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### Cirque Polynesia to open June 2

By HARRY EAGAR, Staff Writer

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KAANAPALI - A new, permanent nightly show, the first to present cirque on Maui, will open June 2 in the Monarchy ballroom at the Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa.

Managing partner Doug Harris says it will be unique in combining cirque and Polynesia - as its name says, Cirque Polynesia.

Cirque has been in Hawaii before, as Cirque Hawaii in Waikiki, but it lost its lease. Harris managed to keep the core of that group's performers together long enough to craft a new show. It was "a perfect storm" that made the Monarchy ballroom available, though, said Harris. ("Storm," by the way, is the title of the opening musical number of the show.)

With ceilings 45 feet high, seating for 550 and the promotional assistance of the biggest hotel (by number of guest rooms) on Maui and 10,000 guest rooms within a short walk, the promoters think they have hit a sweet spot. True, tourism is slow, but Harris says the show is well-capitalized and able to last long enough to find an audience.

Hyatt General Manager Michael Jokovich says he has seen "a little uptick" in reservations in June and July, so he is full of hope. This will be the first cirque show at any Hyatt hotel.

"Cirque" is merely the French (or French-Canadian) word for "circus," but thanks to Cirque du Soleil, it has come to be the label for a particular modern sort of circus. No animals, but a range of acrobats, aerialists and contortionists, performing in moody lighting with a custom score rather than a brass band.

Instead of hawkers of peanuts, patrons will be encouraged to buy the dinner-show combination, starting with dinner at the Hyatt's swank Umalu restaurant at 5 p.m. After that, at 7, they troop downstairs to have a show right in their laps - literally for VIP ticket buyers.

Even "premium" seats will be close and intimate. "There's not a bad seat in the house," said Harris.

The high ceiling is just right for members of the Flying Wallendas, circus aerialists for seven generations, who will be flying over the heads of patrons in the first rows. Up above, there will be musicians on towers. The performance will tell a story through music and action, of the collision, at first tense, then collaborative, of cirque performers and Polynesians.

An obvious comparison is 'Ulalena, a music and dance show with cirque features, which has run for a decade in its dedicated theater in Lahaina. Harris, a native of New Zealand, emphasizes that his show is not cirque-plus-Maui but cirque-plus-Polynesia. Executive show producer and partner Tuffy Nicholas wrote the script, although Harris says he managed to "sneak in" some Maori words.

The combination is envisioned as a franchise, and they hope it will spread to tourist destinations around the world, the way Cirque du Soleil has. Tokyo would be the next stop, although Harris and Nicholas were rushing around Tuesday to get ready for the first performance on June 1. (This one is for Hyatt employees, families and friends only.)

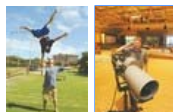
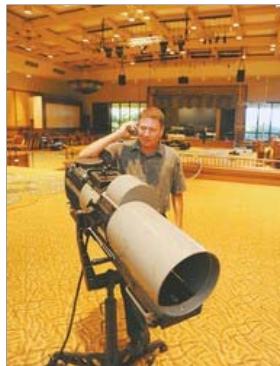
The first public performance will be the next night. The price for the 75-minute show is \$35 to \$75, with dinner-show combinations from \$70 to \$130. Peter Donnelly, food and beverage director at the Hyatt, says the menu will be taken from Umalu's wider menu. The multimillion-dollar restaurant opened at the end of last year.

Jokovich says there will be room-show combinations and kamaaina packages as well.

The promoters envision their show as a complete package, with souvenirs, soon a CD of the score and the other accoutrements of a popular tourist destination.

Harris, who owns a major Hawaii advertising agency, says he sees it as something for repeat visitors to do after they've been to a luau. And he says he has studied the sales of Maui luaus and is confident that

#### Article Photos



Cirque Polynesia managing partner Doug Harris leans on a spotlight as he takes a call in the Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa's Monarchy ballroom on Tuesday afternoon. Behind him, riggers are setting lights and stages.  
The Maui News / MATTHEW THAYER photo

Cirque Polynesia can succeed in like fashion. "We don't need to get anywhere close to half of that and we'll still do fine."

Both sides are optimistic about the support from the other's marketing. Hyatt has been touting the show on the West Coast, and Jokovich says it was received enthusiastically.

On Tuesday, Nicholas was setting up the high wire in a field near the employee parking lot so his aerialists could start working. The strong men have been practicing near the beach and attracting large crowds.

Harris was rushing from meeting to meeting, while riggers were erecting the lighting stands.

At one time, Kaanapali had several large meeting rooms, but the Monarchy ballroom is the last large one. Jokovich says the circus will not squeeze out other users. The high school proms, conventions and other functions can share the room, he said.

Nicholas, whose father was a ringmaster for Ringling Brothers and whose mother trained bears, has spent his life in the circus.

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