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Boat show

*Showboat Circus delights
in tight quarters
aboard historic barge*

By Sean Blake

Children of all ages made their way through the vendors, music and dancing of the Latino Festival down to the Hudson River Maritime Museum this past Sunday, August 14, for the Showboat Circus, a welcome chance to escape the sun, and brief rain, for a couple of hours.

This was not your average circus, however.

This circus was performed aboard the docked 1914 *Lehigh Valley RR Barge #79*. The boat had made its way up the river from its usual home in Red Hook, Brooklyn, "at about four knots, which is about as fast as I could walk it; it took us about 48 hours," said barge Capt. David Sharps.

Sharps came up with the idea for the nautical performance when he was living on a houseboat in France.

Though the 90-foot-long barge may seem a bit tight for a circus performance, the intimacy of the show benefits the audience,— not

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Boat show

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to mention that the odd notion of a "circus on a boat" is too interesting to pass up.

The circus's clown even hewed to the aquatic theme. Billy Bones was a "good pirate" and throughout the show he stopped in to enlist eager children into his "Pirate Academy," where the kids were trained to act like a pirate and help Bones with magic tricks.

Audience participation was involved in most of the acts. One lucky local even got a free lesson on playing the saw when he was called up from the crowd. "Singer and Saw" was an act that answered the age-old question of what would happen if a trained opera singer who has performed at the Metropolitan Opera House is accompanied by a musical saw. Singer Sarah Worthington and Nathan Carver performed everything from "Ave Maria" to Nina Simone's "Summertime."

The heat of the day was an added challenge for many of the performers. Acrobat and aerialist Fran Sperling was probably the most affected by the heat, as her sweating made it difficult to balance herself on her trapeze swing without her hands. This led to some tense moments where Sperling was obviously struggling with the routines that she created specifically for the barge show when she joined in 2003.

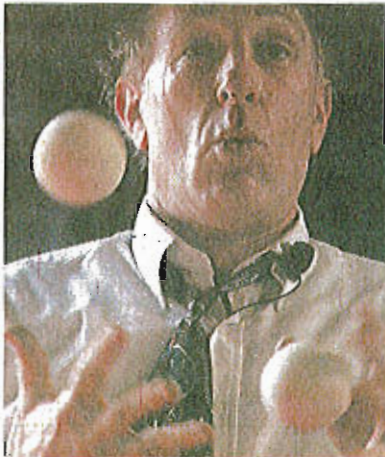
Jugglers Ilka Licht and Will Shaw showed very contrasting styles in their two performances. Licht, who had just arrived from Germany and was making her first performances with the Showboat Circus, used the more dramatic style with new-age music and very serious maneuvers. Shaw, who has been in numerous television commercials, used his wit and goofiness to entertain the adults in the crowd, while his act involving a ball, a spinning top and juggling tricks amazed all the young-at-heart.

Sharps, who spoke to the audience before the show, was the first act with his "Chinese jug and vase manipulation." The captain took three increasingly large receptacles, threw them up into the air and caught them on his head, balancing them there as he spun around underneath them. It was fairly impressive.

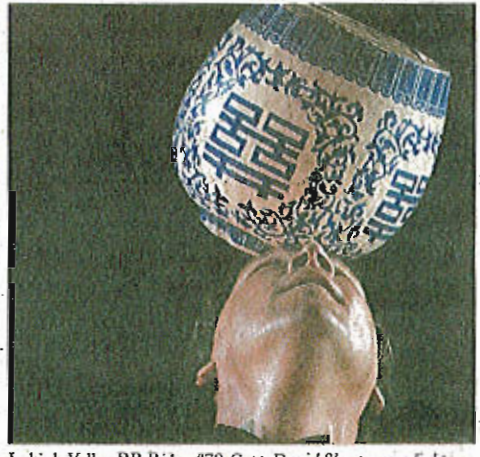
Sunday's show was only the first of two weekend dates the Showboat Circus is scheduled to perform as part of the Maritime Museum's weeklong Waterfront Festival. This Saturday, August 20, will see another two performances, at 12:30 and 3 p.m., from the maritime vaudevillians.



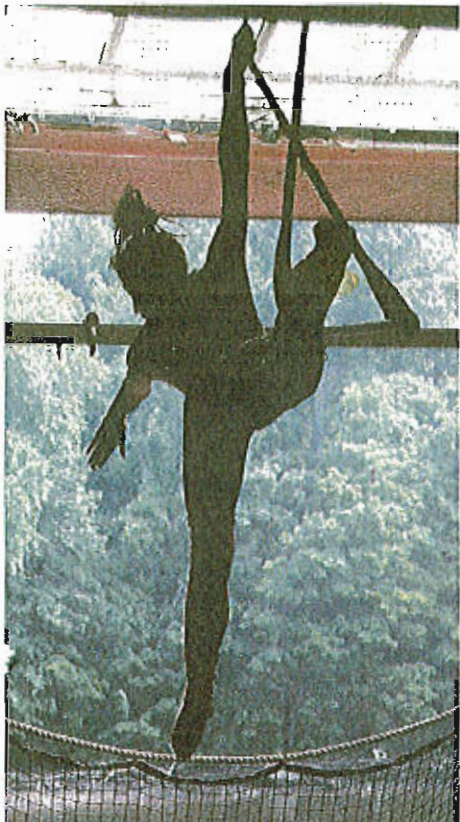
Juggler Ilka Licht plies her ancient trade.



Ball manipulator Will Shaw.



Lehigh Valley RR Barge #79 Capt. David Sharps moonlights with his Chinese Vases routine.



"Good Pirate" Billy Bones gives a lesson in wildlife appreciation, left, and shows kids the ropes, right.

