

Circus by Verena Cornwall
Elemental East: 12th December 2008



“The trick is to lift the spirits outside the normal realm of things, to free the performers and the audience from the boundaries of their everyday existence and show them something special about their lives” Paul Binder, Big Apple Circus

Two Different Perspectives: Policy maker and artists



- *as a policy maker*; working as an adviser for a funding body, creating the policy for circus, street arts and spectacle in the Republic of Ireland and awarding funding; ROI rep on Circostrada network. *Circostrada network is European, shares best practice and go see. Discuss artistic practice and training.*
- *as an independent authority*; undertaking contracts with clients in this art forms [in traditional and contemporary circus] as a freelance management consultant; plus chair the Circus Development Agency [formerly Circus Arts Forum] working with others to advocate and lobby in the UK & Honorary Member of the ACP

What is Circus?



- the word circus comes from the Latin for circle
- circus has always been a non-elitist, accessible, multi-cultural art form. *It is the best template for people working around the world in her opinion.*

- its history is one of integration, international collaboration and co-operation

it is skill based and often includes other disciplines, such as the narrative of theatre or the movement of dance. *The definition is quite wide; it crosses a range of artforms, but skill at its heart.*

- predominantly it uses props in performance - be these other performers, objects or animals

Circus Overview



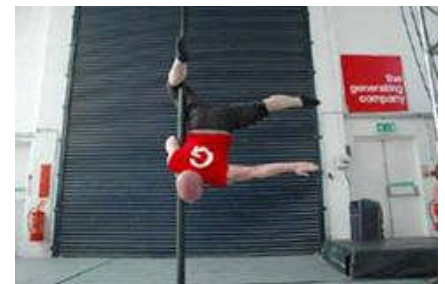
- in most countries across the world there is some level of circus activity, but England is credited with having 'invented' circus [in London in 1768]

- circus takes place in a variety of setting; the streets, a tent, a theatre, corporate gigs in shopping centres or nightclubs, open air within a park, in burlesque shows within Spiegel tents

- as with many other art forms (e.g. contemporary dance and ballet) there are two genres to circus - traditional / classical circus and contemporary circus and sub-genres including aerial-dance

Circus - An Art Form

- in 2002 ACE recognised Circus as an art form, and published a Policy for Circus, following a period of research, in the 1980's and in 2001. *Important - need to have spaces for training, formation and put on the agenda. Can respond on licensing reform and how that impacts on work made in public space. Ongoing debate - final hearing in HoC about circus to be removed*



- circus has been located within the ACE Theatre team ever since
- in October 2006, the European Parliament passed a motion for EU Countries to recognise Circus (*with animals*) as Culture
- in 2007 a Worldwide Circus Federation was formed

Cultural Value of Being Recognised as an Art Form



- ensures that circus is on the agenda for politicians at a variety of levels

- recognition opens doors to debates and circus now included formally
- allows access to public subsidy
- offers status, can use the fact that it is recognised as an art form when lobbying, for example, for grounds from local authorities
- not everything is solved by this, but it ensures that a dialogue at least starts
- begins to put circus on a level playing field with other art forms

Industry Expertise
Circus Development Agency (CDA)
[formerly Circus Arts Forum]



- set up by a group of people with a professional involvement in circus in late 1990's
- the board includes representatives from both the traditional and contemporary circus community; the major UK promoters and circus training centres; touring circus companies and community circus schools; venue-based circuses and other circus arts projects: www.circusarts.org.uk

The Agency is highly representative with a very useful website for finding shows, performers, question, forum discussion and lots of info and good search facility. It is free to join and free to upload.

CDA Website



- 10,000 hits a month, *and climbing*
- includes separate sections on training, tented shows, theatre shows, artists, jobs, youth circus, list of riggable venues and training spaces, FAQ
- has a 'forum' element which allows informal exchange of information and advice, which is moderated is aimed at the 1,000 CDA members and the general public, info can be uploaded for free

Industry Expertise Association of Circus Proprietors of Great Britain



- the Association of Circus Proprietors of Great Britain is a Registered Employers Association and the trade body which represents the circus industry of Great Britain
- it is a membership organisation, need to be voted on it deals directly with the government on issues such as licensing, work permits, LEZ: www.circus-uk.co.uk

ACP Members



- The Chinese State Circus
- John Lawson's Circus
- Gandey World Class Circus [*Cirque Surreal, Spirit of the Horse, Circus Starr*]
- Gifford's Circus
- The Circus of Horrors
- Happy's Circus
- The Blackpool Tower Circus.
- The Great Moscow State Circus
- Zippos Circus
- Billy Smarts Circus
- Wookey Hole Circus School



Dedicated Circus Training in England



- two RFO clients- Circus Space (London) and Circomedia (Bristol) offering a variety of professional level courses - to degree level as well as a first level entry non-vocational training
- two other building based training spaces, Greentop (Sheffield) and Skylight (Rochdale)
- three circus training organisations run by traditional circus proprietors, two of which focus on youth circus provision; Wookey Hole Circus School (Wells), The Hippodrome (Great Yarmouth), The Academy of Circus Arts (which trains on tour)

Circus Audiences:

There have not been statistics or headline research on circus for a while, policy makers do not split out the circus stats from the other genres.



- the Social Survey Division of the Office for National Statistics, show that that 18 % of the population visited a circus, street festival or carnival in the year surveyed

- the ACE Jermyn Survey in 2001 estimated the mean audience figure per company as 156,000 usually concentrated into an average 30 week working period. *This is the only survey carried out into practitioners; the figure is very vague and need to be included in research going forward.*

- the most recent national survey, titled 'Taking Part', carried out by DCMS in 2005/6 failed to include circus as a sub-category - but did segment out street arts and carnival

- in 2008 City Circ, the Alliance of Theatres and CircusArts for London (which is set to expand to cover the whole of England from 2009 onwards) commissioned with ACE, London, a study of Audiences for Circus Arts

- key audience indicators taken from Snapshot (the arts-consumer data-sharing initiative) were analysed using audience data for circus performances accumulated during the period 2000-2007, to offer an outline profile of the types of audiences that would be attracted to circus performances

- this mapped the actual attenders of Circus performances (using box office data from a variety of venues) against the Snapshot data, and utilising Mosaic Geo-demographic Profiling



Circus Audiences: Figures

Mosaic Profile Generic Group - Symbols of Success
[Global Connections; Cultural Leadership; Corporate Chieftains]

- 9.6% of UK Populous
- 31.4% of Snapshot Data [Total Attenders]

- 28% of Actual Circus Attenders

Mosaic Profile Generic Group - Urban Intelligence
[Counter Cultural Mix; City Adventurers; New Urban Colonists]

- 7.19% of UK Populous
- 27.0% of Snapshot Data [Total Attenders]
- 40% of Actual Circus Attenders

Current Issues Facing Circus:

- **funding** - local authorities spending often capped or reducing; ditto Arts Council England funding. *It is often hard to get money from trusts and foundations as circus, there have previously been 365 applications which got no funding and raised £60m from other trusts and foundations for other clients.*



- **training** - those leaving the professional circus schools not necessarily ready to join the industry. *Training doesn't leave them ready for legislation, health and safety. These are things they can't learn at apprenticeship level. Gaps can be bridged by circus schools and starting work/company.*

- **progression routes** - few high level companies to be able to join in an apprenticeship capacity
- **lack of infrastructure** - very few producers working with circus performers so many find it hard to get shows programmed if working without support
- **availability of grounds** - is an issue, as is licensing, for tented circuses
- **isolation** - many people experiencing the same problems but trying to work through them alone [issues with training; rehearsal; product]

ACE Funded National Development Projects, include:

- Young People's Participatory Theatre Project [YPPT]- Circus Initiative (run by Eira Gibson at The Circus Space)
- Circelation (run by Leila Jancovich and Chenine Bhatthena)
- Circ City - Venues Alliance (run by Crying Out Loud)
- International Youth Circus Festival (run by Ian Scott-Owens from Albert & Friends Youth Circus)

- Circus Futures (run by Moving Ahead Productions)
- Circus Fronts (run by The Roundhouse, in association with Rachel Clare)

Circus Futures



- took place in Bristol 2006 and offered a two-day event (conference and 3 showcases) for people interested in playing a role in the development of contemporary circus in the UK

- the target audience included promoters from venues and festivals, practitioners, local authority arts officers, agents and circus proprietors

- it provided connection routes between policy makers, programmers and artists by stimulating the conversations taking place and providing extracts of performances to show the breadth of contemporary circus in the UK

Circus Futures had 5 key objectives:

- seek out emerging circus talent in England
- form working relationships with venues and programmers in England
- create a National Showcase in a major Bristol Venue over a two day period of emerging circus work, highlighting both contemporary & traditional
- run an associated conference in audience development for circus
- create links with international circus festivals to allow the work shown to have a wider audiences

Circus Futures Outcomes

- 55 companies and individuals applied for 19 places in the 3 circus showcases
- 127 delegates attended the conference and showcases, including key representatives from the UK and individuals from Norway, Finland, Ireland and Spain
- 100% said that they would attend the event again

- planned to take place in Leicester in September 2009
- new elements include 3 commissions with key directors; ‘dedicated time support’ bursaries for 3 companies after the event; assistance for international festival directors travel

Jeune Talent Cirque Europe:

Young talent for circus in Europe and have worked with UK performers so that they are in with a chance of being selected. The standard has increased from previous years. Verena is on panel for selection, emerging circus companies are invited and present for 15 minutes, and sit and talk for 20 minutes about process. 8 presented in Paris 8 weeks ago.

- to create a European development initiative for circus arts
- a provide a co-operation network between cultural actors for the creation of the modern circus
- to offer assistance for creation and residences adapted to projects
- to develop training, enrichment of artistic projects, time for research and exploration
- to co-operate with other networks on the circulation of information
- to advocate for recognition of cultural establishments’ commitment in favour of contemporary circus



Jeune Talent Cirque Europe [JTCE]

JTCE has five elements:

phase 1 : call for projects

phase 2 : selection based on application form

phase 3 : further selection based on viewing of performance work and meeting with a selection committee

phase 4: allocation of support and practical assistance [residencies]

phase 5: public presentations

Theatre Bristol - CAST Initiative

CAST - Advocate:



- for circus & street theatre, a two-year international advocate role was created specifically in the first year to work on creation of a new festival
-in year two to focus on spaces
- tasks include; visiting international festivals to discuss Bristol and the strength of work being created there; creating a business plan for the festival; writing a feasibility study for a circus creation centre

CAST Member - Cirque Bijou

Sequins and Sawdust

- a new show developed in 2007 as a partnership project between Circus Space, The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School (BOVTS) and Cirque Bijou
- performed in a tent in Bristol and London, the show featured live musicians and a range of circus skills



- directed by Jon Beedell, co-directed by Mitch Mitchelson
- offered circus students, and technical students from BOVTS, a first-step into the professional world



Sequins and Sawdust
Cirque Bijou
Tightrope

- a multi-art form piece currently in development with three partners; Greenwich & Lewisham Young People's Theatre, THEATRE IS, Cirque Bijou
- Tightrope is an adaptation of the novel of the same name by the award winning author Gillian Cross. The novel is a “sharply observed thriller”, about Ashley, a young person with a secret
- central to the story are the circus skills of its young protagonists, Tightrope fully utilises and challenges the traditions of circus and theatre



Cirque Bijou
Project 360



- a large scale performance production developed in partnership with Bristol City Council as part of Bristol's first showcase event of urban arts and sports

- it features extreme sports practitioners, digital artists, parkour exponents and circus artists
- performed as part of the UK Schools Games in August 2008 in Bristol, and as part of the 'Find Your Talent' initiative in Telford
- outdoor site specific pieces aimed at young people

The Future - Potential Solutions



- a pan-European apprenticeship scheme
- a high level international circus festival
- encourage festivals and venues to commission emerging companies
- provide links between rep theatres and circus companies to offer technical and artistic support

- assist funders to understand the needs of circus practitioners [through initiatives such as this regional roadshow!]
- train and subsidise producers to work with companies
- find ways for traditional circuses to share experiences with contemporary circus practitioners to raise the level of touring expertise

Festivals to Visit:

- Festival Circa - Auch - France - www.circuits-circa.com
- Circo Circolo -Hertogenbosch - Holland - www.circocircolo.nl
- Festival novog cirkusa - Zagreb - Croatie - www.cirkus.hr
- Trapezi- Reus - Espagne - www.trapezi.org
- Monte Carlo Circus Festival - Monaco - www.montecarlofestivals.com



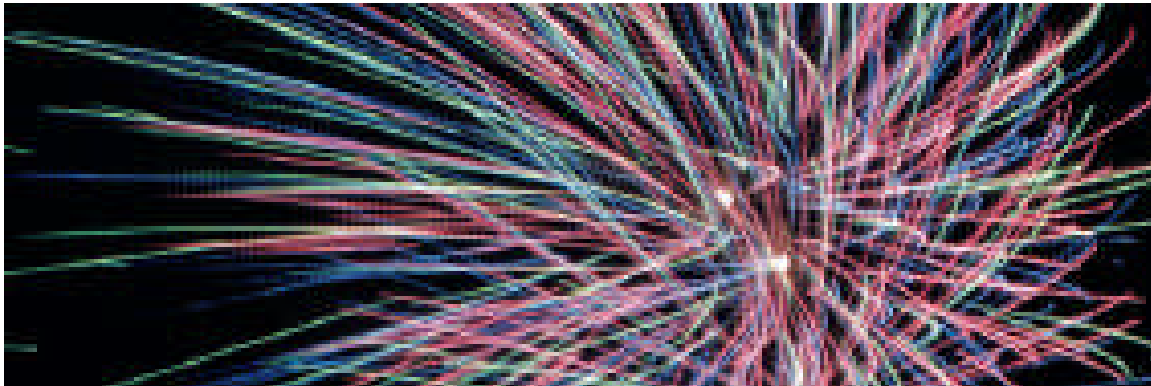
UK Companies to See

- No Fit State Circus
- Gravity and Levity
- Stumble Dance Circus
- Ockham's Razor
- Acrojou
- Upswing
- Company FZ
- Expressive Feat
- Wired Aerial Dance



International Companies:

- Fidget Feet [Eire]
- Cirkus Cikor [Sweden]
- Le Cirque de Tunis [Tunisia]
- Cridacompany [France]
- Le Cirque de Tunis [Tunisia]
- Circa & Acrobat [Australia]
- Dynamo Theatre & Les 7 Doigts de la Main [Canada]
- Baladeux [Belgium]
- Jeune Talent Cirque Europe winners* - Rémi Luchez [France] and Cie IETO [France]
- Performance artist Maren Strack [Germany]



By Verena Cornwall