

Leah Angutimarik, Derek Aqgiaquq and Guillaume Saladin visit the "Project," an art centre in Dublin, Ireland, on April 6. As members of Igloolik's Artcirque, they performed their unique style of juggling and acrobatics, and screened several films they helped produce. (PHOTO BY ARTCIRQUE)

Three-ring circus rocks one-horse town

Igloolik circus troupe grows to 17



JOHN THOMPSON
Nunatsiaq News



Joey Ammaq stands at the bottom, supporting Abraham Ivalu and, at the top, Nikita Nutarariaq during practice. Yvan Morgan watches while standing on an inflatable ball to the right. (PHOTO BY QAJAAQ ELLSWORTH)

Clowning around has life-and-death urgency for Guillaume Saladin.

A graduate of L'Ecole Nationale de Cirque, Montreal's renowned circus school, Saladin spent seven years teaching Igloolik youth how to combat boredom and despair with rock music, juggling and acrobatic stunts.

He started the project, *Artcirque*, after two Igloolik teens he knew killed themselves. Today the circus troupe has grown to 17 members, and recently, they've taken their show on tour.

In early April Saladin and two others visited Dublin, Ireland to show off their moves and screen several films about life in the Arctic.

They have even more ambitious plans for the future: Saladin said he hopes to return to Ireland next year, with 10 performers in tow. Closer to home, the troupe plans to perform in Hall Beach this summer.

As well, they'll receive help this summer from professionals visiting from Montreal's Cirque Eloize, who will teach juggling, clowning and trampoline in June and July.

Saladin's watched the self-confidence of performers grow since the group's inception.

"There's big results, I feel," he said. "In circus, you can't cheat. What you show on stage is what you practiced. That's a very good tool to know yourself."

He remembers having to prod teens out of bed to practice during the summer. Now he said fellow performers do that job for him.

"They understand if one person is missing, the whole group can't work. Everybody counts," Saladin said. "People are realizing that when we're alone, we're weaker."

For performer Leah Angutimarik, the trip to Ireland was like something out of a movie. She should know: Angutimarik plays a lead role in Igloolik Isuma's *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen*.

"I'd like to go back again," she said.

Angutimarik is a "flyer" — someone who spends a lot of time balanced precariously on top of fellow performers. "It feels good. It makes me so tall," she said.

The circus troupe has given her focus. Other than

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Artcirque, there isn't much to do in Igloolik except aimlessly wander town and hang out in front of the stores, she said. "There's absolutely nothing here."

It also gave her strength. "I was out of shape. I was so weak," she remembered. "But I kept on going and kept on training," she said.

She practices several hours a day, five days a week.

"Never give up."

Artcirque's routines weave together traditions from Inuit culture and the circus. Some take inspiration from traditional games such as the high kick, but give them a modern twist.

"If you play hip-hop and then you high-kick a Pepsi can you just drank and crushed, then you get an act," Saladin said.

Lately they've been experimenting with the trampoline,

inspired by an old Inuit practice of bouncing people into the air with animal skins to look for animals to hunt in the distance.

For music, ayaya singing meets electric guitar and bass, along with Saladin's trombone.

The group practices inside a building that holds the community's old pool, using old mattresses in place of a real trampoline and crash mats.

"The dump is full of very good equipment," Saladin said.

Each performer is both acrobat and actor, Saladin said.

Their clowning routines reflect life in Igloolik: during a performance held in front of a crowd of 250 in March, Jaycko Arnatsiaq wore a colourful clown wig and set of headphones to play a young man who wanders town while listening to his walkman, lost to the world.

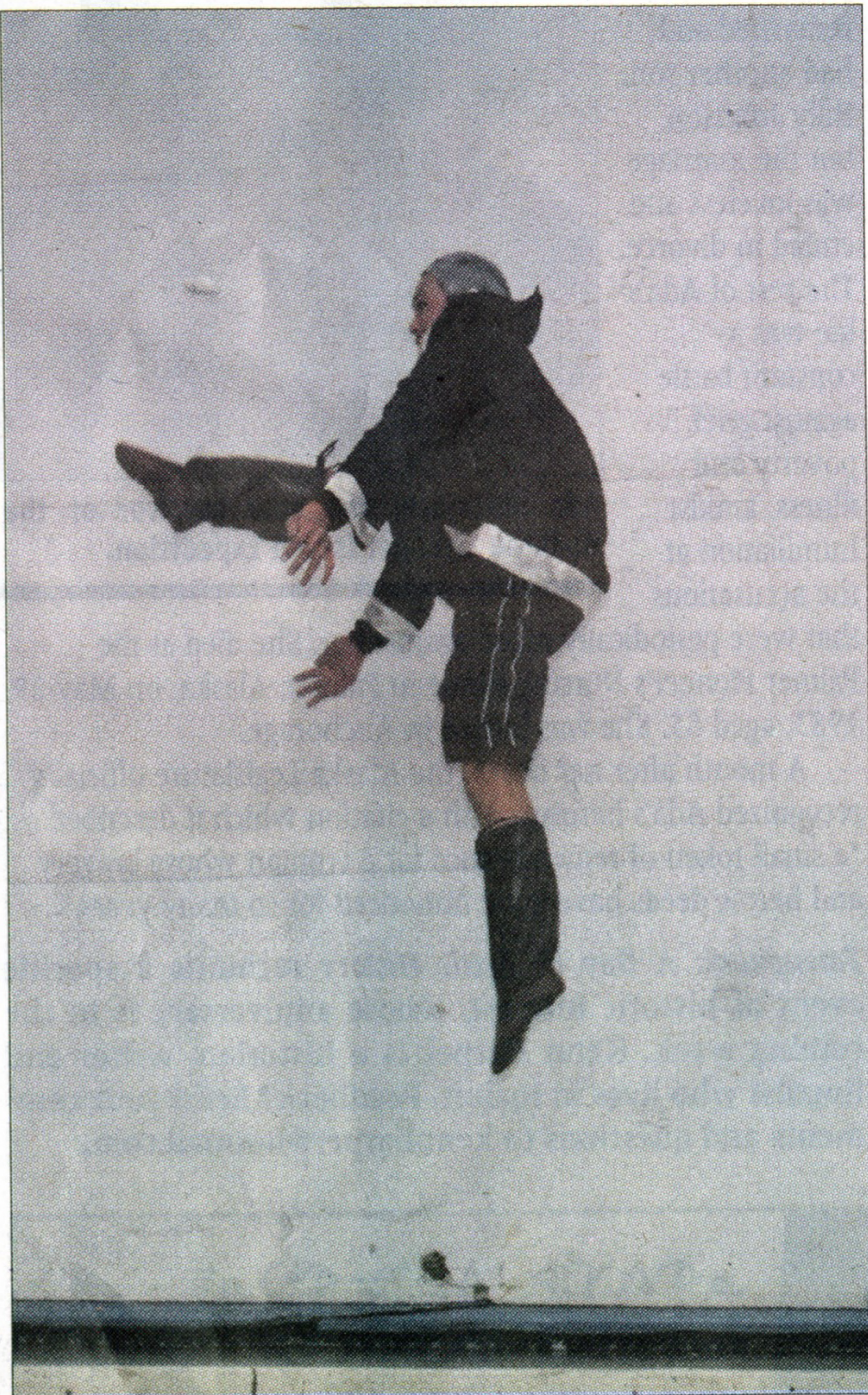
Besides clowning around, Artcirque is also a video collective that works closely with Isuma Productions. While in Dublin they showed a video for an Igloolik rock group, the Eskies, and a documentary about how lonely life can be in small, remote communities.

Artcirque receives funding from the Canada Council for the Arts and is sponsored by First Air.

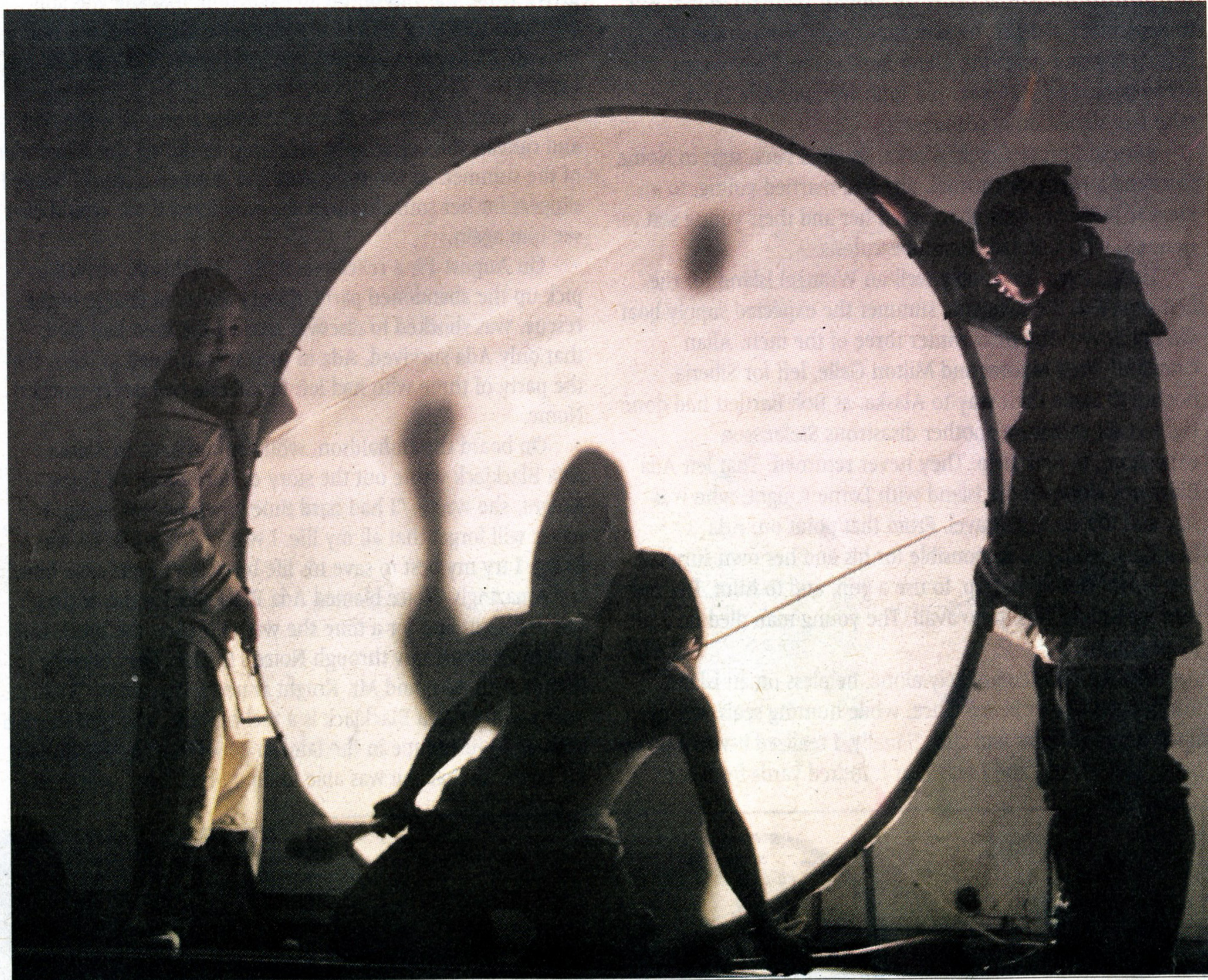
If Artcirque is able to send 10 performers to Dublin next year, Saladin said he will have that many role models who return to Igloolik.

"It's going to be 10 little fires who are going to be burning in the community," he said.

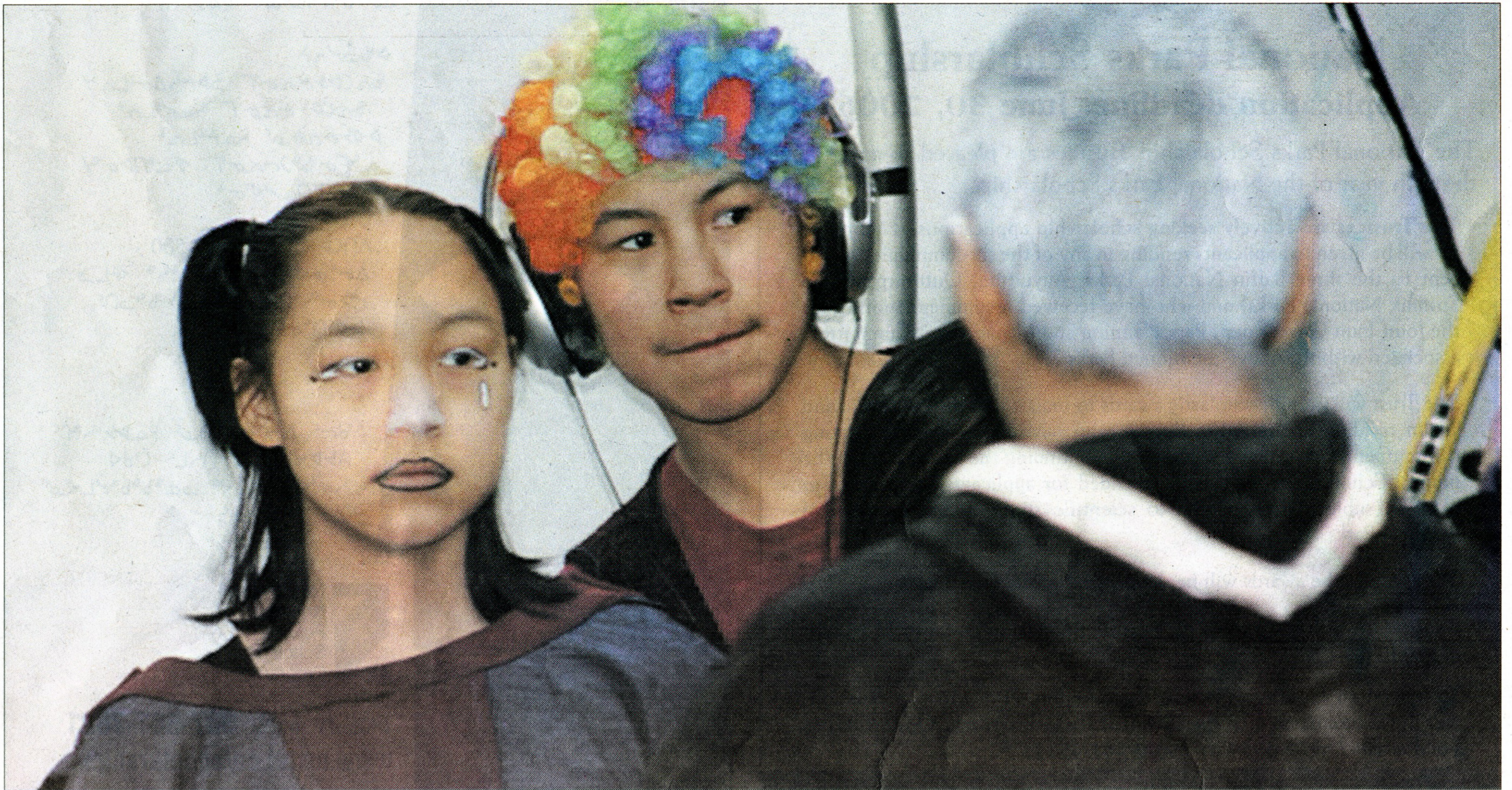
And 10 more examples of what you can do with life, other than aimlessly wander the streets.



Silas Qulaut high kicks a crumpled Pepsi can after drinking it, combining traditional Inuit games with a twist of modern life and circus acrobatics. (PHOTO BY QAJAAQ ELLSWORTH)



Yvan Morgan juggles behind a screen during a performance this March in Igloolik, in front of a crowd of 250 people. (PHOTO BY QAJAAQ ELLSWORTH)



Sheeba Kubluk and Jaycko Arnatsiaq prepare backstage before a show in Igloolik. Kubluk is a contortionist — someone who twists herself into all sorts of unusual positions — while Arnatsiaq plays a young man who wanders town while listening to his walkman, lost to the world. (PHOTO BY ARTCIRQUE)