

CIRCUS IN SCOTLAND

A Blueprint for Development 2012 - 2017

CURRENT SITUATION

Contemporary circus is coming of age all over the world and is rapidly achieving recognition in Scotland as a vibrant, exciting sector of the arts. After many years of sporadic activity, there are now supported circus artists and performances in Scotland, regular public classes, youth outreach programmes, professional development opportunities and a wellspring of passionate and dedicated individuals committed to nurturing the talent, discipline and creative spirit of circus.

There is no doubt however, that the position is fragile. Without significant infrastructure in Scotland it remains difficult to attract and retain circus practitioners. The lack of dedicated facilities for training and practice, and specialist production support in particular, makes it difficult to sustain professional careers. However, Articulation believes that there is a bright creative future for circus in Scotland and that this will be achieved with considered investment of time, money, resources and expertise.

The vision is for circus to be recognised as a thriving art form in Scotland, able to support the livelihoods of professional practitioners and inspire people across ages and communities to participate in and enjoy its pleasures. Scotland will be a place where great work is created and presented to ever growing and appreciative audiences.

Creation

In recent years, circus companies and artists have become established in Scotland and are now creating and touring shows. Creative Scotland and Conflux have been the main public investors in this.

Presentation

Circus work, both international and home grown, is beginning to be programmed in a wide variety of venues and locations, and the demand for corporate entertainment grows too. Although most people's experience of circus seems to be the traditional touring variety, audiences are becoming increasingly aware of the different dynamism and theatricality of the contemporary art form.

Training

There are now pockets of activity in warehouses, church halls and community centres dotted throughout the country. There has been a significant increase in professional development opportunities, including master classes and residencies enabling artists to hone their skills and develop new ones. Scotland hosts the Edinburgh Aerial and Acrobatic Convention, the UK's largest weekend convention, attended by over 150 participants in both 2010 and 2011.

Access & Participation

Regular weekly classes are the backbone to public access. Introductory classes and weekend workshops are also important. These are already proving popular where they are offered and there is evidence of widespread demand. Classes open to all (from beginner to professional level) in a variety of circus skills take place across Scotland delivered by circus clubs



and circus professionals. Youth and community circus activities have been taking place for some time but are not wide spread and there is a shortage of suitably experienced teachers.

Resources & Infrastructure

Specialised resources are required to support circus activity and a major break on growth has been the lack of suitable space. Circus, by its very nature can be demanding of space, particularly height and has specific technical requirements (especially for the aerial disciplines) that most arts spaces lack. Although there are no developed specialist spaces for circus in Scotland, the undeveloped 'Shed' space at the Briggait goes a long way towards filling the immediate gap in Glasgow.



VISION FOR THE FUTURE

There is great potential for Scotland to be home to a thriving circus scene. Much progress has been made but there is a requirement for some key elements of infrastructure and activity to be supported.

Articulation has identified the following priorities for action and investment:

- Support for sustainable livelihoods in circus
- Development of circus training opportunities and circus practice
- Establishment of specialist circus centres
- Provision of resources for high quality creation
- Increase in the number of platforms for presentation
- Increase in access and participation
- Continued advocacy and strategic planning, particularly at a national level
- Recognition of circus as a legitimate art form by the cultural sector
- Development of international links

These priorities are interlinked and mutually influential. The single biggest priority is to attract and retain circus talent in Scotland without which it will be difficult to make real progress. Talented individuals need to be actively working here in order to create and present quality home-grown circus work. These individuals can offer quality teaching via accessible public circus classes and can encourage the next generation of artists to pursue a career in circus. Meeting several of the priorities will encourage circus professionals to base themselves here.

Whilst more nurturing is needed, the seeds have been firmly planted in fertile (if harsh) ground. Scotland is a small country with a young circus scene which is healthy and beginning to grow strong.

Articulation and others in Scotland use the term 'physical performance' to broadly group together circus with physical theatre, outdoor performance and street theatre. Whilst these art forms are distinct from each other, there is much sharing of resources and overlap between practitioners. This is to be encouraged. The cross fertilisation of ideas and practice will help realise the enormous potential Scotland has to become a significant and significantly different element within both the UK and European circus scenes.

KEY INITIATIVES

The Briggait

The intention is to turn the large 'Shed' in this iconic Glasgow building into the National Centre for Dance and Circus. Containing four large studios, two specifically kitted out for circus. It would enable a broad spectrum of physical performers to train and make work.

The vision for the Briggait is to be: "A crucible for experimentation; a hub; a home; delivering inspirational opportunities for training, making and sharing work in the cross-over worlds of dance, circus, live art, street performance and visual arts, providing opportunities for professional, aspirant and recreational practitioners of all ages & abilities to develop their practice... the Briggait will be a facility unique in the UK, nurturing creative interaction amongst diverse art forms and disciplines."

Since 2010 the Briggait has housed over 60 visual artist's studios and the offices for several physical performance and dance organisations. It is already a creative hub...

Cubed

There are plans for a year round physical performance creation centre and venue in Edinburgh (potentially in St Stephen's Church previously used by Aurora Nova during the Edinburgh Fringe). Providing a dual role, as both a specialist receiving house for high quality national and internationally touring companies, and an advanced creation centre focused on the development of talent in Scotland, it would be a place that would enable much longer creation and rehearsal periods for circus shows.

Conflux

Legacy Trust UK/Creative Scotland funded four year project launched in March 2009 with the specific remit to develop and support a thriving professional circus, street theatre and physical theatre community that will in turn be able to deliver an extensive range of education opportunities to young people in Scotland. It has a specific role in identifying and supporting emerging artists. Conflux will continue beyond 2013. Conflux run the Surge Festival, a great platform for physical performance work which takes place in Glasgow alongside the Merchant City Festival in July every year.

Articulation

Articulation was created in 2009 to be Scotland's umbrella organisation for physical performance. The organisation supports the development of the sector through advocacy, strategic planning, facilitating partnerships and close involvement with infrastructural initiatives like the Briggait. It also plays a role in supporting high quality – in health and safety, in teaching standards and in the work itself. Articulation provides a forum in which circus professionals can discuss and debate what the sector requires. Articulation represents Scotland within European-wide, cross-border initiatives. It is a member of Cicostrada and an associate partner of Jeunes Talents Cirque.