

Atlantic City

With David J. Spatz

Mixing fun, flexibility

Sasha Pivaral and Molly Woltman are living the life other kids only dream of – they've run away from home and joined the circus.

Sasha, 12, and Woltman, 20, respectively, are the youngest of the 19 cast members of "Il Circo: Viaggio," the circus-style production show that recently opened an 11-week run at Bally's Atlantic City.

"The only thing I may have missed out on is maybe some of the [teen] drama in high school, but I really don't think I missed anything," Woltman says.

Her stage partner is more succinct.

"I think it's pretty cool," Sasha chirps.

Family-friendly show

Woltman, an acrobat for 12 years, is stepping into a different role in a show that blurs the line between entertainment and athletics.

She's playing Columbina, the lead clown in the colorful, family-friendly show that draws its inspiration from the 16th-century Italian entertainment known as commedia dell'arte.

Sasha, whose talents as a contortionist remain hidden from the audience until the show's finale, plays a wide-eyed girl who becomes separated from her parents at a carnival. She's taken in hand by Columbina, who introduces her to tumblers, balancing acts and aerialists as the clown tries to reunite her with her parents.

Woltman, who has performed around the world in various circuses, says her family has been

'Circo's' youngest exercise talents



Sasha Pivaral, left, and Molly Woltman star in "Il Circo: Viaggio."

supportive of her career.

"I don't think they had much of a choice," she says with a laugh. "They'd been hearing me tell them I wanted to join the circus from the time I was 8 years old."

While her friends' parents were driving them to soccer and softball games, Woltman's mom and dad were taking her to gigs in community circuses. With that experience, she made the leap to the professional level.

She wants to continue living the circus life for another 10 years and then open a circus-performing arts restaurant in her native San Diego, which would serve a gourmet menu flavored with circus entertainment.

Sasha didn't actually need to run away from home. Her parents, Nelson Pivaral and Goulia Rozyeva, perform a hand-balancing act in the show.

Life on the road doesn't give her a free pass from school. Be-

fore the weekday matinee and evening shows, her mother home-schools her in the hotel where the cast is staying until April 5.

Element of surprise

Sasha's talent was discovered when she began gymnastic lessons four years ago. Her mother, a lifelong circus artist, was working with a group of contortionists who spotted Sasha's gifts and began coaching her.

"I really loved [contortions] as soon as I started doing them, and it's cool to be able to do things most people can't do," she says. She also enjoys touring with the show because it gives her an opportunity "to hang out with a lot of really cool friends."

The surprise factor she brings to the show is especially fun, she adds, because the audience never sees it coming.

"They just see me walking around the stage staring at everybody, and they think it's the only thing I do," she says.

Sasha eventually wants to pursue a career in medicine.

"But not for a while," she says. "I'm having a lot of fun doing this."

"Il Circo: Viaggio," Bally's Atlantic City, 3:30 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and 7 and 10 p.m. Saturday, through April 5. Tickets are \$25, available through Ticketmaster.

For what's happening in Atlantic City, click on Calendar of Events at: atlanticcitynj.com

Idol Gossip: House of Blues changing hands

Negotiations are ongoing between Harrah's Entertainment Inc. and global entertainment giant LiveNation for Harrah's to acquire the House of Blues at Showboat. Although there's been no official comment, sources on both sides have confirmed that talks have gone on for weeks and that a deal could be announced within the next 30 days. If it happens, Harrah's, which owns Showboat and three other Atlantic City casinos, would continue to use the House of Blues brand name in essentially a franchise arrangement. HOB's booking policy, which had skewed heavily toward a much younger crowd, would be adjusted dramatically. There would be fewer rap and hip-hop artists and more bookings of traditional casino entertainers, although some acts that appeal to a younger demographic also would be presented in HOB's 2,350-seat Music Hall. HOB opened at Showboat in June 2005 as part of a \$65 million project that includes the big venue, a smaller multipurpose ballroom, a House of Blues restaurant, the members-only Foundation Room restaurant and lounge and the late-night Club Worship nightclub. HOB also controls 15 percent of Showboat's casino floor, the poker room and several dozen HOB-themed hotel suites. Late last year, LiveNation, a division of Clear Channel, purchased the entire House of Blues chain. ... Adult film star **Jenna Jameson** was spotted ringside recently for the "Cage Fury Fighting" matches at Tropicana. ... House of Blues celebrates Super Bowl weekend in a naughty way Saturday when porn star **Gina Lynn** hosts a lingerie party in the Foundation Room. ... **Stephen Stills** will sit it out when rockers **David Crosby** and **Graham Nash** team up March 31 at Borgata.



JENNA JAMESON



DAVID CROSBY

Food & Drink: Risi Bisi at Borgata

With a pair of fine-dining Italian restaurants – Ombra and Specchio – chef Luke Palladino has been a rising star on the casino culinary scene since Borgata opened more than three years ago.

What most visitors to the trend-setting casino don't know is that Palladino is also on the cutting edge of unpretentious grab-and-go cuisine.

Risi Bisi is Palladino's ultra-casual "sidewalk" café. Located along the small shopping plaza connecting

Borgata's self-park garage with the casino floor, Risi Bisi ("rice and peas" in Italy's Venetian dialect) offers soups, salads, pizzas, panini and wraps. Simply put, Risi Bisi specializes in Italian "street food."

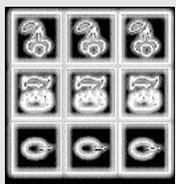
From an attractively arranged display case, customers place their orders, and their food is served within minutes.

The small breakfast menu offers bagel sandwiches, egg wraps, omelets and Italian

toast made with brioche.

For lunch, dinner and late snacks, the white pizza with chicken, spinach and oven-dried tomatoes, and the white portobello mushroom pizza are popular choices, while six panini are served with a variety of stuffing choices.

Wrought-iron chairs and tables overlooking a patio make for an ideal people-watching setting, and all orders are available to take out.



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Arthur Walter,
West Caldwell

Dec. 30, Tropicana

\$1 Triple Play

Joker Poker slot machine