

# New circus show coming to Club Fugazi

*7 Fingers acrobats to appear in former home of 'Beach Blanket Babylon'*

By Leslie Katz  
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An intimate circus show with a San Francisco theme is coming in 2021 to take over Club Fugazi, the North Beach home to the beloved musical revue "Beach Blanket Babylon" for decades.

Slated to open in the fall, the yet-to-be named show is presented by Club Fugazi Experiences, a venture formed by Bay Area-bred circus arts pros Gypsy Snider and Shana Carroll of the classy Montreal-based circus-theater collective The 7 Fingers.

"I feel honored and privileged, and also a great responsibility to this venue and to the neighborhood," says Snider, adding, "I also feel a great

responsibility to performing arts in general and to coming back after this very, very difficult time for everyone — but especially for the performing arts."

Snider — daughter of Peggy Snider and Larry Pisoni, co-founders of San Francisco's independent, down-home Pickle Family Circus — is not daunted by the prospect of filling the iconic theater in the 114-year-old Italian community center.

"What 'Beach Blanket' did is legendary in the entertainment world. We won't meet it, we won't match it, we won't surpass it; it's an incredible anomaly and it was just perfect for everything that it was," she says. But she adds, "We're doing something so completely different. We're mostly really just excited to be able to activate this space in a totally new way."

In a reconfigured theater that will have about 300 seats, the show will feature nine skilled acrobatic artists, including a few with local ties and



RENDERING BY ALEXANDER V. NICHOLS

**Club Fugazi in North Beach is being remodeled to accommodate an upcoming circus-themed show.**

experience with Cirque du Soleil.

Calling the show "a love letter to San Francisco," Snider says she and Carroll conceived it by putting ideas they've developed about The City's history, and what has moved them about it, into a big box of cue cards.

"We're going to use those to create

an image-based line of storytelling," she says, adding, "What we're trying to do is get [the audience] to really feel the essence of San Francisco in all its volatility: the boom town versus the bust town versus the explosive energy of the 1970s, where just anything seemed possible and revolutionary, to the far swing toward the neo-tech capitalism. No one in San Francisco in the '70s could have even imagined that The City would move in that direction."

The goal, she says, is to "marry all of those tensions" into "eye-opening, heart-opening and mind-opening" imagery to which the audience can relate.

The notion of being "relatable" and addressing everyday life — unlike the sparkle and spandex and flipping and flying of the traditional circus — is what has set The 7 Fingers apart, Snider says.

And while the new production will be nothing physically like "Beach Blanket Babylon" with its crazy songs, pop culture jokes and huge hats, Snider says that audiences may find a few parallels.

Unlike musicals or dramatic plays, both "BBB" and the new show are cabaret, which Snider calls a "vehicle for social encounter, for social discourse that's supposed to provoke

and include the audience."

And both are meant to appeal to tourists as well as Bay Area folks.

"We're hoping that eventually this is going to be a place where out-of-towners are going to be able to come and see and feel the heartbeat of The City, and also encounter locals," she says.

"We want people to come and be able to converse before the show, and have things happening slowly around them ... and then they realize they're actually part of the show."

She adds, "There's not a definite beginning and ending to the piece, it's as fluid as The City."

With tickets going on sale in late June, and a tentative target opening date in October, Snider says the show's producers are "starting small" and taking advantage of how the pandemic has given them the luxury of time, some two years, to develop the project.

"We're really going to try and cultivate a safe space, an intimate space for people to get used to going back to the theater and being in the same room as other people."

But after that initial re-entry, the permanent show and cast will shift and evolve over time: "There always will be something fun and new to experience," she says.