

## It's a bug's life — and a fun one at that



Cirque du Soleil's new show "OVO" at the Fan Pier features acrobatic spiders, ants, crickets, and more. (Benoit Fontaine)

By [Don Aucoin](#)

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### OVO

Written, choreographed, and directed by Deborah Colker

Sets, Gringo Cardia. Costumes, Liz Vandal. Lights, Eric Champoux. Presented by Cirque du Soleil.

At: Grand Chapiteau on Fan Pier, near Pier Four, through Aug. 29. Tickets: \$35-\$161 for kids, \$45-\$230 for adults. 800-450-1480, [www.cirquedusoleil.com/ovo](http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/ovo)

Actually, make that crawling, running, gyrating, whirling, hurtling, cycling, and flying.

Cirque du Soleil is in town with a new show, "OVO," that is set in the insect world. It's a charmer and often a dazzler, marred only by a grating audience-interaction segment in the second act that stalls the show's momentum and made me wish someone would send *out* the clowns.

As with earlier Cirque du Soleil productions, there are times in "OVO" when the performers achieve a level of artistry that almost defies comprehension. It is like watching Fred Astaire dance or Mariano Rivera pitch.

At this particular moment, Cirque du Soleil may feel it has something to prove. Since it was founded in 1984, the Montreal-based organization had succeeded in casting a spell over audiences with one spectacle-laden show after another. All told, its productions have been seen by nearly 100 million spectators.

But Cirque experienced an embarrassing hiccup last month when “Banana Shpeel,” a \$20 million foray onto Broadway, closed after only six weeks.

Now comes the inventive, if amorphous, “OVO.” Written and staged by Deborah Colker, the first female director to take the helm of a Cirque show, it is a fast-moving riot of acrobatics, aerial wizardry, and dance movement. (Colker, a native of Brazil, also devised the choreography).

“OVO” purports to be about such grandiose themes as biodiversity, the mystery of life, and what the company calls the “hidden, secret world at our feet.” That’s eyewash, really, since the insect-kingdom setting is largely a pretext for Cirque’s 54 performers to do what they do so well, albeit while wearing outfits of iridescent green, red, and blue devised by costume designer Liz Vandal.

The slender plot of “OVO” concerns a fly (Francois-Guillaume LeBlanc) who wanders into a community of other insects while toting a giant egg on his back (“ovo” means egg in Portuguese). He instantly becomes enamored of a fetching, flirty ladybug (Michelle Matlock).

The other insects, meanwhile, are captivated by the large white orb (in what the Cirque creators acknowledge is a nod to the way the apes get transfixed by the obelisk at the beginning of Stanley Kubrick’s “2001”). So while the fly is pitching woo with the ladybug, the other insects make off with the egg.

But the egg is not central to subsequent developments — not that there really are subsequent developments. “OVO” suffers from the lack of a compelling story line and the absence of a truly hissable villain who would ratchet up the dramatic tension.

You’re not likely to care much when the performers start to do their stuff. The crowd was electrified midway through the first half of “OVO” when five jugglers attired as ants (Han Jing, Su Shan, Wang Shaohua, Zhu Tingting, Kong Yufei, and Pei Xin) used their feet to flip objects (meant to represent corn and kiwi) end over end and transferred spinning disks (representing eggplant) from one to another.

As a pair of amorous butterflies, Maxim Kozlov and Inna Mayorova created a gorgeous aerial ballet on a rope, swooping and twirling upside down far from the ground. Further upside-down astonishment was later delivered by “Spiderman” (Li Wei), who balanced on his chin on a unicycle while pedaling the cycle back and forth on a wire suspended 15 feet from the stage. Did I mention that the wire was swaying much of the time?

Words can't really capture "Creatura" (Lee Brearley), a headless character whose torso-twisting moves and now-you-see-it-now-you-don't manipulation of his limbs gave him the appearance of a giant, living Slinky, friendly and spooky at once. (With Creatura, "Toy Story" meets "A Bug's Life.") Speaking of manipulating limbs: Svetlana Belova led a team of spider contortionists who created such impossible pretzels of their bodies that it made me wince to see it. Familiar, though still impressive, thrills were delivered on the trapeze by 11 performers dressed as scarab beetles who demonstrated remarkable teamwork as they caught or flipped one another.

"OVO" saves the highlight for the end: A gaggle of performers attired as green crickets who scale a clifflike 20-foot-high wall and then proceed to leap from it and bound back to the top again and again (there are trampolines on the floor), somersaulting and whizzing past one another diagonally.

It's an exhilarating display, flawlessly executed, and like much of "OVO," it made me wonder who needs CGI when human beings can generate these kinds of special effects.

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