

The Suburban

# magazine

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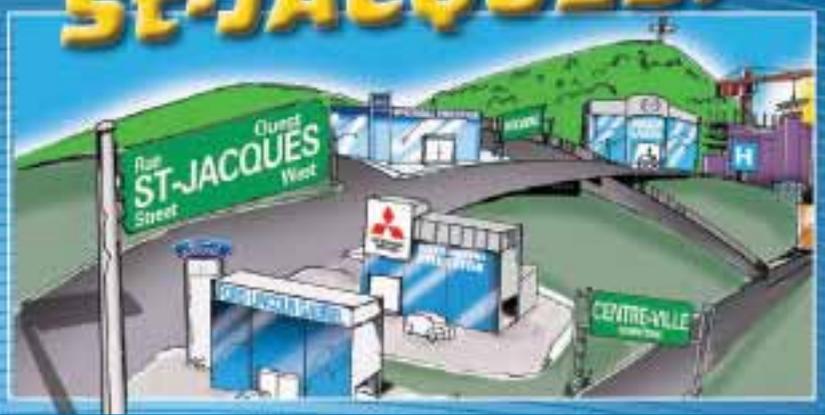


## A cabinet of curiosities

*Cirque du Soleil's Kurios*

PIERRE MANNING AND MARTIN GIRARD PHOTO

### It's happening on St-JACQUES!



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# Montreal circus maven Gypsy Snider leaves her stamp on Tony Award-winning Pippin

By Mike Cohen  
The Suburban

NEW YORK - To say that a Montrealer played a pivotal role in the Tony Award winning Broadway musical Pippin ([www.pippinthemusical.com](http://www.pippinthemusical.com)) is an understatement. Gypsy Snider beamed with pride as she recounted to me the role she successfully undertook to

revive this production with a circus flair.

Pippin, playing at the Music Box Theatre (239 West 45th Street), was the winner of four Tony Awards including Best Revival of a Musical, Best Actress in a Musical (Patina Miller) and Best Direction of a Musical (Diane Paulus). Music and lyrics are by noted Jewish composer Stephen Schwartz, of Wicked fame while celebrated Broadway powerhouse Barry Weissler is the producer.

The storyline of Pippin revolves around a travelling troupe of Players putting on a play about the son of Charlemagne, Pippin, and the perils of his pursuit of happiness. He wages war, plots revolutions and tries out domestic life before finally being led toward an “extraordinary” ending crafted by the demonic Leading Player played by rising female Broadway star Patina Miller. But the gender of the Leading Player isn’t the only thing flipped around in this revival by Paulus. Now the Players are a circus troupe thanks to Snider, whose Les 7 doigts de la main are pioneers of circus on a human scale. She was actually personally recruited by Weissler three and half years ago, brought down to New York and along with Paulus began to rewrite Pippin from scratch.

“We reimaged it,” Snider told me. “It was originally about a travelling theatre troupe. We made it into a travelling circus. I got to sit down with Stephen Schwartz several times. He was incredible. Pippin has a tremendous history. This was the first musical to have TV commercials. It launched the career of actor Ben Vereen and it marked legendary choreographer Bob Fosse’s first Tony Award. It is really about the existential crisis about a young man wanting to be extraordinary.”

Pippin marks Snider's Broadway debut. Her career as a performer actually began at age four in San Francisco as part of her parents’ Pickle Family Circus, for which she toured internationally. “That is where the name Gypsy came from,” she said.

Snider discovered Montreal when she joined the Cirque du Soleil. This is where she met her now ex-husband Patrick Leonard. The two remain close friends, parents to two young girls and partners in the acrobatic troupe Les 7 doigts de la main, responsible for the hit show Traces among others.

“My parents weren’t just people who made my lunches and told me to do my homework,” Snider recalls. “I learned from them every day by watching them work and working with them. Most importantly, they taught me that no matter how bad you feel or how hard life can be, the show must go on. It was a very profound lesson for me,



and it's become a wonderful parallel for my own life."

The circus had always been Snider's life, but everything turned upside-down in January 2008 when she was diagnosed with advanced stage colon cancer. She needed massive abdominal surgery and rounds of chemotherapy and radiation. "Suddenly, my work felt trivial and my family became more important than ever before. I began to question how taxing show business can be and wondered if I should just move to the country and raise my two daughters in a stress-free environment, instead of in the glory of this wonderful but all-consuming lifestyle. It was during this difficult time that Diane Paulus reached out to me about the possibility of collaborating on a new production of Pippin."

Snider's first meeting with Paulus was at a sushi restaurant in Montreal. "I had never seen Pippin before," she recalls. "But after reading the script and doing some research, I realized I was familiar with certain pieces. I think the fact that I never saw the full package was vital in creating this reimagined revival. I saw Pippin with pure eyes. I knew that Diane wanted the company to become a circus troupe, and so that was my only vision of the story."

Snider's cancer officially went into remission during tech rehearsals of Pippin at ART in Cambridge, Massachusetts. "With Pippin, I was in love," she said. "I hired some of the best acrobats in the world, who are not only excellent at what they do, but are incredibly expressive and theatrical and passionate people onstage. They're not just performing tricks; they're also beautiful to watch. But what really blew my mind was that the dancers and the actors all wanted to be a part of the circus world, too. The passion that Patina Miller, Matthew James Thomas, Andrea Martin, Terrence Mann and Charlotte d'Amboise have surpassed anything that Diane, choreographer Chet Walker and I could have ever dreamed of. I'm not used to working with non-circus people, and it was so enriching to have to rethink my whole creative process."



Gypsy Snider

On the morning we spoke, Snider had just left her St. Henri home and dropped her two daughters at school. She returns to New York monthly to see the show and work on changes to choreography. A fall national tour is being planned. It will begin in her hometown of San Francisco. "I have not seen any confirmed Canadian dates," she says. "It has been promised to me that it will come to Canada one day."

Needless to say, Pippin has truly opened doors for Les 7 doigts de la main. "The work we do is very different," she says. "People know that."

This show is nothing short than spectacular from the moment the curtain rises and an energetic acrobatic scene lights up the stage.

The current cast features Matthew James Thomas as Pippin, Tony Award winner Patina Miller as Leading Player, Tony Award nominee Terrence Mann as Charles, Tony Award nominee Charlotte d'Amboise (Mann's wife) as Fastrada and Rachel Bay Jones as Catherine. Other members of the company include Erik Altemus, Colin Cunliffe, Andrew Fitch, Orion Griffiths, Viktoria Grimm, Sabrina Harper, Kelsey Jamieson, Preston Jamieson, Olga Karmansky, Richard Maguire, Luke Kolbe Mannikus, Gabrielle McClinton, Bethany Moore, Brad Musgrove, Billy Harrigan Tighe, Molly Tynes, Anthony Wayne, Ashton Woerz, Florian Zumkehr and adorably trained little dog.

Emmy and Golden Globe Award nominee Annie Potts ("Designing Women," God of Carnage) recently assumed the role of "Berthe" in the production. She looks outstanding for a woman of 61 years of age, totalling taking the audience by surprise with some acrobatic feats of her own. She was also very gracious the night we attended, signing autographs for everyone waiting at the stage door.

Pippin is approximately two hours and 35 minutes, including one 15-minute intermission. Presentations are Tuesdays through Sundays, with two shows each on Wednesday and Saturdays. Tickets can be purchased online or by calling Telecharge at 1-800-432-7250. The Music Box Theatre is located at 239 West 45th Street, between Broadway and 8th Avenue.

