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 Walking tall

Carpetbag Brigade, Nemcatacoa team up for Tsunami on the Square

Patrick Whitehurst
 The Daily Courier

PRESCOTT - It's not easy being tall, but stilt walkers have it down to a science.

And performers with the Carpetbag Brigade and Nemcatacoa Teatro do it so well they're invited to perform all over the world.

This week they can be found in Prescott as they take part in the 2013 Tsunami on the Square. The two companies will perform their collaborative project, titled "Dios de la Adrenalina," during the festival.



Courtesy photo
 Performers with Nemcatacoa Teatro, pictured, have joined forces with The Carpetbag Brigade, which began in Prescott, for a collaborative tour entitled "Dios de la Adrenalina." The companies will perform the show during the 2013 Tsunami on the Square this week.

The groups will appear at three local events, including Flourish Before the Flood on Thursday beginning at 6:30 at the El Gato Azul restaurant. The groups will also perform Friday during the Tsunami festival at courthouse plaza and other engagements on Saturday. Over the course of the last week members have offered seminars at the Peregrine Book Company and the Prescott Public Library, as well as other locations.

For a full schedule of this week's events, visit the Tsunami on the Square website at www.tsunamionthesquare.org.

Jay Ruby, executive and artistic director for The Carpetbag Brigade, said the company has a busy week ahead of them. The brigade specializes in acrobatic stilts as a medium for outdoor "physical theater."

"Physical theater starts with the body as the basis of story. In most of our acrobatic stilt work, there's very little text," Ruby said. "The big part of this tour is supported by the Mid-Atlantic Arts Foundation. It's to help broaden the perception of Latino artistic culture beyond the Mexican border."

Their stilts, Ruby said, range between 2 to 3 feet.

"We are all relatively close to the ground so we can do acrobatics on the ground. We take a mix of contact improvisation and specific acrobatics for stilts. You can't really do everything you can do on the floor with stilts, because you only have two points of support," Ruby said.

A fundamental understanding of the acrobatic stilt vocabulary is important for those interested in learning more about the craft, Ruby said. He also encourages team members to learn Yoga, Pilates and other measures to build core strength. Contact improvisation and release-based dance

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... and other measures to help create a more vibrant and diverse dance work is also import to create what he called "sequential flow." Butoh dance is also an important practice, he added.

The Carpetbag Brigade, which began in Prescott 15 years ago, travels both nationally and internationally for performances.

It was during a 2005 trip to Columbia in South America the group met Nicolas Cifuentes, artistic director for Nemcatocoa Teatro. The two groups quickly hit it off.

"In 2010, Jay was directing a stilt seminar in San Francisco and I was participating. Since then we started talking about doing a collaborative project. In 2011, the brigade toured Columbia for almost two months. Before the tour we did a laboratory together so our two companies could all meet and start working together. In 2012 they came to Columbia and we created Dios de la Adrenalina and that is the performance we are bringing here," Cifuentes said.

Accompanying Nemcatocoa Teatro is the musical group Hojarasca, who performs contemporary Andean music using traditional Andean instruments.

"They're providing the music for Dios de la Adrenalina and they're also doing concerts in the places we visit on our bicultural road tour show," Ruby said. "With Carpetbag Brigade is Verbo: Bala, from Tucson, are a spoken video group that does spoken word and video projection."

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