



# ACTION FOR CHILDREN'S ARTS

**Circus For Children  
And Family Audiences  
Inspiration Day**

# SO WHAT'S SO INSPIRATIONAL ABOUT CIRCUS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?

Dear Reader,

The image of the traditional travelling circus coming to town is one that has resonated with many since childhood; it is also an image that many contemporary circus practitioners distance themselves from in their artistic explorations. Circus has been a developing art form in the U.K, and the quality of the work being produced goes from strength to strength. Circus has also attracted the attention of theatre practitioners and choreographers that seek to incorporate it within their work – with some innovative offerings from contemporary UK companies having emerged with recent years. Clearly there is a growing interest in the art form, but what is on offer for young people and their families?

On 25th October 2011, a group of circus practitioners, artists, producers, arts managers and educationalists gathered to think the creation of circus for young people and their families. Action for Children's Arts has an excellent track record for delivering 'Inspiration Days' on various art-forms – it was wonderful that circus was at the heart of this lively debate.

Please enjoy the read – it's a quick peek into some of the debates and discoveries of this particular Inspiration Day. It was written with every intention to inspire you - to think about circus in a new way, to consider what young people gain from engaging with it, or even... to try it out for yourself!

With Circus Love,

Liat Rosenthal

ACA Executive  
Board Member



## CONTENTS

So what's so inspirational about circus?

Did you know – random research & facts about circus

Circus: A beginner's guide

Take the Quiz: What circus performer would I be?

Up Close and Personal – we talk hard facts with circus artists

Making work for young people – Circus Practitioners Speak Out

Fancy a bit of circus? Find out where and how

The Top Ten – summary of the ACA Inspiration Day

ACA Inspiration Day: Itinerary

ACA Inspiration Day: Contacts of Artists and Speakers

With thanks to ACE and Circus Space for their generous support

# Did you know?

That the word 'circus' (Latin for 'ring') was first used in the late C14 in reference to ancient Rome, and described circular arenas for performances and contests and oval courses for racing (especially the Circus Maximus).

To find out more about the wonderful history of circus:  
<http://www.circushistory.org>  
<http://www.circusmuseum.nl/eng/>

## Did you know that the Egyptians used to juggle?

Depictions of juggling practice, which boffins call 'multiplexing', goes all the way back to the 5th Beni Hassan tomb of an unknown prince, dating from the middle kingdom period of about 1994-1781 B.C. Professor Arthur Lewbel's research into juggling history tries to identify whether juggling was part of a religious ritual or a sporting event!

[www.vam.ac.uk/page/c/circus](http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/c/circus)

## Did you know... that juggling improves your brain?

Researchers looking at brain functioning of people learning to juggle found that it didn't matter how 'good' you were at juggling, it was the process of learning the skill that helped the brain develop connectivity.

Dr Heidi Johansen-Berg of the Department of Clinical Neurology, University of Oxford, who led the work, said 'It is possible for the brain to condition its own wiring system to operate more efficiently.... We have demonstrated that there are changes in the white matter of the brain - the bundles of nerve fibres that connect different parts of the brain - as a result of learning an entirely new skill.'

**So whether it's two balls or ten - keep practicing to develop your mind!**

## Did you know.... Circus makes you happy!

Circus arts increase 'flow' which positive psychologists say make you feel good!

The 3 conditions necessary to achieve the flow state are:

- Being involved in an activity with a clear set of goals.
- Having a good balance between the perceived challenges of the task at hand and your own perceived skills
- The task at hand must have clear and immediate feedback

Whilst the 'flow state' can be achieved through different creative practices, Amy Cohen, Operations Director for the American Youth Circus Organisation believes that Circus is a unique tool for educators as it has multiple 'access points' - circus is a mixture of sports and arts and has lots of different skills within it, so there's something for everyone to be happy about!

## Did you know these circus superstitions...

Performers must enter the ring on their right foot to avoid bad luck.

For good luck, some circus performers keep a hair from an elephant's tail in their pockets.

Once a performer's wardrobe trunk is set down backstage, it's considered bad luck to move it before the circus relocates.

Taken from New Victory Theatre Blog: 46 Circus Facts in 45 Days



# Circus skills

## A beginner's guide!

Don't know your trapeze from your Chinese pole?  
Not sure about the full variations of the flying trapeze?  
Want to understand the whole spectrum of juggling?

**This beginner's guide is a great place to start!**

Images courtesy of Circus Space



### Handstands

Handstands are an acrobatic discipline that require the performer to support their entire weight on to handstand blocks – as the performer becomes more advanced they are able to maintain positions whilst having less physical contact with the equipment.



### Static Trapez

The static trapeze is part of the aerial family. Static trapeze is a great place to start if you want to try some aerial skills – because the bar stays pretty ‘static’ whilst you are in the air. If you fancy some partner work the larger ‘doubles’ static bar allows you to work on your moves with an aerial partner – you can hang off the bar – or off each other. Other members of the trapeze family are the swinging trapeze (looks like the static trapeze but only it swings back and forth) and also the flying trapeze – to do this you'd need more people, including a catcher and a platform pal. Oh – and excellent core strength!



### Acrobalance

Acrobalance is usually done in pairs – but there are all kinds of acrobatic acts, including group acrobatics, hand-to-hand acts, and acrobatic trios! Traditionally there is a base and a flyer – the base supports the flyer as they balance off different body parts.



### Chinese Pole

Chinese Poles are vertical poles of aluminium on which circus performers climb, slide down and hold poses. The poles are generally between 3 and 9 metres in height and approximately 7 to 9cm in diameter. Chinese Poles is an acrobatic discipline that has rapidly grown in popularity as some of the tricks have been incorporated with pole dancing techniques. There are lots of creative possibilities to explore with this skill – choreographically work can get really interesting when you have several performers working together, moving from pole to pole, and creating different images as they drop and suspend themselves in the air!



## Juggling

You'll need to develop your sense of rhythm and musicality to make it as a juggler! There is much more to juggling than just throwing and catching – circus performers create juggling acts that incorporate dance, mime, slap-stick, martial arts and movement. Not many people realise the full range of juggling - toss juggling, bounce juggling, rings, knives, fire torches are just a few. Most professional jugglers are also skilled in other prop based skills like diablo, cigar boxes and manipulation skills. The “Gandini Jugglers”, are an excellent example of contemporary juggling at its best!

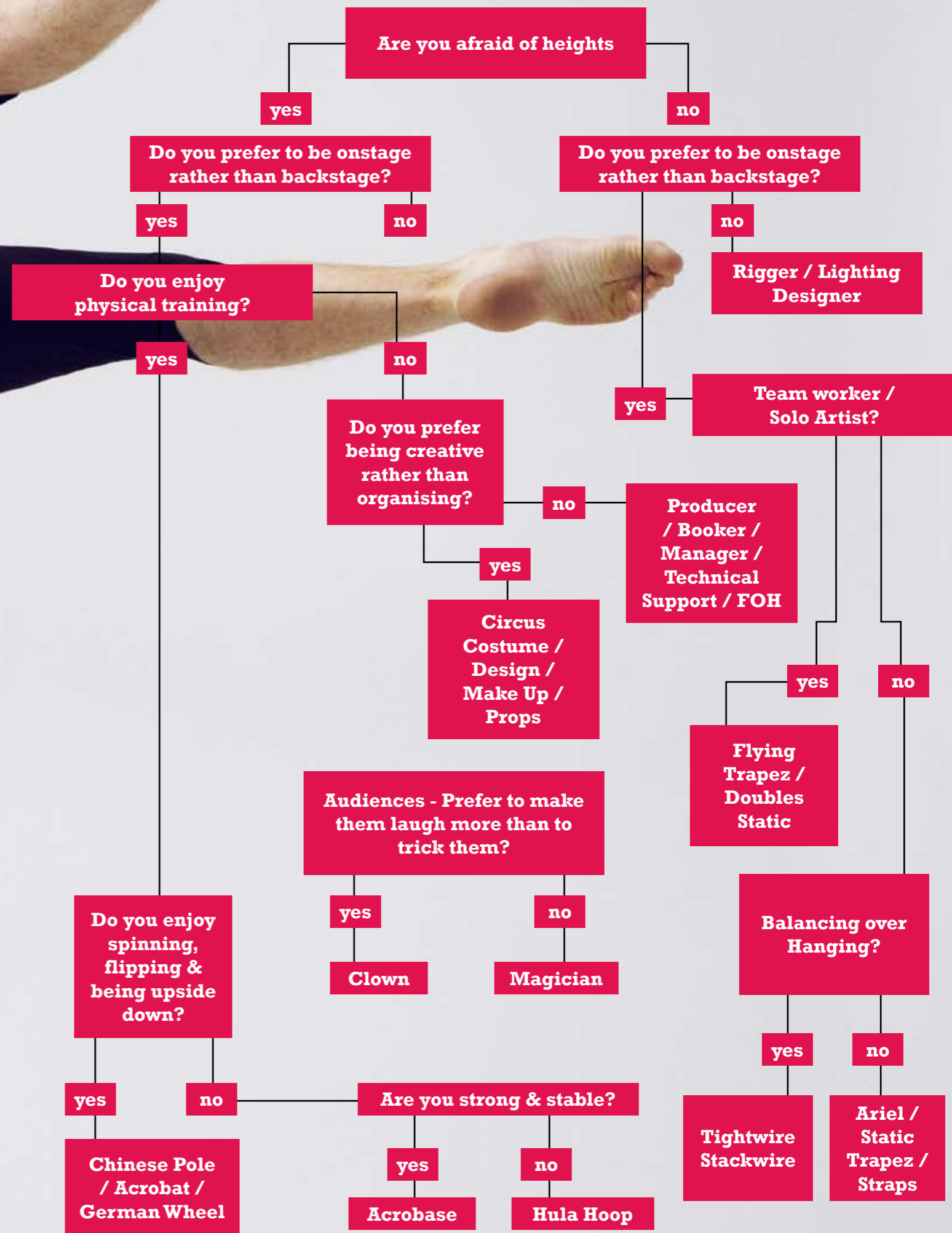


## Hula Hoop

Hula hooping is a fun and accessible circus art – it requires a great deal of rhythm and timing. Advanced hula hoop artists can manage to keep multiple hoops going at the same time - on their necks, hips, legs, arms. Some even hula hoop with a fire hoop - but this is not recommended for beginners.

# WHAT

Circus performer would I be?



# Up close and personal

We talk to circus artists...



## Why is Circus so inspirational?

We gathered a group of circus practitioners together to find out:

**Tim Lenkiewicz is a circus artist and Artistic Director of Square Peg**  
[www.wearesquare.co.uk](http://www.wearesquare.co.uk)

### How did you get into Circus?

Several things -I got into yo-yoing, so I ended up going into juggling shops. I use to do fire performances in Edinburgh whilst at University, and my capoeira practice got me into acrobatics.

### What's the hardest thing about working in circus?

That you have to figure stuff out for yourself – the career path is not straight forward. Now there is more awareness around career development but when I started it was really about finding things out as you went along – a real case of trial and error!

### What advice would you give to someone keen to get into circus?

Just get on with it! Learn the skills and get good at them, and remember that you need stage-craft, movement, body awareness, conditioning.... You must understand the breadth of what's involved.

### What inspires your work?

Lots of things – the people I work with; their passion for circus, their enthusiasm. Through collaboration I can do things that I would not do alone. I am excited about music, stories, images... work that leaves something to the imagination and asking questions. I am really inspired by the work of “Square Peg”, – the company of acrobats that I’ve set up – that excites me!

### Do you think family audiences and young people are different?

Children are easy to connect with – they think things are funny that adults don’t. When I perform in mixed age group, I work with the children to engage the adults.

**Layla Rosa is... a creator of theatre and circus. Layla is a performer, director, choreographer and teacher.**

### How did you get into circus?

I did a degree in English and Drama but always knew that I wanted to get into more physical performance. I fell in love with circus after seeing a performance by “Mama Lucas Human Circus”, – I knew I wanted to work with rope.

### What advice would you give to anyone wanting to become a circus artist?

Good question – I am still trying to work out my own answer! I think that to be a circus “artist” you need to nurture lots of different skills –not just physical training. Also, it’s good to develop other skills, non-physical skills, alongside your circus practice.

### What's the hardest bit?

As a performer the training is very physically rigorous. As a circus artist, it is a constant challenge to maintain focus, and to keep openness and trust in the process – this is essential to keep it alive!

### You've been developing a performance for young people, “Beneath My Feet” – what inspired this project?

I have a young son, and he inspires my work - it's inspired by his interests, and by my experiences as a mother. I wanted to make something that children and their families can enjoy together.

### Do you find making work for young people different?

I find it very freeing, the process is playful and enjoyable. I have found that I create the work with a different approach – allowing myself to be more playful in the process.

### Why is do you think circus appeals to young people?

It's a unique visual language, it's highly accessible, and it really absorbs them – in a very similar way that puppetry does...



Image courtesy of Ockham's Razor, Photo Credit to Nik Mackey

### **Danny Schlesinger is a clown!**

#### **How did you get into clowning?**

I learnt to juggle and then went to “Fool Time Circus School”, Bristol (now Circomedia) for a basic foundation course in Circus Skills, and clowning was part of the course

#### **What’s the hardest part of being a clown artist?**

Practicing - it’s very difficult to practice to a wall, so it’s important to be in front of an audience. You never know if a new routine will work until it’s tried a few times in front of an audience.

#### **What’s the best bit?**

The audience laughing, clapping and some of them thanking you after a show.

#### **What’s your top tip for someone getting into circus?**

Learn the skills you are interested in to the best you can and ALWAYS learn performance techniques too.

#### **What’s your top tip for someone working with circus artists for the first time?**

Ask questions and be patient.

### **AMY COHEN is a circus performer and educator. Amy is the Operations Director for the American Youth Circus Organisation.**

#### **How did you get into circus?**

As a kid I was a complete monkey! Always climbing on everything and seeking creative ways to explore the world from different angles. My mom discovered a circus day camp near my house and I attended for 6 weeks each summer. The teachers there became my circus family and connected me to the greater circus community.

#### **What’s the hardest part of being a circus artist?**

I think the hardest part is also the most important part- that you are constantly advocating for your art form. Educating and explaining the scope and spectrum of circus as an art form.

### **What’s the best bit?**

The best bit is that circus is all about unity in diversity. It honors everyone’s unique gifts - I love collaborating with artists of different disciplines, making something out of nothing,

#### **What performance do you like?**

“James Thierree”, “CompagnieIeto”, “Racehorse Company”, “Ockham’s Razor”, “Collect if and Then”.

#### **What inspires you about making work for children and families?**

Children have so much to teach adults! I am very inspired by the lack of judgment, seriousness, and purity of intention of the child’s world of play and discovery.

#### **What inspires your work?**

SoundPlay is very much about challenging the relationships between art forms and creating a common language. What happens if a composer writes music for the sounds made by a hula hoop? Or if a sculptor creates an instrument? Or if a percussionist performs choreographed movement? We seek to encourage mutual understanding, communication, and collaboration between artists of different genres and the audiences they engage with.

#### **What’s your top tip for someone getting into circus?**

Play, explore, surround yourself with teachers who inspire you! Make sure you are rooted in technique and have safe practice, and then feel confident using your vocabulary to share your unique story and perspective.

# Making work For young people

## Looking at circus artists' work

**"Beneath my Feet"**, was presented by Circus Director Layla Rosa and her talented team of performers and puppets! Created for the very young, the performance uses puppetry and aerial arts to explore an adventure into an underwater world.

**"Something in the Air"**, was an inspirational and intimate performance for young people with severe and profound learning disabilities. **"Oily Cart"**, collaborated with **"Ockham's Razor"**, to create a performance in which both circus artists and audiences were airborne.

Oily Cart's work for young people with Special Educational Needs includes sensory play, the use of music, light, interaction and texture.

Tim Webb, Artistic Director of the company, spoke about experimentation with different equipment during his career - mostly with equipment found in the SEN schools - from hydro-pools to trampolines! Tim explained that it was crucial to work with equipment that young people are familiar with, that's why before the young people visit the theatre they are given the chance to see the new equipment. This process of familiarisation is important, helping the young people feel comfortable in the new theatre environment.

**"Poppet on a Wire"**, combines puppetry and tight wire to create a small-scale piece of touring theatre suitable for outdoor spaces. Alana and Mike of **"Dizzy O'Dare Presents"**, explain how 'young people take a journey with Poppet... they can identify with her... and learn about bravery through watching her learn to overcome obstacles'

**"The Tempest"**, was an excellent example of bringing circus to a traditional text - one that many young people engage with in an educational context. Within **"The Tempest"**, there are some wonderful characters for circus artists to play - like Ariel, a winged flying creature and Harpies, ugly winged bird-women. **"The Tempest"**, is set on an island full of magic and the way in which aerial disciplines enable the telling of the narrative is very unique and exciting for an audience.

Gemma Fairlie spoke about her own journey from text-based theatre to working with circus artists, and how circus ignited her interest in combining physicality and text.



# Fancy a bit of circus?

## Find out where...

### NORTH EAST

- Circus and Youth Circus projects with Let's Circus [www.letscircus.com](http://www.letscircus.com)
- Circus skills workshops by 'Circurama' [www.circurama.com](http://www.circurama.com)
- Steve Cousins - street arts and circus [www.stevecousins.net](http://www.stevecousins.net)
- Hang Aerial Dance [www.hang.org.uk](http://www.hang.org.uk)
- FrayedKnot: [www.frayedknot.org.uk](http://www.frayedknot.org.uk)

### EAST

- Cambridge Community Circus [www.camcircus.org](http://www.camcircus.org)
- Ipswich Juggling Workshop [www.ipswichjugglingworkshop.co.uk/news.php](http://www.ipswichjugglingworkshop.co.uk/news.php)
- Juggling Circle [www.jugglingcircle.co.uk](http://www.jugglingcircle.co.uk)

### EAST MIDLANDS

- Charnwood Juggling Club <http://billbrookman.co.uk/clubs/home.html>
- Jay Linn Circus Arts <http://jay-linn.co.uk/jlca/homepage.shtml>
- Mayhem Circus Skills, Buxton, Derbyshire
- Swamp Circus Trust [www.swamptrust.org.uk](http://www.swamptrust.org.uk)
- The Secret Circus [www.kevinburke.co.uk](http://www.kevinburke.co.uk)
- Truelee Peachi [www.trueleepeachi.com](http://www.trueleepeachi.com)

### LONDON

- AirCraft Youth Circus [www.aircraftcircus.com](http://www.aircraftcircus.com)
- Albert & Friends Instant Circus [www.albertandfriendsinstantcircus.co.uk](http://www.albertandfriendsinstantcircus.co.uk)
- Brixton St Vincent's Community Centre [www.bsvcc.org](http://www.bsvcc.org)
- Cirque Nova Ltd. [www.cirquenova.com](http://www.cirquenova.com)
- Circus Space [www.circusspace.co.uk](http://www.circusspace.co.uk)
- Jackson's Lane Community Circus [www.circusskills.org](http://www.circusskills.org)
- Splats [www.splatsentertainment.co.uk](http://www.splatsentertainment.co.uk)
- UpSwing [www.upswingaerial.co.uk](http://www.upswingaerial.co.uk)

### NORTH EAST

- Circus and Youth Circus projects with Let's Circus [www.letscircus.com](http://www.letscircus.com)
- Circus skills workshops by 'Circurama' [www.circurama.com](http://www.circurama.com)
- Steve Cousins - street arts and circus teacher and mentor [www.stevecousins.net](http://www.stevecousins.net)
- Hang Aerial Dance [www.hang.org.uk](http://www.hang.org.uk)
- FrayedKnot [www.frayedknot.org.uk](http://www.frayedknot.org.uk)
- JUST - Juggling Unicycling Stockton On Tees [www.justonline.org.uk/](http://www.justonline.org.uk/)

### NORTH WEST

- Ambleside Community Jugglers
- Blackpool Circus School [www.blackpoolcircusschool.co.uk](http://www.blackpoolcircusschool.co.uk)
- Bzercus Community Circus
- Euphoric Circus
- Off the Ground Theatre [www.offtheground.co.uk](http://www.offtheground.co.uk)
- Ppal Circus Ltd [www.circustraining.co.uk](http://www.circustraining.co.uk)
- Skylight Outreach programme [www.skylight-circus-arts.org.uk](http://www.skylight-circus-arts.org.uk)
- Skylight Youth Circus [www.skylight-circus-arts.org.uk](http://www.skylight-circus-arts.org.uk)
- Toy Box Circus, Manchester
- Green Top Circus [www.greentop.org](http://www.greentop.org)

### SOUTH EAST

- Academy of Circus Arts [www.academycircusarts.co.uk](http://www.academycircusarts.co.uk)
- Alight Fingers [www.alightfingers.com/](http://www.alightfingers.com/)

### SOUTH WEST

- Circomedia [www.circomedia.com](http://www.circomedia.com)
- No Fit State [www.nofitstate.org](http://www.nofitstate.org)



# Top Ten

## Summary of the ACA Inspiration Day

1. It's a great 'universaliser', when you teach circus to young people it cuts across the gender divide and challenges participants in different ways. Facilitators from "Splats", circus workshops noted, that unlike dance, which can alienate boys, circus gains even interest from boys and girls.
2. Once you touch circus you never let go... there is something about the fun, risk and challenge of the training that ignites people's imaginations (Kate White, Co-Chief Exec, Circus Space)
3. Circus is adaptive; it's an art form that is constantly evolving and changing (Billy Alwen from "Cirque Bijou").
4. Circus allows you to explore a narrative through visual story telling (Paul McEneaney, Cahoots Theatre, Northern Ireland.)
5. Circus is an excellent teaching tool. When we learn circus we also learn about risk, fear, resistance, our boundaries and our bodies (Dodger Philips, Movement Director)
6. Circus is highly accessible; it unites people from different ages, and cultural backgrounds (Vicky Amedume, "Upswing Aerial".)
7. Working with circus artists can help you to develop new ways of engaging with your own artistic practice. I have used the rhythms and movement that circus skills create when teaching piano to children, to help them explore the scope and range of the keyboard. (Laura Harrison, Music Composer, Trinity College)
8. Circus is a metaphor for society - where we need all types of people with all types of skills - just like a circus. We need big strong ones, little ones to fly, and thinkers, and risk takers and dreamers... it is a genuine celebration of unity in diversity. (Eira Gibson, Director of Participation and Outreach, Circus Space).
9. Audiences respond to honesty on stage - that means the courage to take risks and the possibility of failure. (Danny Schlesinger, Wild Balloon Tamer and Clown).
10. Circus is rich in metaphor and young people are stimulated by its colorful characters. Storybooks about circus can be a great way to engage young people in the art form - even before they've been to see a show! (Anne Sarrag, Director The Summer Reading Challenge 2011)



# Who was there?

## Summary of the ACA Inspiration Day

Kate White, kate@Circusspace.co.uk	Co. Chief Executive Circus Space	Dodger Phillips dodgerphillips@mac.com	Movement Director and performer
Eira Gibson eira@Circusspace.co.uk	Director of Participation and Outreach Circus Space www.theCircusspace.co.uk	Billy Alwen billy@cirquebijou.co.uk	Director Cirque Bijou www.cirquebijou.com
Kate Webb katewebb@circomedia.com	Outreach Manager Circomedia	Laura Harrison laura@laura-harrison.co.uk	Composer
Rebecca Fitzgerald rebecca Fitzgerald@circomedia.com.	Outreach Manager Circomedia	Vicki Amedume Vicki@upswing.org.uk	Director Upswing www.upswing.org.uk
Jude Merrill jude@travellinglighttheatre.org.uk	Artistic Producer Travelling Light	Danny Schlesinger danny@circoeridiculoso.com	Director CircoRidiculoso www.CircoRidiculoso.com
Nick White nick@travellinglighttheatre.org.uk	Participation Director Travelling Light	Elizabeth Rice info@giffordsCircus.com	Giffords Circus www.giffordsCircus.com
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Mike Redwood, mike@splatsentertainment.com	Director Splats Entertainment www.splatsentertainment.com	Ali King ali@turtlekeyarts.org.uk	Director, Turtle Key Arts www.turtlekeyarts.org.uk
Paul McEneaney paul@cahootsni.com	Artistic Director Cahoots Theatre Northern Ireland www.cahootsni.com	Gemma Fairley gempyre@hotmail.com	Director Tin Bath www.tinbaththeatre.com
Tim Webb tim@oilycart.org.uk>	Artistic Director Oily Cart www.oilycart.org.uk	Layla Rosa layla@shunt.co.uk	Director Shunt www.shunt.co.uk
Daryl Beeton, daryl@kazzum.org	Artistic Director Kazzum www.kazzum.org	Mark Morreau mark@morreaux.co.uk	Film maker www.morreaux.com
Anne Sarrag anne.sarrag@readingchallenge.org.uk	Director The Reading Agency	John Reading John@johnreading.co.uk	Photographer and technical help www.johnreading.co.uk
www.Circus-stars.org.uk		Vicky Ireland vicky ireland@virgin.net	Co.Artistic Director A Thousand Cranes www.athousandcranes.org.uk
Alana Jones and Michael Imerson mimerson@yahoo.com	Directors Dizzy O'Dare Presents www.dizzyodare.com	Elizabeth Greaves admin@childrensarts.org.uk	Action for Children's Art www.childrensarts.org.uk
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## **CIRCUS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILY AUDIENCES**

### **An Action for Children's Arts**

#### **INSPIRATION DAY**

**25 October 2011, 10.00-4.00**

**Circus Space, Coronet Street, London N1 6HD**

9.45 Registration

10.00 WELCOME Vicky Ireland (ACA)

CIRCUS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

- film montage Mark Morreau

PROGRAMMING WORK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE -  
knowing your audience

Kate White (Co.Chief Executive Circus Space),  
Mike Redwood (Director, Splats Entertainment)  
Circus workshops in schools

10.30 CONTEMPORARY AND TRADITIONAL  
CIRCUS ARTS - current practice

Tim Webb (Artistic Director, Oily Cart), Billy  
Alwen (Artistic Director, Cirque Bijou) Paul  
McEneaney (Artistic Director, Cahoots NI)

11.00 Coffee at The Real Greek

11.15 HEAR IT FROM CIRCUS ARTISTS

Personal stories and how Circus can influence  
other art forms

Anne Sarrag (Director, The Summer Reading  
Challenge, The Reading Agency 2011,  
Circus Stars), Laura Harrison (composer),  
Dodger Phillips (Movement Director and  
performer), Vicki Amedume (Artistic Director,  
Upswing), Danny Schlesinger (Director,  
CircoRidiculoso - Wild Balloon Tamer), Daryl  
Beeton (Director, Kazzum)

12.30 MAKING CIRCUS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE -  
training, artistic development and collaboration  
Eira Gibson (Director of Participation and  
Outreach Circus Space), Kate Webb and Rebecca

Fitzgerald (Outreach Managers, Circomedia),  
Jude Merrill and Nick White, (Artistic Producer  
and Participation Director, Travelling Light),  
Elizabeth Rice (Giffords Circus)

1.00 Lunch at The Real Greek

2.10 WORK FOR CHILDREN

Alana Jones and Michael Imerson (Artistic  
Directors, Dizzy O'Dare Presents),  
JUGGLING WORKSHOP with Tim Lenkiewicz,  
(Director and performer)

or

Ali King (Producer, Director Turtle Key Arts)

2.20

2.30 WATCH JUGGLING WORKSHOP

WORK IN PROGRESS - Q & A

Jude Merrill (Travelling Light) and Circomedia,  
- Gemma Fairley (Director, Tin Bath), "The  
Tempest." -Layla Rosa (Director Shunt),  
Beneath My Feet."

3.15 Tea at The Real Greek

3.30

4.00 FEEDBACK - plenary session Chair,  
Liat Rosenthal

Finish. The Pub