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Props to the clown

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A sheet of paper, a chair, some rubber balls, fruit and a suitcase. That's about all the props Jamie Adkins needs to create theatrical magic in his family-friendly "Circus Incognitus."

A veteran of Montreal's Cirque Eloize and other circus troupes, the 30-something performer combines clowning, juggling and acrobatics in a delightfully silly show that had the kids at Sunday's matinee giggling from the first moment to the last. And running just an hour, it didn't tax their attention spans.

Shyly venturing onto the dark stage with a flashlight, clad in baggy pants, Adkins seems to be preparing to make a speech. But he never gets around to it, as he struggles with everything from a malfunctioning microphone to pingpong balls that mysteriously appear in his cheeks.

Performing his mostly silent, intricately choreographed mayhem with the deadpan aplomb of Buster Keaton, Adkins makes it all look easy. But his graceful athleticism and perfect comic timing are apparent, whether he's climbing a ladder that quickly falls apart or catching oranges thrown by the audience on a fork clenched between his teeth.

After a "one-minute intermission" during which he sits quietly at the foot of the stage, he holds up a sign that heralds "Le Grande Finale," in which he walks a not-so-tight tightrope a dozen feet above the stage.

It's a scary, thrilling sight -- but, unlike performers in "Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark" at the theater next door -- Adkins manages to emerge unscathed.

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