



GORDON BECK THE GAZETTE

A team of circus performers from Artcirq trains at Cirque Éloize headquarters in Montreal yesterday. Co-director Guillaume Saladin (in tank top) and National Circus School teacher André St-Jean give one member a leg up.

MEMBERS OF NUNAVUT'S ARTCIRQ have been visiting Montreal as part of a mission to help Northern youths find their creative spark

Arctic circus warms up

KATHRYN GREENAWAY THE GAZETTE

The thing that surprises sound technician and circus artist Jack Orunnngnut the most about Montreal is the great weather.

"It's November and we're wearing T-shirts," he said during a rehearsal break at Cirque Éloize's headquarters in Old Montreal Monday. "Back home we're riding snowmobiles."

Home is Igloolik, Nunavut – 2,663 kilometres from Montreal.

Orunnngnut is one of 11 circus artists from the Igloolik-based troupe Artcirq who have been participating in workshops at Cirque Éloize for the past week. They are working with Artcirq co-directors Lucy Tulugarjuk and Guillaume Saladin (a Cirque Éloize alumnus), plus Cirque Éloize head trainer Krystof Sorosczyński and theatre director Daniele Finzi Pasca. Éloize has been involved in various exchanges with Artcirq for eight years.

Monday, the artists gathered in a spacious studio and formed a circle, six of them holding long wooden poles. They tossed the poles from one to another, with no warning.

The exercise hones team focus.

"Being involved with Artcirq helps them find out who they are," Tulugarjuk said as she watched from the sidelines. "It helps them realize they can accomplish things through art."

Tulugarjuk teaches theatre techniques, throat singing, traditional songs and drum dancing to Artcirq members. Moviegoers know her from the award-

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ARTCIRQ'S GUILLAUME SALADIN

winning film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner*, in which she played Puja. She also stars in *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*, which opened the Toronto International Film Festival in September and recently played in Montreal cinemas.

Artcirq is a positive initiative born of tragedy. In 1998, two Igloolik teens committed

suicide. Saladin was up north as a member of the Inuusiqu Youth Drama Group at the time, and was also training at the National Circus School in Montreal. In the wake of the tragedy, a group was formed by the Igloolik-based Isuma production company (which was responsible for *Atanarjuat*) to help young people develop creative skills. The first project was a television series about the plight of young people in the Far North. Saladin got involved as a writer and actor.

Then, with the help of six circus school buddies, he established Artcirq.

"There is a big culture clash going on (in the North)," Saladin said. "The big-screen television is tuned to MTV. Then you open the door and there is nothing but vast open space."

Saladin has toured the world with Cirque Éloize and has been involved with the Montreal troupe's exchanges with Artcirq over the years.

"We just try to see the good side of everything and teach skills they can use," Saladin said. "They begin to feel better."

It's the first visit to the southern part of Canada for most of the performers. They are sharing an apartment in the vicinity of the Jean Talon Market, have attended circus shows and are hoping to visit the pool at the Olympic Stadium before heading back home on Sunday.

"The biggest challenge was breaking their fear of the south – and their fear of getting lost," Saladin said.

Orunnngnut, 21, likes Montreal and wants to return one day to study lighting design. In the meantime, he has Artcirq projects to complete.

The troupe would like to perform at the National Aboriginal Achievement Award gala in Edmonton in March.

"And we plan to tour to other (northern) communities to give workshops – given by young people for young people," Saladin said. "We want to invade the Arctic."

For more information about Artcirq: www.artcirq.org.

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