History as art to come alive at CityStage

By Keith O'Connor | Special to The Republican

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IF YOU GO

Event: The Grand Parade (of the 20th Century)
When: Thursday and Friday at 7:30 p.m.
Where: CityStage, 1 Columbus Center, Springfield
Cost: $30
For more info: Call (413) 788-7033 or visit citystage.symphonyhall.com

History has never been so much fun. Especially when it is presented as art.

Imagine no teacher or professor standing in front of you lecturing and putting you to sleep. Then imagine instead watching six actors on stage as they depict major events of the 20th century in theatrical style inspired by artist Marc Chagall's kaleidoscope vision of humanity at play, at war and at rest. Watch as trapeze, circus, dance, projections and popular culture fill the height and breadth of the stage in a spectacle of history populated by people and animals in acts of grace and destruction from the ecstasy of landing on the moon, the frenzy of war, the skilled escapes of Houdini, the atomic bomb, Kennedy's assassination, and Hitler's brutalization of Europe.

That's exactly what audiences will see on Thursday and Friday night when the Double Edge Theatre – beginning a multi-year commitment with the City of Springfield – brings its "Grand Parade" to CityStage.

When it comes to art and history, Stacy Klein, artistic director at Double Edge Theater and director of "The Grand Parade," said she believes "art has an obligation to use history to bring meaning to it."

"But this is not a history lesson. What we are trying to do is to use our artistic minds by taking events and trying to understand them through art," Klein said.

"For example, we brought The Grand Parade to school groups at an arena in Washington, D.C. After the performance, we asked them what it meant to them. This young high school student said he learned about World War II in high school, but he
never knew it was that horrible and said he never felt anything about it until he saw our performance," she added.

The Springfield performances, along with free matinees for Springfield Public High School students, are being accompanied by additional youth programming, including conversations with the creators and performers, classroom activities inviting a creative exploration of history and art, and ensemble-led workshops for students at CityStage.

"We are really very excited about our new partnership with Springfield and have been putting a lot of energy into it," Klein said.

"It has been quite moving working with the students. Our work, however, is not just for students. Our work is for anybody. We want to engage the entire community," she added.

Founded in 1982 by Klein at Tufts University, Double Edge later purchased a 105-acre former dairy farm in Ashfield where they moved their operations from Boston.

The theatre's highly physical performances, staged both indoors and outdoors, are performed nationally and internationally.

"Our next project will be one of our outdoor pieces where we will engage different people to participate," Klein said.

Hopefully it won't be in the winter months.