

St. Petersburg Times

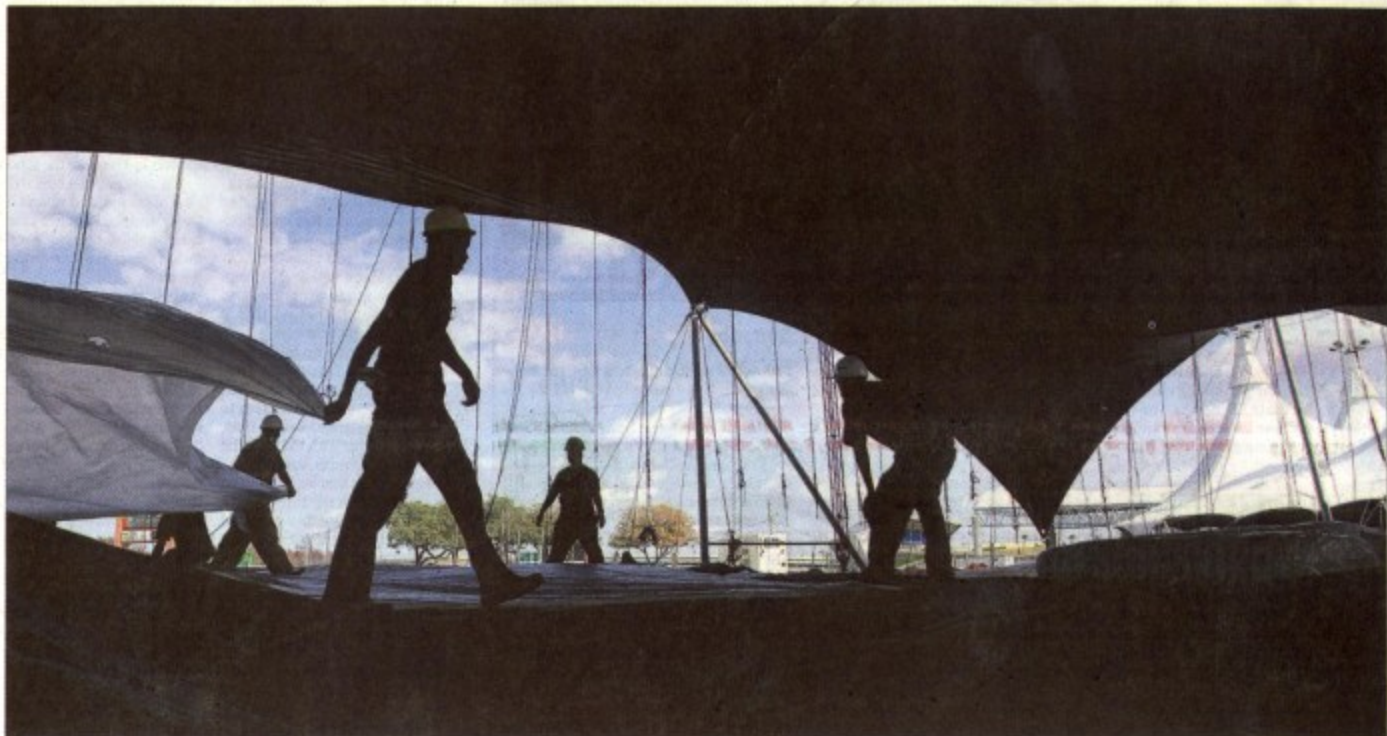
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Taking the term 'big top' to new extremes



WILLIE J. ALLEN JR. | Times

Workers stand beneath the big top for the upcoming *Cavalia* show at the Florida State Fairgrounds on Tuesday morning and pull up the plastic sheeting used to protect the huge tent from the ground and keep it clean. *Cavalia* is a multimedia equestrian performance with all the acrobatics and aerial stunts of *Cirque du Soleil*, mixed with interaction between humans and more than 60 horses. The big top is 110 feet tall, covering 30,000 square feet. **Story, 3B. For video of big top going up, go to video.tampabay.com.**

Titanic tent raising precedes extravaganza

BY STEPHANIE BOLLING
Times Staff Writer

TAMPA — What weighs 45,000 pounds, spans 26,264 square feet and takes seven semi-trailers to transport? The white big top tent of *Cavalia*, billed as the largest touring tent in the world.

In rose in just 10 minutes Tuesday at the Florida State Fairgrounds.

"I have goose bumps every time it goes up," said Normand Latourelle, founder of *Cavalia* and co-founder of *Cirque du Soleil*.

Cavalia is an equestrian performing arts show premiering March 12 in Tampa.

On Tuesday, 50 people worked to erect the tent — among them, 20 *Cavalia* specialists and 30

laborers from the Tampa community. The massive structure went up without a hitch.

"We've been very lucky," Latourelle said. "It's the 40th time I've seen it go up."

Preparation to erect the tent started Friday. Workers had to level the ground using 2,500 tons of rock, sand and other material — about 100 truck loads — before the big top could be laid out. Stakes plunged up to 12½ feet into the ground help support the tent, said Latourelle.

A traditional circus tent has masts that extend 50 to 60 feet high and 40 feet apart. The *Cavalia* big top tent has four masts extending 110 feet high and 75 square feet apart, creating 2.5 million cubic feet, enough

An eclectic show

What: *Cavalia* features 12 breeds of horses, 35 artists, acrobats, dancers and riders performing to live music.

When: March 12 through March 21.

Where: Florida State Fairgrounds, Interstate 4 at U.S. 301, Tampa.

Tickets: \$44.50 to \$189.50 general; some discounted rates available for children and seniors. For information, visit cavalia.net or call toll-free 1-866-999-8111.

room for the horses to run and stop, said Duncan Fisher, *Cavalia* tour manager.

"To up and move every time is quite an endeavor," he said.



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Workers raise the big top tent for the *Cavalia* show on Tuesday morning. The tent is 110 feet tall, covering 30,000 square feet of the Florida State Fairgrounds. *Cavalia* is a multimedia equestrian show with *Cirque du Soleil* style acrobatics and aerialists.