

## **NCL putting new spin on dinner shows with 'Cirque Dreams'**

By: Johanna Jainchill April 04, 2010

POMPANO BEACH, Fla. — Neil Goldberg, the producer of the Cirque Dreams and Dinner show that will debut on the Norwegian Epic this summer, has one small goal: to reinvent cruise ship entertainment.

Goldberg, the founder of Cirque Productions, which produces cirque-style shows around the country (the company is not related to Cirque du Soleil), created the two-hour show for the Epic that will be the first to combine interactive, cirque entertainment with a three-course meal.

The show will be performed twice a night, six days a week on Norwegian Cruise Line's upcoming 4,200-passenger Epic.

Speaking at a behind-the-scenes tour at Cirque Productions' studio that included a preview of the Cirque Dreams and Dinner show, Goldberg explained that no other show at sea would have acrobatics happen so close to the audience.

Much of the show will be performed on a 10-foot diameter stage under a 20-foot-high ceiling. Tables and chairs will surround the stage, but the performers will also be integrated with the dining experience: They will put hats on audience members, sit on their laps, bring them drinks and perform aerial acrobatics over their heads.

"What they see on Epic they will not see anywhere else," Goldberg said.

Goldberg has been producing cirque shows since 1993, and for almost that long, he said, cruise lines have been approaching him about putting together a performance on a ship.

But until NCL came knocking, none agreed to Goldberg's terms.

"No line has ever stepped up to the plate to commit to the quality of entertainment that I want to do," he said. NCL was the first to make that commitment, he said, primarily by allowing him to bring on the entire cast of the show, and also by letting Cirque Productions be involved from an early stage.

NCL even designed the Epic's Spiegel Tent with the production in mind.

The Cirque Dreams show is what Andy Stuart, NCL's executive vice president of sales and marketing, said it takes to stand out in the realm of vacation entertainment, especially with consumers seeing more high-quality entertainment than ever in places such as Las Vegas and Orlando.

"We brought our partner in early, because entertainment is such an important part of the Epic," he said.

Stuart said NCL made a "significant investment" in the show but would not disclose how much.

"We made a decision to change the face of cruise ship entertainment," he said, pointing to both the Cirque Dreams show and other acts that will perform on the Epic, such as Blue Man Group and Legends in Concert.

On land, a Cirque Productions show costs from \$25 to \$50 per person, without dinner. NCL is charging between \$15 and \$20, including dinner.

For NCL, a challenge will be having its servers wind through the room to serve diners while performances are under way.

Karl Muhlberger, NCL's vice president of food and beverage, who was at the production studio to check out the show, said that some of the serving staff would dance and perform as part of the show.

"We will try to find talented crew members and bring them on the ship," he said.

To make it easier on servers, the menus will be set and substitutions will be very limited. But at the Cirque Dreams show, Goldberg expects food to be an afterthought.

"Some people might even forget to eat," he said.

Stuart brushed off comparisons to Celebrity Cruises' attempt to bring Cirque du Soleil performers onto its ships. The partnership with Montreal-based Cirque du Soleil, which launched in 2004, was terminated after a few years.

Stuart said people came onto the Celebrity ships expecting a full Cirque du Soleil "spectacle" but instead got vignettes from the show.

"People will also expect a spectacle with Cirque Dreams and Dinner," he said. "And what they get will exceed their expectations."