audience.

During the playing of “Hunter and Hunted,” watch to see whether students display the following drama behaviors:

- following directions,
- sustaining involvement in the activity, and
- cooperating within the group.

You may want to use a checklist to keep track of these behaviors and others over time.

***Extensions and Connections***

Ask students to use their definition of theatre to evaluate other kinds of experiences throughout the curriculum. Have them apply the definition to videos used in other classes, school performances, or classroom activities.

Ask students to identify the actors, audience, and conflict in theatrical experiences, then discuss why some theatrical experiences are more interesting or engaging than others.

**Correlated National Standards: Theatre**

***Content Standard 6***

Comparing and connecting art forms by describing theatre, dramatic media, and other art forms

***Content Standard 7***

Analyzing and explaining personal preferences and constructing meanings from classroom dramatizations and from theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions

Source: *National Standards for Arts Education*, published by Music Educators National Conference (MENC). Copyright © 1994 by MENC. Used by permission. The complete National Arts Standards and additional materials relating to the Standards are available from MENC, The National Association for Music Education, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191, telephone 800-336-3768.

## **PROGRAM 1**

### ***Lesson 2: What Is Music?***

#### **Overview**

Through discussion and activities, learners explore their perceptions about music and deepen their understanding of the art form. They listen to a variety of sounds to create their own definitions of music.

#### **Objective**

Investigate musical elements and create a basic definition of music.

#### **Materials and Resources**

- “What Is Music?” audio examples found on the Classroom Demonstration Materials videotape (on-screen time counter at 12:58), including the following:
  - 12:58 *The Entertainer*, by Scott Joplin
  - 13:33 African Drumming
  - 14:14 Jazz Saxophone
  - 14:29 Street Sounds
  - 15:10 Slavic Chorus
  - 16:08 Office Sounds
  - 16:46 Sounds of the Rainforest

*There is blank space between the examples so the tape can be stopped for discussion.*
- Television and videocassette player
- Handout: Is This Music? Listening Guide found at the end of this document

#### **Planning and Preparation**

Read through the entire lesson for content and process. Preview audio examples. Pay attention to any new vocabulary.

#### **Background Information for Teachers**

Becoming an active listener involves learning to recognize the various elements of musical composition. Most large-scale works are constructed with intricate musical forms. Becoming familiar with the architectural, harmonic, and melodic implications of form and construction enables the listener to follow the direction of the work and the intention of the composer.

Active listeners also enjoy recognizing differences in interpretations of the same work as performed by various artists. Listening for instrumental and vocal timbres or tone colors also is very important. For many listeners, there is nothing more exciting in music than being able to recognize the voices of various instruments in a score, both individually and in combinations.

Live music never can be fully replaced by recordings. There are many excellent recordings available, but we must remember that music is created with human hands and breath, and we must always recognize the human qualities of music.

## **Vocabulary**

Music is organized sound created to communicate an idea, feeling, or process.

- *Articulation*: how the individual notes are attacked
- *Design*: the arrangement of musical parts; the form of the music
- *Duration*: music in time; the length of the sounds
- *Dynamics*: loudness and softness in music
- *Expressive Qualities*: variables within performance parameters
- *Melody*: a planned succession of pitches; the tune
- *Pitch*: the high and low qualities of music
- *Rhythm*: the patterns of sounds in relation to the steady beat
- *Steady beat*: the regular pulse of the music
- *Tempo*: the speed of the music
- *Timbre*: tone color; the distinctive quality of a given instrument, voice, or sound source
- *Tonality*: the combination of pitches as they function together

## **Instruction**

### ***Warm-Up/Motivation***

Engage the class in a discussion about the components of what we call “music.” Keep a list of ideas for everyone to see. Add musical vocabulary to the list as appropriate.

### ***Lesson***

Distribute the handout, *Is This Music? Listening Guide*. Play the “What Is Music?” audio examples and ask students to list and describe what they hear, using as many musical terms as they can.

Stop the tape after each excerpt and discuss these questions:

- What did you hear?
- What musical elements were present?
- Is this music? Why or why not?
- Which elements from your brainstormed list are present? Which are missing?
- When all examples have been considered, guide the class to craft a simple definition for music — probably something like “Music is organized sound created to communicate an idea, feeling, or process.”

### ***Assessment***

Formative assessment occurs during all discussion periods as students use stated vocabulary with accuracy and understanding, providing specific and supported evidence for their observations and opinions.

### ***Extensions and Connections***

Invite students to bring music of their own choosing to class and engage in its analysis through discussion of the question “What about this music appeals to you?”

**Correlated National Standards: Music**

***Content Standard 6***

Listening to, analyzing, and describing music

***Content Standard 7***

Evaluating music and music performances

***Content Standard 9***

Understanding music in relation to history and culture

Source: *National Standards for Arts Education*, published by Music Educators National Conference (MENC). Copyright © 1994 by MENC. Used by permission. The complete National Arts Standards and additional materials relating to the Standards are available from MENC, The National Association for Music Education, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191, telephone 800-336-3768.

## **PROGRAM 1**

### ***Lesson 3: What Is Dance?***

#### **Overview**

Through discussion and activities, learners explore their perceptions about dance and deepen their understanding of the art form. They use their bodies to create a dance by varying the elements of shape, space, and time.

#### **Objective**

Experiment with movement and identify essential elements of dance

#### **Materials and Resources**

- “What Is Dance?” footage (without sound) found on the Classroom Demonstration Materials videotape (on-screen time counter at 17:37), including the following:
  - Scarf Dance
  - Native American Dance
  - Ballet
  - Swing Dance
  - Modern Dance
  - Martial Arts Dance
- Television and videocassette player
- Hand drum

#### **Planning and Preparation**

Read through the entire lesson for content and process. Preview the dance footage. Pay attention to any new vocabulary.

#### **Background Information for Teachers**

All dance — whether it is about a story, a culture, a specific style, a feeling, or movement for its own sake — involves a body in motion. All styles of dance communicate using the basic elements of shape, space, and time.

#### **Vocabulary**

- *Chant*: singing or speaking that repeats itself
- *Choreographer*: the person who creates the dance
- *Choreography*: the dance movements
- *Cue*: a signal
- *Freeze*: stopping all movement
- *Shape*: using the body to create lines
- *Space*: the locations occupied by the body; for example, low, middle, and high levels or negative and positive
- *Time*: the cadence or meter that determines the motion; it can be slow, medium, or fast
- *Transition*: the passage among ideas, places, thoughts, and stages

## **Instruction**

### ***Warm-Up/Motivation***

Ask students to respond to the following questions, recording their ideas:

- What is dance?
- What types of physical activities do you enjoy? (Examples include basketball, volleyball, swimming, rollerblading, biking, jogging, baseball, and martial arts.)
- What do all these activities have in common?
- Can dance be about these activities?
- What else can dance be about? (Examples include emotions, all of the above physical activities, social conditions, and everyday life.)

### ***Lesson***

Move into an open space and ask the students to explore the essential elements of shape, space, and time. Give the following instructions, accompanied by drumbeats in varying rhythms:

- Move randomly around the space, being careful not to bump into anyone.
- When “shape” is called, create a shape with your body and freeze.
- When the drumbeats begin again, resume moving around the room.
- When “shape” is called again, change your shape and freeze.
- Follow the same directions in response to the cue “space” by changing the space you occupy in the room. Think of space as low, middle, and high as well as near and far.
- Follow the same directions in response to the cue “time” by changing your timing. Move slower or faster to the drumbeats while using shape and space.

Participants chant “shape, space, time” as they move in response to each word, creating movements that reflect their choices. The chant can be repeated in a whisper, an inside voice, or an outside voice as students move to the chant. Adding the subjective element of thought to motions, this action gradually becomes a moving improvisation. It evolves into a phrase of movement with transitions from shape to shape.

Working with small groups of students, demonstrate different movement phrases to the class. Guide students to realize that the essence of dance is movement communication, exploring the elements essential to dance — shape, space, and time.

View the “What Is Dance?” footage of various styles of dance. Afterward, discuss the dance elements of space, shape, and time. Brainstorm a group definition for dance.

Ask individual students to perform their own movement phrases. Ask the class to watch and think about the elements used in the student-created phrases as well as in footage of various dance styles. Discuss and compare individual choices and the feelings the performers experienced. Ask whether any of the phrases told a story.

***Assessment***

Review the group definition of dance to be sure it includes the basic elements of shape, space and time.

Observe student participation during the movement activities, watching to see whether students follow directions, sustain involvement in the activity, and cooperate within the group.

You may want to use a checklist to keep track of these behaviors and others over time.

***Extensions and Connections***

Students can combine their movement phrases in groups of twos (duet), threes (trio), fours (quartet), etc., to create a dance with a beginning, middle, and end. Ask students to demonstrate their collaborative work for the class.

**Correlated National Standards: Dance**

***Content Standard 1***

Identifying and demonstrating movement elements and skills in performing dance

***Content Standard 2***

Understanding choreographic principles, processes, and structures

Source: *National Standards for Arts Education*, published by Music Educators National Conference (MENC). Copyright © 1994 by MENC. Used by permission. The complete National Arts Standards and additional materials relating to the Standards are available from MENC, The National Association for Music Education, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191, telephone 800-336-3768.

## **PROGRAM 1**

### ***Lesson 4: What Is Visual Art?***

#### **Overview**

Through discussion and activities, learners explore their perceptions about visual art and deepen their understanding of the art form. They analyze an assortment of objects to determine whether they fit their own personal definitions of art.

#### **Objective**

Formulate, discuss, and revise personal definitions of visual art

#### **Materials and Resources**

- “What Is Visual Art?” footage found on the Classroom Demonstration Materials videotape (on-screen time counter at 19:40), including the following:
  - Performance Artist
  - African Costume
  - “Golconde” by René Magritte, 1953
  - Seashell
  - Family Photograph
  - “Farmhouse on the Hill” by Will Henry Stevens, 1929
  - Tree Branch
  - Gold Man
  - Different Family Photograph
- Television and videocassette player

#### **Planning and Preparation**

Read through the entire lesson for content and process. Preview the visual art footage showing various objects that may — or may not — be considered art. Pay attention to any new vocabulary.

#### **Background Information for Teachers**

In this lesson, students experience an approach to art called aesthetics, a branch of philosophy that considers why art is made and how it fits into society. As students create their own definitions for art, they are engaging in philosophical inquiry. Definitions of visual art vary depending on cultural context and personal viewpoints. As students develop a personal understanding of art, they will be engaged in higher-order thinking as they gain respect for many interpretations of works of art, possibly revising their own interpretations as a result; become familiar with the language of visual art and develop their visual literacy skills; support their definitions by using evidence from works of art; consider issues and ideas that have been debated for centuries without one “correct answer”; formulate, discuss, and revise their own definitions of art; and reflect on the roles art plays in society.

### **Vocabulary**

- *Art*: the conscious production or arrangement of sounds, colors, forms, movements, or other elements in a manner that affects the sense of beauty
- *Composition*: design manipulation — balance, repetition, movement, unity, and center of interest
- *Craftsmanship*: quality of design and technique
- *Elements of art*: components artists often manipulate — line, color, shape/form, value, texture, and space
- *Intent*: the mood, message, or meaning desired by the artist
- *Performance art*: a form of theatrical art in which thematically related works in a variety of media are presented simultaneously or successively to an audience
- *Technique*: materials and working methods used by artists

### **Instruction**

#### ***Warm-Up/Motivation***

Ask students to write down their own definitions of visual art.

#### ***Lesson***

Using another sheet of paper, ask the students to divide the page into four columns with the headings “Description,” “Yes,” “No,” and “Maybe.”

| Description | Yes | No | Maybe |
|-------------|-----|----|-------|
|             |     |    |       |
|             |     |    |       |
|             |     |    |       |
|             |     |    |       |
|             |     |    |       |
|             |     |    |       |
|             |     |    |       |

View the “What Is Visual Art?” footage, asking students to describe each object and use their definitions to decide whether the object is art (yes), is not art (no), or might be art (maybe).

Look at each image again and discuss which definitions work and which might need refining. Take notes on a dry-erase board or overhead transparency to capture ideas as they are mentioned. Examples include “Art should be beautiful,” “Art should tell a story,” and “Art should express something.”

As the discussion progresses, ask students about the group dynamic. Were there agreements as well as disagreements? Were some people arguing? Does the room have an emotional charge? Acknowledge that there can be many different points of view about what art is. The important thing is to support one’s viewpoint with evidence. Throughout time, many definitions of visual art have been created and challenged.

This discussion enables novices to recognize various points of view and the difficulties in creating an all-encompassing definition of art. Particular challenges arise when the artwork features aspects of more than one art form, such as a play that has acting, music, scenery, and costumes.

***Assessment***

During the lesson, observe student responses to determine whether they are grappling seriously with the question “What is visual art?” Because they are discovering rather than being told information, students spontaneously use visual art vocabulary. Listen to whether words are being used correctly, and ask students to explain new concepts.

***Extensions and Connections***

Ask students to talk with their friends and family about what they think is or is not art and report interesting comments to the class.

**Correlated National Standards: Visual Art**

***Content Standard 2***

Using knowledge of structures and functions

***Content Standard 6***

Making connections among visual arts and other disciplines

Source: *National Standards for Arts Education*, published by Music Educators National Conference (MENC). Copyright © 1994 by MENC. Used by permission. The complete National Arts Standards and additional materials relating to the Standards are available from MENC, The National Association for Music Education, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191, telephone 800-336-3768.

## **PROGRAM 1**

### ***Lesson 5: Combining the Art Forms***

#### **Overview**

Learners explore Cirque du Soleil's production of *Quidam* and discuss the enduring idea for this unit of study: fantasy impacts our perception of reality.

#### **Objectives**

- View a videotaped performance of an excerpt from *Quidam* and discuss initial impressions
- Examine ways in which fantasy impacts perceptions of reality in Cirque du Soleil's *Quidam* and in everyday life

#### **Materials and Resources**

- Opening three minutes of *Quidam* footage found on the Classroom Demonstration Materials videotape (on-screen time counter at 22:18)
- Television and videocassette player
- Handout: Description of the First Three Minutes of *Quidam*
- Reading: Cirque du Soleil
- Reading: *Quidam*

#### **Planning and Preparation**

Read through the entire lesson for content and process. Preview the *Quidam* footage. Pay attention to the discussion questions.

#### **Background Information for Teachers**

Cirque du Soleil (Circus of the Sun) is a world-renowned organization known for its striking, dramatic mix of the circus arts and street entertainment, featuring fantastical costumes, magical lighting, and original music. Its production of *Quidam* is a surrealistic and highly theatrical circus event that has been performed worldwide since 1996.

*Quidam* is the story of Zoe, a young girl whose world is boring and meaningless until a headless stranger invites her on a journey through a fantastic world where gravity is irrelevant and the impossible is possible. Like Alice's adventures in Wonderland and Dorothy's quest through Oz, Zoe's experiences with the strange and unreal change her everyday life, demonstrating the "enduring idea/understanding" that fantasy impacts our perception of reality. See the readings at the end of this document for more information on *Quidam*.

#### **Vocabulary**

- *Enduring ideas/understandings*: the big concepts about a theme or topic that students should comprehend and retain after they've forgotten many of the details (a *topic* is a subject; a *theme* is an idea about the subject)
- *Fantasy*: a product of the imagination; illusion
- *Reality*: something real or genuine, not artificial or imaginary

## **Instruction**

### ***Warm-Up/Motivation***

Provide the class with basic information about Cirque du Soleil and *Quidam*.

### ***Lesson***

Distribute and read aloud the description of the first three minutes of *Quidam*, found in the Handouts section at the end of this document.

Discuss what the students think they will see and hear.

View the first three minutes of *Quidam* and ask students to compare and contrast the performance with the written description. Ask students whether they would like to attend such a performance and why.

Following the viewing of *Quidam*, engage the class in a discussion of these questions:

- In what ways did *Quidam* meet the expectations you formed from hearing it described? What surprised you?
- What kinds of movement did you see? Would you call this dance?
- How did the music communicate an idea, feeling, or process?
- How were dramatic and visual elements used to juxtapose reality and fantasy?
- What are some big questions that you have about this work?
- What is your understanding of the enduring idea/understanding that fantasy impacts our perception of reality?
- What is the story of *Quidam*?
- Who is *Quidam*?
- What is the role of fantasy and reality in *Quidam*?
- How does fantasy impact reality in *Quidam*?
- How does fantasy impact reality in our daily lives?
- What other performances have you seen that are similar to *Quidam*?

### ***Extensions and Connections***

For a full understanding of *Quidam*, it is strongly recommended that you view the show in its entirety on videotape. Look for examples of fantasy and reality and the interaction of dance, music, theatre, and visual art.

## **Correlated National Standards: Theatre**

### ***Content Standard 7***

Analyzing and explaining personal preferences and constructing meanings from classroom dramatizations and from theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions

Source: *National Standards for Arts Education*, published by Music Educators National Conference (MENC). Copyright © 1994 by MENC. Used by permission. The complete National Arts Standards and additional materials relating to the Standards are available from MENC, The National Association for Music Education, 1806 Robert Fulton Drive, Reston, VA 20191, telephone 800-336-3768.

**Handout**

***Is This Music? Listening Guide***

Your definition of music:

---

---

---

The chart below will help you remember what you hear. Use words or pictures to note important sound images.

|   | List all the sounds you hear. | Which musical elements are present? | Is this music?<br>Y / N / M |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 |                               |                                     |                             |
| 2 |                               |                                     |                             |
| 3 |                               |                                     |                             |
| 4 |                               |                                     |                             |
| 5 |                               |                                     |                             |
| 6 |                               |                                     |                             |
| 7 |                               |                                     |                             |
| 8 |                               |                                     |                             |

## **Handout**

### ***Description of the First Three Minutes of Quidam***

A lonely young girl sings as her parents sit and read.

Suddenly, a headless man appears at the front door. He is carrying a bowler hat which he drops on the living room floor. A tall man and a clown dance into the living room, listening to the young girl sing.

The young girl picks up the bowler hat and places it on her head. Just then, everything in the living room changes. Her parents float to the ceiling and the door disappears.

## Reading

### *Cirque du Soleil*

In the early 1980s, a group of young street performers in Quebec, Canada, pooled their talent and dreams and founded the “Club des Talons Hauts” or “High-Heels Club,” aptly named because most of them were stilt-walkers. The club also featured fire-eaters, jugglers, and other performers, who were known collectively as buskers. At that time, Quebec did not have a circus tradition, so the club organized a festival where street performers could come together to exchange ideas and techniques. They called it the “Fête Foraine de Baie St-Paul” (the Baie Saint-Paul Fair). That was all a few visionaries needed to hatch the idea of bringing all this talent together under one roof or — why not? — a big top! Cirque du Soleil was born.

Cirque du Soleil was officially created in 1984 with the assistance of the Quebec government, as part of the celebrations surrounding the 450th anniversary of Jacques Cartier’s arrival in Canada. Cirque was based on a totally new concept: a striking, dramatic mix of the circus arts and street entertainment, featuring wild, outrageous costumes, staged under magical lighting, and set to original music. With not a single animal in the ring, Cirque’s difference was clear from the very start. The show debuted in the Quebec town of Gaspé and then was performed in 10 other cities throughout the province. The first blue and yellow big top seated 800.

Since its creation, millions of people around the world have seen Cirque du Soleil’s productions. In 1996, the Cirque du Soleil International Headquarters was completed in Montreal. This \$40 million project made it possible for more than 500 permanent Montreal employees to work together. It is here that all of Cirque du Soleil’s shows are created and produced.

Cirque today runs several simultaneous productions worldwide. Some of the productions, such as *Mystère* and *O* in Las Vegas, *La Nouba* at Walt Disney World, and *Alegria* in Biloxi, Mississippi, enjoy permanent runs. Others, including *Quidam*, *Saltimbanco*, and *Dralion*, are touring in both the United States and Europe. Cirque du Soleil also has released its first feature film, *Alegria*, inspired by the show of the same name, and its first-ever large-format (IMAX) production, *Journey of Man*.

Cirque du Soleil also is known for its commitment to social causes, particularly youth at risk. One percent of potential revenues from ticket sales every year is devoted to outreach programs. Cirque du Soleil can identify with the situation at-risk youth are facing because, in its own way, the Cirque lifestyle is also a wandering, marginal one. The creators of Cirque du Soleil were young self-taught artists who couldn’t be pigeonholed, and before they began playing under sumptuous big tops, their only stage was the street.

Cirque du Soleil's social action knows no borders, reaching out to youth worldwide. This outreach is proactive and committed, since Cirque chooses its partners and undertakes to work with them long term for a common goal. Just as their shows seek to stimulate the imagination and inspire dreams, so they strive to work creatively with youth at risk, opening up new avenues to help them find their place in the community without forcing them into highly structured and disciplined roles.

Cirque du Soleil wants to achieve a multiplier effect for its social action by building a solidarity network centered around its chosen cause. Alliances have been forged with numerous partners from all sectors of society that share the commitment to helping youth in difficulty.

The international success story known as Cirque du Soleil is above all the story of a remarkable bond among performers and spectators the world over. For at the end of the day, it is the spectators who spark the creative passions of Cirque du Soleil.

Adapted from the Cirque du Soleil Web site, [www.cirquedusoleil.com](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com).

## Reading

### *Quidam*

In 1996, Cirque du Soleil premiered a work entitled *Quidam*. According to Cirque du Soleil's Web site, the character Quidam is meant to be "a nameless passer-by, a solitary figure lingering on a street corner, a person rushing past. It could be anyone, anybody. Someone coming, going, living in our anonymous society. A member of the crowd, one of the silent majority. One who cries out, sings and dreams within us all. This is the Quidam that Cirque du Soleil is celebrating."

This work is different from previous productions in that it contains a narrative story line. The performance opens with Zoe, a young, angry girl who already has seen everything there is to see. Quidam, the anonymous character, invites Zoe into a mysterious, magical world, and she discovers that there is a lot more out there than she ever could have imagined. She meets John and Fritz, who befriend her and dazzle her. She is very excited about her new discoveries in this world, but then she sees her parents. Her parents, though, cannot see her, just as they don't notice her in the real world. In the end everything works out for Zoe. She is reunited with her parents and is glad to see them again. She is much appreciated in the real world now but is sad to leave the excitement of *Quidam* behind. For just a second, Zoe is reluctant to leave and looks to John for advice. He hates to say good-bye to her, but he knows she must return to her own world and her own life.

*Quidam* was written and directed by Franco Dragone, who has been working with Cirque du Soleil since 1985. Dragone came to the circus from a background in theatre, working with several theatrical companies across Europe. It was his experiences in Europe that led Dragone to propose an integration of theatre and circus that is now the trademark of Cirque du Soleil. The rest of the creative team included Michel Crete, set designer; Dominique Lemieux, costume designer; Benoit Jutras, composer; Debra Brown, choreographer; Luc Lafortune, lighting designer; and Francois Bergeron, sound designer. *Quidam* has more than 50 performers, ranging in age from 12 to 43. The current cast members hail from Canada, United States, France, Russia, Ukraine, China, England, Argentina, Belgium, Australia, and Israel.

Cirque du Soleil means "circus of the sun." *Quidam*, like all of Cirque du Soleil's shows, can be considered a circus performance. A circus is a type of performance staged in a circle surrounded by tiers of seats, usually under a tent. While the tradition of traveling performers can be traced back to the Middle Ages, the first modern circus was staged in London in 1768 by Philip Astley. His circus included only one act — a show of trick horsemanship. Over time, circus performances expanded to include many different kinds of acts. Today, a circus performance typically includes displays of horsemanship; exhibitions by gymnasts, aerialists, wild-animal trainers, and performing animals; and comic pantomime by clowns. The founders of Cirque du Soleil loved the circus but wanted to change it. Cirque du Soleil is not about elephants and lion tamers. It is more the circus of the future, a fusion of street performance and theatre.

The structure of *Quidam* (circus acts linked by a storyline) imitates the style called vaudeville. The American tradition of vaudeville grew out of saloon entertainment during the late 1800s. The pattern of a vaudeville performance was always the same: separate acts to musical accompaniment by comedians, serious and comic singers, jugglers, dancers, magicians, trick cyclists, etc., all structured in a single program or “bill” to be performed twice nightly.

One of the comments you will hear about *Quidam* is that it is visually breathtaking. The set for *Quidam* is stunning. One of the production’s most spectacular features is a 120-foot overhead conveyor, whose five imposing rails take up the entire interior surface of the big top. This system is used to bring performers onto the stage and to create a multitude of special effects in various acts. The costumes for *Quidam* are colorful, spectacular, and unique. The costumes were designed to let the individual personality of each performer and character come through.

The music of *Quidam* is of remarkable dramatic intensity. Drawing on influences that range from classical music to the most eclectic and contemporary sounds, the music accompanies, envelops, and accentuates the magic of the show. The music is played live by six musicians using violins, cellos, percussion instruments, saxophones, synthesizers, samplers, electric guitars, classical guitars, and a varied assortment of other string instruments. For the very first time at Cirque du Soleil, the voices of a man and a child add texture and unique color to the music.

Adapted from the Cirque du Soleil Web site, [www.cirquedusoleil.com](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com).