



HOT TOPICS [Today's deal](#) [MoMA art for kids](#) [Baby photo contest](#)

Things to Do Arts + Entertainment Eating + Shopping Staying In Guides + Resources Today's Deal

Find an event

Movies, Music & Stage

Running Amok

Rabble-rousing entertainment is coming to a city park near you *By Raven Snook*

Jennifer Miller, the founder of Circus Amok—a politically charged, multicultural outdoor extravaganza—is someone to be reckoned with. She is quick-witted and charismatic, and when she speaks about her troupe, the face beneath her dark, shiny whiskers glows.

OOMPAAH Jennifer Miller (right, foreground) fronts her troupe.
Photo: Eve Lueckring

Categories
Children's theater, Circus or magic, Circus/Magic, Comedy, Theater

0

0

Jennifer Miller, the founder of Circus Amok—a politically charged, multicultural outdoor extravaganza—is someone to be reckoned with. She is quick-witted and charismatic, and when she speaks about her troupe, the face beneath her dark, shiny whiskers glows. Miller is a real-life bearded lady who also juggles knives, turns cartwheels, acts as ringmaster and directs this mind-boggling circus, which will celebrate its 15th anniversary in September with a month of performances in parks around the city.

OOMPAAH Jennifer Miller (right, foreground) fronts her troupe.
Photo: Eve Lueckring

Circus Amok has an agenda: to entertain while it skewers the status quo. Every season, Miller and her gang dissect a controversial theme. Last year, it was homeland security. This year, it's education. But the seriousness of the issues doesn't detract from the fun. "People just dig it," Miller says. "We try to hit on every level, so the kids are watching vaudeville and clowning, and the parents are getting the double entendres and the puns. It's a big, fabulous circus, and it's also political."

The first Circus Amok performance took place indoors, at P.S. 122 in the East Village, back in 1989. But after five years of playing to what Miller had dubbed "the art ghetto," she decided to take the show to city parks. "It was a huge change," she recalls. "Not only were we starting to play for more kids and families, but also for people of many colors, ethnicities, ages and classes."

Circus Amok's array of outrageous acts includes drag-king jugglers, tattooed tumblers and queer clowns, as well as a raucous six-piece band that plays everything from punk to and hip-hop to show tunes. Last year's showstopper was "The Ballad of Georgio Bushwack," a parody of Eminem's "I'm Shady" that sharply criticized Dubya, one of Circus Amok's favorite targets.

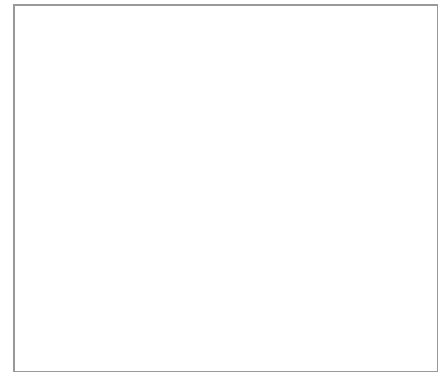
Miller is enthusiastic about her choice of education as this season's theme. "It's about the kids' world and their rights," she says. "Education is Mayor Bloomberg's calling card, which is why we can take him to task on it." The show will spoof myriad topics, such as third-grade testing, teaching to the tests, the dissolution of community school boards and the Board of Education, and imposed curricula. "But we'll do it through the magic of the circus," Miller adds, and shifts effortlessly into ringmaster mode: "Testing will be put to the test as the valiant vaulters fly through the air! The great educational thinkers of our time will make an appearance in a pageant of ducks and divas! A rope-walking act will explore the separation of school and Snapple!" Broader concerns will be addressed too: The circus opens right after the Republican Convention, and Miller promises to keep alive the issues raised by that event in the run-up to Election Day.

And of course, Miller's very appearance—her thick beard juxtaposed with her female form—is innately political. She challenges ideas of masculine and feminine, gay and straight by just walking down the street. But even kids respond positively. "One of our most amazing experiences is going out and finding that people aren't nearly as homophobic as the mass media leads us to believe," says Miller. "Circus Amok is set in a queer world, but it's a queer world that welcomes everyone." Which is why Miller is always sure to greet the audience by exclaiming, "Ladies and gentleman, boys and girls, and the rest of us...."

For a performance schedule, visit www.circusamok.org.

September 21, 2004

Comment | Email | Share on | Print



On the blogs

TONY KIDS BLOG
WHAT'S GOING ON FOR FAMILIES IN NYC