

# CROSSBOW TO BEAR

The journey from musical theater to shooting an apple off her head

**C**reating an act can be a meeting of minds. With the crossbow act of Mr. & Mrs. G [aka Ottavio Gesmundo & Naomi Brenkman-Gesmundo] in the production show of "Lunaro" at the Beau Rivage Casino & Resort in Biloxi, Mississippi, the key comes from family. Octavio's family helped open the Circus Circus in Las Vegas in the 1960s and his grandfather Ottavio Canestrelli was a circus pioneer who traveled the world in the 1920s & 30s. After working in musical theater as well as the EFX show at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas in the 90s, Octavio headed out on his own. He met his act and life partner Naomi when they were in one of the first international productions of Elton John "Aida" in Sweden. Their collaboration blossomed from there.

## Casino Player: So how did the crossbow act begin for the both of you?

**Ottavio:** Coming from a circus family, my sister had been doing a crossbow act for a number of years, for a few decades, actually. And she was phasing out of that and asked if we would be interested in kind of picking it up. And then Naomi immediately was like, "Oh, that's so cool. I want to try that." So, we went and we trained with my sister for a little bit, and then we took the equipment. Then it took us about a year to try to figure out how we wanted to present the act in terms of integrating our other skills, because, being dancers and choreographers, we wanted to have that element represented in the show, in our performance. We integrate dance, and sometimes martial arts in between the death-defying crossbow stunts that we perform.

It's been a challenge, because coming from that dance background... we were both in theater for many, many years. And it's a different mindset. It's a different warm-up that we have to do. You still have to remain physical within the performance, but there's a mental preparation that we have to do for this, because in between the shots, we're dancing, we're pulling targets from various body parts, and holding the targets. But then we have to be very, very still when the person is holding a target and when the person is shooting. So, having that dynamic of going from explosive dance to "Okay, now we have to be very still and concentrating" requires some training.

We didn't want to just do the shots and have them come off as being just a stunt. We want it to represent something. So, when Naomi comes charging at me during the performance, we do a little bit of an adagio dance. And then at one point, I reach in and grab a paper heart from her chest, like stealing her heart. And then she pushes me away, and then she takes the heart, and then she goes away, and then I shoot that out of her hand.

## A metaphor with a bit of elegance and danger...

**O:** At the very end of our performance here, I do an apple shot. So, I shoot an apple off her head. And it's complete silence. But it's never complete silence, because people inevitably are like, "Don't do it!" Last night this woman even said *ibat*. She was like, "Don't do it!" And I said, "No? Okay! Good night everybody!" and I pretended to walk off stage. And then everybody was like, "No, no, no," and they called me back. And then I performed the shot.



Mr. & Mrs. G bring their exciting – and dangerous – crossbow act to *Lunaro* at Beau Rivage

## Tell us about the collaboration in terms of the larger construct of the show?

**O:** Working with Misha [Matorin] is great and he has some clear ideas of what he wants. We'll show him something. And then he'll add something else in. Same thing with Eugene, the choreographer. He'll enhance our performance in terms of the sword fighting. When I come out with the sword, jump over it, and then start the sword fight. And it's been really fun in terms of making it fit the theme of the show. One of the great things that Misha does have is that background. He's been the director for a long time. So being a dancer and also having that cross of working with performers in the circus genre – you find that more and more often now – the genres are beginning to meld together.

## Is it just a matter of fusion of style?

**O:** Just the psychology behind integrating those elements of circus and dance and theater has been around for a long time considering how my grandfather and my grandmother did it. But it is becoming more and more integrated now. Coming from a circus family and seeing those tricks, we understand what it takes for the preparation until that point of performance. In between those moments, those things can be crafted. What is it that we're trying to emphasize in the story? How does this further a story? Is there a story within the context of the performance? That's something that we try to do as much as possible even if it's just symbolism. But at least, it's something. There's a connection that people get. When I pull the heart from Naomi's chest, that's something they really understand.

**Naomi:** And it's always fun. I like the challenge of being able to do this act in different venues, different spaces. For example, at Beau Rivage, we're shooting on-stage and then go down to the pit if you will. With the costumes, we kind of have that down already.



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