

# The Semaphore

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THE  
CIRCUS  
IS COMING!





## FROM THE EDITOR

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Two well-traveled circus people are coming home. But they aren't coming alone. They're bringing the circus with them.

Starting next month, a new contemporary circus production opens in San Francisco, taking up residence at the historic Club Fugazi, the home of our beloved theatrical extravaganza, "Beach Blanket Babylon."

Those travelers, Bay Area natives both, Gypsy Snider and Shana Carroll, are the renowned creators and co-collaborators of "Dear San Francisco: A High-Flying Love Story," which they describe as an "intimate and immersive production."

I had the good fortune of speaking with Gypsy about her career, the evolution of contemporary circus, and the 7 Fingers theatrical circus company responsible for this show.

Snider's early start as a performer—she was four—is not surprising, when one learns she is the daughter of Peggy Snider and Larry Pisoni, founders of the famed Pickle Family Circus.

The Pickle Family Circus opened in 1974, offering a "theatrical revolution" to traditional circus programming—at which tigers and elephants were not merely unshackled but completely absent, replaced by clowns and jugglers and other performers conveying a social message in story form. The messaging was subtle; throwing a "pie in the face" was a reference against authority.

The spirit of the Pickle Family Circus was also different, its structure operating in an egalitarian and collaborative way, dividing roles, responsibilities, and earnings equitably. It collaborated with local nonprofit organizations as it toured from southern California to Alaska, bringing attention to its enterprise and needed revenues to its partners.

The origins of the Pickle Family Circus can be traced most directly to the San Francisco Mime Troupe, its objectives focused on issues of social and economic injustice using an "everyman perspective" to oppose racism, war, and corporate greed. (The Troupe continues to bring its theatrical performances to Bay Area audiences, even during the pandemic restrictions via "radio play podcast.")

And the SF Mime Troupe itself brings the legacy of "guerrilla" messaging or "guerrilla theater" in its cleverly choreographed calls for social action, though the guerrilla movement certainly has not been subtle in its methods.

Many of us became acutely aware of guerrilla tactics watching and reading about the actions of the Aids

# CLUB FUGAZI IS BACK!



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Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). With a coterie of desperate men dying of AIDS and unable to get support from the federal government, the group started to use direct action and political theater (the famous infiltration of the New York Stock Exchange to protest the price of AZT, the only approved but unaffordable drug to treat the disease) to heighten awareness of the issue.

In the same city, a group of women artists, the "guerrilla girls," called attention to the lack of gender and racial equality in the art world, naming themselves after deceased and often forgotten women artists, wearing guerrilla masks to protect their anonymity and protest the anonymity of their forebears. The "guerrilla girls" are active today, via productions, billboards, and social media, asking provocative questions like "Are there more naked women than women artists in art museums?" that invite the public to "Visit Your Favorite Museum, Count 'em Up & Let the Guerrilla Girls Know!"

The Pickle Family Circus and the San Francisco Mime Troupe, as well as the Big Apple Circus and, later, Cirque du Soleil, exemplify the "New Circus" movement (European style) characterized by a one-ring structure, which brings performers and the audience closer together, facilitating interaction as the

action—and story—unfolds.

The circus and arts company responsible for the show, 7 Fingers, was created in 2002 by seven circus artists—Snider and Carroll are two of the founding members—to redefine circus by stripping it down to its exhilarating quintessence.

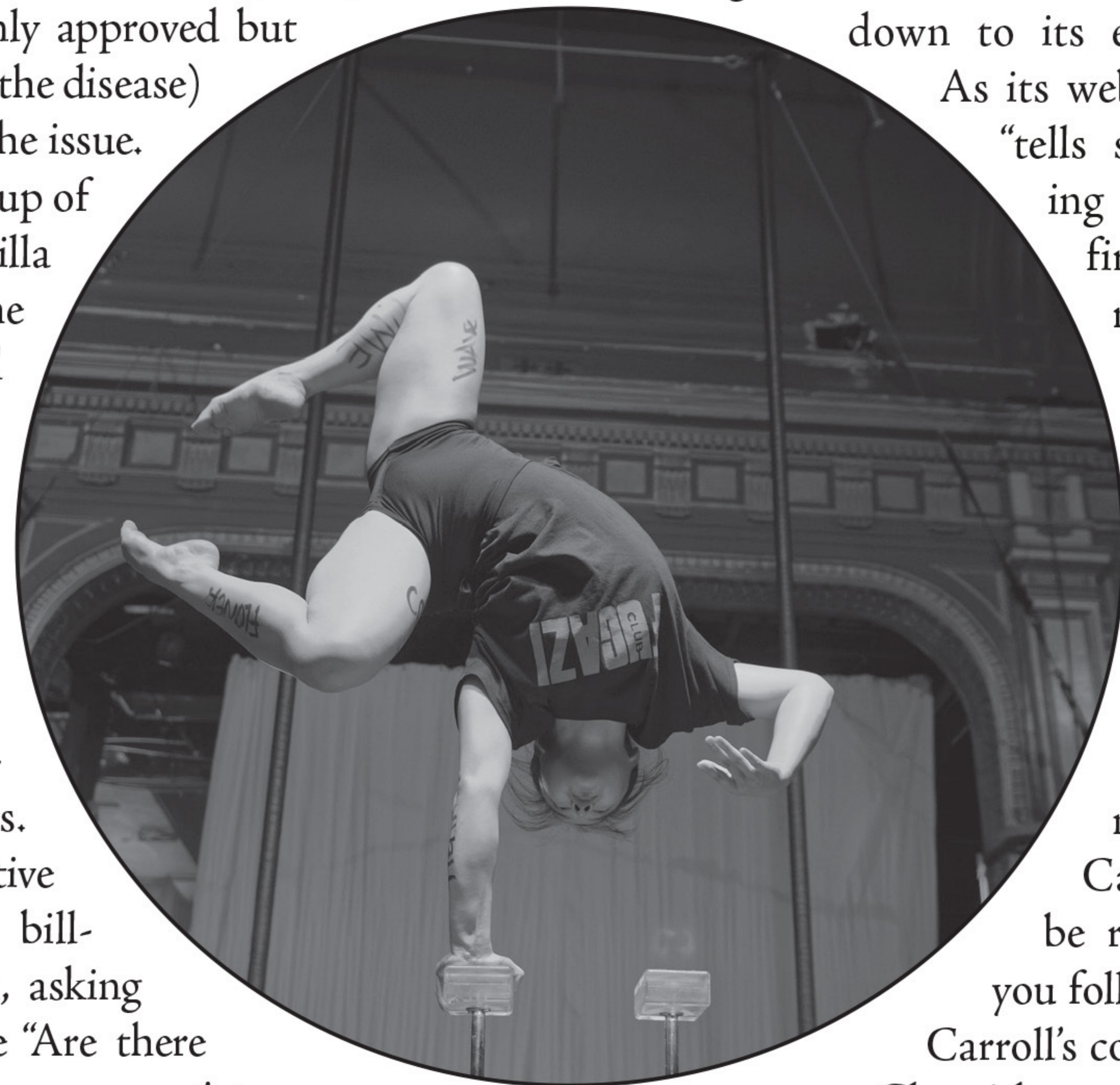
As its website proclaims, 7 Fingers "tells stories using death-defying acrobatics with a life-affirming theatricality." The modern circus collective creates different kinds of works—individually and collectively—that "bring out the challenges of living, the joys and the issues."

Not to be overlooked is award-winning collaborator Shana Carroll, also delighted to be returning to her roots. If you followed noted journalist Jon Carroll's column in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, you read about the experiences of his trapeze artist and Pickle Family alum daughter.

"Dear San Francisco..." indeed. What a wonderful post-pandemic joy this new theatrical entertainment will bring.

Gypsy and Shana, welcome home! ✂

Ticket information can be found in an advertisement elsewhere in this issue.



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