



# The Rise of Circotica

REBUILDING AN URBAN CIRCUS COMPANY IN EARTHQUAKE RIDDEN  
CHRISTCHURCH CITY.

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## INTRODUCTION

I decided to do this masters project at a very weird point in my life.

In 2015, I was working as a video game test analyst at Cerebral Fix, which was part of the Enterprise Precinct and Innovation Campus (EPIC) in Ōtautahi/Christchurch. I showed great promise there and was eyed-up to become the company's lead test analyst; with a potential scholarship to pay for my Masters in the technology field.

But underneath it all I was a suppressed Circus Artist.

Working in game development was like a sabbatical and a momentary renunciation of the Circus Life - I was fed up with it! All the performance work had dried up and the local circus community was completely fractured and thrust apart by tectonic forces. The city was on the slow mend and I had been beaten up to the point of taking up a "normal" job out of financial insecurity and sheer frustration.

After six months, I had completed the first phase of masters-research project in software testing and was all set to move on to the next phase - but there was a problem. I began to resent working at a computer all day and the monotony of the job. What would you expect from an acrobatic clown!? alas, my head was in it; but my heart was not. I began plotting my escape from the office and *running back to the circus* by applying for arts-funding and working with my wife Mim to rebuild a new circus school in our traumatised city.

What about my Masters!? I'd already paid for half of it. If I couldn't do it in tech - could I do it in circus? Surely, it is about professional practice after all...

Thankfully the team at Capable NZ (Otago Polytech) have helped me too make it happen here – a catalyst for change in Aotearoa/New Zealand! Circus Arts is on the rise and I hope for this project to assist in the professional-development of the local and national circus community. So, here is a story, of sorts, about circus research in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the rise of Circotica, and my role as creative director.

This research is presented in three sections:

The first section explains the creative-arts mixed methodology and establishes some background context for the motivation of this research. My resources include two key texts from which I derive vital management information. There are also three important interviews from my research and development travels in Australia.

The second section provides an overview of our journey to secure public arts-funding and opening a circus school and training facility in post-quake Christchurch. It contains info on the design of Circotica curriculum, management strategies, and addresses some of the issues we experienced as a start-up business making its way to sustainability.

The third section concentrates on the rise of Circotica, reflecting on its development and my roles as creative director. The interviews with circus directors and organisations in Australia provide an insight into the contemporary climate of the circus industry and valuable information for the direction of Circotica as a company and school into the future.

In order to represent my journey/narrative in storyform this research progresses chronologically from circa 2011 to the present, however, there is some time-frame overlap between the sections herein.

## METHODOLOGY

As a circus artist I draw on multifarious sources for working concepts and inspirations: films, games, music, theatre, science, philosophy, mythology, religion. Circus is a multi-modal art form (Bouissac, 2012), and as such, requires a flexible and disciplined approach. The circus artist disciplines oneself in flexibility and trains to change and adapt in dynamic

situations. In this project I will attempt to exercise my creative writing muscles and flex my interpretivist skills to make it accessible you! my circus peers, stake holders, and extended community throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand. Right from the get go I will be utilising a holistic and reflexive approach as this is the nature of my profession. This eclectic approach may provide the reader with an insight my mind and into the world of circus arts grounded in observation, interviews and site visits to three major circus organisations in Australia selected by the author because of their prominence.

Circus is a relatively understudied academic subject, but, is certainly on the increase due to its acceptance into the mainstream mass-media entertainment industry (Beadle & Könyöt, 2006). It was tricky finding arts-management practices that I felt would apply to my circus life. I had no map for what I was doing; only my prior experience of roughly fifteen-years in show business. This was an utterly unique situation and I have missed the train quite a few times, then had to find my own way to the next stop. I did manage to peg down two texts for the propping up of my theoretical circus-tent. They offered a cohesive and wholistic framework to reinforce my aspirations for Circotica.



*Wayfinding Leadership: ground breaking wisdom for developing leaders (2015), by Dr. Chellie Spiller, Hoturoa Barclay-Kerr, and John Panoho.*

The ‘Wayfinding’ approach helped me to understand my own personal development as a creative director and traveller to an unknown destination. I wanted to connect with a local-leadership paradigm that represents Aotearoa/New Zealand cultural heritage. There are three main features of the text which I refer to on my journey.

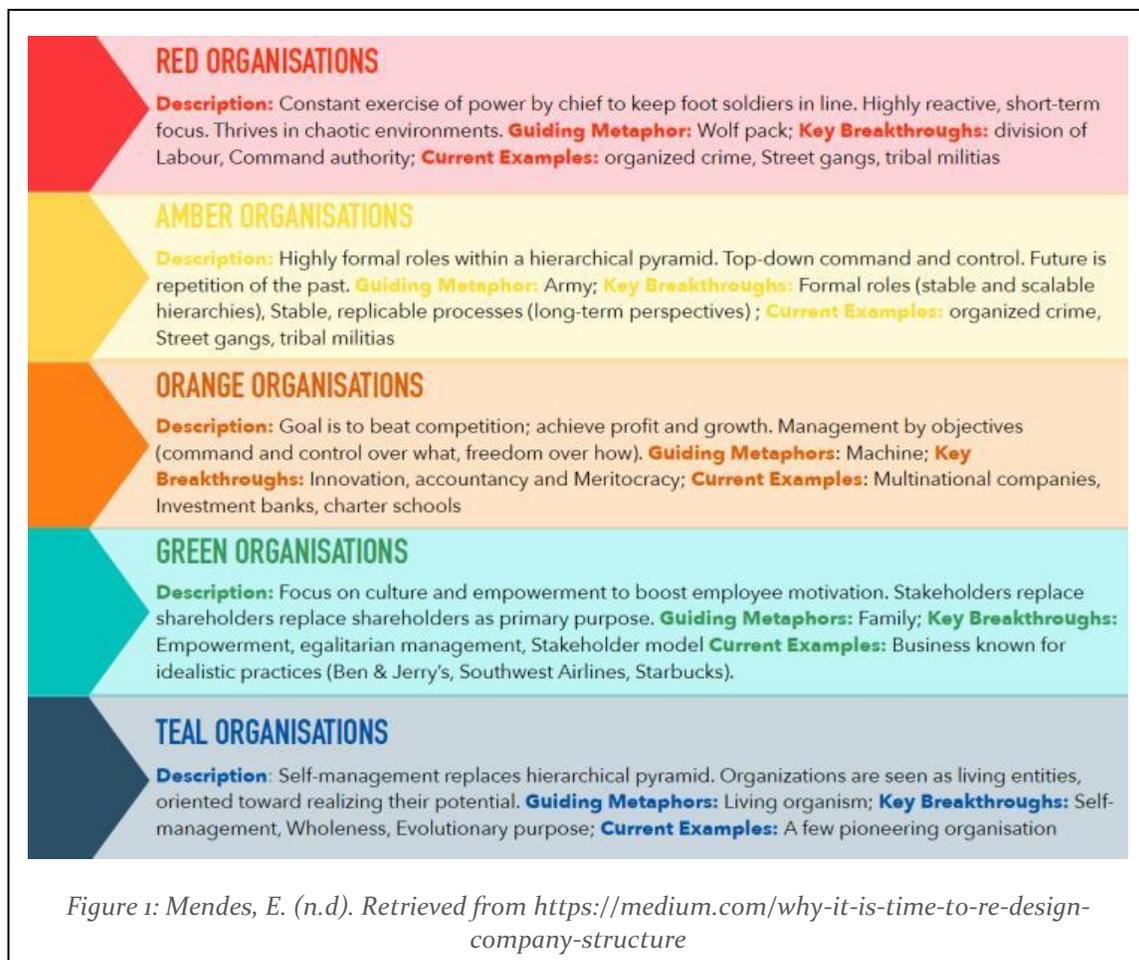
1. **MANA** – “Leaders are recognised for their great Mana. Mana is multi-faceted and can be explained as qualities such as prestige, power, influence and charisma. Mana is ultimately a spiritual energy, it is not simply a position, status, or control, but is the fullest expression of potential of a person as a spiritual being having a human experience.”

2. **MAURI ORA** – “Closely linked to mana is mauri, which refers to life force...Leaders with mana use the agency of their mana to be stewards and guardians who tend to mauri in the world. Their objective is to consciously create mauri ora – wellbeing. Mauri ora...means to be awake to the potential of a situation and the potential in each other, and consciously manifest that potential.”
3. **PHILOSOPHY OF RECOGNITION** – “Wayfinding leaders must recognise many elements in the information received to build a multi-perspective understanding of a situation. They:
  - Accept the task of discerning signs of valuable potential in others and harnessing this potential for the purposes of the group.
  - Have the ability to refresh their cognitive models by challenging their own thinking in order to have sharp mental clarity and discernment.
  - Recognise their own limitations and habitual responses that might get in the way of seeing clearly.
  - Deal with the sometimes very testing personal dynamics among the crew as individuals different personal and interpersonal struggles.
  - Understand that non-recognition is harmful and even dangerous; it can mean not seeing important information about a situation and can cause conflict in interpersonal relations.
  - Understand that values such as reciprocity, humility, response-ability (to respond, not react), and respect for all living creatures are crucial for successful leadership.

“Underpinning the craft of wayfinding are the practices of mindfulness and presence.”  
(Spiller, 2015, p 22.)

I discovered that the Wayfinding principles applied to the creative disposition and practice of a circus artist, performer, and hobbyist. The focus on empowering the people on your Waka resonates with me - which, much like circus training, requires a multi-dimensional intelligence. This empowerment also requires, and nurtures, a breathing and dynamic empathy with the people which “values the kind of authenticity and ethical conviction that grows valiant and honourable people” (Spiller, 2015, p. 16).

*Reinventing Organizations: a guide to creating organizations inspired by the next stage of human consciousness* (2014) by Frederick Laloux, has been valuable in helping me contextualise Circotica within larger society and the world - where it's at and where I wanted it to be. Laloux's work integrates evolutionary theory with development philosophy, utilising five colour-coded categories that show a socio-historic gradation from a 'red in tooth and claw' form of operations to a more 'higher-powered' organism. By integrating this frame-work a person/company can better understand what level they are operating at, and/or, utilise it to make changes. It offered sound guidance in how to develop my priorities, by recognising and integrating psychological and organisational philosophy into my practice.



In these schemata, later stages are not necessarily better than earlier stages, rather, “...they are more complex ways of dealing with the world. For instance, a person operating from Pluralistic-Green can integrate people’s conflicting perspectives in a way that a person from Impulsive-Red most likely cannot. At the same time, every level has its own lights and shadows, it’s healthy and unhealthy expressions.” (Laloux, 2014, p. 28).

Human development

change factory

Overview of the main (organizational) paradigms

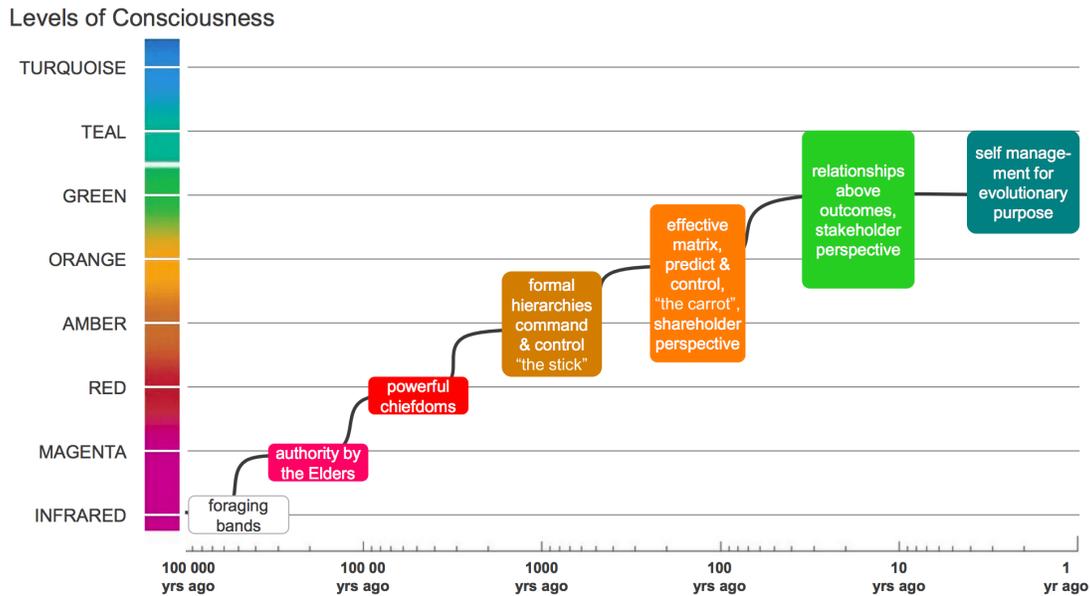


Figure 2: Lee, K. (n.d). Retrieved from <http://www.kevanlee.com/reinventing-organizations/>

“All of the multiple intelligences in humans develop through actualization hierarchies.”  
(Laloux, 2014, p. xvi)

This work explains how intelligence develops through actualisation and that there has been a modern emergence of companies and organisations that cooperate in a very different and more ‘evolved’ way; labelled **Teal Organisations** (Reinventing Organizations, n.d.). It is helpful to recognise that each stage is well-adapted to certain contexts; Impulse-Red is likely to serve you better if you are fighting for your life, and Pluralistic-Green will help you build a family life. This work enabled me to contextualise and play with designing Circotica by finding the colours that matched my different developmental phases, and those with which I wish to repaint it in future.

Laloux's 'Reinventing Organisations' alongside the orientation of Spiller's 'Wayfinder' provided a relatable-base to analyse my internal principles and external artistic-business practices as I entered the unknown. Within the following sections I'll playfully-attempt to identify my colour-stages as the journey unfolds as opposed to analyse what period Circotica is set in. In this way I'll use this identification as a multi-coloured lens to process my personal psycho-social progression and arts-management perspective.

## BACKGROUND

The Aotearoa/New Zealand circus industry is comparatively young and has only a few instances of recorded research (Trotman, 2012). There are only a few independent circus companies in the country which haven't had the opportunity to deploy substantial amounts of public arts-funding. This lack of recognition from funding bodies and the limited institutional infrastructure is stifling the growth and progression of the national circus industry. It's very difficult to make a living as a circus performer here (Tan, 2015). There are a few oft-heard explanations for this: low population base, lack of government funding, a laissez-faire attitude and general non-competitiveness. It's just simply underdeveloped. The Aotearoa New Zealand Circus Association (ANZCA, n.d.) has been up and running for a few years. There is movement to and 2017 marks a year in which the major circus-centres in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin made great strides in conspiring with each-other to set about trying to revolutionise the industry. Evidenced with the establishment of the New Zealand Circus Community Facebook group. There is a new wave of activity and eager leaders willing to take to it the next level of organisation.

Going back a bit further...

The Christchurch and Canterbury earthquakes in 2010-2011 shut down the only professional academic circus-training programme in the country: Circo-Arts, at Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology – which is now ARA Institute of Canterbury. This left a well-established circus community fractured and homeless. Most of the working-performers left the city to earn a living, and fair enough; those left got by

on scraps of minor-work and were temporarily practising in parks, beaches, rigging in trees, or any warehouse beam that would support them.



Mim and I remained proactively based in the city during the ongoing quakes, but years of professional turmoil ensued as we struggled to make ends meet financially. We also needed to travel/tour out of the city on occasion to earn an income - which quickly became an emotional drain and took its toll on our wellbeing. We felt rootless while on the road and only really 'doing it to get paid', which may seem odd for a traditionally nomadic occupation. I bear a strong sense of loyalty, ancestry and place in Canterbury though and this whanaungatanga had become amplified, as my people and home town lay wounded. Of my 16 great-great-grandparents who immigrated to New Zealand circa 1840, 14 had settled and are buried in Canterbury.

At this point we're very much in the Impulsive-Red paradigm. It is survival mode for me, my family and friends. Our time is consumed by our immediate concerns: proper shelter, clean water, good food, paid work. It is too difficult to consistently create art.

"Present-centeredness makes Red Organizations poor at planning and strategizing but highly reactive to new threats and opportunities that they can pursue ruthlessly. They are therefore well adapted to chaotic environments...but are ill-suited to achieve complex outcomes in stable environments." (Laloux, 2014, p. 18)

In 2013, I made a bold decision to stop running away from the situation and hunker down in the city. I had a firm desire to take charge and lead my circus community out of the rubble and focus on rebuilding. For a Wayfinder this speaks to Kaitiakitanga – Stewardship and Guardianship; a visceral sense of responsibility and interconnectedness with people and the environment as living web. This feeling of ownership, oddly, imbued me with inspiration and purpose. Spiller suggests that Kaitiakitanga is imperative for developing ethical integrity, wisdom, and is the fount of leadership (Spiller, 2015).

Mim and I cofounded Circotica (see Circotica 2013) with the desire to create and share outstanding circus arts, re-establish circus arts infrastructure, and thrive within the spirit of the Christchurch Rebuild environment (Otakaro, 2018). Circotica was our attempt at consolidating our professional circus industry experience together. I spotted an amazing opportunity to start fresh and innovate, as I was witnessing many other small-businesses and companies doing. I chose to double-down, redesign and deliver a circus arts company and community experience to potentially go beyond what we thought was possible for circus in NZ. Big ideas, big expectations, and little funds to help realise them.



## GETTING FUNDING

Throughout 2014, I continued to struggle trying to run a ‘circus company’ based out of our own home. I was primarily drumming up projects and work for ourselves and our

performing peers. The occasional corporate and local festival gig popped up bringing some financial relief, but it was inevitably too unpredictable to be relied upon. There were very-few affordable venues to put on circus-shows that still had amenities and the technical requisites such as high-ceilings, rigging points, lighting & sound etc...

I'm making a steady transition into the Conformist-Amber paradigm. Coming out of the chaotic realm of the impulsive red self, I started conjuring plans to construct a *circus empire*. Formalities, rules, procedures, hierarchies, all set like insects in a blob amber. Molten creativity cools and solidifies.

“this breakthrough is very much linked to the invention of processes, with processes, we can replicate past-experiences into the future.” (Laloux, 2014, p. 20)

During this period, I had also helped establish the Christchurch Circus Trust in an A-framed church in Waltham. We were part of a board with some colleagues from the old Circo-Arts at C.P.I.T (Ara) programme. After a year or so the building was deemed unsafe and shut down and we parted ways with the members of the Circus Trust due to unresolvable differences. It also became more evident to us that without a proper training facility to base a community we could not sustain nor grow our own business in line with our vision of re-establishing the community.





Figure 6: Left: Ascend. 2012. Poster by Author. Right: My first show as Creative Director, Writer, and Performer. Photo by Theuns Verwoerd.

Our initial contact with the Christchurch City Council was early 2015, we sought funding

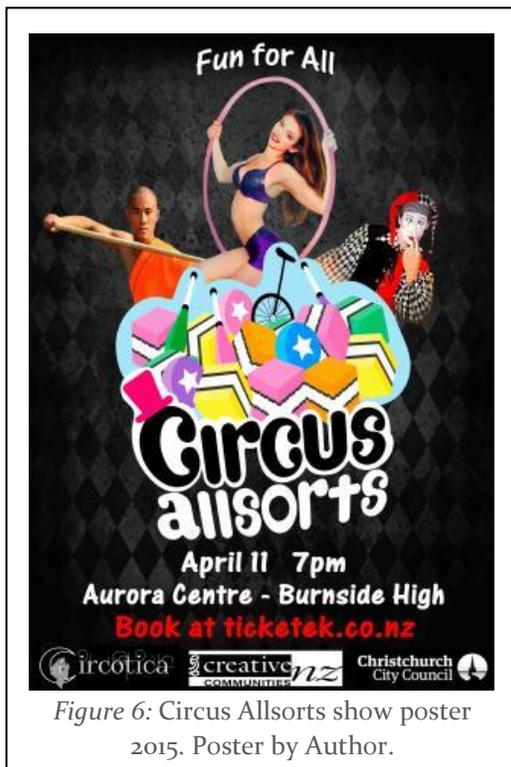


Figure 6: Circus Allsorts show poster 2015. Poster by Author.

to put on a circus show in a larger-venue at The Aurora Centre for Performing Arts (Aurora Centre, n.d). The rationale for this project, Circus Allsorts, (Anderson, 2015) was to produce an ongoing opportunity for local circus-performers to get paid and provide an entertaining and uplifting community experience for Christchurch. The arts advisors were supportive and saw the potential for positive-social impact. Circotica was granted \$8200 from the Community Arts Development Fund to kick start the project, which was enough to hire the venue and pay the performers a guaranteed set rate. Our first Circus Allsorts was put on in April 2015 and had 571 audience in attendance. Our second show was part of Kidsfest in July 2015 and saw 437

attendants at the Aurora Centre. The shows went very well and acted as a proof of concept and catalyst for change. However, we knew that an 'ongoing-show' was not going to be a sustainable enterprise, we needed to shift focus. Without a fulltime training facility; let alone an affordable performance venue, we couldn't sustain regular productions. We were still devising and rehearsing shows in inadequate spaces.

Here I enter an Achievement-Orange perspective and "the world presents a new face" to me. I set out and stir up the NZ circus industry. The key breakthroughs: innovation, accountability, meritocracy compel me forward single-mindedly in what is considered the dominant worldview amongst contemporary leaders. But every stage comes with its shadows.

"...solidly materialistic – only what can be seen and touched is real. Achievement Orange is suspicious of any form of spirituality and transcendence because of a difficulty in believing something that cannot empirically proven or observed." (Laloux, 2014, p. 24-25)

We started consulting with various arts-advisors and business-associates regarding the viability of establishing a circus school. The feedback was positive and workable. The only inherent risks were that of any start-up business. Everyone we consulted supported us and acknowledged the value of circus culture and training in the city.

In correlation with this consultation process, we were also participating in ongoing discussions with arts advisors, architects/designers, and project managers around the prospect of installing a purpose-built circus space within the new Christchurch Metro Sports Facility. We were providing design and usability information to the Metro team. Our funding was based on the idea that we first establish ourselves in a temporary space, and then move into the new circus space once the facility is built. Exciting! To have a multi-million-dollar circus space built from the ground up would be another first for NZ and an absolute dream come true.

I was emboldened by all these discussions with the council and the potential of utilising \$30,000 by moving into a pre-existing shared recreational facility. The bulk of this funding was to provide the equipment we needed to move into this facility and get started running classes and making an income.

The year was flying by, and it became evident that \$30,000 was going to be nowhere near enough to make it our project happen, I had been bouncing back and forward with our arts advisor and had yet to secure an adequate and affordable space. The facility manager of the potential facility decided it wasn't viable to lease their venue at the ideal-times that we required. The funding application stalled, and we hit a wall both personally and professionally. Exhausted and feeling like giving up, we entertained the idea of abandoning the project and moving to Finland, where we had a potential artists residency.

Somewhat despondent – I resolved that we had to push on. We needed a fulltime space and I found one. With only days to go before we had to submit the business plan (Appendix A) and funding application, fortuitously, we found a tidy and compact warehouse space that sat just on the outer-edge of the city district; which was still close enough to entice the council funding scheme. Also, it was far enough out of town that it didn't cost inner-city rates. It had all the requisites we needed: clean, high ceilings with a major support I-beam to bolt trussing on to, an office/lounge space, and an extra room upstairs for studio-space that would enable us to run two classes simultaneously. The



Figure 7: Left: A blank canvas. Empty warehouse. 2016. Right: Initial trussing concept design. Photo and design by Author.

start-up equipment we needed: technical installation, trussing, mats, aerial/rigging gear, juggling balls/clubs, paint, office equipment, first aid etc. exceeded \$50,000 and pushed

the cost of the project right up to \$150,000. We then applied for the Christchurch City Council's Creative Industries Support Fund (Christchurch City Council, n.d.).

Toward the end of 2015, our arts advisor gave us the news that the funding committee had recommended to the council to award us with \$74,945. She suggested that we do a presentation to the council to further bolster the application and, perhaps, bring a "we are real people" perspective to the council. I made up a simple power-point presentation (Appendix C) and delivered an impassioned case for the psycho-social benefits, usefulness, and constructiveness of circus arts within a society that had so much trauma and mental health issues to resolve. The councillors were all for it and gave great feedback, however, The Chairperson expressed reservations about whether we could make it happen for \$74,945! "is that enough?" he asked... "yes we will make it work...it's a good start" I replied, while fully aware it was going to take twice that amount. Like many small-businesses in Christchurch, I just had to take it one year at a time. They unanimously voted in favour of the project and Circotica got started within the week.

Growing into a Pluralistic-Green perspective, I realise that this is not just a 'duo-show'. All the rigmarole and official processes are in play and so much of Circotica's future was in the hands of other people now: the mayor, councillors, arts advisors, stakeholders, future clientele. I begin to see how *relationships are valued above outcomes* but I'm still feeling weathered by rubbing up against others.

"Pluralistic-Green strives for bottom up processes, gathering input from all and trying to bring opposing points of view to eventual consensus", I have a conflicting sense of being a small tree in a big forest that is and ultimately "uneasy with power and hierarchy."  
(Laloux, 2014, pg. 30-31)

On World Circus Day April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2016, NZ's first council-funded circus training facility opened its doors amongst much fanfare and public interest - see related advertising media (Appendix J). Our Facebook likes shot up 1000+ and we started an Instagram page to document activities within the school. Since that day, I've been figuratively shot out of

a cannon while they are still making the safety net. The first year of business was pretty- hectic with a lot of new input to absorb and before I knew it - it was near the end! I had unfinished issues with funding to solve...



Figure 8: Promo-media for opening, 2016. Designed by Author. (see media appendix A)

Circotica needed more funding to keep going. I had proven that the circus school works and there was a demand for our services with over a hundred students strong. The initial funding only covered our first year, so, we set about applying for \$40,000 from the council to assist in our lease and to import more specialist gear to increase classes. This wouldn't get us through the third year...but again...one year at a time.

Upon submitting the new application, we could only wait in anticipation to know if it was even possible. Three months went by and I heard very little, so started losing hope and went into 'Plan B' mode; seeking out sponsorships or possible shareholders. Eventually, I pressed our arts advisor for some answers (though I was acutely aware that beggars cannot be choosers), and she said the arts-panel decided to push our funding recommendation total up to \$74,000...

We were both astonished by this! Apparently, there was a stagnating arts-fund that had to be cleared by the end of the year, and we were in the running to receive the bulk of it. This would effectively pay our lease for the next two years and provide a massive buffer while we tracked toward sustainable levels.

It was nearly another three months before hearing the decision for this second lot of funding. I had to ask our landlord for an extension on our overdue lease payment, luckily,

he's a great supporter of the cause and gave us *all the time we needed*. The arts advisor informed me that there had been very robust debates in the council chambers over the size of the funding, and on the use of public funding for a private start-up business. Though, our case was put forward under exceptional circumstances (re-establishing communities post-quake rebuild) and carried a lot of weight based on our successful first year of business.

In July 2017, the council quietly granted us the second round of funding and sealed our future. A future that was to go on and be integrated into the new Metro Sports Facility (the Metro timeline is outside of the scope of this project however. The Metro may open around 2021). Circotica now had the financial resources and confidence to carry on nurturing a new circus community and playing a part in the rebuilding of the devastated city.

## ESTABLISHING THE FACILITY

Circus training require specific facilities. Floor-based circus activities can generally be practised anywhere, however, aerial-arts need height with safe rigging support. This makes securing an adequate venue with rigging potential a constant struggle for those willing to establish a circus space. There were new health and safety guidelines implemented in 2016 which also brought the importance of safe practice to the fore of the circus industry.

Post-Earthquake sensitivities played a factor in what people are okay with while putting themselves in risky positions when a quake could strike at any time. For Circotica to meet obligations to the city council and to fulfil my own peace of mind, it became imperative that the facility held safety at its highest standard. This echoes the Wayfinder's sense of aroha (love) as Spiller mentions, might be missing from the corporate world:

"The best leaders feel a deep sense of aroha and duty of care for people...another example is the critical area of safety. A leader who practises the value of love will ensure that safety is paramount. The organisation will have clear processes for responding immediately to any sign of physical danger and everyone will know safety comes

first...acting and performing in a loving manner is central to mana and wairuatanga". (Spiller, 2015, p. 60)

**This is all very real now!** I'm a Circus Director with the responsibility of making this funding work, meeting public expectations, the safety of people in my premises, the possibility of failure. I'm continually re-writing the plan in my head as the various pressures get to me and experience waves of intense chaotic thought. I need to weave in another muse to keep inspired – and sane. I apply self-care by regularly checking in with myself, and Mim, to make sure I do not *lose the* plot. Mental health become a talking point and an important factor in *the plan*.

Chellie Spiller suggests the idea of "Values as Hulls". As a Wayfinder your values act as the structural support for your endeavour; they are waka ribs that bow and flex with the dynamic ocean surface. At this point in the process, I've come to value rangatiratanga as one of the *poles propping up my tent*. Rangatiratanga is about embracing personal sovereignty, kindness, and ownership over one's causes/conditions; with an intention of weaving people together as a chiefly authority for a social group.

By choosing leadership one can be susceptible to overreaching with one's authority - so I am careful not to become *that guy* who is "standing at the front, in a way which casts others into shadow". I observe the *painting a picture* metaphor, whereby, I try to convey foggy-concepts in images others understand, "When they see the picture a leader paints, they will do everything to be a part of it" (Chellie et al., 2015, p. 65). I aim to enable people to take ownership and express themselves in the Circotica space, which, in turn, lightens the managerial-load.

Mim and I personally commissioned and funded a fantastic circus-street-art mural for the main wall of the space (see media appendix A). This is very much in the spirit of the street-art movement enlightening gaps and spaces throughout the city. I had hoped to have the mural finished before the rigging was installed, but there were a few delays in the fabrication of the trussing brackets that bolted to the wall. I decided with our street artist: Lydia Bee, to begin the mural before the rigging-installation. This was a good idea because the mural ended up taking seven-days to complete, and the all-important aerial-rig installation wasn't installed until the week before opening. Showquip (see Showquip, n.d) provided the aerial trussing and implement the installation which only took a day or two to install. Having the space prepared for our open day went right down to the wire. We were ready but running on fumes.



Figure 9: Unfinished mural. Bolting the trussing into place. 2016. (See media appendix A). Photo by Author.

## DESIGNING THE CURRICULUM

Designing the educational curriculum for our very own circus school was an exciting prospect. Mim had already done significant work on the timetable structure within our funding application and had good idea of how the first year would pan out. In the first year (2016), it was a matter of finding firm ground and pitching classes based on foundational practices and apparatus: trapeze, aerial silks, clown and mime, contortion/stretching, juggling, adagio, tumbling, handstands, - all important physical skills in any circus curriculum. The aerial silks had more classes based on its popularity. Class enrolments grew to over a hundred students - many of whom were showing strong commitment to their training and to Circotica as a company, community, and lifestyle. During 2017, student numbers waxed and waned, but we saw marked increase in single students doing multiple classes – some as many as eight to twelve classes per week.

I quickly saw the need to development different intermediate-classes to cater to our students' development, some of whom wanted to perform public acts and in be in shows. So, we trialled stage combat, equilibristics, performance, youth circus-troupe, body-care, mindfulness and massage. Some things have stuck, and others haven't. Additionally, we were better able to split many of the classes into different levels – beginner, intermediate, advanced, as the needs of senior students grew and had to be balanced with the newer inexperienced students.

<b>Circotica Demographic</b>	<b><i>Kids/Youth Female</i></b>	<b><i>Adult Female</i></b>	<b>Total Female</b>	<b><i>Kids/Youth Male</i></b>	<b><i>Adult Male</i></b>	<b>Total Male</b>	<b>Total Students</b>
<b>Term 2 2016</b>	18	51	<b>69</b>	7	12	<b>19</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Term 3 2016</b>	30	56	<b>86</b>	5	16	<b>21</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Term 4 2016</b>	27	61	<b>88</b>	9	14	<b>23</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Term 1 2017</b>	24	59	<b>83</b>	7	15	<b>22</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Term 2 2017</b>	35	56	<b>91</b>	6	20	<b>26</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>Term 3 2017</b>	32	57	<b>89</b>	6	18	<b>24</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>Term 4 2017</b>	36	62	<b>98</b>	7	27	<b>34</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>Term 1 2018</b>	50	63	<b>113</b>	7	25	<b>33</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>Term 2 2018</b>	62	53	<b>115</b>	6	22	<b>28</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Term 3 2018</b>	67	48	<b>115</b>	8	22	<b>30</b>	<b>145</b>

*Figure 10: Circotica Circus School age and gender demographic.*

The modus operandi of the Circotica learning environment is holistic self-development and empowerment. The destruction of our city and infrastructure has left many traumatised, our teachers and students included. Having the facility enables us to work through aspirations and traumas in a fun, supportive, and challenging shared-space. The skeleton of circus education provides the frame to flesh out an inspired body and mind which spreads intrigue and joy in society. This has always been my experience of the transformative power of circus arts.

Mim and I teach the lion's share of classes, but, we are also students here. To encourage all of our teachers to be communal and retrain/upskill we offer them 2 free classes a week. This puts the teacher in a student role and enables a fuller perspective on how to run classes, keep their training fresh, and learn to interact with the community and clientele in a closer way.



The pandemonium of establishing the school settles and I find myself manifesting TEAL principles. Education takes on a new level of meaning and we are starting to generate real self-management practices. I am witnessing a buzzy culture of wholeness in our facility - a shared sense of purpose through circus education. I start seeing more potential in other people to further their development in circus.

“Self-managing structures transcend the issue of culture versus systems. Inner and outer dimensions, cultures and systems, work hand in hand, not in the opposite direction” (Laloux, 2014, p. 229)



Self-motivation to practice and train skills is a necessary concept to get across to new students, and in so doing, students learn to encourage each other and usually bring more energy to the class and ensemble as they feel more valued. As a circus teacher, I challenge students to have input into the class (warm-ups, performance ideas, etc.) to learn to try and observe and analyse things for themselves where at all possible. But sometimes they just need to be told what to do – Point Your Toes! – to help switch of the brain and engage in somatic awareness. I acknowledge our students' different body types and abilities, so they can discover ways in which things work best for them, this seems to produce more-quirky and innovate results and encourages them to envision circus-arts as a valuable long-term holistic practice akin to kapa haka, martial arts, tai-chi, yoga, and other such disciplines. These are Evolutionary-Teal qualities, “the responsibility for learning is firmly in the hands of the student [and they] continuously toggle from being learners to being teachers” (Laloux, 2014, p. 94). This reciprocal process creates a dynamic feedback system that keeps our classes thriving and energetic.

It has always been important for us to maintain circus as a performing art and not just a form of fitness and exercise though. It is the heart of what we do! – perform for others. Although many of our students won't perform beyond our termly student showcase: Circo Hullabaloo, some do take the leap. I was were thrilled with the way our first school-based production: WILD (2016), turned out. It explored the animalistic/social human with comedic panache. Mim and I performed in it with our adult students. Then our second adult student production in Deluge (2017), which had fun with with the challenges of social media and smart phones, while hanging from a trapeze. Mim and I to put the show together by working with our students/cast for in a timetabled class for three-hours a week, over a four-month period. It was a great creative bonding process for all involved and the first full-blown public performance for them.



Figure 11: Circotica Circus School's first production. 2016. Poster by Author.

For the Wayfinder exploration is a mindset. One *learns by doing* because “knowledge is a verb, not a noun”. In this sense, everyone on the Waka is encouraged to have a depth and breadth of knowledge that is constantly put to the test in the circus space. While it's important to look to the horizons; it's equally as important to look toward the depths. “The captain is constantly helping the crew learn by asking them to consider ‘What would happen if we tried this?’ If it's not too dangerous...try it, so if it works then they know that in these conditions they can try it again: ‘it's about testing, safely failing and also knowing they can come and talk to you and say, ‘I've got an idea’.” (Chellie et al., 2015, p. 150)

Mim and I have both found that our study and qualifications have been immensely helpful in equipping us with the skills to design and implement an educational curriculum. It



Figure 12: My first qualification. 2006. This piece of paper and I have survived a house fire and earthquakes. Photo by Author, 2018.

prepared us to wade through the oceans of paperwork, waves of applications, administration, communications and media related discourse. The structured process of the Master of Professional Practice has been an essential in refining my thinking on what I am actually trying to achieve. Working with the Capable team and meeting educational peers to bounce ideas off, has further bolstered my ability to critically evaluate my own behaviour and prioritise

more effectively. I still leave things till the last minute, but, can better laser-focus on a task and get lots done. All these things have made taught me how to back up my fluid creativity with structure and physicalisation. Education matters.

It is a wonderful thing that circus is a multifarious art form because it makes me workable and enterprising. It is akin to the *agile process* (“Agile Software Development”, n.d) that I learned during my time at Cerebral Fix. Agile is opposite to the *waterfall process*: where something is designed and signed off at the start - then is built with little usability testing – then is delivered into a changed market place. Like a paper raft designed/crafted on the riverbank, then gently placed in the river for waterfall testing. I must manage things iteratively because most of what I do relies on intuition. I have learned to fail-fast and make quicker-smaller corrections based on what feels right. Abandon a movement sequence if it’s too clunky, drop a pose if it doesn’t work. This not by my design, mind you, it’s in the eclectic nature of the circus professionals I have worked with – find what works and make it happen.

Make subtle adjustments as I tumble down an aerial rope.

My circus-credentials enabled me to work smart and played a decisive factor in gaining the trust of the City Council to make good use of our funding, essentially ‘proving’ we are

*serious about circus.* In the long-term, we intend to reintroduce a new circus qualifications programme. This will give another massive boost to the status, culture, and credibility of circus in New Zealand, further boosting its international reputation as an innovative creative-arts country. Steady as she goes though. My experience of building a business and school in post-quake Christchurch says sail cautiously and try not to overreach; unless there are prevailing winds - then be resolute and direct.

## BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

Before creating Circotica in 2013, I'd had a fair amount of experience managing my own solo-professional career, working within companies, and a duo career with Mim. In particular, (going further back to 2007-2011), I was a founding member the now defunct Loons Circus Theatre Company (LCTC) in Lyttelton, Christchurch, which has gone on to become The Lyttelton Arts Factory. The LCTC had an immense impact on circus and theatre in NZ, with multiple national tours and eventually off to London. For it to work, the establishing members were required to be flexible with their time and took on multiple roles in the and operation of company and venue. Some of the key management skills involved: networking, marketing, scheduling, safety and security, physical training, research and development for acts and shows, logistics.

So, I expected this to put me in good stead to handle the uptake when Circotica opened.

I was kind of blindsided by how personally I would take people's expectations of me and Circotica. In so many ways, managing the expectations of our clients, stakeholders, peers,

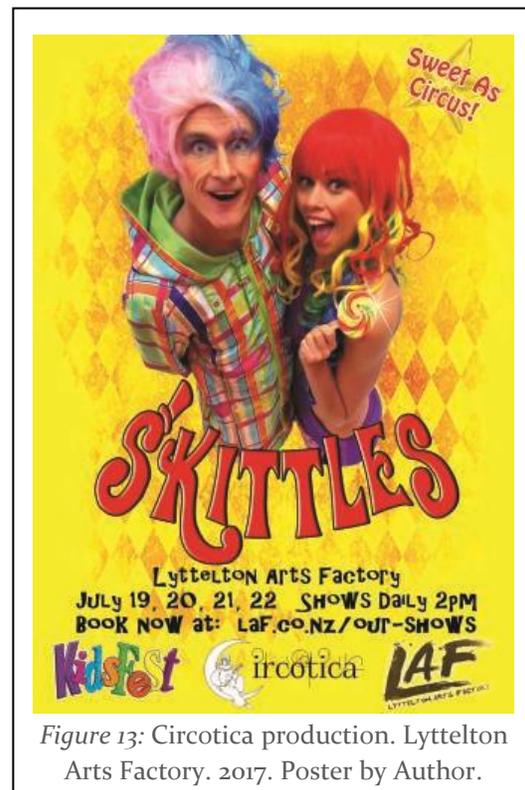


Figure 13: Circotica production. Lyttelton Arts Factory. 2017. Poster by Author.

and society has been the most difficult thing to manage. I found that my psychological wellbeing was affected in ways I had not experienced prior to this project. I had to manage fears of being negatively judged, isolation, or left out of important opportunities because of my status. I struggle to convey to people a vision I am unsure of and sometimes abandon things out of sheer timidity. This is prevalent among many of my performer buddies – we are introverted artistic types that fit *uneasily* into an extroverted profession - to make a living. This sometimes means compromising my emotions to earn a crust.

So here we are these self-employed trailblazers from out-of-left-field Yay! But Mim and I handle the bulk of the teaching and administrative work load, and as such, also handle most of our client's emotional wants and needs too. There are those times when I feel like my psyche is melting and I must put on a sane mask to appear professional.

When the Christchurch City Council voted in favour of giving us funding I was obviously very excited to get the news out to the public to get the media ball rolling. Within the first few weeks of announcing the opening of Circotica Circus School, we were both inundated with feedback from people wanting to be involved. Communication processes quickly consumed our lives, as we plunged deep into the service-industry pool.

The opening year flew by, Circotica was receiving enquiries through so many different media that it got confusing and difficult to maintain a work/life separation. You know the rules! the rules are >> access 24/7 365! example: people were contacting us *whenever they liked* through facebook, instagram, email, text message and phone call. Which is manageable if I can make it clear: go to our website, download the enrolment pack, email us back with your decisions and confirmation, then show up and do the stuff. Easy right!?

No, because when people have a hundred and one questions about the details of circus – in relation to their personal timetable, it becomes a cumbersome psychosocial ordeal that has left us burnt out on a few occasions. The voluminous messages through the multiplicity of media became too much to handle, so I made the decision to restrict the ways in which people could contact me. I have deleted my personal Facebook account in favour of privacy, amongst other reasons, but still use an



Figure 16: Circotica's circus schools second student production. 2017. Poster by Author.

account to run Circotica and communicate with the New Zealand Circus Community Facebook group. Generally, now people must contact us via our company email and phone number, which is so much more streamlined and easier to archive (which would otherwise be disparate) information.

The social-lines blur when responding and reacting to people through the different social-media. When people chat to you through the friendly-lens of Facebook, for example, they then may expect 'personal/friendly' emails too, and sometimes feel put out when it comes time to sign up, show up, and do the work. I have also been asked to modify the Circotica timetable - to suit the individual's timetable - on numerous occasions. While we try to consider the general schedules of our clientele (kids' classes before dinner time – adults after then) we simply cannot meet every individual's wants and needs.

Some people may have misunderstood how far the public-funding we received would stretch. Perhaps, they looked at the sum-total alone and were enamoured, or ignorant of the expenses of a circus-space fit out. Some thought we had hit the jackpot! When in fact, Mim and I have invested much of our own life savings into this project, and still must work for a low income to keep Circotica open.

I received a dozen or so emails from international people that I didn't know, asking if there was any teaching (or other) work to be had. Whilst this was a good sign and in-line with our mandate to attract people back to Christchurch, it also put us in a difficult position. We are a start-up social enterprise with a responsibility to provide work first and foremost to ourselves, and our peers who had supported us throughout the application process and had mostly stayed in Christchurch and toughed out the harsh post-quake years. So, we had to explain to the enthusiastic-applicants that we were not yet in the position to take on much extra staff, and actually we had at least a year of building the foundations before any such employment opportunities would exist.

This is great for many reasons! People are getting so invested into Circotica and what it offers which feels fantastic. But upon analysis, these various pressures of meeting client expectations are a constant tension that I have just learned to go beyond and push on.



Figure 14: Circus Life can be tough. 2017. Photo by Author.

There will always be a conflict between what people expect and what we provide. This reminds me of something Zen man and executive Albert Low wrote in the classic *Zen and Creative Management*, “Generally we do not recognise conflict as part of the creative process that is necessary for any form of growth. The tendency is to

suppress conflict, and from this suppression comes many of our psychological ills...fear of conflict itself is one of the major causes of poor organisation”. (Low, 1976, p. 61)

Conflict is a matter of fact and to manage it I draw on the perennial wisdom of myriad cultures - be still and quieten my mind. Hush the myriad voices in my head and observe. Not to be confused with *navel-gazing* passivity, rather, a active and conscious engagement with what is happening presently. Move from stillness. Greet the crazy chatter – hello, how are you!? Low explains this active and dynamic response to phenomena: “life problems and worries, projects and plans crowd the mind...the struggle consists in allowing thoughts to well up without resting on those thoughts, and this struggle is very great. But when the practitioner becomes adept, the stress and effort is transformed into tautness and the mind becomes ready. ‘like a bow’.” (Low, 1976, p. 200)

The Wayfinder knows conflict as salt in the ocean and the waves pounding the Waka, all ample conditions to foster a still-core. This perception of a still-core is like the “bottom of the ocean which is in a state of perpetual rest and placidity”. Everything that has happened in my career so far has been beyond expectations; particularly regarding the rise of Circotica, and I’ve come to understand that to manage people well, I must actively “sort it out”, in-order-to digest all this complex social-information. This is not an easy task, so I include practices that help clear the clutter. Chellie Spiller presents the meditation practice of *nohopuku* – to sit with something deep in the belly. A mindfulness practice that helps to develop the ability to act from stillness.

“The place of calm repose in our belly is the place we move from despite any turbulence happening on the surface of our lives, be it natural disaster, an emotional turmoil, a stressful task or some upheaval. The Wayfinder must move from belly-centred calm in order to truly be able to read the signs, make clear decisions, act with purposefulness, and build steady mental toughness, even in the most trying circumstances. In so doing she or he models the way for others”. (Chellie et al., 2015, p. 135)

Another tricky set of expectations I had to overcome, was that some new incoming adult students and the parents of kids/youth, had preloaded ideas of what a circus school was and how it would run. Some thought that Circotica would operate the same as a normal fitness gym, whereby, membership implies casual access to the facility and classes could be taken ad hoc, and that they could generally use the space and its equipment as they desire. While some of these students adapted to our operational curriculum well and saw the benefits of regular weekly training and commitment to a full term, a few were averse to our long-term structured approach to training. We were unable to match their individual needs with the greater needs of the community, i.e. regular attendance, consistency in training, relationship and community building.

On-the-whole our students have taken to this long-term view and many have made circus arts a significant part of their lifestyle.

As a Director of this crazy circus project, I have been subjected to fresh and differing psycho-emotional stressors, that are made bearable by learning to relax and enjoy the process and the people. This is in tune with what Laloux describes as finding

Evolutionary-Teal purpose, “people learn to tame the fears of their egos. This process makes room for exploring deeper questions of meaning and purpose, both individually and collectively: What is my calling? What is truly worth achieving?” (Laloux, 2014, p. 194)



Figure 15: Be childlike. 2017. Photo by Author.

It is important to try and work for an organisation you authentically believe in (or create one of your own – of course) and reflects your deeply held values, to be intrinsically in tune with the organisation as a *living system*. I view Circotica in this way akin to Laloux: “an entity with its own energy, its own identity, its own creative potential and sense of direction. We don’t need to tell it what to do, we just need to listen, partner with it, join in its dance, and discover where it will take us.” (Laloux, 2014, pg. 199)

I set up a good team and “let self-management work its magic”. Laloux emphasises the importance of incorporating “practices in the spiritual realm” to bolster the Evolutionary-Teal organisational environment. Which is effectively about finding ways to lessen my self-centred needs in favour of the tapping into “broader sources of wisdom”. I accept that managing people’s expectations is about going beyond them – like thoughts they arise and dissolve.

A circus artist lives a complex and dynamic life and has many energy outputs, therefore needing many energy inputs. We place huge expectations on ourselves because circus training and performance requires us to be in high-pressure situations on a regular basis, which is an intense mental/emotional challenge necessitating checks and balances. It is then imperative that a holistic approach to our wellbeing is factored into the often-tight timetable.

## LEARNING FROM AUSTRALIA

It became desirable to seek ‘outside’ knowledge regarding the running of a circus company and facility. So, Circotica invested considerable funds into research and development (this MPP included) and travelled to Australia in early October 2017 to visit Circus Oz and the National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA) in Melbourne, and later the Flying Fruit Fly Circus (FFFC) in Albury, NSW. It was an optimised circus-business trip, to catch some shows, upskill with private lessons, and meet with other directors, managers, and the wider community. I wanted to ascertain what management and philosophical practices worked for them, contrast/compare to our own vision, and perhaps find out what we could do differently to complement the Australasian circus-scene. We also

needed to find out some information about how they built, utilise, and maintain their facilities to provide valuable information regarding the Metro circus-space in Christchurch.

From my perspective the Australian circus industry is inspirational. The three circus facilities researched are buffered by regular government funding which provides regenerative power and the ability to scale-up in size, resource, and influence. This provides an enviable amount of circus-infrastructure and support for the national circus industry to continually produce high quality and varied circus performance. These companies are also able to support a gamut of independent circus companies that create work locally and globally.

On October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017 – Mim and I meet with Antonella Casella (Senior Artist Associate) of Circus OZ for an interview. I needed to know how they became this national icon, how they sustained themselves and maintained such a prolific status worldwide. We also had the good fortune of some ‘off the record’ discussions with Tim Coldwell (Senior Circus Artist and Founding Member).

**Read full-interview in Appendix B.**



*Figure 18: Circotica and Circus Oz meeting. Left to right: Author, Mim Syme, Tim Coldwell, Antonella Casella.*

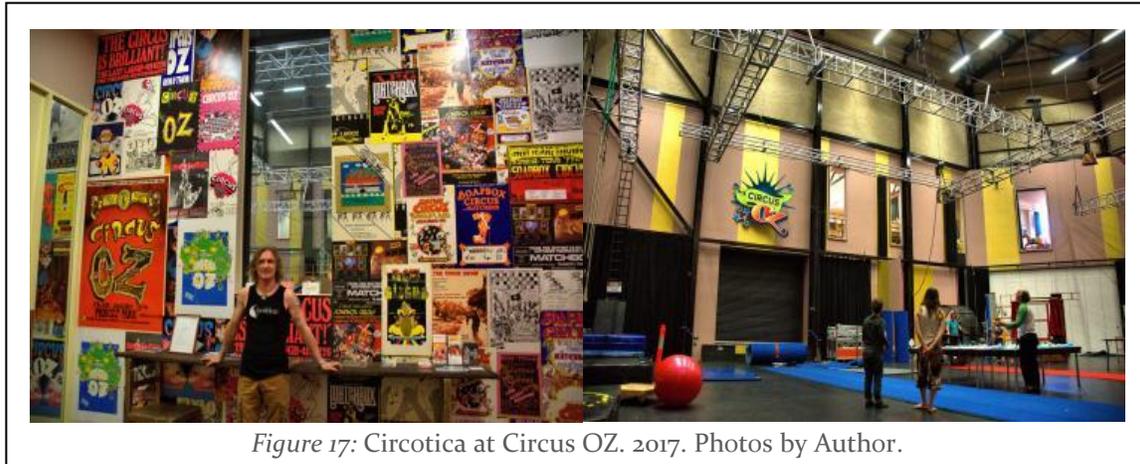


Figure 17: Circotica at Circus OZ. 2017. Photos by Author.

The day at Circus OZ was very fulfilling. This company has rightfully earned a renown as a parent of the contemporary circus arts and is in its 40<sup>th</sup> year. They are political, creative, resourceful, socially conscious. They are partially funded and mostly self-sufficient, spreading their resources out to support other upcoming companies. Their amazing facilities provide a sanctuary for smaller-independent companies to develop and rehearse work, which is definitely a factor we want to fold into Circotica. There is a real sense of the value of work at Circus OZ, meritocracy enables them to keep their organisational standards high.

I admire Antonella's steadfast attitude and passion for social justice. She turned the lens back on me a few times throughout our interview, which helped me to answer my own questions. Some elements we absorbed from Circus Oz: staying true to your vision, the power and value of social enterprise as means to create awareness around ethical issues, providing for 'outside' artists, being a progressive and culturally significant organisation.

Circus OZ maintains a strong Australian cultural identity and go to considerable lengths to value Aboriginal Australian perspectives and include them in their decision making. Through their social circus programmes they work with many of the local-national communities and also provide training frameworks targeted at Aboriginal people. They receive a funding revenue stream which helps sustain these initiatives which. Interestingly, they only fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island flags above the Circus OZ tent – the Union Jack is absent.

We intend on following Circus OZ's lead here and continue to integrate more mātauranga Māori knowledge and Te Reo within our cultural values and processes at Circotica. The Wayfinding work of Chellie Spiller has really helped me understand some ways to action

this. It was mentioned off-the-cuff during the interview, that New Zealand is comparatively *way ahead* when it comes to indigenous rights, the Treaty of Waitangi, and various land-settlements. This was encouraging to me and made me want to put more effort into this wholistic cultural perspective.

Circus OZ is a not-for-profit and propriety limited organisation with a board. This enables them to create many revenue and funding opportunities. Their policies around long-term employees electing members to their board - appears to work well. It empowers its members to decide on its leaders in a democratic way. They also have external board members who don't have to follow these processes though, which strikes me as a possible contradiction when regarding values, however, they are answerable to federal funding so is understandable. We do not need a board for Circotica at this scale, but we do need to reconsider our status as a for-profit business to potentially open ourselves to more funding opportunities.

Mim and I spent some time with people in the wider community and got to hear some independent perspectives on Circus OZ. There is a view that they make political work "*because that's popular*" and perhaps gets bums on seats. There were a few who opined that Circus OZ has not created any good shows in ten-years and may have lost their edge. There are speculations as to why this might be: administrative glut, lack of directorial control, or as an organisation has simply become comfortable. Ultimately, I think, Circus OZ's track record is prolific, sustained, and they have maintained remarkable creative control over their productions despite funding obligations and other external-influences. It is the way they optimise the use of their space that was the big take home lesson for us though. They offer a myriad of uses at all hours, the facility is practically utilised 100% of the time, and from what we observed there is plenty of creative experimentation happening within their walls.



On October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017 - We met with Rose Stephens (Executive Director) and Wayne Appleton (Production Manager) of NICA. We were also privileged with a brief encounter with legendary circus man: Lu Guang Rong OAM (NICA Founder and Director of International Engagement) whom encouraged us to connect with him to further develop OZ/NZ relations. We initially sat down with Rose in a formal interview to find out some ins and outs of NICA and to also glean any valuable information regarding setting up another tertiary programme in Christchurch.

**Read the full-interview in Appendix C.**

*Figure 20: Circotica and NICA meeting, 2017. Left to right: Author, Rose Stephens, Mim Syme. Photo by Author.*



*Figure 19: Circotica with Lu Guang Rong. Inside the abundant NICA facility. 2017. Photo by Author.*

NICA are a fully funded organisation that operates within the framework of Swinburne University. They are a significant social force and are in control of sizeable training facilities. They receive a set amount of funding each year that must be deployed sustainably regardless of how many students they take on each year. Rose admits that NICA has an elitist streak that aims to create *the best of the best*, primarily for a global market tailored toward commercialisation. Then on the other hand, there are many of its students that have gone on to create their own unique companies and productions. Rose thoroughly explained the complexity of running such a large organisation. The immensity of what she suggested we would need to manage an organisation like NICA was dizzying and made me doubt even considering it for Circotica. She also cleared up any

misconceptions we had about the possibility us starting a private tertiary programme – it would be impossibly expensive for us at this time. However, there is potential if we build our brand-name into greatness (see Whitehouse Design, n.d.) we may be able to achieve our own certificate/diploma based on reputation. Because of its funding and infrastructure NICA provides a consistent turnover of performance ready students for an international market. Australia as a country has a larger capacity to sustain their local performers and provide a stronger foundation for them to launch international ventures. Unfortunately, in NZ, without ongoing government funding this level of output is impossible. There is much of what NICA has that is probably attainable for us, but we are still inspired by the professionalism and energy of the place.

We got to look around their awesome facilities and I was quite overwhelmed by the size of it all. There are two massive spaces on each end connected by 2 or 3 other smaller-scale spaces in between that are the size of our current location at Circotica. I had conflicting thoughts of *“if only...nice to have”* with *“wow this place is massive, grand, and has everything – but because of that size and space, it feels ponderous and a lot to manage”*. The highlight of the trip, aside from meeting wonderful people, was getting our first look at the circus infrastructure in the building. We were taken on a tour up in the roof-gantries and had their rigging health and safety procedures explained. We took many notes on how they optimised the trussing systems to be multi-purpose and versatile and got some ideas on how it could work in our Metro space in Christchurch. Another key learning was how they designed their anchor-bolts for their aerial-lines to be hidden within the floor, and the various other mechanisms that they use to tuck-hide things away making the space more airy and efficient. Because of the size of NICA we could easily envisage the size of the Metro space by marking out on the floor. They had floor configurations that helped us decide on how our tumbling tracks would work in within a raised floor, rather than a sunken one. The way in which they utilised the trussing to hang lighting, sound, and various black-curtains to cordone off spaces was very effective and definitely on our to do list.



I've learned that despite the capacity, ability, and large financial turn-over of these two organisations, there can be an underlying dissatisfaction with work and the way things have become. People can feel powerlessness to affect significant change which further

compounds the sense that *it's just the way it is*. Bearing in mind, there is still a truck load of passionate, hard-working, bloody-good people driving it along, which, I imagine, makes up for those challenges.

I have entertained the thought of having a school as big as NICA or as prolific as Circus OZ on many occasions. I've never manage to square these thoughts with the truth that, once you become too giant (size, resources, funding) you run the risk of losing control of your creative vision and becoming overly complex. Everything starts to be same-same



Figure 21: Team work is essential to build Circus. 2017. Photo by Author.

just another day on the job, and there is little motivation to try something completely fresh, insightful, or poignant. As Rose mentioned: they wanted to do a create a show that addressed the issue of suicide, but, concluded that it was *not in their best interests*. There is artistic integrity there: an integrity that must incorporate executive and federal level expectations. The company must submit to the multifarious policies of boards, funders, governments, administrators, and commercial interests. These are problems inherent in the mechanisations and systems kept in place to sustain these organisations. We believe, as does Frederick Laloux, that “the general rule seems to be that the level of consciousness of an organisation cannot exceed the level of consciousness of its leader” (Laloux, 2014, pg. 239), and as such, if orange executive types take over the arts there is little room for other perspectives, as Laloux points out:

“Let’s take a practical example: the tendency in organizations to create rules and policies. Avoiding rules and policies is no easy feat. We have grown up with a deeply held assumption that control mechanisms make us safe...Trust is so countercultural that it needs to be defended and reaffirmed every time a problem arises”. (Laloux, 2014, p. 241)

For Circotica I believe it is important that I'm held accountable and have a personal commitment to our students and staff. Mim and I want to remain approachable and relatable. These are Pluralistic-Green perspectives that are value-driven, in representing stakeholders that are part of the *family*.

We left our first Australian excursion overloaded with conflicting concepts and looked forward to getting back *our place* to finish off the term at Circotica.



In December 2017 - We shutdown Circotica entirely for a whole month - *because we sure did need a break!* Mim, Manny (Son), and my-self, headed back to Oz for some fun-times in the Gold Coast, and then inland to the family home in Wagga Wagga for Xmas day.

The Flying Fruit Fly Circus facility is located about an hour and a half of south Wagga Wagga.

On January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2018 - I had arranged to meet with the FFFC Artistic Director: Jodie Farrugia. I was particularly excited about this opportunity because I'd heard a lot of great things about the FFFC and was eager check out the space which included a renown aerial-trussing setup on wheels. The FFFC is government funded and works with an education institution - with an interesting twist - the core students of the FFFC do a normal school week which includes twenty hours of after-school circus training. In partnership with Wodonga Middle Years College and the Victorian Department of Education, "the students/young artists in years 3–9 attend the selective entry FFFC where they undertake academic studies to complement their circus training, which is uniquely incorporated into the curriculum" (Flying Fruit Fly Circus. n.d.).

Like NICA and Circus Oz, FFFC also provide various community classes and maintain a diversified revenue streams to keep things running.

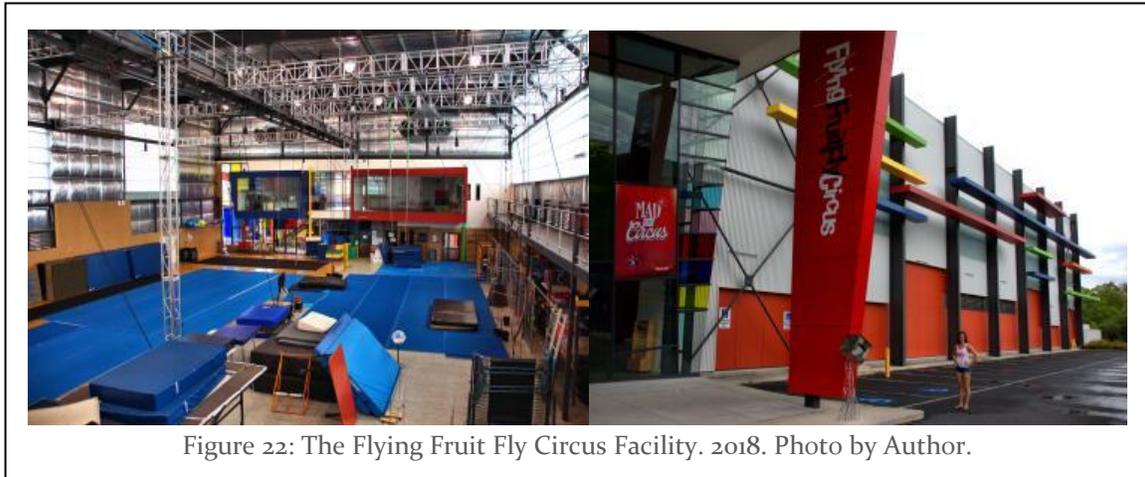


Figure 22: The Flying Fruit Fly Circus Facility. 2018. Photo by Author.

I knew that the FFFC was very good at transforming young-people with circus, and as a small-town community endeavour, had values that coincided with ours. What I wasn't expecting was an invite to the home of Jodie Farrugia to have dinner with her and the family. Because of this – I threw my formal-interview idea right out the window – and decided to meet on her terms. That day we toured the FFFC facility with the production manager and recorded information regarding infrastructure and management. Then later that evening we went to Jodie's place.

I found out that Jodie was at the end of a five-year tenure with the FFFC and had created and directed their outstanding show entitled: *Junk*. She was pretty much leaving the company and on the cusp of much change. Our conversations spanned so much relatable stuff, the pros and cons of all things circus: community, corporate vs independent, sexualisation, business, gender issues, youth issues, aboriginal issues, creative content and problems with social-media. Mim and I felt well-received and understood by Jodie and her partner. We found common ground and I thought to myself "*this is the Director to emulate*", a kindred spirit.

Upon our farewell she agreed to do an interview at-a-later-date, which turned out good, because it allowed time to reflect on what I needed to know. We hit the road back to Wagga, concluded our holiday, and flew to NZ with a head full of ideas and hearts full of aspiration.

On March 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018 - We flew to Auckland to see the Flying Fruit Fly Circus show: Junk, created and directed by Jodie. She lined us up some tickets and we nestled in for the ride.

I was floored by the show! The young performers worked so well together and many of their skills were outstanding. The crafty junk-yard aesthetic, and clever Directorial choices in lighting and puppetry, sung a message of fun and celebrated the *old-school* ways of playing.

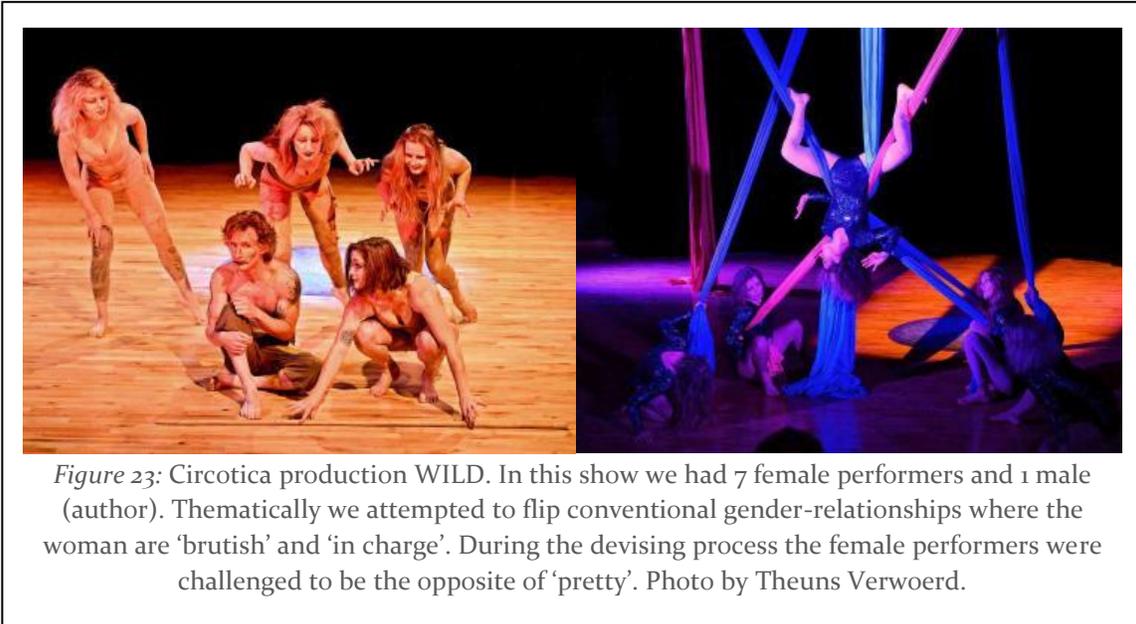
After seeing the show, I decided to send Jodie a few interview questions in writing. I had been pondering on Junk, Her, the FFFC. However, I didn't want to follow the same tack as the previous interviews. I already had a better idea of Circotica organisational structure from the previous interviews. What I really wanted to understand was her directorship, values, and perspectives on work, to inform my own directing in a personal way.

#### **Read interview in Appendix D.**

Jodie's answers really got me thinking about what it is a value most when it comes to directing Circotica into the future. She made me think less about Circotica emulating Australian companies and more about my personal-yearnings and what I wanted Circotica to represent. Her insights reinvigorated my belief that there is a *pure* side to circus and that artistic integrity is important. Especially in the face of increasing market-pressure to conform to commercialisation. Do I want Circotica it to become a large-scale institution dependent on copious administrators and governmental funding? Or do I want it to grow more organically as its own unique brand and community organisation?

Jodie laments the corporatisation of circus and the way in which sexualised content is gradually dominating the mainstream perspective of circus - especially within arts festival circuits, which are becoming heavily influenced by corporate bodies and their associated interests. I admire the amount of ethical change Jodie implemented during her tenure with the FFFC, and I share much of her concerns regarding the current-climate of corporatisation and the commodification of issues such as: gender, sexuality, cultural diversity and representation in contemporary circus arts.

Even over the three-year duration of this masters-research, Mim and I have both observed that there has been a noticeable increase in the sexualisation of circus arts to sell acts and shows. This style of circus is often branded: Cirque, (circus essentially aimed at wealthy adult audiences) and can contain erotic themes and sexually suggestive choreography including; sexual touch, lusty movement and simulated coitus; all done in an artistically 'serious' manner, as opposed to a humorous or political one.



*Figure 23: Circotica production WILD. In this show we had 7 female performers and 1 male (author). Thematically we attempted to flip conventional gender-relationships where the woman are 'brutish' and 'in charge'. During the devising process the female performers were challenged to be the opposite of 'pretty'. Photo by Theuns Verwoerd.*

I have done my fair-share of performance that may be deemed *sexy*. Although, I would call it *sexy* in the aesthetic of cleverness, comedy, and physical virtuosity, not with the intention of baiting or provoking lust in the audience.

I offer two local examples of the commodification/sexualization of circus for consideration: in the South Island there is a corporate entertainment company who offers circus aerial-acts to the market. The performers of this company consist of predominantly young woman age approximately 16-21 years only. The work they produce – which is certainly not always sexualised – serves a market that demands beautiful young woman performers for mainly brand-promotional purposes. In the North Island, we have a major circus-theatre company whose productions consistently portray sexualised and erotic material - that caters primarily to adult and corporate audiences. Last year, they had a negative experience around sexualisation which ended up in the press-media, a youth-performance troupe associated with them were sexually harassed while performing in public for a rugby event (New Zealand Herald).

Alas, “Eroticism, of course, is in the eyes of the beholders. There is nothing pornographic in the staging of regular circus acts” (Bouissac, 2014, p. 171). As circus performers we can never control what the audience perceives of us, but, we can control our actions, intentions, and design of our performances.

This situation has become normalised alongside the proliferation of sexualised content in social media and corporate marketing images. Now, younger fledgling circus-performers copy-along, to attract attention and, perhaps, ignorantly perpetuate uncritical images, stereotypes, and performances. Issues such as these are not going unnoticed, however, and public discussion is critical for the circus industry to maintain integrity in the face of these pressures. There has also been a major cross-over between burlesque and circus performance in the country which further blurs the distinctions between these two art forms.

Australian Circus artist and writer: Charise Rust, attempted to find ways to critically analyse this phenomenon by applying the Bechdel Test (Bechdel Test”, n.d.) to circus arts. The Bechdel Test – more suited to literature than to circus arts – basically tries

to identify whether a woman’s presence in a story, or a show, is there by their own right and ends, or whether, they are there to merely serve a male dominant narrative. Accordingly, some contemporary circus-productions are failing this test in Australia and Europe (Circus Talk, n.d.).

Historically, circus has always had an element of sexy – but that it should be dominated by risqué content is dubious. Circus is well known for its powerful-portrayal of gender-equality via a show of male and female prowess, while at the same-time it is known for its clowning, rude gestures, burlesquing, and lampooning of social mores (Sizurn, 2016). One may argue; circus has no limits, or, that a circus-artist should be free to express themselves sexually, while still disregarding the potential to promote discontent and negatively impact on young hearts and minds.

As my responsibilities grow at Circotica, so does my desire to create work that can be critical, poetic, innovative, and socially-challenging; while still being accessible and relatable to diverse audiences of all ages.

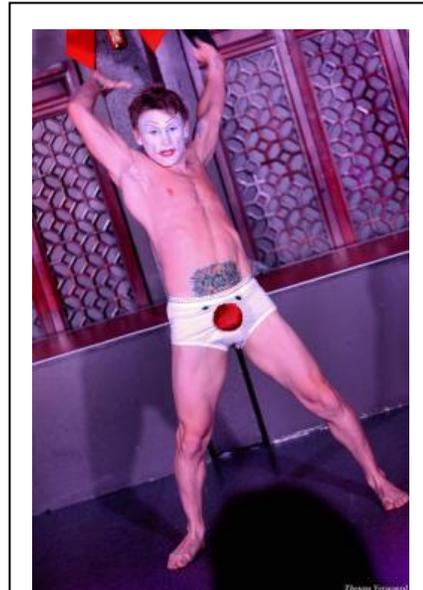


Figure 24. My ‘Boylesque’ clown act. 2015. Making fun of stripping and burlesque. Photo by Theuns Verwoerd

Remarkably, the Australian directors we interviewed were all females, with great mana, passion, and influence. They are potent role models, and prime examples of the benefits of gender-equality and respect in organisations. I wish I had the opportunity to have met informally with Rose and Casella, as I did with Jodie. Perhaps, I would have had a more personal insight into their personal philosophies - less business talk. New Zealand circus also has a large female presence in primary roles, and many companies have co-directors who are married. They are very much operating in the traditional family business mode of the historical circus which is represented by Pluralistic-Green in Reinventing Organisations.

After all, at Circotica our teacher/student base is roughly 70% female. Mim and I often jest with each-other, that it is I who is in the minority gender here – so watch it!

Circus companies in NZ have a fantastic ability and responsibility to encourage respect between genders in the modern market place, and toward the next generation of circus practitioners. It is important for me to think creatively and critically when representing circus to the public.

## THE DIRECTION OF CIRCOTICA

Before Circotica, I had directed a few shows and my teaching-role would sometimes require directorial practices. I had also worked under enough directors to know what I did and did not want to be as a director. Now, I am a full-blown Director in charge of public funds, a warehouse facility, and the welfare of hundreds of paying students.

But I used to be quite iffy about ‘Leadership’...

When I was a kid at Phillipstown primary school, Christchurch, circa 1986, I remember forming a little squad of “Detective” kids whom I quietly lead around the mysterious and

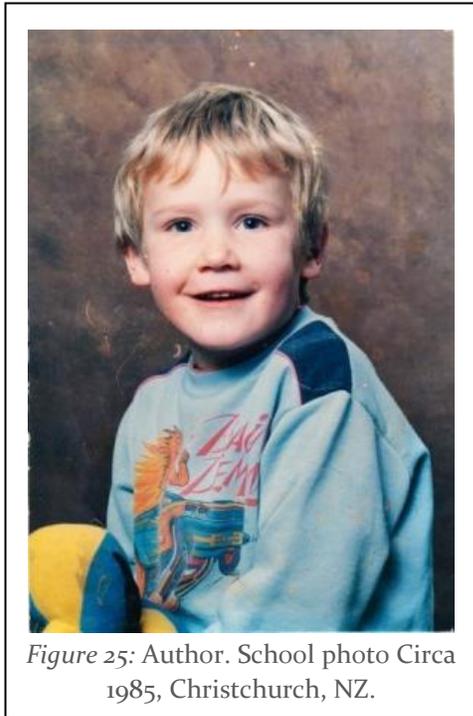


Figure 25: Author. School photo Circa 1985, Christchurch, NZ.

perplexing areas beyond the playground. The forbidden “crime scenes” bid us into the unknown – it was real to us, anyway...

After a while other kids caught wind of these “Detectives” and wanted to join in - they wanted to know too! Eventually, my wee-team had grown too-large and was attracting unwanted attention from the “Bosses” (*sic.* Teachers), and I started getting anxious, annoyed that everybody was *following me around*. One day there were so many kids making so much noise, that I freaked out and started running away, but they all started chasing after me; some innocently, some mockingly. I ran up the slopped-opening the coal shed, stood on top and shouted down “Get away from me! Stop following me!”

...finally, they dispersed, and I sat alone awhile. Pensive and content. And that’s all I remember.

My earliest memory of being *untrusting* of leadership was because it attracts too much attention of the authorities. I never wanted to lead, and I didn’t trust leaders. Though this sentiment still permeates my life somewhat, I’ve gradually learned to trust in leadership that is earned. Proven.

It turns out this is not an uncommon attitude in Australasia. As expressed in the introduction to *Extraordinary Leadership in Australia and New Zealand* (Kouzes, et al. 2015), leadership Down-Under poses “unique cultural challenges”, is passive aggressive and suffers from “tall poppy syndrome”. *Australians are fiercely egalitarian* and *New Zealanders also prefer an approach that is less hierarchical*. Ozzies and Kiwis are sensitive to abuse by authorities and are “leery of taking on leadership roles for fear of how we will be perceived by our peers” (Bunting, 2015, p. xv), and are generally ambivalent around power-relationships. New Zealanders tend to value authenticity, modesty, and distrust those who talk themselves up. There is a rub however:

“Clearly, a directive style does not work very effectively in either culture. But the truth is this: no matter how much people distrust authority and no matter how egalitarian they proclaim to be, everyone craves leadership...leading in Australia and New Zealand

requires sensitivity to the culture and awareness of context...to make extraordinary things happen". (Bunting, 2015, p.xvi)

I am much more willing to play the game now, but, won't give up on self-rule or the ability to guide my own actions based on my own creative and ethical values. In hindsight, this quality has got me into a few heated moments and confronting situations. Nevertheless, now that I am this leader, this director, I try and think about others nearly as much as I think about myself – ha! And I've learned that it takes many to guide the Waka because we need *eyes and ears everywhere* to reach the next waypoint.

Back when I started out on this MPP research project at Cerebral Fix, they identified me as a potential leader in their company and sparked the desire to do my masters. It took an earthquake and a near-complete shift away from my frustrated circus career to help me understand that I had the potential to offer more of myself, not only as a man of circus, but as a human. Slowly but surely, over the last few years, I've managed to pull my act together with the help of this project and the many resources presented herein. Further, via this process, I intentionally set out to embrace my role as a chief of the circus community and committed myself to a research pathway that would result in my Masters credentials and status as a qualified-authority of circus arts in New Zealand. Which would then progress into our future circus-qualification programme.

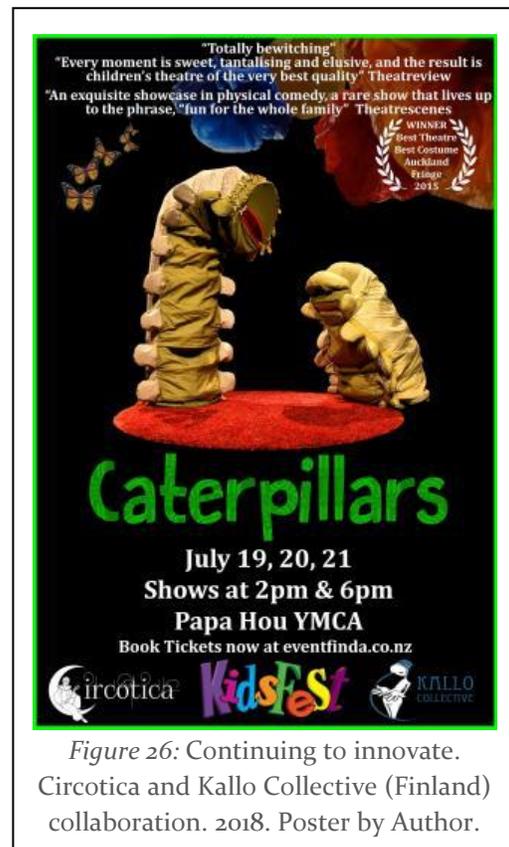


Figure 26: Continuing to innovate. Circotica and Kallo Collective (Finland) collaboration. 2018. Poster by Author.

I utilised the methodology of the *Wayfinder* to help me understand that to operate Circotica I had to *read the signs* in an unfolding reality, in which being open and responsive is part of the plan. The practice of *Nohopuku* and the *philosophy of recognition* aided in taking the edge off my social anxiety with a sense of spirituality through *mana* and *mauri ora*, and a clearer perception of reality as a living sphere of intelligence.

*Reinventing Organisations* enabled me to analysis and contextualise Circotica as a social enterprise, community, and business, and to evaluate Australasian circus organisations and their positions in the evolutionary-spectrum. Within this framework I personally

started off as a fiery-phoenix rising from the ashes of Impulsive-Red & Conformist-Amber. I lifted off the ground through Achievement-Orange and am now circling the sky like the Kahu – Australasian Swamp Harrier [Circus Approximans] cooling my feathers in Pluralistic-Green. Currently, most of our processes at Circotica operate at the Green – community/family level with sprinklings of Teal action. It seems to me that Circotica still has plenty of evolving to do, that will emerge as we track into the future.

My research of Australian circus organisations was highly insightful and helped me realise more thoroughly the impact circus has on society. Christchurch has changed so much, and I have changed too, for the better – though scarred and a little twisted. I cannot reconcile my desire for company independence and autonomy, with a desire to create a national circus institution yet – so, I'm letting it go for now!

When we first started out with Circotica, Mim and I operated as a self-employed arts-business and between the two of us have managed okay. Together, we then sought funding as a circus company/business and thought we could run the circus school in the same way. I have almost dogmatically clung onto the concept of *being a business* because, I guess, I have I always been carving out a path in show-business. I have had enough negative experiences around work and payrates to have become adamant that everyone must get *paid properly*. Perhaps, my stubborn attitude of self-sufficiency has at times



Figure 27: Left: Pre-Quake 2010, Circus Proms with the Christchurch Symphony Orchestra in the Town Hall. Mim and I meet each other on this production. Right: Post-Quake 2011, Circus Proms with the Christchurch Youth Orchestra in the blow-up Geo Dome in Hagley Park.

Photo by Pascal Haring

prevented me from reaching out for assistance because I felt like I could not pay someone properly for their time. This show-business mentality has been interfering with me looking at Circotica as a different kind of organisation.

The circus school is in its third year now and I have realised experientially that the old business model is unsustainable for us both personally and professionally. As it is, Circotica operates because we both put in innumerable unpaid hours of work to keep it humming. The trouble is that it depends on us to be physically present – so if we get sick, or have a gig, or need a holiday, it costs us and the business hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars, to pay other people to make up for that shortfall. The circus school is currently not at a sustainable level by making income through student-fees alone, nor can we fully pay the annual lease for the building.

Additionally, the performing arts scene in Christchurch is still very much in flux, and people are just not coming out to the theatre because the city is empty, and the venues keep changing, which makes it very hard to build up a customer base for your productions. As well as high theatre costs and with little subsidies going around, making money from shows is too difficult to do regularly. We also are not in a financial position to tour shows around the country to generate revenue either. The council funding runs out at the end of this year 2018, and the potential funding organisations will not look at Circotica as a for-profit business.

All three of the circus organisations we visited in Australia depend on funding to operate at their current capacities. So, we have decided to follow Circus Oz's cue and change Circotica – Circus School into a not-for-profit organisation. We have come to realise through our research that this mode of operation is more in line with our evolution and our vision as a community driven social enterprise. Being a not-for-profit organisation will mean we can create more funding opportunities for the school which will in turn feed into Circotica - Circus Company, the business, and vice versa

Circotica's strength is in the community of people who consistently turn up to learn and train at our facility, and the people who come to our productions. So, I want to keep building on that principle by optimising the time that the facility is in use with more daily classes. The Australian companies all share their facilities with other groups in mutually beneficial ways that provide creative input and a revenue stream in some cases.

In terms of educational certification: initially, I wanted to re-establish a full degree tertiary programme in Christchurch, akin to NICA. Upon years of consultation and observations of the local and national circus industry, this is just not possible in the foreseeable future,

due to lack of capital or regularly council and governmental funding. There is still a lot of work to be done in New Zealand in this regard. I admire the Flying Fruit Fly Circus' educational and community structure; where young people have the option to do circus as part of their regular schooling. This is something we will definitely consider in future as we prepare to get into the Metro facility around 2021. The plan is to make a start by implementing a personalised certificate programme that could be accessible to school-kids, beginner and advanced students of all ages; who require a full-time years intensive training programme.

## SUMMARY

I have a comment from Jodie stuck in my head: "I reckon you should create something that looks, feels and smells different to any institution here". That makes a lot of sense. On one hand, I have to! Because Christchurch is such a different city now and things are not quite working the way they do in more 'stable' cities. On the other hand, there is a very-real and visceral sense that we have the potential to grow into something utterly unique because of these demanding conditions. But there is an undercurrent to her statement that niggles me. Is it a friendly counsel against trying to copy anything Australia institutions are doing!? a whisper of beware the institution? I certainly feel like we are on the right track, building our way up to a relationship with another educational institution to provide national qualifications and, perhaps, receive regular government funding. That is what I feel the local and national community needs after all.

My research in Australia has reaffirmed my belief that the New Zealand circus industry can be bigger and better. That it can be an important player within its respective communities and can shine on the world stage. However, we are certainly up against it in-regards-to adequate funding opportunities to develop more complex and upscaled management systems and circus infrastructure. Circotica, as well as a few of the other major independent circus companies in New Zealand, are pushing up against a *glass ceiling* and the question now is how to break it with our integrity intact.

In the beginning of this project my vision of Circotica's future was to be the biggest and best circus company and tertiary provider in New Zealand. That vision is morphing into a desire to be the most creative circus organisation we can be based on its own artistic evolution. I aim to innovate and provide a high-quality qualification that embraces flexible-learning and can be tailored and made bespoke to cater to people needing such a curriculum to fit in with ever busy lifestyles. My own educational background has an influence here; I have done both my undergraduate degree and this MPP project as a distant/extramural student, which demonstrates how flexible models of learning work great for a circus artist academically.

The three Australian companies researched represent an old business model that is contingent on sufficient funding – so what could Circotica do without that sort of funding? Perhaps, as Rose Stephens suggested of Whitehouse, we could make our 'brand of circus' so reputable that people know where to go if they want unique circus training that builds original characters and productions, that does not churn out mainstream *grist for the mill*.

Antonella Casella opened our eyes to the potential inherent in being a company with high ethical standards and diversified revenue streams as a means to sustain our creative destiny. Jodie Farrugia reminded me of something I always knew but sometimes forget along the way: that striving to be *elite* can ravage creative content in favour of technical excellence. Rose Stephens imbued my journey with sense that steadfastness will get the results I desire.

Circotica Circus School will create a programme that works actively with diverse ages whether pre-professional or professional performers, career changers, media designers, seekers of alternative arts education, our students who have been with us for years and now want to take a year's sabbatical to study circus fulltime for a year. Ideally, they would be able to utilise a student allowance from study-link, or some other funding stream. As a not-for-profit organisation we will work for our students and community with circus culture that invigorates society and trades in joy.

I chose to do this Capable NZ Masters in Professional Practice programme because it was the only one I felt would allow me to explore an alternative research enquiry. For what I lacked in academic rigour I had hoped to make up for with creativity and storytelling. I wanted to figure out a way to make education more appealing to circus people and to somehow inject some personality, playfulness and passion into the project. For circus education to work it needs a good balance between creativity and structure. I truly feel I have taken a big step in circus education, learning and research in NZ, and that I still have

more work to do going as we evolve into our future company. That might be the next research project.

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## **APPENDICES:**

### **Appendix A:**

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[bookings@circotica.com](mailto:bookings@circotica.com)

[www.circotica.com](http://www.circotica.com)

<https://www.facebook.com/CircoticaCircus/>

[https://www.instagram.com/\\_circotica\\_/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/_circotica_/?hl=en)

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CircoticaProductions>

Circotica Circus School – Circus Mural Artwork:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ZgE-bQjXxE>

Circotica Circus School - Promotional Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iiEgTvFfBco>

Circotica Circus School – Christchurch City Council Presentation:



Circotica. Council  
Presentation.pptx

**Appendix B:****Circotica – Antonella Casella Interview. Circus OZ. October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017.**

*We meet Antonella in reception. She holds an unopen kebab in her hand while showing us around the workshop and office spaces of Circus OZ. Our interview is in the kitchen/lounge area and a little-less-formal and founding member Tim Coldwell joins us, but is not subject to this interview.*

Danny Syme: We're actually running a circus space at the moment which is an interim space that the council has funded – they gave us all this money to open it up. The idea is that we build the community so that when the new facility opens we've got people ready to go. That's what we've been doing recently, we're not in research phase, we're running the business.

Danny Syme: Okay, things we really need to know. How is Circus Oz economically sustainable?

Mim Syme: Are you full funding reliant?

Antonella Casella: No. We started as a performing company, so it grew from that premise. Of the 60% that isn't funding, a large part of that is box office, workshop income and outreach. We might provide a programme for a council, different sorts of corporate clients and government clients.

Danny Syme: So, you started mainly as a performance company, at one point in your history – you're nearly 40 years old right!? – did you start receiving major funding?

Antonella Casella: We were part of the theatre board of the Australian council as an ongoing funded organisation, and then there was a big arts review that basically said: *in Australia everybody was funded to fail and that no one was funded well enough to succeed*. So, they chose a portion of major organisations; every state theatre company, most ballet companies, couple of contemporary companies, and they created this new board called: The major performing arts board of the Australia council<sup>1</sup>, and we were very fortunate to be included in that group of organisations. So, from that point on we've been part of that funding stream, which is very different from having to apply project by project. We have ongoing funding agreements, but, we have to put on a three-year plan every year. There's a lot of funding related reporting.

Danny Syme: When was the major performing arts board created?

Antonella Casella: Ugh, I don't know, the late nineties or something.

Danny Syme: And you guys were the only circus company?

Antonella Casella: Yeah, and still are the only circus company. There's opera, ballet, theatre, orchestra in there as well.

Danny Syme: Yeah. One thing we've got to do in New Zealand is have circus recognised as an official artform, because at the moment it's not. Ya music, ya theatre, ya dance, all have their own box to be ticked in all those funding categories...we don't have our own box...

Antonella Casella: We don't really have a box either; we have a box within a box, but, the Australian councils changed recently anyway, they're not really arts-based in the way they fund anymore. Their much more-broader in the way they deal with funding. I think that's an issue for Australia as well, for example: in the UK, as a circus company you can apply for the funding stream of circus. That doesn't exist here. That means we're always competing with theatre, dance, and other artforms, with all our funding applications. Because the circus arts are still relatively new in that realm, the peer assessment panels generally have maybe one circus person and five theatre and dance people. So, it's a very difficult area circus-funding, I think. We're in a similar position to New Zealand – but Circus OZ doesn't exist in NZ – we've been able to provide a lot of leadership for smaller companies by being in that position and give a lot of status to those companies that otherwise wouldn't have it.

Danny Syme: So, in that sense, you're a business, you're sustainable through business practices and then you're supplemented by the funding. What is your management structure, do you have a CEO?

Mim Syme: Is there a board you're answerable to?

Antonella Casella: Yes, we're an incorporated not-for-profit and proprietary limited organisation with a board. We have a membership who vote for the board. We have a standard procedure that if you work for Circus OZ for three-years you are eligible to be a voting company member, and then have external board members who don't have to follow that process.

Danny Syme: So, you don't hire *just anyone* of the street into your ranks?

Antonella Casella: You don't have to be a company member to be a staff member, but once you've been a staff member for three years you can become a company member, which gives you voting rights on the board.

Danny Syme: Gotcha!

Antonella Casella: The thing that has been great about Circus OZ I reckon is, that in Australia anyway, that as funded arts organisations had to more-and-more follow policy and procedures around how boards are appointed and how boards are structured, Circus OZ has always maintained a level of core-members involvement, and still has that; although things are now much-more formal in its operations and has more external influence, but the whole process has been gradually getting more formal from the beginning. I think we still manage to maintain a good level of that [core-members] involvement.

Danny Syme: Cool. So currently it works well? Its efficient? Is there anything you would change – if you had to change the management structure?

Mim Syme: Yeah, our own experience of boards is that there are huge ups and downs.

Antonella Casella: You're setting up a tertiary course right?

Danny Syme: Yeah kinda. We sort of have two streams: we can be a private business, or...

Antonella Casella: A for profit, or, not for profit private business?

Mim Syme: Not sure yet.

Antonella Casella: Oh, so you're literally deciding what...and whose deciding? How many people are involved?

Mim Syme: We two are deciding. We've got the polytech who ran the old Circo-Arts there and in discussion, whether it is a good idea to go with the polytech – we're not sure yet.

Antonella Casella: Okay, or whether you just lease your floor from the polytech.

Mim Syme: Yeah, its all up in the air at-the-moment about how it will work.

Danny Syme: We need to decide whether we're gonna keep our branding too. My personal feelings are that we don't really want to become institutionalised as we'll lose lots of our autonomy.

It was certainly the case that, before the earthquakes, Circo Arts was kind of on its last legs, they had a series of years where enrolments were really low, the polytech was restructuring, and the earthquake was just the nail in the coffin really.

Antonella Casella: And why do you think that was the case?

Danny Syme: Umm, I think management...

Mim Syme: They had the same management in place for the whole fifteen-twenty years that it existed, and the management had lost its passion. So, Godfrey was the director who left in 2009, and then they got a new director in who was entirely theatre, she had never done circus – she even got upset at people training neck spinning because she thought it was dangerous, and from there on out it wasn't circus anymore, she just wanted a physical theatre degree. The people in charge of the facility were not getting on with the people of the polytech constantly, so it was just easier for the polytech to cut its ties when the earthquake came.

Danny Syme: It was kind of like the appendix and they just...we don't wanna end up in that sort of area. Obviously, much of that depends on how you manage it and who you got on board, and who you can attract.

Antonella Casella: Okay, so, how did you manage to get that much government funding without existing as an organisation?

Mim Syme: Well, we exist as a formal business at-the-moment which runs circus classes for the wider community.

Antonella Casella: Right, and that's a straight commercial business!?

Mim Syme: Yeah, and so we're the only one in the South Island of New Zealand and we've been funding as a community initiative, and the understanding is that we're in talks with the polytechnic about re-establishing a degree to fill the space during work hours.

Antonella Casella: Okay so they are expecting an education degree!?

Mim Syme: Yeah, but, its not locked in to any contracts or anything yet.

Antonella Casella: Do you have any ideas on what your income is?

Danny Syme: Currently?

Antonella Casella: For the new building? How are you planning to earn income?

Danny Syme: Yeah, I guess that's what we're trying to figure out.

*Antonella still hasn't opened her kebab to eat. I wonder if she's hungry...*

Mim Syme: Whether the polytech leases part of the space, or whether, we run the entire programme there. So, it's up to us now to meet with businesses like Circus OZ to try and understand...

Antonella Casella: Because, I mean, regardless of whether we have a board, or not a board. Or whether we're profit, or not profit. What we have is a series of different stream that generate income in different ways. So, we have the main ensemble show which generates income through touring and makes money; makes *circus* to put toward the organisation beyond paying for its self when we do our own seasons in the big top, and so on, but, when we're touring – the touring shows are not; you don't put on touring shows to make money. Unless you're doing big mainstream Cirque du Soleil...so, that's why an income stream is the touring show.

Another income stream is the classes which we run here. Another income stream; which the classes are part of, is what we now call our social enterprise department. So, as well as the classes; we might get specific health-based funding to do workshops with kids that have health related issues. We have a partnership with the justice centre to do workshops with kids who come up through there. Last year we have a big sponsorship with the Good Guys<sup>2</sup>, and we did workshops all around Australia, helping to market the Good Guys. So, all of that is an entire wing – the social enterprise wing.

Then we have the Melba Spiegeltent, which we earn income; the producer of the Spiegeltent basically semi-curates a season. Its not a curated season; in that we don't have a budget, in which we can say "okay, we want this show, this show, and were gonna pay you this much come in and do your seasons here". What we do is say we have a *venue for hire*, and we just try and attract the types of shows we'd like to be seeing in that venue, but they are the ones paying. They pay us a fee and we have a guaranteed income.

And then obviously we have the government arts funding...

Mim Syme: I love that your social enterprise is funded, I'm definitely gonna have a look into that. Health organisations and things, that's key. Do you still do outreach in the Northern Territory?

Antonella Casella: Yes. As part of our funding agreement – we've got the majors organisations board funding which is overall, but, then we have national touring status; as a company that is supported to tour throughout Australia. And as a part of those tours

we try to fold in outreach programmes as often as we can. More-and-more we're developing through the social enterprise area – separate projects that do that.

Then I guess we have a whole other wing, which is: the artform development wing. We've got the BLAKFlip<sup>3</sup> programme, which is about increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Straight islanders in the circus arts. And we've got the Strong Woman<sup>4</sup> which is about professional pathways through emerging woman circus artists. Then we've got the use of the venue for small companies; many collaborations with small companies that we get specific funding for to make new work.

We do a whole range of different activities here which is funded by slightly different streams. Which is arts funding, or, other sorts of community funding.

Danny Syme: So, with all of those things the venue is utilised pretty well eh, so when's your downtime?

Antonella Casella: Good question! Please tell me when it is! Public holidays {laughs}. Its used *all the time*, for example, yesterday we had three small companies sharing these spaces, plus we had Deadly Elders; which is one of our community outreach programmes where the local-elders come and do circus, music, and theatre. But at the same-time we could just as easily have a workshop going at a school somewhere. There could be five other activities happening offsite, so onsite and offsite.

Danny Syme: Because you've got the costuming area, and you've got the wonderful builder guy there, do you ever that work for other companies?

Antonella Casella: No. They do [outside of Circus OZ].

Danny Syme: And they can do that here?

Antonella Casella: Yeah, its sort of symbiotic. A mutually beneficial arrangement.

Danny Syme: Who in your management structure does all the going out to corporate bodies, various bureaucracies, and tries to fish out all this stuff?

Antonella Casella: Its all different. So...

Danny Syme: Do you just delegate as people put their hand up? Or...

Antonella Casella: No, no, no, it's highly structured. The general manager manages how it all happens, she's like the Major General. She has the major arts funding related relationships. But when it comes to social enterprise, we have a director of social enterprise whose job it is to source all the none-arts and philanthropy opportunities, and

then she actually has two staff members herself. One whose purely focused on potential donors and philanthropic funders, and another, who is more focused on developing relationships, and therefore; looking for the appropriate funding partner for that relationship, if that makes sense!?

Danny Syme: Yeah, and with that in mind you're all on salaries, you can afford to pay everyone a salary?

Antonella Casella: Yeah.

Danny Syme: And your company members are on a salary?

Antonella Casella: Our touring ensemble is now on per-show based contracts. They're on a wage for the initial show creation period, which is actually about ten-weeks. And then they're on contracts for remounts and tours.

Mim Syme: But there's downtime in there...

Antonella Casella: Yeah there's downtime, they're off out the moment.

Danny Syme: Okay so I'm aware of the time, so there's one other important thing I needed to ask. When we go into to find stack holders, funders, and all this sort of stuff, we're trying to push the idea that cultural benefits can balance out economic benefits. What is it for you that Circus OZ culturally contributes to society, and how does circus have an edge over perhaps: music, dance, theatre, movies, or whatever, what is it that we can contribute to society?

Antonella Casella: I mean Circus OZ has been really, what's the word – from the beginning its always been committed to social change through circus. In different ways. In the early days – and to today - its through creating accessible shows that are inspiring, but, also present men and woman being equal on-stage, hopefully; cultural diversity on-stage, representing some-kind-of-version of how we'd like society to be on-stage, has always been a big part of what we do. That's one thing that we contribute, and all our other areas we've developed, have developed from those same principles. So, all of our programmes are about contributing to making society a better place.

And yeah, some people would argue that circus is particular good at that for a whole range of reasons. I think that here at Circus OZ we talk about our values that inform everything we do, and its those values that, give us the edge. Give us the reason for funders to fund us.

*We peter on for a bit and take a photo together, by the end Antonella has eaten maybe half of her kebab. We get shown around more of the studios, training spaces, and take photos/videos of some rigging solutions they have made over time.*

END.

### **Appendix C:**

#### **Circotica – Rose Stephens Interview. NICA. October 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017.**

We open the interview with some formalities, relax a little, and then get onto the hot topic of animals in circuses.

Danny Syme: New Zealand hasn't had animals for years.

Rose Stephens: Really!?! Well we still have animals here. Quite a few of the Tradys [traditional circuses] still have them. I've just come back from Moscow...

Danny Syme: Oh Cool!

Rose Stephens: And I went to an entire animal circus, no other acts just animals, and had the backstage tour afterwards and feed the elephant and the bear.

Danny Syme: And they don't have issues there with animal rights groups?

Rose Stephens: No, it's just so traditional. Yeah, they're treating pretty well. They looked happy. I don't know, I have mixed feelings. But I suppose in some ways you go, it's okay to teach my dog at home to beg, to fetch, and do all those things, but no one would wanna stop that. I think it's the rare animals, the bears that make people really upset. Anyway, we're not here to talk about animals {laughs}.

Danny Syme: Okay I guess we'll start off by asking how is NICA economically sustainable? You sit within the Swinburne University, so that's your umbrella group. We need to know, if we were to form a relationship with an educational institution, what sort of autonomy

do you have? Are there a lot of top down changes that heavily effect your business...agh sorry... management structure?

Rose Stephens: You could call it a business Yeah! {laughs}. That is such a huge question and I could probably spend an hour on that, but I'll try and be more brief. The University is our parent, if you like, so NICA is a solely owned subsidiary company and is expected to stand on its own two feet financially. In many other ways we're intrinsically tied to the university. We have a funding grant that comes from the federal ministry of the arts, whereas universities – their funding comes from the ministry of education. So, NICA is kind of a unique funding model in terms of being an educational institution but not getting any funding at all from the ministry of education. The [Swinburne] university, however, is funded through the ministry of education and on a per head basis. University places were deregulated quite some years ago...university places used to be capped. So, the government would pay for, I don't know, 100 arts students, 100 science students, 100 medicine students, or whatever, but that then disappeared and so universities began to be able to take more students, which meant that they would be funded more money. So, you get paid per full-time student, we don't, we just get a lump of money through the arts and it doesn't really matter if I have 10 students or I have 1000 students – that's my money! So, it's not really about a growth agenda [for NICA] its really about managing the money we're, you know - really grateful for, from the government, and using that wisely. To get thorough as many as possible elite artists as we can. The reason that they fund us is about that elite-ness. It's about training up the very best Australia has to offer and preparing them for a world market. So that they can go and represent Australia and do well. It's a difficult mandate because it requires a whole set of recruitment practices and expensive training regimes. If you come to a school like NICA you'll get one on one training everyday for three years, not all day long – parts of the day, that's expensive! That's seriously expensive.

So, to go back to your question. Without the university – then we're heading into private provider land, which I'll deal with separately, the university provides us with a student enrolment system, accreditation of our degree programmes, the ability to create new programmes if we wanted too, so all that quality and educational oversight. We pay a service fee and they provide that oversight.

Danny Syme: And that service fees comes out of the lump payment that you get from the government?

Rose Stephens: Yep! They also provide us with human resources support. We have our own payroll system here, but, for example, if I need legal advice around any human

resource matters, staffing issues, they provide that sort of support. They also provide student discipline and misconduct support, so that whole big HR machine – you know we’re a small organisation and have one HR person here, which basically looks after the day to day issues and liaises with our medical team and that type of thing. The University also supplies my internet, my phone, computers, G-drive, and the whole I.T support. They also assist with marketing. It’s a serious parent-child relationship. We’re a small organisation and we have one of everything: a finance, an HR, a boss, and you know, a head of academic programmes etc. We also have, therefore, their policies to abide by, their rules and regulations, and their compliance regulations to abide by. All of my staff have to modules on occupational health and safety, bullying, and equity and all those sorts of things people in work places need to know about. And if they do make a change, then yes, some of those things will deflect down to us.

In terms of autonomy, which was also part of your question. I report to the federal government, I report to a board, and I report to the university council as well. So, there’s a fair bit of accountability set up and there’s lots of governance structure in place. Now, that creates a lot of work, there’s board papers to write, there’s six -year plans to go to the government, there’s budgets to be created, there’s a whole feast of work, but, it means it also comes with a great deal of autonomy. So only major big decisions would have to go to the board or go to the government. If I wanted to buy an elephant for example, I’m back on the animals {laughter}, I couldn’t just go buy an elephant, I’d have to see if the government approved that, and see if they board approved of that, and Swinburne thought buying an elephant was the best thing we could do in terms of advancing our circus programmes. But in terms of me hiring staff, or putting shows on, or having relationships with other circus schools like yours, there mostly my decisions. And I have an executive team here, so I would normally go to my executive team and say wadda ya reckon!? Should we do this!? Do you like the idea? We can approve our own projects in a sense.

Danny Syme: And the content of your shows and things like that?

Rose Stephens: Up to me! Yeah, we had one recently that explored the idea of suicide and we wound up meeting a lot about that and deciding it was a poor idea. There’s a whole bunch of literature about why you’re doing this? Are people going to benefit from this!? So, we wound up doing it about falling instead.

Danny Syme: Okay, yeah that’s really interesting.

Rose Stephens: Yeah, Swinburne attends our shows regularly and they always seem to enjoy it so that's a good thing, because if they weren't they'd probably intervene a lot more on what we were doing.

Danny Syme: Do you suppose that NICA has a real cultural value for Swinburne rather than an economic value?

Rose Stephens: Yes, there's no economic value really. It's not about making money. I mean, Swinburne would say that we're regarded as a jewel in the crown. Because it's something very-very different compared to what they do. They're about science, innovation and technology. They're about research with impact. They're about being a modern university. It's quite a new university, its 25 years, this year. Before that it was an institute of technology for a long time, so it sort of converted to being a university.

It certainly not about making money – because we don't make a lot of money. We struggle to make ends meet for the most part. It's about, yeah, some other value that they add.

Danny Syme: Cool! Maybe you could speak to the private tertiary provider – another option we could take.

Rose Stephens: I could tell you a little about that from an Australian perspective if you like. So, NICA was going to become a private organisation in 2013, and we started on that road around about 2011. There was a whole bunch of consultancy and research that went into that. But at the end of the day, the decision was made that it wasn't viable to go ahead that way. There were a number of reasons for that, I mean to be a higher education provider - in this country anyway, you need to have a lot of money in the bank. You need to be able to ensure that anyone who starts in first-year, no matter if your business collapses, they're going to be able to finish their third-year - and you've lived through that experience. You need to be insured to a considerable sum of money, to be able to guarantee that progression all the way through. You need to pay for your own accreditation through the ministry of education, federal level, for degrees. Which means that you have to hire people to write them and then you need to go through an external application process which could take a couple of years. I did it. When I was at TAFE - I wrote all the music degrees; I'm a musician not a circus artist. I wrote the first degrees a Polytechnic could offer in Victoria. I wrote applied music degrees, sound production, composition, and performance. And I can't tell you how much work that was, and there was a big expense, something like \$20,000 just to submit it, let alone reviews, site visits, and all sorts of interrogation about this that and the other thing. You need to have a

library that has a great range of up-to-date texts on your subject matter – I spent \$40,000 on my library...

Danny Syme: Hooooo...{laughs}

Rose Stephens: Yeah, it's a lot of money but I had to have a library or no degree!

Danny Syme: And that's obviously to provide for the students...

Rose Stephens: To provide for the students because there's a law here where if you put a book on the book list, or you refer to a book for a reading, it has to be available free to a student, which means that it has to be in the library, or online. It all requires specialised knowledge. I hired a consultant to rewrite our diploma and I think that cost \$20,000. That lasts for five years and then you got to do it again.

Danny Syme: {referring to Mim} and who pays for that? You know! We can't...we don't have that capital {laughs}.

Rose Stephens: That's exactly right. So, if you're thinking about going down the private line, you need a sponsor, or you need to make a company that has a sponsor, so that could be the city council for example. But then you take on the responsibility of all things like: staff discipline issues, correct pay, entitlements to superannuation, leave, and all those things. You take on all insurance matters, all accidents - they do happen, lease for building payments, you need to hire someone who understands payroll tax.

I sound like I'm trying to put you off that idea, but I really don't mind which way you go {laughs}.

Danny Syme: Aw yeah, no!

Rose Stephens: I'm just pointing out your huge overall responsibility. And NICA did go down that path...not only that! You need to go I need an I.T company to set up all my stuff. You need cleaners. You probably already have some of these things, and you already know about them...

Danny Syme: We're the cleaners!

Rose Stephens: {laughs} Yeah great! So, if I were to weigh up both, I would say, yeah sometimes it can be difficult working with a university that has lots of regulations. But you have this warm sense of comfort that they legally understand what they're doing, and they can advise you in a lawful way. So that you know that you're not doing the wrong thing, that you're within the rules, and you have the prestige and integrity of its

qualifications. Universities usually have a brand name that's well-respected and if your degree sits within a university that has good name, then changes are people are going to think your degrees probably pretty-good, whereas, setting up a private degree it may still be pretty-good, but it's going to take you a long time to build up reputation. For example, in the city we have a place called: The Whitehouse , which is a fashion school, and it's a private college with a fabulous name, and people just banging down the door to get in there, but that's taken thirty years or something to build that name and reputation. And you only build that reputation by graduate outcomes. So clearly some people have graduated over time and have gone on to be well known designers, and then everybody wants to come – you know, and turn into that famous person.

Mim Syme: Is your funding at all reliant upon employment rates at the end of the degree?

Rose Stephens: No.

Mim Syme: Yeah right. Because they've just introduced that for our national dance company. That's the main degree programme in New Zealand now.

Rose Stephens: Yes. Good luck with that! They introduced it in England quite some years ago now, and it's been talked about here, but not at the degree level. It would be at the diploma or certificate level. The problem with areas such as: dance, music, circus, is how do you measure employment. You know! I got one gig at crown casino, therefore, I'm employed, therefore, tick the box, or, a got a two-year contract with Cirque du Soleil – I'd consider that employed.

But, we have a lot of freelance graduates and they work spasmodically, but, reasonably regularly. Are they employed? I don't know how they're going to tick that off.

Mim Syme: They've had it for a few years now and their funding is fully reliant on it. I talked to one of the main dance directors about that and she was really sceptical, but, seemed to think it did mean the institution functioned better. The school is pushing its students a lot more because of that pressure.

Rose Stephens: I think, not all students that do a performing arts course are going to be employable. It seems to me you ought to be able to say at the end of the first-year that you're not going to make it, I'm not going to teach you anymore. Because we're going to do two more years and we know you're not going to be employable. What about injury? And things like that, I mean we have students who are often out for a semester or a year with injury.

Well I hope we don't move that way here because I think it can drive poor practice, as well as good practice. It can really be pretty-hard on students to get them to a job. It could stem creativity.

Danny Syme: Do you think that in the contemporary scenario that educational qualifications are not necessarily about going into your specific field but that process of getting a degree will arm the students in the modern market?

Rose Stephens: Absolutely.

Danny Syme: Yeah, so we've got students potentially that would do a degree or diploma and not go on to be circus performers, but would make great administrators, or managers, some roles that not being utilised in the New Zealand circus industry.

Rose Stephens: That is always the traditional role of TAFE here, basically to engage students – particularly the disengaged. That role has changed over time, with regret, I think. There are many people who might start off in certificate in horticulture or something, and wind up being a general practitioner doctor. It's got nothing to do with how stupid you are really, adolescence is a tough time for most people and some just become disenchanted and completely disengaged with everything. I'm a great believer in the TAFE system as a place to pick up those people who missed opportunities early on. Also, those who start off in a course, I mean I have a daughter who did really well in her year-twelve and got very high marks, won the Deans scholarship to go to Monash to do a double degree in biomedical science and chemical engineering, right, got through first-year and pretty much didn't turn up for much of the second-year, and failed everything. Hated it. Didn't want to do it. Had six-months off, doing nothing much at all. So, this is a star pupil, not just someone who didn't do so well in year-twelve.

Then she went to TAFE and did certificate-four in music, which couldn't be further away from science and engineering, met a whole bunch of people, was playing in bands, and was having a ball. Then thought, I want to be a maths teacher, and went back to university and went into a straight science degree majoring in mathematics and did a master's in teaching and is happily teaching away at a rural high school in the middle of Victoria. So, in answer to your question – absolutely! I mean, so few people finish up where they started off. Yeah, that opportunity needs to be there. I think courses like circus arts are...we have a certificate-four programme, which is like a foundational programme and a lot of people do that and not come back. And that's fine! They'll have an educational certificate, they know what it's like to be part of a course, be responsible, hand in assignments, and communicate with people. I mean the go off and do plenty else.

Danny Syme: Yeah, because currently we're running a programme: we've been funded, we've got a school, we're running a facility, as a community circus. And we're really finding that many of our students are adults, who are working all day...

Rose Stephens: And they come for a relax yeah...

Danny Syme: Well yeah yeah, they come for the community, the culture, and something exciting, especially if they're office working all day.

Rose Stephens: So, in the evenings too...I know what you mean yeah, and they love it!?

Mim Syme: A lot of them will never be professional [circus performers], a lot of them are in their thirties and maybe forties, and it's something that the need, its important in their life because it changes it in some way.

Rose Stephens: Circus is good for that because there's a sense of achievement that's non-competitive. It's pretty much non-competitive and people what to help each other. People want to be part of the community – almost - that has challenges, but it also team-work and trust, and all the things you know about {laughs}.

Danny Syme: Do you get many adult or older learners sign on to NICA? Or is it primarily 18 to...

Rose Stephens: 18 is the entry point to our degree...um...but I have a 35-year-old in it this year! and a 27-year-old, yeah there's a few. That 35-year-old is really about, one of the examples I give earlier; I've done all this other stuff my whole life I didn't wanna do, and I actually always wanted to do this, and she said, "I'm bloody 35 I haven't done it yet and I just wanna give it a crack". So, she's giving it a crack...

Danny Syme: And you guys are open to that, when older people come in...

Rose Stephens: Yes of course. I mean look we do have a physical test, but its not like she's come to us not ever having done anything. She's come in, she's fit, she's strong, and she's reasonably flexible so...she's been doing stuff all her life. Will she become a professional circus artist? I have no idea.

Not at this point, she's in first year. Does it matter if she doesn't? my funding body might say yes. They might say...however, they know about her and they want to interview her. They're interested in that aspect of it as well. Maybe that's a great outcome as well. I think it will be for her personally. A great outcome.

Danny Syme: How can we differentiate...Circo Arts (pre-quakes) was typically seen as an alternative to NICA. A lot of the students were perhaps seeking something a wee bit different to the NICA experience and educational model. I personally thought that people were also attracted to the kiwi lifestyle and the environment. It was a bit more relaxed...

Mim Syme: Yeah so for me a young Australian I saw NICA as being like gymnastics...it was quite an acrobatic school, and I wanted to learn clowning and performing, like a lot of the quirky buskers and crazy characters I came across were from Circo Arts. That's why I chose Circo Arts rather than NICA, and I think it's really important that the schools offered completely different things.

Danny Syme: So, our question would be, if we were to start a degree programme ourselves, what are some things that we could do differently compared to NICA? I know it's a pretty tricky question...say someone's coming from Norway or Montreal, you know, where they already found really great circus schools there, and are deciding to come down-under and they're going to choose between NICA or New Zealand. What can we do that's different? Or perhaps say what you think NICA provides in terms of holistic circus training and then we can tease out what we could do different.

Rose Stephens: Okay. Well your observation is right. This school was started by Mr Lu, and Pam, who is a very-very traditional Chinese acrobat, and some [object] manipulation as well. It's still run very much as acrobatics being the foundation. Each day, all of them do four hours of circus training. One hour is what we call basics, which is: tumbling, handstands, flexibility, building strength, all the fundamental skills for building a strong flexible body that can tumble and do handstands, pretty much. They then do a group hour which could be teeter-board, or it could be group juggling, ground-acro, wall tramp, something like that, and they usually pick that for the three-years. In the hope that by the end of the third-year you've actually got another act, so that's for two-hours. And then our point of difference is that they do two specialty acts. Everyday they'll train one hour one specialty and one in another specialty, and in most circus schools there's just the one specialty. So that's been our point of difference for a while.

It has some issue. Four hours of training, by some people's standards, is not enough, and by other people's is too much. You work it out...and the other half of their day; some groups do that in the morning and some groups do that in the afternoon for timetabling reasons. They do academic subjects, so they do: anatomy, circus history, small business studies, and technical aspects of theatre sound and lighting, make up, and all that. And in the new version they'll also do a music unit, which is more about music-appreciation unit, it's about choosing the right music, it's about being able to play rhythms or walking in

time to the music. Because so many circus people put a piece of music on and they do anything...but it doesn't make any resemblance to what the music's telling them. They have no idea – I dunno why, its hopeless. So, we've put in a music subject.

So that's circus academics. Then we have dance, they do dance every year, they do: ballet, contemporary, hip hop, and choreography. Particularly in the final year there's quite a bit of choreography for making your own piece. Then there's performance, and every year they do performance studies and they have a show. Third years have two shows. That's kind of in nutshell what we do.

Danny Syme: Wow that's really comprehensive isn't it.

Rose Stephens: I think so, I think its comprehensive, and its full, you know, its full on, I mean its five – seven-hour days. That's thirty-five hours [per week] and sometimes more particularly in show week. So, in a normal old dance degree its twelve hours [per week], and its twelve for twenty-four weeks. And we do thirty-five for thirty-eight weeks. It's a pretty intense course. And I guess that's partly why is so expensive to run {laughs}, it's a lot of hours and a lot of staff. The ENC in Montreal - their emphasise is a lot more on performance and creating of work, than just straight training of skills. London ones pretty similar to us, except they only do the one specialty – not two, that's my understanding. As I've said we've just reviewed our whole programme and it takes such an enormous amount of work, you almost want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. You go – oh are we really dissatisfied with everything we've already got, so you tweak a bit. We've combined dance and performance into the same unit, which split the circus unit from one huge-unit into two.

If you wanted to make it different, my view would be that - picking up on the clowning. Our guys specialise in clown and whatever, and they do some comedy-acro as a group thing. The biggest complaint I would get is from our [object] manipulators, jugglers in particular. Jugglers are...I shouldn't generalise...most jugglers I know run circus schools. They have really well wired brains, like to be able to actually do all that, requires a fair bit of smarts I think. But they would be the biggest complainers of "why do I have to do these handstands everyday", "why do I have to do all this tumbling", "I just wanna work on my juggling skills". And our view on that is, more and more ensembles and bigger companies are asking for multi-skills. If your still in Europe, Russia, or China, you'll still get hired as that solo act that we just have-to-have in our circus. You're hired, and you just came in and do your thing and get paid and that's all you do. But more and more companies like: Dragone and Cirque du Soleil , it's like: can you do that, can you do this, could you be in this bit, its more about the ensemble and what you can bring to the ensemble.

We like to think that everybody who graduates from NICA has a range of skills, a couple of which are at a really high level. But if you had to juggle-three, you could. If you had to do a tumble run, you could. If you had to hang upside down, you could.

Mim Syme: Yeah, we actually notice that in Toruk which came to New Zealand...

Rose Stephens: Ahh yes, Crispy's in that!

Mim Syme: I noticed there were quite a few Australians in that.

Rose Stephens: About five I think, yeah...

Mim Syme: It came down to the fact that they could do all the skills, because it wasn't an act-act-act show.

Rose Stephens: No...

Mim Syme: It was a: we need you to tumble here, and aerial here, and do a lot of everything.

Danny Syme: But some of the cast we meet with lamented that they didn't get their solo spot {laughs} which is interesting.

Rose Stephens: Yeah, it's just opened in Sydney but we haven't had it in Melbourne yet. Its on its way. We'll be looking forward to catching up with Crispy when he gets in. He's been all the papers, you know – Australia Read, and so. He graduated before I got here, awhile ago now.

I think before you invent any new programme, you need to go: what do we want our new graduates to look like? What sort of work do we want them to be fit for? And in which case what skills do the need? We work a lot with the local industry and a lot of visitors like yourselves, that come, and-more-and-more they're saying they want creative thinkers. They want people who can sit in a room during a creative development process and contribute with good ideas, not just be directed and told what to do. Lots of our own graduates form their own companies and create their own work, which is terrific, and some of them are touring internationally and doing very very-well. They also want reasonable human beings, you know, that's actually something we struggle with here – I don't mean that the way it sounds – because everybody can be a reasonable human being. But being easy to work with, and not being a spoiled brat, is what I mean. Sometimes is difficult, particularly in an elite dance school, or circus school, or even music school. People who are really-really-really good, know they're really-really-really good,

and struggle with ego and arrogance and those types of characteristics, and they don't work well in ensemble.

Danny Syme: Which could be an issue if you're training soloists strictly...

Rose Stephens: Yeah, because really to be an elite artist you have-to-have a certain amount of healthy ego. You actually have to believe you can do it, and you actually have to tell yourself that you're the best or whatever, its about confidence building and all those things. But you don't have to be a jerk about it either {laughs}.

Danny Syme: {laughing} Ok cool. Thank you so much for all this information Rose, I think we've covered pretty-much everything...

Rose Stephens: So you've got answers...

Danny Syme: Yeah Yeah totally and much more...

Mim Syme: Yeah, all the key points...

Rose Stephens: The other thing I'd probably be aware of either way, whether you're gonna go with the Polytechnic, or you're gonna go out on your own, is that things like staff qualifications matter! And I really struggle with it here. You know, you find my circus trainers with PhD's!?!? Have some with Master's, someone like yourself studying for your Master's, that's almost totally necessary if you're going to run a degree programme. All of your staff should have a Master's degree. Me too – but haven't! I've got two or three working in a programme – so there's an expense too – supporting people to upgrade their qualifications to Master's level. That's an expectation of the University, expecting all staff to have a PhD, or be working on one.

Danny Syme: This is really interesting isn't it! {referring to Mim}.

Mim Syme: Yeah unless you've been in a traditional Chinese circus for thirty-years...

Rose Stephens: Yeah! I mean, Mr Lu is a very intelligent man, and he hasn't got a qualification you know {laughs}...

Mim Syme: It's the same with our teachers, none of our teachers at Circo Arts had qualifications.

Danny Syme: And there's a cultural...sort of...animosity towards quals, as if it's like "the certificate doesn't matter mate!" and even my peers who have their diploma – they mock it. And I personally think that's wrong-minded...

Rose Stephens: These are battles you will fight...and I call them they “Carnies” – you know what I mean!? Versus people who graduated out of college. Always – and it doesn’t matter if its circus arts or some other trade or profession, where: “we’re experienced! We’ve been doing it for years! Don’t you tell us what we need to do! We know everything!”. I get a lot of that too and I think often it’s just nervousness. If you’re under qualified, and you might be thinking your jobs at risk, I don’t know -I think it’s a self-defence mechanism, and you’ve gotta get through that and bring them on board, because they will be your prime supporters if you’ve got them on side. If you alienate them, they can be a tour de force {laughs}.

You might want to think about – is your market going to be at degree level? Maybe your better of using the Australian certificate and diploma qualifications, or whatever New Zealand has, much easier.

Mim Syme: Do you offer any post-grad?

Rose Stephens: No. I just don’t think there’d be a market for it.

Danny Syme: So, people would be going into a Master of Arts or PhD?

Rose Stephens: Yeah, well I’ve got a couple with Master’s and my performance coordinator did his at NIDA – National Institute of Dramatic Arts and he did it in directing. But they’ve got one so just go there and do that, and then come back here {laughs}. Because we don’t have government support for Master’s at Swinburne, so you’d have to pay, it’s probably cost you \$20,000 to \$30,000 dollars, they just don’t have a market that are willing to pay that.

Danny Syme: I kinda feel that most universities would be okay with you doing a PhD in Arts and its Circus Arts and you’re just paving the way right...

Rose Stephens: Yeah correct.

Danny Syme: It doesn’t necessarily have to be NICA provides a PhD maybe!? This project, my Masters in Professional Practice is open to anything...{laughs}

Rose Stephens: And there’s nice one at Monash which is in Creative Industries, you can basically build your own project around your work and get your Master’s that way, I’ve tried to talk a few into doing that...{laughs}...well how about I show you around. Are you sure you’ve got enough information? Hope I haven’t bamboozled you...

Danny Syme: No not at all.

Mim Syme: Its really-really useful.

Rose Stephens: Okay good.

We proceed to be shown around the amazing facilities at NICA. We're introduced to many main figures there and are taking up into the gantry to check out the infrastructure of the building.

END.

#### Appendix D:

##### Circotica - Jodie Farrugia Interview. Flying Fruit Fly Circus. June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

###### **1) How and when did you get into Circus?**

I did dance and gymnastics as a child, I went on to complete a Bachelor of Arts and education in dance and theatre, once graduated I begun working in contemporary dance and physical theatre. NICA just begun in Melbourne, and I was excepted into the pilot project for what would become the bachelor of Circus, it was a 6-month fulltime course in circus training. Once I did this training I begun working in Circus also.

###### **2) You've recently finished as Artistic Director with the Flying Fruit Fly Circus and created the wonderful show: Junk. How did you come up with the idea for Junk? What was your motivation?**

My Motivation for shows always starts with "What do I Want to say" in the case of JUNK there was 3 questions:

- 1) "What do I want to say to Adults in the audience?"
- 2) "What do I want to say to the children in the audience?"
- 3) "What do I want to say to the Flying Fruit Fly (FFFC) students/ young artists?"

For me I wanted to question how we parent in this time, how we deal with risk taking as a thing to be avoided, as opposed to a thing that can be learnt from and enjoyed. I was interested in exploring how children work unsupervised by Adults. I have always been fascinated with the risk element in circus and even more so when working with young people. The young artists at the FFFC step up and support each other when they take risks, they understand the dangers in circus and they focus, they respect each other when real safety is at risk. All other rules in their life seem meaningless, for example- wearing the proper uniform to school or not being allowed to climb trees. That's a good example climbing trees - this is a wonderful thing to do! Yes, there is dangers in climbing trees, but I guess what I want to ask is: why don't we teach the child to assess if the tree is dangerous to climb before they climb, as opposed to not having the joy of sitting up the top of a tree and taking some responsibility for their own safety.

As a parent of 2 children, I noticed myself start to show signs of helicoptering parent - risk aversion - I questioned this in my own life. I became fascinated in how children used to live in the world. I focused on childhood stories of elders that were children in the 1940's, because they were our elders still alive today, and before external stimulus and technology such as TV in homes etc. I want to tell a regional Australian story because that is where the FFFC students are from. I want to connect the young people of today with their elders, hear their stories, reflect on how things have changed, and find the wild children's spirit that is innate to being human.

Circus seemed the right creative language for this idea and content.

Junk also had a sustainability message: reduce, reuse, repurpose, use your imagination to build stuff that would otherwise be thrown into land fill, we spent a lot of time talking about landfill, war on waste etc....

### **3) Can you write on some ideas and elements of your process in working with these talented young people?**

I started with a research residency at the local nursing home, I paired up young artists with elders and they need to research their stories. This connected real meaning and understanding to the content being explored for the young artists.

We started off exploring these stories, not with circus but with puppetry, this allowed the young people to understand the stories visually, how they could be abstracted without worrying about the limitations of circus as a creative language. We used paper puppets, so they could just mould shapes out of large strips of paper, it was easy, it was fun!

We used a pile of real junk that was donated by the young FFFC families, this allowed the kids to remain playful, use their imagination, if they needed to create a prop it needed to come from the junk pile - again heaps of fun! We then story boarded the show together,

collaboratively with the kids. We did so many development periods, to play and try out ideas.

**4) What changes, if any, did you implement at FFFC during your five-year tenure as Artistic Director?**

So many things:

- I updated and introduced new policies: including child protection policy, drug and alcohol policy, and codes of conducts.
- I introduced a new creative/performance training curriculum, that included movement, choreography, theatre, music, puppetry, circus analysis, act development classes, termly youth led performance nights, circus cultural studies,
- I created a circus links program at the academic school, that used circus themed ideas to deliver their Humanities subject for grade 3 - year 9 students. This included: learning to plan creative projects, budgets, marketing, company structures, dynamics.
- I spent a lot of time increasing working with the staff/ trainers to extend their teaching, planning, artistic practice.
- I developed and changed the training program with the Master trainer.
- I developed a Graduate pathway program – for graduates to transition into the industry. This was through: internships with circus companies, emerging artists funding to support their further studies, or support to create their own independent work.
- I developed and created a new role to oversee the welfare of the students (this took 4 years to do). The FFFC now has a part-time welfare care manager to look after the student's holistic needs.
- I developed a way to communicate to students and parents about the ethics of being a FFFC student, what it means to be a holistic circus artist, through a 4 pillared approach. Are you showing respect and motivation in your?

1) Creative training

2) Physical training

3) Academic studies

4) Social (interpersonal skills)

These became the things we measured up against for all students.

- Developed a strong touring and performance program including: regional Australian tour, International tours, national tours to major performing arts venues. Also developed an Artistic performance program locally with an annual end of year showcase for all students.
- Developed the Creative Spaces program- for independent Circus companies or artists to undertake residencies at the FFFC space and skill share with students.
- Developed partnerships with leading circus companies in Australia.
- Joined the FEDEC<sup>5</sup> (European Federation of Professional Circus Schools).
- Developed the curriculum to deliver the Certificate 3 in Circus Arts, which senior students can undertake in partnership with NICA.
- So so so many things!

### **5) Are there any things you wished you could have changed?**

- Yes! I wish I could have changed the culture around sustainability/environmentally - I tried but it was hard.
- I wish I could have integrated a richer artistic culture in the organisation, felt there was not the right people in certain positions to make this really-holistic, in an inspirational way.
- Wish I could have made it a more diverse place, again people in certain positions that did not share my views on the importance of diversity/cultural diversity, gender diversity.
- I wish I could have changed the increasing elitism of the organisation; able to keep the privilege of being a FFFC student based on your physical and creative skills opposed to if you can afford it. The fees increase each year, it is heart breaking!

### **6) From your own experience, in what ways do circus arts affect local communities and society at large?**

Wow, this is a hard question. I think.....Circus in its pure form is a beautiful thing, it shows humans doing wonderful things together, or on their own. This shows trust, love, support, it shows risk taking, dedication, hard work. However, I do worry the more that circus becomes corporatised - or commercialised, that it can start to take on images that are not helpful to progressing our culture. I don't think it is helpful for society to see some of the gender stereotypes that is flooding the contemporary circus scene at present. We are no longer just appreciating the circus artist for their circus skills because it is blurring with exploiting sexuality or cheap imagery, (kind of like JUNK food). I say this because I

feel that these kinds of images are not helpful for society to be feed with. I also worry that what makes circus so incredible to me, which is the skills, tricks...are being taken over by the promotion of consumerism based on sexuality and cheap thrills.

But of course, on the basic level of our local communities having an experience of circus arts, then yes! it is a positive thing. Standing on someone's shoulders, or someone standing on yours, I think could heal our world. Empathy respect and all that good stuff that circus in its pure form offers.

**7) What helps circus communities thrive in an often-competitive business environment?**

*Nothing thrives in an open business environment.* I believe the arts has been lost to the Executive business world. We have less artists earning a wage and more corporates running the festivals. I think it is really-hard times to be an artist with any true artistic integrity, and to make your way in this competitive business market. I think that circus is flooded, and we have enough trained circus companies/artists willing to compromise their art to sell-their product. It feels harder and harder here in Australia to just sell the arts that actually ask good question of our Audiences.

**8) How is the Australian circus industry tracking into the future? any positives and negatives you can identify regarding cultural and economic importance? Is Government funding important for industry sustainability?**

Yes, Government funding is so very important, we need more, but for me the problem is bigger than this. For me it is about the corporative approaches to the arts here in Australia. I am developing a distaste to the kind of circus work that is thriving in Australia, there seems to be more and more programming at arts festivals of commercial circus work, that has little innovation and little artistic questioning. I leave most shows feeling like I have just seen the same thing over-and-over again. When I am finally moved by something, a piece of circus, it is so very rare, and when I do I feel these artists are always struggling. This question depresses me....

You see, I have always approached my circus and show making as a way to ask questions of society, to push boundaries. I think that is the role of an artist. This could just be by showing some amazing acrobatic skills - but I struggle as soon as the imagery pushes us further into the destructive ways of our world, i.e.: anything that exploits or is damaging, and I guess I put gender issues into this category also. So, I guess the kind of work I like is getting programmed less, because the people who are programming our festivals are needing to care too much about how many bums on seats, as opposed to how challenging they can be for our society. My other frustration here is that I feel there is no more important time then now to speak very loudly and clearly to our society about the destructive way we are living, and the inequalities of our times. So, arts and circus should

be part of this, but alas, here in Australia we are still seeing soft porn feature in our arts festivals, and the artists that have something helpful to say are silenced by the bottom line on an executive budget...a bit like JUNK FOOD.

**9) What is the most important thing/philosophy you want your students to understand by working with you?**

That hard work is important. That kindness and self-reflection in training and creating is essential. That ego is unhelpful. That being a trained circus artist is a privilege and to use your voice positively and powerfully!

END.



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