

LEAPS AND BOUNDS

Acrobats take over Club Fugazi with strength, grace and glee.

BY LESLIE KATZ

Club Fugazi is back — filled with nine sexy acrobats diving through hoops, sliding down poles, standing on top of each other, bouncing off a teeterboard and, as the name of their show declares, soaring through the air.

Dear San Francisco: A High-Flying Love Story features The 7 Fingers contemporary circus troupe from Canada in the North Beach theater where,

for five decades, *Beach Blanket Babylon* delighted audiences with goofy songs and huge headgear until it closed on New Year's Eve 2019.

Dear San Francisco: A High-Flying Love Story

Club Fugazi, 678 Green Street, San Francisco; Wednesday-Friday, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, 2 and 7:30 p.m.; Sunday, 2 and 6 p.m.; \$35-\$89; clubfugazisf.com

Hats are in this show, too, juggled deftly in a segment set in the Mission by **Enmeng Song**, a Chinese performer who also dazzled handling a Chinese yoyo called a diabolo, and shared an anecdote about wanting to move with his wife to a warm place, but,

he said, "This city is cold."

And though the costumes (by **Keiko Carreiro**) in black, white and gray reference our ever-present fog, *Dear San Francisco* — the brainchild of Bay Area-bred circus pros **Gypsy Snider** and **Shana Carroll** of San Francisco's Pickle Family Circus fame, back home after a stint in Montreal — bursts with warmth in this love letter to their city. But it's cool as well.

Years in the making, the show opened October 12 to friends and



Enmeng Song mesmerizes the crowd with a diabolo.

dignitaries including Mayor **London Breed** (sassily mentioning she checked with public health to make sure it was OK to not wear a mask during opening remarks) and Supervisor **Aaron Peskin**, whose district includes North Beach. Calling the evening a "dream come true" after the show concluded, he presented a citation of honor to the cast and creators.

Other familiar names flowed, too. Performers read love notes to the City from famous folks — including former Giants right fielder **Hunter Pence** ("You accepted me before I accepted myself") and theater producer **Jon Moscone** ("Try as I might, I can't quit you") — after an opening film sequence showed historical footage of horse and buggies cruising down Market Street,

and from the big 1906 earthquake.

Still, the stunts ruled. Single flyers on a trapeze caught performers thrown in the air by acrobats on the ground; a fellow on a unicycle brought his bike into the house and rode down a long, narrow table right behind Breed; the acrobats maneuvered in and about an old-time phone booth.

Best were the acts with the entire nimble cast: **Isabella Diaz**, **Melvin Diggs**, **Devin Henderson** (originally from San Francisco), **Ruben Ingwersen**, **Kalani June**, **Jérémi Levesque**, **Natasha Patterson** (also from the Bay Area), the previously mentioned Song (who introduced from the audience Master **Lu Yi**, former artistic director of China's Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe and beloved teacher



and mentor to many 7 Fingers performers) and **Junru Wang**.

After butterscotch candies were passed out and masked audience members were instructed to unwrap them and eat the “treat they deserve,” things caught fire with the athletes working two Chinese poles: scampering up them, swirling and twirling around them, and sliding down them, even head first, to the throbbing strains of The Doors’ “Break on Through (To the Other Side)” and the audience’s gasps of delight. Wild!

In an equally thrilling hoop-diving segment with the whole ensemble, the performers recited works by Beat poets **Diane di Prima**, **Lawrence Ferlinghetti**, **Allen Ginsberg**, **Jack Hirschman** and others set to groovy jazz of the era. (It was hard to catch

every word, though; the sound could be sharpened.)

Dialogue from *The Maltese Falcon* with **Humphrey Bogart** accompanied a smooth duo of jugglers finessing and balancing gleaming orbs the size of soccer balls; and two flying men bounded and somersaulted on a teeterboard amid lightning and thunder.

The breathtaking finale saw the strong and graceful Wang doing the seemingly impossible: balancing on her hand(s), perching on a post in the air, while a haunting bittersweet piano melody filled the air and her compatriots showered her with words and water, in that touching way *Cirque du Soleil* enchants when it’s good.

The cast performs amazing feats throughout the new show, including high-flying stunts.

For the epilogue, there was a therapeutic, lively group sing of “San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair)” during which troupers came into the house, offering blooms to some patrons; I took home a little stem with bright yellow petals.

Like the mayor predicted in her talk at the outset, the 90-minute show did capture the spirit and resilience of San Francisco. The perfect tonic for recovery during this world-changing pandemic, *Dear San Francisco* also offers an opportunity, said general manager **Eric Eislund**, for audiences to get a rare, up-close view of world-class acrobats in a small, intimate venue. Club Fugazi is back, indeed! **NHC**