



PRODUCTION INFO FOR MEDIA

Media Contact:
Melissa Ferlaak
Senior Communications Manager
612.872.5110

Children's Theatre Company Presents *Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams*

WHAT: Children's Theatre Company (CTC) is proud to announce the presentation of ***Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams***, running **September 17 through October 20, 2019**. This new circus was created by brothers [Bibi and Bichu Tesfamariam](#) in 2017, who have been circus performers for over two decades. Recently, they were performers in Disney's live-action remake of *Dumbo* as members of the Medici Brothers Circus. *Circus Abyssinia* has been touring worldwide consistently since it began including the UK, New York, Japan, France, Hungary, Australia and Abu Dhabi. This is only the second time *Circus Abyssinia* has been in the United States. The show delves into the rhythms and roots of Ethiopia's rich musical and artistic traditions to weave its story through death-defying tricks, and feats of juggling, clowning, and contortion, all performed to the irresistible beats of modern [Ethiopian popular music](#). Full cast list below.

ABOUT: A whole new kind of circus is coming to town! The rhythm of Ethiopia comes alive as this internationally acclaimed, dream-filled adventure makes its daring Minneapolis debut. Jaws will drop as one amazing feat after another defies gravity and awakens possibility; oh, to be part of the spectacle! It's an incredible range of high-flying hilarity, hula hooping, death-defying tricks, and ridiculously joy-filled juggling with the music and movement of East Africa.

"One of the things I love most about theatre is re-imagining what theatre means, especially on our own stage," states CTC Artistic Director, **Peter C. Brosius**. "And while the Twin Cities is a large hub for circus training and performance, *Circus Abyssinia* will be the very first circus piece to play on our stage. What I loved most when I saw this piece at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe was the pure joy, virtuosity, and expression by these acrobats. Their incredible skill and heroic acts are both extraordinary and deeply human, and we know will leave anyone who sees them in awe."

"We're over the moon to be bringing *Circus Abyssinia* to the CTC," stated performer/director **Binyam "Bichu" Tesfamariam**. "It's going to be an absolute privilege to perform at such an extraordinary theatre, one so perfect for kids and their families. And we can't wait to come to the brilliant city of Minneapolis!"

THEMES: Circus; community; modern African music; Ethiopia/East Africa; teamwork; family; traditional circus; transformation; strength; belonging; physical expression.

PRESS DATES: Media are invited to attend opening weekend performances, which include:
Friday, September 20 at 7pm
Saturday, September 21 at 2pm
Sunday, September 22 at 2pm

Each media person can RSVP for two tickets gratis with the option to purchase additional tickets.



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SOURCE: Children's Theatre Company
2400 Third Ave S, Minneapolis

MEDIA NOTES: Contact Melissa Ferlaak, Senior Communications Manager, for access to interviews with the creative team, performers, or CTC executive staff.

PHOTOS: Advance photos are available [here](#).

Children's Theatre Company (CTC) is the nation's largest and most acclaimed theatre for young people and serves a multigenerational audience. It creates theatre experiences that educate, challenge, and inspire for more than 295,000 people annually. CTC is the only theatre focused on young audiences to win the coveted Tony Award® for Outstanding Regional Theatre and is the only theatre in Minnesota to receive three Tony® nominations (for its production of *A Year with Frog and Toad*). CTC is committed to creating world class productions at the highest level and to developing new works, more than 200 to date, dramatically changing the canon of work for young audiences.

CTC's engagement and learning programs annually serve more than 93,000 young people and their communities through Theatre Arts Training, student matinees, Neighborhood Bridges, and early childhood arts education programs. ACT One is CTC's comprehensive platform for access, diversity, and inclusion in our audiences, programs, staff, and board that strives to ensure the theatre is a home for all people, all families, reflective of our community. childrenstheatre.org

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Circus Abyssinia: Ethiopian Dreams

Co-Created and produced by Mehari "Bibi" Tesfamariam
Co-Created and directed by Binyam "Bichu" Tesfamariam
Written by Cal McCrystal
Choreographed by Kate Smyth
Best Enjoyed by Everyone
UnitedHealth Group Stage

Creative Team & Production Staff

Director | Binyam "Bichu" Tesfamariam
Producer | Mehari "Bibi" Tesfamariam
Writer | Cal McCrystal
Choreographer | Kate Smyth
Lighting Designer | Connor Lovejoy
Stage Manager | Gaby Cooke
Tour Manager | Elshaday Shimels



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Performers

Mehari "Bibi" Tesfamariam
Binyam "Bichu" Tesfamariam
Alemayehu Mulugeta
Ezera Nigusse
Semeret Getachew
Etsegenet Ashenafi
Helen Shimeles
Betelhem Dejene
Daniel Gezahegn
Befekadu Esmael
Abraham Lemma
Tesfamichael Bilal
Tarekeyn Teshome
Abraham Tadesse
Ermiyas Manayeh
Endalkachew Belaynehe
Hanna Tina
Hailekiros Kidanu
Filmon Haregot

Runtime: 90 minutes, including one 20-minute intermission.

Tickets:

The Ticket Office is accessible by phone two hours prior to most performances. These posted hours are subject to change.

Email: tickets@childrenstheatre.org (inquiries only, no ticket processing)

Phone: 612.874.0400

Website: <https://childrenstheatre.org>

Subscription packages are available. Please see website for complete details:

<https://childrenstheatre.org/tickets/subscribe>

Lap passes available for children newborn to three years for \$5

ASL/AD Performance: Friday, October 11 at 7pm

Sensory Friendly Performance: Friday, October 18 at 7pm

Group tickets up to 10% off regular tickets for groups of six to nine.

Group tickets up to 25% off regular tickets for groups of ten or more.

Performance Dates

Tuesday, September 17	7pm (Preview)
Wednesday, September 18	7pm (Preview)
Thursday, September 19	7pm (Preview)
Friday, September 20	7pm (Opening night)
Saturday, September 21	2pm and 5pm



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Sunday, September 22	2pm and 5pm
Thursday, September 26	7pm
Friday, September 27	7pm
Saturday, September 28	2pm and 5pm
Sunday, September 29	2pm and 5pm
Thursday, October 3	7pm
Friday, October 4	7pm
Saturday, October 5	2pm and 5pm
Sunday, October 6	2pm and 5pm
Thursday, October 10	7pm
Friday, October 11	7pm (ASL/AD Performance)
Saturday, October 12	11am and 2pm
Sunday, October 13	2pm and 5pm
Thursday, October 17	2pm and 7pm
Friday, October 18	2pm and 7pm (Sensory Friendly Performance)
Saturday, October 19	11am and 2pm
Sunday, October 20	2pm and 5pm (Closing Performance)

Plot Synopsis

Be warned: This is a complete synopsis of the performance, so it is full of spoilers.

Bibi and Bichu are juggling back and forth in their bedroom. Every night, they make plans to run away with the circus. The boys fall asleep and the man in the moon makes their dream come alive.

The company fills the space with dance and circus tricks. Bibi and Bichu are thrown into the air by the ensemble and perform a variety of jumps and flips including an act where performers standing on top of each other.

The ensemble leaves and two contortionists take the stage. They twist their bodies into unbelievable shapes. Then, two jugglers arrive. They start by juggling three balls each, but increase up to five each.

Five women join and perform scarf juggling. They spin the scarfs on their hands and feet while dancing and performing acrobatic feats.

A man and woman join the stage and dance while performing a variety of lifts and acrobatics. It is clear they are in love. Young Bibi and Bichu kick them offstage and show off their juggling skills. They are quickly joined by Adult Bibi and Bichu who kick the boys offstage and show everyone how it is really done. They juggle clubs between them. The boys rejoin and the four juggle together.

The moon lights up and we see four women shadow dance, perform contortions, and acrobatics. They return to the moon. The ensemble finishes by performing acrobatic tricks on large poles and dancing.



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MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM

Mehari "Bibi" Tesfamariam (Producer)

Bibi has juggled with Bichu in thousands of shows; from the Fuji Rock Festival to the Olivier Award-winning opera, *Akhnaten*. For years, the brothers have also been funding circus schools in Ethiopia. In 2017, they were cast in Tim Burton's *Dumbo* and used their wages from filming to launch *Circus Abyssinia*.

Binyam "Bichu" Tesfamariam (Director)

As Bichu's circus dreams came true, they also began to change. Thinking of the many would-be acrobats clamoring for opportunity back in Ethiopia fueled his desire to create a bone fide Ethiopian circus. Bichu's experience as an artist and choreographer enabled him to fuse Ethiopia's musical and artistic heritage with the arts of circus to create *Circus Abyssinia*.

Cal McCrystal (Writer)

Dubbed 'Britain's funniest director,' Cal's prolific career includes the Broadway hits, *One Man, Two Guvvorns*; *School of Rock*; and the acclaimed revival of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*. Cal not only wrote the dialogue for *Circus Abyssinia* but is a mentor to the cast. The show is deeply indebted to his comedic vision.

Kate Smyth (Choreographer)

Kate Smyth is a dancer and choreographer who has held the role of Can Can soloist for the Bal du Moulin Rouge in Paris, performed at Frank Sinatra's 80th birthday celebrations in Los Angeles, and choreographed productions for Cirque d'Hiver in Paris, Circus Roncalli in Germany, and Giffords Circus in England.

Connor Lovejoy (Lighting Designer)

Connor is an award-winning lighting designer who has worked all over the world at theatres, fringes, art galleries, and top variety venues. He joined forces with *Circus Abyssinia* at Adelaide Fringe in February 2019 and has since worked closely with Bichu to realize the director's vision of a non-physical 'set' of colors, light, and shade.

Gaby Cooke (Stage Manager)

Gaby met Bibi and Bichu in 2017 while tutoring the youngest members of the *Circus Abyssinia* troupe. She fell in love with their story and their vision of an Ethiopian circus, so she started working with the brothers to launch their company and produce *Circus Abyssinia*—first in the UK, now around the world.

Elshaday Shimels (Tour Manager)

Elshaday is the cast's tour manager, organizing the logistics of travel and taking care of the cast while on the road. With a background in computer programming and a talent for graphic design, Elshaday also plays a part in the creation of the company's artwork and digital publicity.

MEET THE CAST

Bibi and Bichu Tesfamariam

Bibi and Bichu grew up dreaming of joining the circus, but no circuses ever rolled into town, only rumours and televised glimpses from lands overseas. Self-taught and determined, they came to England as teenagers and met with more success than they ever dared hope for. Throughout their long careers they've been providing circus schools in Ethiopia, like Circus Wingate and Bitu Brothers, with much needed funding and support. At these schools they discovered the incredible acrobats who now form the cast of *Circus Abyssinia*: artists who started out like they did, performing on city streets with no expectation of pay.

Alemayehu Mulugeta



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'Alemayehu' means 'to have seen the world' and this young acrobat is living up to his name. He plays Bichu's younger self in *Circus Abyssinia* and has performed in Europe, America, Asia, and Australia, even gaining a spot on the UK's Royal Variety Performance just months after the show's debut.

Ezera Nigusse

Ezera plays Little Bibi in *Circus Abyssinia*. In 2012 he joined the Circus Wingate School with Alemayehu, who plays his brother onstage and is his best friend offstage. Ezera has been with *Circus Abyssinia* since its debut, and Bibi and Bichu are training him to juggle just like they do.

Semeret Getachew

Semeret joined Circus Wingate in 2008 after word reached her of its classes for would-be acrobats. She has been touring with *Circus Abyssinia* since its debut. She performs as part of a quartet of cloth-spinners and contortionists, and in a dual contortion act in the show called the 'Sun-Worshipping Pythons.'

Etsegenet Ashenafi

Etsegenet joined Circus Wingate as a nine-year-old: a self-confessed 'troublemaker,' she was enrolled by her parents to keep her out of mischief! Now one of the most disciplined members of the cast, she is a four-time gymnastics champion in Ethiopia and has enlisted these skills to perform extraordinary feats of contortion in *Circus Abyssinia*.

Helen Shimeles

Helen trained for years at Circus Wingate, but with no opportunity for paid work, it wasn't until Bibi and Bichu invited her to join the cast of *Circus Abyssinia* that she enjoyed performing publicly. Helen has since performed feats of cloth-spinning and contortion around the world—from Asia to Australia to New York.

Betelhem Dejene

Betty joined Circus Wingate when she was ten-years-old after passing by the school and spotting its students forming seemingly impossible human pyramids on the training ground. She has toured with *Circus Abyssinia* since its inception and has performed her extraordinary contortion and cloth-spinning acts in Europe, Asia, Australia, and the US.

Daniel Gezahegn

Danny was a street performer before joining Circus Wingate when it was opened by Solomon Tadesse in 2005. He also honed his clowning skills, working as a *weyala* (a taxi driver's helper). Competing with other *weyala* to attract taxi passengers in Ethiopia's capital city is very much a performance art.

Befekadu Esmael

Befekadu is the rock of the cast, with an eagle eye for the safety of his acrobatic brethren. Having started out as a street performer in Addis Ababa, he joined Circus Wingate when it opened and now trains the younger students. He has been with *Circus Abyssinia* since its 2017 debut.

Abraham Lemma

While working as a *weyala* in Ethiopia, Abraham met Kibrom 'Bita' Samuel, who would go on to create Bitá Brothers Circus School. Fascinated by Bitá's tales of circuses overseas, Abraham jumped to join his school as soon as it opened. His first professional job was with *Circus Abyssinia* in 2018.

Tesfamichael Bilal

Tesfamichael joined Bitá Brothers Circus when it opened and trained in the disciplines of hoop-diving and Chinese pole for nearly a decade. He was asked to join *Circus Abyssinia* when Bichu saw him perform during a visit to Ethiopia and made his professional debut at Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2018.



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Tarekeyn Teshome

Tarekeyn joined the Bitá Brothers Circus School in 2008 and like many circus artists in Ethiopia, trained for years without paid opportunity to perform publicly. He was cast in *Circus Abyssinia* in the summer of 2018 and now performs in the hand-vaulting, hoop-diving, and Chinese pole acts of the show.

Abraham Tadesse

Abraham trained at Bitá Brothers Circus from 2010 until 2018, often visiting schools in Ethiopia to entertain children with his circus skills. His first professional opportunity came with *Circus Abyssinia* in 2018, and he has since performed Chinese pole and hoop-diving around the world, from France to Australia to Japan.

Ermiyas Manayeh

Ermiyas joined Bitá Brothers Circus School in 2010 and was cast in *Circus Abyssinia* in 2018. His first time performing professionally was at Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and he has since toured with the show in Europe, Asia, and Australia, from the WOMAD Festival to the Fuji Rock Festival.

Endalkachew Belaynehe

Endalkachew discovered his passion for the physical arts as a child and used to perform street circus for the crowds at the market near his village. He joined Bitá Brothers Circus School in 2012 and his first professional opportunity came when Bibi and Bichu invited him to join *Circus Abyssinia* in 2018.

Hanna Tina

Hanna is one of the newest members of the cast of *Circus Abyssinia*. She joined Circus Wingate when she was just 11 years old and now coaches the students, while also working as a judge for the Addis Ababa Gymnastics Federation during state and national gymnastic competitions.

Hailekiros Kidanu

Hailekiros joined Circus Wingate in 2005 and specializes in Icarian Games, a stunning combination of acrobatics and human foot-juggling. Hailekiros has performed with his young stage partner, Filmon Haregot, at festivals in Germany, Austria, and Turkey. His first time performing with *Circus Abyssinia* will be at Children's Theatre Company.

Filmon Haregot

Filmon joined Circus Wingate in 2013. His signature act is Icarian Games which he has performed in Europe, the Middle East, and at schools throughout Ethiopia's capital city. His first tour with *Circus Abyssinia* is at Children's Theatre Company, followed by a tour of France in 2020.