

# Beyond characterization

*Tomáš Kubínek's one-man show has a little bit of everything*

By **JEREMY D. BONFIGLIO**  
Sight & Sound Editor

**BENTON HARBOR** — Tomáš Kubínek was 19 when he made his circus debut with Brazilian father-and-son clown duo, Leo and Nani Alarcon in Circus Flora.

“They had a number where the father played a mean horse trainer with a whip and there was a pantomime horse,” Kubínek says. “They needed someone to be inside the rear half of the horse costume. That was me.”

At the end of the gag, the horse split in half. The front end ran away, leaving Kubínek to chase after it in undershirt and boxer shorts with the back half of the horse costume around his ankles. From there, he says, there was really no turning back.

Kubínek worked his way up from “Back End of Horse” to “Guest Villain,” where he masterminded an elephant kidnapping, terrorized spectators and later plummeted 40 feet into the ring after fencing on the high-wire with Tino Walenda of The Flying Wallendas.

These days, Kubínek is a circus all his own, starring in the one-man show “Certified Lunatic and Master of the Impossible,” which makes a stop Saturday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.

While some shows claim to defy categorization, in Kubínek’s case it happens to be true. Making use of acrobatics, illusions, improvisation, fantastical inventions, European clowning and American vaudeville, Kubínek seems to live up to his theatrical title.

“I want to create a sort of heightened reality,” Kubínek says. “Clowning and vaudeville have so many elements of the same art form that I don’t see them as different, it’s just different colors of the same palette. It’s theatrical and physical. I tell stories and do crazy stunts. There’s structure for how things work, but it’s about making it alive in that time. It’s about being present and in the moment and not doing anything prepackaged. In that way, I think it has an old-world feel to it.”



Photo provided / D.A. Hill

**Tomáš Kubínek presents his one-man show, “Certified Lunatic and Master of the Impossible,” on Saturday at the Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre.**

Kubínek grew up as an immigrant child in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, when his family fled Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion in 1968.

“The takeover happened overnight,” says Kubínek, who was 3 when his parents fled to Austria. “Tanks came over the border and a lot of people left. The borders were pretty flimsy at the time. We went across and were in a refugee camp outside of Vienna. We spent about three months there waiting for a country to accept us, and then Canada accepted us and we came here.”

It was there, in St. Catharines, that a 5-year-old Kubínek saw his first circus. He became passionately interested in clowns, circus, theater and magic.

“I was quite inspired by that,” he says. “I started to become interested in daredevils and clowns and magicians and animals. I went to the library and started to put together a show, and it began this whole path or learning.”

When he was 9, Kubínek joined the library’s junior magic club, and started attending the adult meetings of the Society of American Magicians, and the Interna-

tional Brotherhood of Magicians.

“I started to go to these adult meetings and I met all these older magician guys and they’d have a special lecture and perform for each other,” he says. “I started hanging out with these eccentric men and women and learning tricks from them and started learning acts I could do myself at birthday parties and for senior citizens or on the street.”

By age 13 he had an agent. He performed in coffeehouses between folk

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Photo provided / Bruce Leseur

**Tomáš Kubínek came up with the idea for his leg extensions while doodling a cartoon in Belgium.**

## KUBINEK

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music acts and while still in his teens, he made that inauspicious circus debut.

Working any and all jobs related to showbiz, Kubínek was able to travel to Europe to study with some of the world's greatest theatrical teachers, including Monika Pagneaux, Pierre Byland, Jaques Lecoq and Boleslav Polívka. Those studies, combined with his own experiments in the art of live performance, led to the creation of his solo stage show.

"I started doing street theater and improv in comedy clubs," Kubínek says. "I worked with a theater company in England for a year and worked in the circus and all of those things came together in my pool of experience and passion. I draw on all of those aspects when I entertain people."

At the start, he did standard tricks, traveling by bus with a suitcase full of eggs and handkerchiefs. Now that he's 50, his repertoire has expanded to involve a contraption that allows him to walk with six feet.

"I was in Belgium and I was just doo-

## IF YOU GO

**What:** Tomáš Kubínek: "Certified Lunatic and Master of the Impossible"

**When:** 7 p.m. Saturday

**Where:** Lake Michigan College Mendel Center Mainstage Theatre, 2755 E. Napier Ave., Benton Harbor

**How much:** \$15-\$30

**Contact:** 927-1221 or [lmcmainstage.org](http://lmcmainstage.org)

**Artist info:** [www.kubinek.com](http://www.kubinek.com)

dling and imagined a cartoon of extensions on my legs and extra shoes that I could walk on," Kubínek says of that particular gag. "I draw a lot of pictures and scribble things on envelopes and that's how it begins. As I get deeper and deeper in my experience there's a greater freedom to go to wider edges of the island. Like any skill that becomes second nature you don't have to think about the technical aspects of it and can focus on the art of it."

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