

Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - May 18, 2009  
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## PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

Friday, May 15, 2009

# Island-themed 'cirque' show will open at Hyatt Regency Maui

Pacific Business News (Honolulu) - by [Chad Blair](#) Pacific Business News

Partners in a new high-wire acrobatic production in Kaanapali are gambling that the show will prove a Valley Isle draw.

**Cirque Polynesia**, a 75-minute theatrical ensemble featuring aerial acrobats, illusionists and contortionists, opens June 2 at the **Hyatt Regency Maui Resort & Spa**.

If the show is a hit, there are plans to expand to Oahu, Japan, the Philippines and other Pacific islands.

Cirque Polynesia managing partner Doug Harris and show producer Cornell "Tuffy" Nicholas aim to capitalize on the growing popularity of cirque — French for circus — productions worldwide.

The best-known is **Cirque du Soleil** — Circus of the Sun — founded 25 years ago in Montreal and since spread to every continent except Africa and Antarctica.

Recession aside, Harris and Nicholas think the timing for a new tourist attraction in Hawaii is propitious.

"I honestly believe that right now, if you look across the sector, time shares are still doing well in Kaanapali, and although corporate business has receded the leisure business will rebound," said Harris, president and CEO of **Harris Agency**, an advertising, marketing and public relations company. "The numbers for summer are already looking relatively promising. It's a good time to invest."

Michael Jokovich, general manager of the Hyatt Regency Maui, said Cirque Polynesia is perking sales interest in the West Coast market the resort relies on.

Harris and Nicholas declined to disclose investment costs in Cirque Polynesia.

Jokovich also declined to share numbers but said the Hyatt Regency Maui will pitch dinner-show packages for Umalu, a new pool-side restaurant.

Taking a chapter out of the Cirque du Soleil playbook, Cirque Polynesia also plans to merchandise related products.

The announcement of the new show comes as Maui seeks more tourists. Visitor arrivals through March totaled 466,000, a 22 percent drop from the same period last year. Spending fell 24 percent to \$709 million.

Noting that Cirque du Soleil shows have been "wildly successful" in Vegas and other vacation destinations, Jokovich said Cirque Polynesia appeals to emerging markets but also to regular visitors looking for something new after playing golf, sunning at beaches and shopping.

That has been the case with "Ulalena," which has played at the Maui Theatre on Front Street in Lahaina for 10 years.

Cirque Polynesian is built on the remnants of **Cirque Hawaii**, which ran for three years at the former Imax Theater in Waikiki. The only dedicated cirque-type show of its kind in Hawaii, Cirque Hawaii closed in December after its lease was up.

"We wanted to stay, but our landlord wanted a huge rent increase, and it didn't make sense financially," Nicholas said.

Nicholas also looked at the nearby Royal Hawaiian Center, where Waikiki Nei was shuttered after only two months in October following postponements, mechanical problems and slow sales.

"It would have made sense to be there, but it just didn't work out," he said.

The decision was made to revamp the show from the ground up and take it to the Hyatt Regency Maui's Monarchy Ballroom, which has theater-style, split-level seating for 600, an expanded stage, enhanced show lighting and audio effects.

The interior is spacious enough so acrobats can swing 50 feet in the air, and solid enough to support more than 10 times the weight of a performer on a cable.

Eleven Cirque Hawaii cast members are part of the 22-member Cirque Polynesia cast (along with Nicholas, they relocated to Maui). They include sixth- and seventh-generation family members of The Flying Wallendas, famed for death-defying high-wire acts.

Cast members hail from Germany, Russia, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Brazil. The show is supported by a live band playing an original

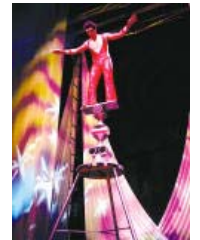


Photo courtesy: Harris Agency

Simon Arestov, 24, performs an act called "Rolla Bolla," in which he balances on razor-thin platforms placed on a variety of rolling objects. Arestov began practicing the routine when he was 13.

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score.

Nicholas stresses that Cirque Polynesia has “an entirely different story line” than Cirque Hawaii.

“Without giving too much away, it has more of an island feel to it — a salute to the Islands,” he said.

Nicholas said he will alter the show every few months to keep things fresh, and feature guest performers.

Nicholas has cirque in his blood. His father was a Ringling Brothers ringmaster and his mother a bear trainer. He has been the producer and show manager of the Moscow State Circus and the Moscow International Circus.

He has been president and CEO of **Global Entertainment Productions** in Hawaii since 2000.

Harris, a New Zealand native who has lived in Hawaii for 20 years, is an expert on brand startups and turnarounds.

“The Hyatt Regency Maui is a great venue for us,” he said. “In Kaanapali alone there are 10,000 rooms within a one-mile distance. And my PR background is a perfect complement. The line for demarcating entertainment and marketing becomes fuzzier every day.”

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