



Show director Sylvia Zerbini tends to Beijo after Valitar closed in November 2012. JOHN GIBBINS • U-T FILE

FORMER WORKERS GETTING PAID A YEAR AFTER VALITAR'S CLOSING

2012 show's collapse stung more than 50

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DEL MAR

More than a year after the Valitar tent show abruptly closed at the fairgrounds, former employees and performers are finally getting unpaid wages.

The equine-human acrobatics show that one of its producers called "Cirque du Soleil with horses" closed after just a handful of performances in November 2012. The producers said poor ticket sales were to blame.

A short time later, the production company Equustria Development Inc. declared bankruptcy, leaving more

than 50 employees and performers without paychecks.

Last month, a bankruptcy court order cleared the way for those people to be paid.

"It was a lot of work, but I'm glad that we were able to get them some money this time of year," said Suzanne Porrazzo, an attorney who represents 51 former em-

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VALITAR • Records were an obstacle

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ployees who filed claims.

Porrazzo said she successfully argued that paying the workers should be made a priority and the court shouldn't wait until the case is over to release their wages. The case is likely to continue for another year or two, she said.

A total of \$213,692 was released for payments, according to court records.

Each of the workers and performers received payments of between \$1,000 and \$9,500, before taxes and attorneys fees.

Porrazzo said it was difficult proving to the court that some of the employees had worked for the company. Because none of them received a paycheck, they had no check stubs to provide to the court.

Poor record-keeping by

the company also made her work difficult, Porrazzo said. She and an assistant pored through company records for two days looking for documents to back their clients' claims.

Her clients include horse stall cleaners and some of the show's main performers, including Valitar show director Sylvia Zerbini, who is also a horse trainer and performer.

Vendors who provided services and production equipment supplies are owed about \$2.9 million, according to court records. Those payments have not been settled.

The abrupt end to Valitar stunned performers and crew members, some of whom came from other parts of the world and were left stranded without pay in local apartments and hotel rooms. With the help of a fundraising show and donations from the public, most were able to return to their homes.

The court has been able to recover more than \$600,000 from the company, including about \$217,000 in net proceeds from an auction held in January 2013 of five large tents and other equipment used in the show. An additional \$255,000 came from the show's ticket sales.

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