

Interview with Brigitte Scherrer, Jury Member

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Conducted by the Museum, Library and Archive of Hungarian Circus Arts

Risk-taking, innovation, and equal opportunity in contemporary circus

– an interview with Brigitte Scherrer



She began her career as an artist and is currently a senior casting consultant for Cirque du Soleil, considered a pioneer in contemporary circus. Brigitte Scherrer has been an active shaper of the circus world for more than thirty years. During her career, she has worked with thousands of artists, both on and off the stage. Her main focus is on talent scouting, but at the 16th Budapest Circus Festival, she served as a jury member and gave a presentation on equal opportunities at the festival conference. During the intermission of the Red Show, we asked Brigitte Scherrer about, among other things, the collaboration between Cirque du Soleil and Hungarian circus institutions, the renewal of the genre, the issues of risk and ethics, and the role of diversity and accessibility.

Kertész Ádám: Cirque du Soleil donated three costumes to the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts. Why do you consider this type of collaboration important?

Brigitte Scherrer: Whenever we have the opportunity, we are happy to collaborate in this way. It is a valuable relationship for both parties. It is important to us because it gives the costumes a second life: after their time on stage, they can live on in a museum space. We are also very pleased that your institution is accepting these costumes, as they are essentially works of art (costume designer: Dominique Lemieux – ed.). We are grateful that you are providing a platform for them.

K.Á.: Why did you donate these particular costumes to the museum?

B.S.: It happened last year, we selected costumes from the show *Corteo* (a Cirque du Soleil show premiered on April 21, 2005, in which a clown watches his own carnival-like funeral, ed.). We chose costumes that had previously been worn by Hungarian artists. We thought that this connection would be particularly important for a Hungarian institution. I was not involved in the decision-making process at the time; a colleague of mine handled it.



*Costumes donated by Cirque du Soleil at the 2024 exhibition entitled *The Wonderful World of Circus* at Vajdahunyad Castle.*

K.Á.: We saw many productions at the festival that combine different circus genres. Why do you think this is becoming more common?

B.S.: I think combining different disciplines is essential today. If we want to evolve, if we want the genres to live on and not repeat themselves, we have to look for new paths. In recent decades, the technical level of every circus genre has improved enormously. One of the most important forms of innovation today is when different disciplines come together.

K.Á.: But hasn't this made circus acts more dangerous?

B.S.: The circus has always been dangerous. If we look back at the past, we see many impressive but extremely risky productions. Today, in some genres, the technical level is so high that I no longer feel comfortable as a spectator. For example, one of the Icarian Games acts at the festival: when the artist is working at a great height, it's really

impressive, but for me it's too dangerous. I feel that this is not necessarily necessary for the audience to appreciate the performance. Especially since we are talking about a very young artist.

K.Á.: Do you think it is important for circuses to consider ethical aspects as well?

B.S.: For me, safety comes first. At the same time, acrobats think differently about risk than spectators do. If they have practiced something ten thousand times and know exactly what they are doing, then for them it is not recklessness, but a calculated risk. The essence of the circus is precisely to push the limits of human performance. But it is important that the risk is controlled and that if a mistake occurs, it does not have fatal consequences.



A scene from the Red Show at the 16th Budapest International Circus Festival, the Venice Carneval silver medal-winning act, which combined the circus genres of the rubber table, the Icarian Games, and the Russian pole.

K.Á.: In your presentation at the International V4 Conference on Creating Opportunities in Circus in Central Europe, you spoke about diversity, equality, and inclusion. How relevant are diversity, equal opportunities, and inclusion in contemporary circus today?

B. S.: It depends greatly on the cultural environment. In Canada, diversity, equal opportunities, and inclusion have been part of public discourse for twenty years. I wouldn't say it works perfectly, but it is constantly evolving. In other countries, however, this is still a novelty, and we can really talk about it as an innovative topic. At Cirque du Soleil, a special council has been in place for several years to deal specifically with these issues.



Brigitte Scherrer and József 'Dodi' Graeser with the silver prize winner Duo Aerial DNA at the awards ceremony

K.Á.: How do you make performances more accessible to different audiences?

B.S.: There are always wheelchair spaces in the tent and theaters. In addition, there are so-called "sensory-friendly" performances, where the lighting, sound, and interaction with the audience are more subdued. These performances also have a separate rest room where anyone can go if they find the environment overwhelming, and then return later.

K.Á.: Do you also address access for lower-income social groups?

B.S.: When we start performing in a new country, we often invite various groups—youth centers, circus schools, civil organizations—to the dress rehearsal or opening performance, often free of charge. In addition, our artists often hold workshops, visit schools, or welcome student groups to rehearsals. These are all free knowledge-sharing opportunities.



Speakers at the first section of the International V4 Conference on Equal Opportunities in Circus in Central Europe, held on January 8, 2026.

K. Á.: What criticism would you have about the festival?

B.S.: To be honest, this is my first time here, and I'm really enjoying it. I find the organization extremely professional. The conference, the discussions, the interviews all enrich the festival. There is a lot to learn from the practices of other countries and companies. The jury members also came from ten different countries, which is incredibly inspiring. For me, that's what circus is all about: no borders, no politics – just a passion for an art form. The museum and your work play a key role in this.

Interview conducted and edited by Ádám Kertész, librarian, and Tamás Szabó, archivist

Photos: Ádám Urbán and the staff of the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts