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Illusion, magic, acrobats, lions at Germain Arena

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Illusionist David DaVinci can escape a straightjacket in seconds. This August, he even broke a world record by doing it 193 times in eight hours.

But all that experience didn't prepare DaVinci for what he's doing now for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus.

He's still escaping from a straightjacket - only this time, he's doing it suspended upside down.

"I have always done it standing on two feet," DaVinci says and laughs. "Now I'm doing it upside down, three stories in the air. Over lions."

It's all part of the circus gig. The 26-year-old Orlando illusionist takes center stage next week when the circus show "Illuscination" comes to Germain Arena.

The entire show was built around DaVinci's magic.

"The acts were chosen to kind of fit the theme of 'illuscination,'" he says. "Is it illusion? Is it magic? Is it real?"

So you have a man "walking" upside down high above the audience, motorcyclists zipping along wires and Cuban acrobats forming human towers standing 3 stories tall.

"These are acts that most people haven't seen," he says. "We tried to bring in acts that are very different and very unique."

The News-Press talked to DaVinci recently about the new show, his magic and what it's like hanging over lions. Here's what he had to say.

Q: I read about you breaking the world record a few months ago. How does that compare to what you're doing now?

A: "That was different. That was on the ground, for one. And it was outside in August - in Florida. But fighting humidity and everything all day, you know, even doing that didn't prepare me for the lions.

"Man, the first time they pulled me up, I looked down and three lions are looking up at me - licking their chops.

"It's intense. There's no other way to put it."

Q: How did you change your act for this show?

A: "Magicians don't usually work 'in the round' - surrounded by an audience on all sides. We had to develop different ways of doing our thing.

"We added a bunch of production numbers, for one. Instead of just me and an assistant coming out,

for example, there's a whole team of people behind me doing backflips."

Q: Why did you choose the stage name "DaVinci"? Your real name is David Womach, right?

A: "Right. I had wanted to come up with a stage name for a long time. I do a lot of work over in Asia - and basically my last name doesn't translate well into other languages.

"We wanted not only a name with alliteration, but I also wanted a character that people in every single history book in the entire world have heard of. And DaVinci just kind of worked; it's kind of a mystical, magical name."

A: How did you get into magic?

A: "My brother got a magic kit for Christmas when he was 7 and I was 4. It went in the closet. A couple years later I found the kit. I took it out and started playing with it.

"My brother and I were very competitive. And since he was older, everything he did - baseball, basketball, ice hockey, every single sport we played - he was always better at it and he got the attention. And as a kid, you do things to get attention.

"So when I pulled out that magic kit and started doing tricks, I realized it was a different avenue for me to start getting that attention - and only be in competition with myself."

Q: Is this the first time you've done a circus show?

A: "This is a first time for me. I've done a lot of other things, from cruise ships to my own theater overseas. But this is a really and new exciting venue. It's very different, it's very fun."

Q: It sounds like the whole thing was built around you.

A: "Yeah. It's humbling. It's been surreal. It's just mind-boggling to see it unfold."

Additional Facts

IF YOU GO

What: Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Presents
"Illuscination"

When: Opens Thursday. Show times are 7 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 5 p.m. Sunday. There are also matinees at 3 p.m. Saturday and 1 p.m. Sunday

Where: Germain Arena, 11000 Everblades Parkway, Estero

Tickets: \$16-\$50 Available through all Ticketmaster outlets or the arena box office

Info: Call 948-7825 or go to germainarena.com. Ticketmaster can be reached at 800-745-3000 or ticketmaster.com.
