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# ALEGRIA

(FANTASY — CANADA-FRANCE-  
NETHERLANDS)

An Overseas Filmgroup presentation of a Lampo di Vita Films Inc./Mainstream/Egmond production with the participation of Canada Television and Cable Production/Telefilm Canada/Equity Investment program. Produced by Stephane Reichel, Alexandre Heylen, Hans de Weers. Co-producer, Rudy Barichello. Executive producer, Helene Dufresne.

Directed by Franco Dragone. Screenplay, Rudy Barichello. Camera (color), Pierre Mignot; editor, Jean-Francois Bergeron; music, Benoit Jutras; art director, Johnny Bolvin; production designer, Ben Van Os; costume designer, Dominique Lemieux; sound, Claude Kazanavicius; assistant director, Michelangelo Csaba Bolla; casting, Vanessa Pereira, Simone Ireland. Reviewed at the Palm Springs Film Festival, Jan. 10, 1999. Running time: 94 MIN.

Frac ..... Rene Bazinet  
Fleur ..... Frank Langella  
Giulietta ..... Julie Cox  
Marcello ..... Heathcote Williams  
Momo ..... Clipper Miano  
Old Taps ..... Brian Dowhurst  
Little Box ..... Jade Fafieanie

## By LAEL LOEWENSTEIN

**T**o fans of the Cirque du Soleil, the idea of a film based on one of its productions might seem as magical as the Cirque itself. Unfortunately, "Alegria" is nothing like the Cirque's show of the same name and turns out to be inaccessible, fluffy fantasy with lavish technical elements but with a story that doesn't gel. Despite the international interest that no doubt attends its release, "Alegria" is unlikely to do much business but will be a noteworthy addition to the festival circuit.

Since its 1984 inception, the Quebec-based Cirque du Soleil has been seen by 15 million spectators on three continents. In its various incarnations, including "Alegria," "Mystere," "Saltimbanco" and "Quidam," the Cirque has dazzled crowds with innovative spectacles. Blending light, music, humor, wildly colorful costumes and daring physical feats, its animal-free performances have helped redefine the circus.

If the Cirque du Soleil has any failing, it's the thread of a plot clumsily woven throughout its productions that loosely attempts to connect disparate acts. Usually, however, the anemic storyline is easy to disregard because contortionists and acrobats are dangling before you. In the new film, by contrast, veteran Cirque director Franco Dragone seems to have forgotten what people love about the Cirque: He plays up the

sappy, sentimental narrative elements while all but eliminating the physical artistry. There are a few shining moments — a contortionist in a fountain and a Christ-like trapeze artist provide breathtaking homage to famous Fellini vignettes — but they are few and far between.

Story revolves around a depressed mime, Frac (Rene Bazinet), whose chance encounter with a circus troupe changes his life and restores hope.

When he meets the enchanting performer Giulietta (Julie Cox), Frac falls instantly in love. But to get to her, he must win over her father Fleur (Frank Langella), the troupe's leader, who refuses to let his daughter be swayed by Frac's advances.

Meanwhile, deep in the heart of the mythical city, a Fagin-like taskmaster named Marcello (Heathcote Williams) captures young children and forces them to vend flowers on the streets. Only with the aide of Frac and Giulietta can the tenacious gamin Momo (Clipper Miano) lead his fellow prisoners to freedom.

The liberation of the children, who swap dirty gray rags for sparkling white duds and head off to the circus, is heavy-handed allegory that isn't nearly as effective as it should be. Having left Marcello's world of evil slave labor behind, the children are free to regain their innocence and joy in Fleur's world of the magical circus. Production notes make a case that the film's social mission is to educate viewers about the plight of exploited children around the world, but that message gets muddled in the elaborate production.

Frank Langella's Fleur is the only character that rouses any real sympathy, especially when he delivers a moving speech on what it is like to be a performer. Most of the time, however, the actors are in the service of some larger technical scheme and as such give largely two-dimensional performances. Pierre Mignot's production design and veteran Cirque costume designer Dominique Lemieux's threads are striking, but both would have been better served by a stage performance than by this film. On that note, a better bet is the video "Alegria: The Truth of Illusion," which documents the troupe's 1994 production.