



dance festival preview

# High-wired

Circus elements transform ffIDA fest **By JUNE MORROW**

## FFIDA INTERNATIONAL DANCE FESTIVAL

**2004** a festival of work by 75 choreographers. Runs to Aug 22, various times and venues at the Distillery District (55 Mill) and across Toronto. Pwyc-\$35, passes available. [www.ffida.org](http://www.ffida.org).

FIRE SPINNERS, AERIALISTS AND JUGGLERS might seem more appropriate for a street fair than a dance festival. But several acts at this year's ffIDA are changing all that.

"Modern dance and ballet are often for the elite, whereas circus is for kids and everyday people," says Jodi Lomask, co-founder of San Francisco's Capacitor. "I wanted to create something my family and peers could relate to."

Lomask and her partner, Zack Bernstein, a former busker, have spent the last seven years developing pieces that incorporate elements of both worlds.

"When I first started performing with Zack, I was jealous of the response he'd get from audiences," explains the classically trained dance artist.

"How could I compete with fire juggling? How could I get that kind of attention for my dancing? So I designed

a fire headpiece. I'm mixing expression with a bit of danger."

Capacitor (performing August 19-21) has faced mixed reactions to its approach from U.S. dance audiences, but in Toronto the company isn't alone.

"We're trying to push the envelope a little," says Lara Ebata of Toronto's Goodness Gracious Fire Dancers (August 14-15 and 20-21). In their untitled piece based on the myth of the labyrinth, three dancers spin poi - chains or ropes tipped with balls of fire - while Ebata and her partner, Natalie Fullerton, dance on stilts wielding flaming ropes. The aim? To see how close they can get the fire to a dancer without touching.

"There's been a learning curve," laughs Ebata. "We don't make the same mistakes any more."

Dancers must not only perfect their choreography but also become, as Lomask puts it, masters of their props.

"You want to make it look fluid, like the equipment is an extension of you," explains Cirque Sublime's (August 14-15) Rachel Jacobs, an aerialist who specializes in performing on hanging silk ribbons. "Regular dancers are surprised that the equipment isn't as



Hybrid troupes like the Goodness Gracious Fire Dancers are burning up ffIDA stages.

friendly as it looks. The hoops can bruise, the silks can give you burns. This is equipment that bites."

Most of the artists find working with their apparatus more liberating than traditional dance.

"It doesn't result in a standard movement vocabulary," says Toronto's Tina Park about the hanging horizontal wheel she'll be performing on at ffIDA's Grande Scale Event (August 19-21). "The way we move our bodies determines what the wheel does, and that informs what can happen as well."

The flame-wielding Fullerton agrees. "It's a lot less structured than

ballet, where everything has a name and a place. With poi, we let the fire lead the movement."

But does spectacle upstage art? "If you're just doing trick after trick it's not really a piece," explains Jacobs, a former gymnast. "What makes it dance is the personal and individual creativity linking the tricks."

"Onstage, the circus can become about beauty and the dance can become about spectacle," adds Lomask. "Today, boundaries are dissolving. The sheer accessibility of global communication ensures that. Our work reflects that cross-pollination."