



CIRCUS WITHOUT BORDERS On Tour



By Taylor Dueweke

Film Shares Pain and Hope with Boston Students

As the city dreamed of spring eternal, students at Boston public schools and colleges were introduced to a week of cinematic dreamscapes and heartfelt stories from a re-imagined world. A series of screenings of the film, *CIRCUS WITHOUT BORDERS*, followed by live performances spurred discussions about cultural identity and the obstacles of belonging to a community.

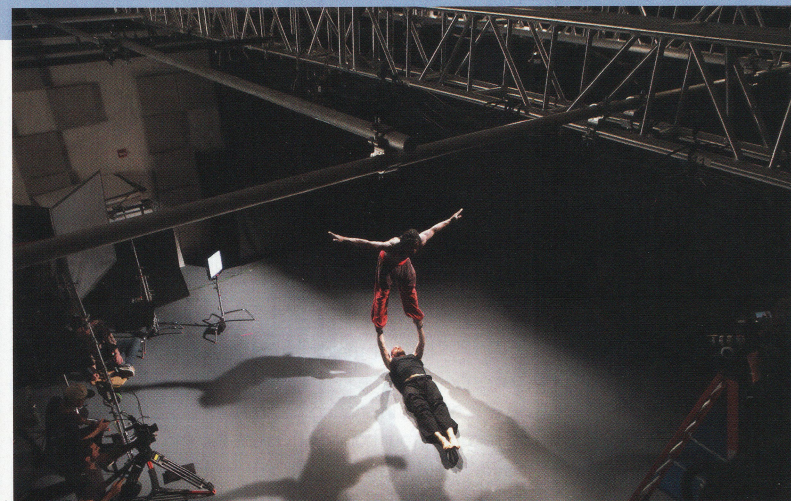
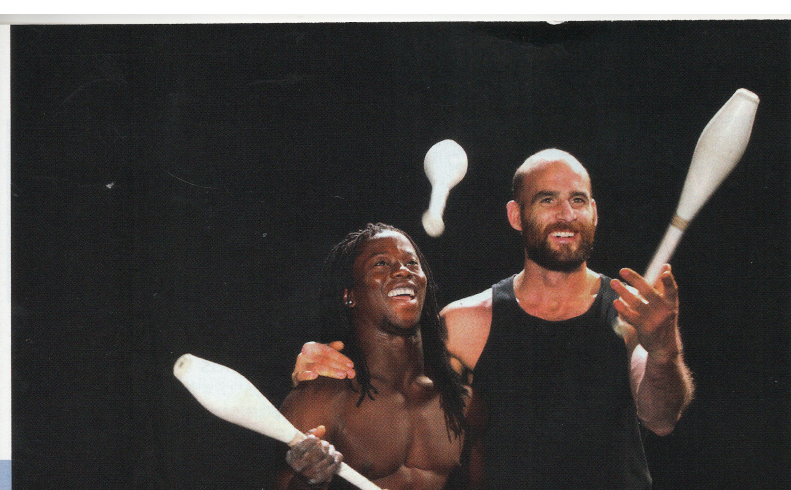
The seventy six minute documentary film, produced by Northern Light Productions, tells a story of friendship between two world-class acrobats and the partnership formed between the circuses each had founded — Artcirq, based in Igloolik, Nunavut, and Kalabante in Guinea, West Africa. On the surface, these two groups could hardly be more different, given their disparate homelands and ethnicities. But the two share the same vision: to bring hope and change to their struggling and isolated communities through circus arts.



The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, an early supporter of the documentary, dedicated resources to promote a dialogue about mental health awareness and poverty alleviation as part of the tour of *CIRCUS WITHOUT BORDERS*. During the week of March 21st, filmmakers Susan Gray (director) and Linda Matchan (producer and Boston Globe reporter) joined acrobats, Yamoussa Bangoura and Guillaume Saladin, to screen the film and engage with students— through juggling, gymnastics, music and deeply personal conversation.

"It's very touching to see that, right away, they get it," explained Guillaume Saladin, the founder of Artcirq. "They're not just amazed by the flips, but they can understand the message of hope."

CIRCUS WITHOUT BORDERS follows the journey of Saladin and Bangoura, as they bring their dreams into reality: to help the disadvantaged communities where they grew up. One is in the Canadian Arctic, where children are facing depression and suicide at a rate ten times higher than the Canadian national average; the other is in Guinea, West Africa, where Guinean children deal with crippling poverty and



limited options to improve their quality of life. The film documents how ArtCirq and Kalabante are transforming their communities as they inspire hope through acrobatics and art.

The tour is a part of the Pulitzer Center's educational outreach program, which had already brought the film to Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C.

"A girl who was sitting next to me in the audience said, 'I want to thank you for talking about suicide in the film because I have some friends right now who are struggling with that, and I think this film really helped all of us,'" said director Susan Gray, "so, it's working."

It took seven years to produce and fund the film, with many obstacles in the way. Initially, the film's subjects were resistant to the idea. There was a great deal of mistrust that had to be overcome. "The white man has come often and not left the Inuit feeling very satisfied with how they have been treated and portrayed in the media," Guillaume Saladin explained at many of the screenings.

Then, of course, there was the funding of the film, a problem familiar to all independents. Little did the filmmakers know that a flight to Igloolik, Nunavut, Canada was upwards of \$4,000.00. Through small fundraising events, auctions, and a Kickstarter

campaign, it became increasingly clear that for Matchan and Gray, this was a passion project.

CIRCUS WITHOUT BORDERS seems to have found its true home in young, academic communities. Students are recognizing that even though cultures can appear so different on the outside, we all share many of the same struggles within.

"We had a lot of kids coming to talk to us saying, 'I really like what you guys do -- it just touched me. It's opened my eyes since now I know that the world is big,'" said Yamoussa Bangoura, founder of Kalabante.

The work of Guillaume Saladin and Yamoussa Bangoura is now affecting youth outside of their immediate reach. Both troupes use art and the power of imagination to transform themselves and their communities. This tale of two circuses — ArtCirq and Kalabante — is a culture-crossing performance piece that offers a portal into two remote worlds while telling an inspiring story of resilience.

In a recent tweet posted after one of the week's screenings, a participant wrote, "Just had a beautiful night at Simmons watching and discussing CIRCUS WITHOUT BORDERS. I feel so connected to humans right now -- it's amazing."

left page, top to bottom,
Guinean acrobats on tour with Montreal's world
renown Cavalia circus.

Igloolik, Nunavut, Canada

Director of Photography Jesse Beecher reviews
scene with crew and talent.
All photographs by Michele McDonald

above, clockwise from top left,
Kalabante Circus founder Yamoussa Bangoura
performs with ArtCirq founder Guillaume Saladin.

Director Susan Gray

From top left: Producer Linda Matchan, Kala-
bante leader Yamoussa Bangoura, Director Susan
Gray, Associate Producer Taylor Dueweke, ArtCirq
leader Guillaume Saladin and Executive Producer
Bestor Cram.

Yamoussa Bangoura and Guillaume Saladin
rehearsing a performance. All photographs by
Michele McDonald