

NEW YORK

Entertainment: Going for the Juggler

A circus for kids and Ruth Messinger voters.

By [John Bove](#)

Bob writes for the *Times*. Jenny's a music archivist. Adrian teaches gymnastics. But like Burt Lancaster, Federico Fellini, and George Plimpton before them, they've all run away to join the circus.

Or, more specifically, to start a circus. Along with a dozen or so other artists, performers, and assorted slackers, they are Circus Amok, a one-ring hodgepodge of goofy antics and irreverent politics that was founded in 1989 at P.S. 122. The show was such a hit, they took it on the road, to audiences of all ages in public spaces around town. And last year, they hired professional fund-raisers, who failed to generate even a dollar in contributions -- a fact they blamed on the group's lefty politics -- and left the circus too broke to perform last summer.

But Circus Amok is regrouping with a full schedule of appearances this summer, from Manhattan's Riverside Park to Padre Plaza in East New York. Though a significant departure from the usual performance spaces, these outdoor shows in far-flung neighborhoods have come as a welcome relief to all involved. "Getting the community out and performing outdoors is both more political and more spectacular than other venues allowed us to be," says ringleader Jennifer Miller, otherwise known as the Coney Island Sideshow's bearded lady.

The show has the same delightfully unpolished feel that it always did, but it's picked up some new acts, such as a paeon to jaywalking, a Hula Hoop sketch about petty crime, and a clown act with insurance agents and asthmatics on unicycles. But the social commentary is all done in the spirit of rec-room fun. Besides, there's always a carload of jugglers and clowns, a family of cross-dressing stilt-walkers, or a pride of lions (the Julie Taymor kind, not the Siegfried and Roy kind) just around the corner.

Putting it all together with tiny grants and donations isn't easy, but getting approval to perform such work in public parks, considering the current political climate, is something of a miracle. As Miller puts it, "With the hand of Giuliani coming down on everyone, it just seems important to keep our voices raised. So why not raise them on stilts, juggling, with some of the most fabulous drag divas in town?"