

ENTERTAINMENT

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Roll up, roll up for great show

IT'S not every day you get to see someone walk across Chelmsford Civic Theatre on a tight rope. But that's exactly what you'll get when Barnum! comes to town.

The members of Chelmsford Amateur Dramatic and Operatic Society (CAODS) have taken on one of their most challenging productions to date.

Barnum! tells the real-life story of P T Barnum who achieved his lifetime's ambition of setting up Barnum and Bailey's Circus - the Greatest Show on Earth.

The cast has been busy rehearsing since April as they have the tricky task of learning all manner of circus skills ready for the show in September.

Members of the troupe are learning juggling, stilt walking, unicycling, spinning plates and tight rope walking.

"Before rehearsals even started we had a few circus workshops, so people could start to see what they had a talent for," said Claire Carr, who plays Barnum's wife Chairy. "Some

people have found they have a natural talent for spinning plates on a stick or juggling, for example."

Simon Bristow, who plays Barnum, has the most challenging task however. His character is required to walk across the length of the Civic Theatre stage on a tight rope - which is six foot high from the ground.

He also has to learn the unicycle, which can take months and months to master.

"Simon has been putting in such long hours of tightrope practise since he got the part in April," said Claire. "He is determined to do it and will be giving it his best shot."

As well as months of rehearsals, the cast of Barnum! has been having tuition and support from the members of Team Kinetix - the Essex-based professional parkour and acrobatics team.

It's the first time CAODS has performed Barnum! in their 106-year history. "We've always wanted to do Barnum! but we've

never had the chance," Claire explained. "It's hard to get the copyright and we were lucky to get it. It's very technical and takes so much preparation."

"It also has fantastic score." Barnum's best-known songs include Come Follow the Band, The Colors of My Life and There is a Sucker Born Ev'ry Minute.

"It's a cheerful, colourful show and it's so much fun to perform," Claire said. "We are working so hard to get up skills up to scratch. There are lots of little tricks in it and some fun set pieces."

The relationship between Barnum and his wife Chairy is also explored in the show.

"Barnum wants to bring excitement and colour to the world, whereas Chairy is more brown and sensible," Claire said.

■ Barnum! is at Chelmsford Civic Theatre from Tuesday, September 27 to Saturday, October 1. Tickets are Tues & Weds: £15, or Thurs - Sat inc matinee: £17. Visit www.chelmsford.gov.uk/theatres or www.caods.com

