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## Cirque Polynesia

### Up close and personal with a high wire act

by Jessica Armstrong write the author

July 23, 2009

I'll admit I was a little nervous. I lucked out with front row seats at Maui's newest stage show, *Cirque Polynesia*, but from where I was sitting, it seemed like the two pretty blondes teetering net-less across the high wire could have easily taken a misstep and fallen on me.

**Cirque Polynesia**  
 Hyatt Regency Resort and Spa, KaaNapali  
 200 Nohea Kai Drive  
 667-4540  
 \$61.90 show only  
 \$116.10 with dinner

I'd been holding my breath for most of the show—which included a variety of stunning acrobatic feats interspersed with theatrical and comedic performances. We'd seen acrobats, contortionists, magicians, extreme hula hoopers and even a cube manipulator.

Cirque Polynesia producer Cornell "Tuffy" Nicholas explained to me that the show tells the tale of several cirque performers who get stranded on an island inhabited by ancient Polynesians. The two groups come together to learn the other's form before blending them into a modern hybrid of Polynesian circus.

The storyline isn't essential to the show, however. Much more important is the blending of two artistic genres and the perfect execution of difficult circus acts performed in a lively theater atmosphere. Nicholas achieves that in an entertaining, if sometimes obvious, way.

At the beginning of the show, after a comical but long opening act by an elaborately dressed and painted Polynesian "warrior" (funnier if you or someone you're with gets pulled up on stage), the circus begins as one group of traditional Polynesians perform a quick hula while a set of outrageously costumed cirque performers begin a hula hoop routine involving one woman impressively spinning her full body length in rings.

The theme seems to fall away after that as more serious circus acts follow. I had to peek through my fingers to watch as one woman dangled precariously from a rope by her ankle while holding another rope that swung her partner around in dizzying circles by the neck.

The small but impressive cast is pulled mostly from two longtime circus families,



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the Wallendas and Arestovs, but includes artists from Brazil, Germany and Eastern Europe, and even a few from Oahu.

Perhaps the most remarkable performance came from rola bola artist Simon Arestov, who climbed to impossible heights aboard a rickety, rocky contraption built of cylinders and tiny platforms. It's a balancing feat that attains the skill and difficulty levels usually reserved for the more popular (and more elaborate) Cirque Du Soleil productions.

But despite all the death-defying acts that we saw that night a different type of performance stole the show. Just to the left of the main stage, in her own tiny spotlight, stood cellist Diane Rubio. Petite as she was, this dark beauty commanded attention behind an instrument taller than she. Local artists, Rubio and her partner, percussionist Daniel Cruces, perform a magnetic, live original score that melds rock and classical music for a sound that stays perfectly in tune with the action on stage. After the show Rubio hinted she's been practicing aerials and may someday take her incredible Cirque performance off the ground.

"The show is evolving," said Rubio. "We've just joined the circus, and this is only the beginning." *MTW*

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