

## Circus performer's flight preview steals NASA show

July 23 2009, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer

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In this image provided by NASA the Japanese Logistics Module is handed over from Endeavour's remote manipulator system to the space station's remote manipulator system during unberthing and mating operations Tuesday July 21, 2009. (AP Photo/NASA)

(AP) -- A former stiltwalker and fire-eater stole NASA's show Thursday, saying he'll be "like a kid in a candy store" experimenting with zero-gravity tricks on his upcoming tourist trip to the international space station.

Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberte is shelling out a reported \$35 million for his round-trip ticket aboard a Russian spacecraft. He will rocket into orbit from Kazakhstan at the end of September with a professional astronaut and cosmonaut, and spend more than a week at the space station.

At a news conference in Houston, as 13 people circled overhead on the shuttle-station complex, Laliberte was bombarded with questions from journalists, most of them gathered in his home country of Canada.

"As you know, I'm not a scientist. I'm not a doctor. I'm not an engineer. I'm an artist. I'm a creator, and I'll try to do and accomplish this mission with my creativity and what life has given me as a tool," said the Quebec billionaire, who turns 50 in September.

He described his life as a fairy tale and said watching men land on the moon 40 years ago this week, on a black-and-white television at a campground in the middle of the forest, taught him that all things are possible.

Laliberte assured reporters that he we will not play with any fire in space - for obvious reasons. But he hopes to try some acrobatics in weightlessness and may teach his crewmates a card trick or two.

"I don't know how we'll be using stilts up there," he said. "But I think there are a couple little things, hopefully, that I have learned in my career of street entertainer that will try to apply up there."

Laliberte said he's seen pictures of floating bottles and other items at the space station that might make for some interesting tricks. But he noted, "I think I will be more like a kid in a candy store up there, discovering things that those guys know. Because I know what I can do on Earth. But what I'm really interested, is to gain and learning what their world is."

As Laliberte talked up creativity, art and safe water for the world's poor in both English and French, astronauts 220 miles up worked to place science experiments on the new front porch of Japan's \$1 billion space station lab.

The combined crews of the space station and shuttle Endeavour installed the porch last week.

Thursday's work involved using the 33-foot robot arm on the lab, Kibo - Japanese for "hope" - to install the experiments. The first to go on was an X-ray telescope for astronomical observations. Up next were a package of communication equipment and a space environment monitor for measuring atomic oxygen, cosmic dust and light particles, and their effects on electronics and other materials.

Japanese astronaut Koichi Wakata was at the controls of the lab's robot arm, being used for the first time to hoist payloads. He's been at the space station since March and will return to Earth next week aboard Endeavour.

Back in Houston at the home of Mission Control, meanwhile, Laliberte promised to announce next month the full details of his "social, poetic mission" to draw attention to the world's dwindling water supply.

The circus performer-turned-manager is at Johnson Space Center this week, along with Soyuz crewmates Jeffrey Williams and Maxim Suraev, for training in emergency procedures and familiarization with NASA equipment.

Laliberte will become the seventh space tourist, courtesy of Virginia-based Space Adventures, which brokered the deals with Russian officials. The first six were software, technology and business types, making Laliberte the first professional artist set for space.

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On the Net:

NASA:

[http://www.nasa.gov/mission\(underscore\)pages/shuttle/main/index.html](http://www.nasa.gov/mission(underscore)pages/shuttle/main/index.html)

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