



PHOTO COURTESY MATT BEARD

BEAUTIFUL BEING AND NOTHINGNESS

Cirque du Soleil's Quidam explores darker themes

One of the biggest stars of Cirque du Soleil's *Quidam* cannot fold into a pretzel while dangling from a silken rope or pivot through hoops while defying gravity. The star is rather inflexible, actually. The *Quidam* cast and crew affectionately calls him "Télé," but in more formal circles, he is known as *téléphérique*. Télé is a 120-foot-long aluminum arch system, and he allows his fellow performers to take flight. "It's just stunning," says *Quidam*'s Assistant Artistic Director Georgia Stephenson. "There are five arches and they stand from backstage all the way to the front of the stage where the audience is." So if you're in the audience this week, look up.

Quidam, Cirque du Soleil's ninth stage production, is one of the Canadian company's longest-running shows,

punching in at 16 years, and perhaps its darkest. Trading the saturated oranges, fuchsias and emeralds of *Saltimbanco* or *Koozâ* for a more somber palette of grays and gas lamp greens with pops of red and yellow, *Quidam* exists in the imagination of Zoé, a teenage girl filled with existential *ennui*. *Quidam* (meaning a nameless passer-by in Cirque du Soleil tongue) is a world of whimsy where she can escape her indifferent parents, and the title character — a headless gentleman with an umbrella and bowler hat (think surrealist painter Rene Magritte's *The Son of Man*, except juggling) — represents "everyone and no one," or if you want to go further down the rabbit hole, being and nothingness.

"The thing that I find interesting is it is [Zoé's] imagination, however the characters are all very human," Stephenson says. "Humanity is a driving force in the story as opposed to

fantasy or fantastical characters." The characters may be more quotidian than others in the Cirque du Soleil family, but they are certainly not lacking in humor. Target is literally a human target with a red bullseye painted on his chest (and an uncanny smile on his face), the Chiennes Blanches (translates to White Bitches — of the canine persuasion) are a faceless and voiceless chorus and then there's Boum-Boum (translates to Bang-Bang), a clownish version of *The Dark Knight Rises*' Bane, who proudly harasses the audience with his howls.

Zoé's story is told through soaring acrobatic acts like the Cloud Swing and Spanish Web and this is where *le téléphérique* shines, launching the performers as they soar above the stage and swoop down over the audience. *C'est magnifique*. ■

Quidam runs Oct. 25-28 at Matthew Knight Arena; \$29.50-\$92.