

színház-
tudományi
szemle⁴⁸

theater
science
review⁴⁸

01/02 2025

Cirkusz, oktatás, örökség

ECA nemzetközi tudományos konferencia

A 15. Budapest Nemzetközi Cirkuszfesztivál programja

Circus, Education, Heritage

ECA International Academic Conference

Programme of the 15th Budapest Circus Festival

Színháztudományi Szemle 48

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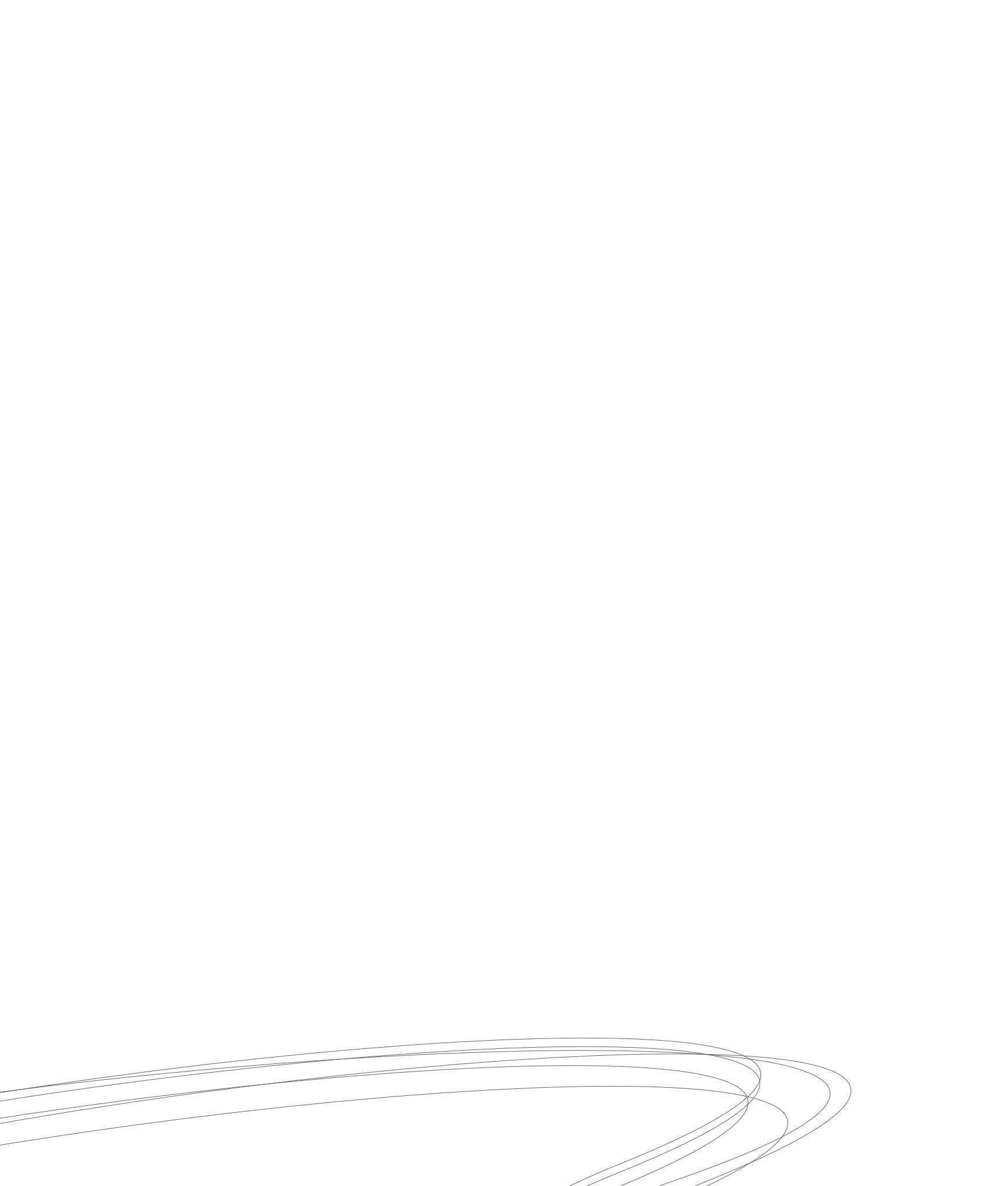
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PÉTER FEKETE

DIRECTOR,
CIRCUS ARTIST,
GENERAL DIRECTOR

National Circus Arts Center
(HUNGARY)

BIOGRAPHY

Péter Fekete is Director of the Capital Circus of Budapest and General Director of the National Circus Arts Center. He served as Hungary's Minister of State for Culture between 2018 and 2022. He is a board member of the European Circus Association, chairman of the Central European Circus Art Association, a regular guest at major international circus events, a jury member at leading world festivals and a frequent lecturer at professional conferences.

Trained in both theatre and circus, he has worked as a theatre director, manager, performing artist, instructor, illusion designer and magician, as well as an editor and director. Between 2007 and 2015, as director of the Jókai Theatre in Békéscsaba, he established a complex centre for the arts, education and public culture, built the Jókai Studio Theatre and founded the Szarvas Water Theatre. Since 2015, as Ministerial Commissioner, he has led the renewal of Hungarian circus arts and infrastructure, with a special focus on the development of backstage professions and circus-related research.

His work has been recognised with the Prima Primissima Country Prize (2011), the Knight's Cross of the Order of Merit of Hungary (2013) and the Mari Jászai Award (2014).

The author suggests drinking
mint tea
whilst reading his essay.

The author suggests listening to
Romanian Folk Dances by *Béla Bartók*
whilst reading his essay.

Welcome

It is a great pleasure and an honour to welcome you to Budapest on the occasion of the European Circus Association's international professional and scientific circus conference, held here for the fourth time – after 2016, 2018 and 2020 – in close cooperation with the Hungarian National Circus Arts Centre, as a flagship programme of the Budapest Circus Festival.

In 2024, the international scientific conference “Circus, Education, Heritage” serves as a key strategic meeting point for the circus sector. Beyond exchanging experiences, we will work together with leading figures of the European circus community to articulate shared objectives that will shape the present and the future – both near and distant – of this art form.

It is a particular pleasure to welcome Helmut Grosscurth, Managing Director of the European Circus Association, who will open the conference by highlighting some of the most pressing practical challenges currently faced by European circuses and their wider political and international legal implications. Among these, I would especially like to mention the highly topical and widely debated issue of possible regulatory frameworks for circus arts that include animals. A similarly crucial theme will be addressed by Annette Schwer, ECA Education Officer and Vice President of the European Network for Traveller Education board. Drawing on examples from the Netherlands and Germany, her presentation will explore educational opportunities for children and young people who live and travel with circuses, and will offer an overview of both the possibilities and the challenges within the European Union.



The morning session of the conference will feature several presentations on innovative areas of circus education and training: from early childhood to university-level arts degrees, from introductory and informal learning opportunities for the general public to the pedagogical dimensions of circus values such as responsible animal care or audio description for circus performances.

The afternoon session will focus on an issue of growing importance: the preservation of cultural heritage. In line with the 2003 UNESCO Convention, safeguarding and promoting our shared cultural heritage is of the utmost importance, and circus arts play a significant role in this endeavour. Hungary has been at the forefront of these efforts, as one of the first countries in the world to inscribe circus arts on its national list of cultural heritage.

We are delighted to see that more and more circus exhibitions, museums, collections, archives and libraries are opening around the world, and that an increasing number of researchers are dedicating their work to the preservation of circus heritage. With this conference, we are creating – for the first time

globally – a shared platform for circus collections and for our own academic hub, the Museum,

Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts, to exchange methods and build close professional relationships. Our international exhibition on circus history, “Wonderful Circus World”, organised in conjunction with the conference, will present circus heritage preservation activities in thirteen countries. It will showcase remarkable circus artefacts to the public while fostering dialogue around emerging academic fields such as circus museology and the taxonomy of circus genres – both of which are still niche areas within circus heritage studies.

This year’s ECA conference is perhaps more diverse and complex than ever before. It brings together a vibrant international community of researchers and practitioners, demonstrating that the questions we address here are not the concern of a narrow professional circle alone. They reach far beyond that sphere and are fundamental to the future of our shared culture.









EMESE JOÓ

DIRECTOR,
CHIEF MUSEOLOGIST,
MUSEUM EDUCATOR

Museum, Library and Archives of
Hungarian Circus Arts
(HUNGARY)

The author suggests drinking
long coffe
whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
Magyar Banda
whilst reading her essay.

Circus, Education, Heritage - ECA International Academic Conference

BIOGRAPHY

Since 2019, Emese Joó has served as Director and Chief Museologist of the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts at the National Circus Arts Center. She leads the institution's scholarly work: researching the living heritage of Hungarian circus arts, expanding and cataloguing the historical collection, curating exhibitions, publishing, teaching, and running museum education and circus education programmes.

Her main professional focus is to establish a solid scientific foundation for the circus museum. She does this in close cooperation with Hungarian circus artists and through professional partnerships in order to present the values of Hungarian circus arts as widely as possible, both in Hungary and internationally. For her innovative use of museum knowledge, she received the Museum Education Award in 2007 and 2013, the Outstanding Museum Educator Award in 2018, and the Hungarian Silver Cross of Merit in 2022.

On January 11, 2024, as an official professional program of the 15th Budapest Circus Festival, we organized the international conference of the European Circus Association (ECA) on current issues in circus education and training, as well as circus heritage and museology. For the fourth time, the Hungarian Agricultural Museum, located in the Baroque palace of Vajdahunyad Castle in Budapest's City Park, hosted this prestigious ECA professional circus gathering.

The Circus, Education, Heritage - ECA International Academic Conference was a particularly substantial event in 2024, as it actually comprised three professional programs: an education conference, an exhibition opening, and a museology conference. During the day-long program, experts discussed circus education and training in the morning session, and circus heritage and museology in the afternoon session. In between, at noon, they jointly participated in the ceremonial opening of the Wonderful Circus World - International Circus History Exhibition and the signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation on the preservation of circus heritage.



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Conference Program:

10:00 / 12:00

Morning session:

Circus Education and Training

- **Peter Fekete**, Director General of the National Circus Arts Center (*Hungary*): **Opening Speech**
- **Helmut Grosscurth**, Managing Director of the European Circus Association (ECA) (*Germany*): **ECA Goals and Achievements**
- **Annette Schwer**, Education Officer of the European Circus Association (ECA) (*Germany*), Former Director of the School for Circus Children in North Rhine-Westphalia, Vice President of the ENTE board (European Network for Traveler Education), President of the IfiF (Privates Institut für individuelle Förderung und Schulmanagement): **Interaction of Education and Culture to Secure the Future of Circus**
- **Kamilla Reidl**, Rector of the Budapest College of Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance (*Hungary*): **Integration of Circus Arts Program into the Hungarian Higher Education System**
- **Andrea Horthy**, Leader of the Mentoring Programme of the National Circus Arts Center (*Hungary*): **Circus Mentoring Programme – Mentoring of the Amateur, Self-organizing Circus Communities in Hungary**
- **András Sándor**, Leader of the Educational Programme of the National Circus Arts Center (*Hungary*): **Circus Networking in Hungary ‘Learn circus!’ - Skill Development in Educational and Cultural Institutions**
- **Emese Joó**, Chief Museologist, Director of the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts (*Hungary*): **Circus Education is Circus and More – Publication Premier**
- **Peter Fekete**, Director General of the National Circus Arts Center (*Hungary*): **Audio Description – Poster Presentation**



12:00

Wonderful Circus World - International Circus History Exhibition

Ceremonial Opening and signing of the Memorandum of Cooperation on the preservation of circus heritage

1:00 / 5:00

Afternoon session:

Circus Heritage and Museology

- **Dr. Alain Frère**, Circus Researcher, Collector, Musée du Cirque Alain Frère (*France*): **Video Presentation of the Museum Collection**
- **Antonio Giarola**, President of the Centro Educativo di Documentazione Arti Circensi (*Italy*): **CEDAC: A Management Model for Circus Heritage**
- **Genis Matabosch**, President of the Circus Arts Foundation and Director of the Circusland (*Spain*): **CIRCUSLAND: The European House for the Professional Conservation of Circus Heritage**
- **Julia Osipova**, Museologist, Archivist, Circus Art Museum (*Russia*): **Circus Art Museum: Heritage Preservation and Creative Laboratory**
- **Michael Swatosch**, Director of the Vienna Circus & Clown Museum (*Austria*): **Circus YES-TERDAY - TODAY. The Circus & Clown Museum Vienna as an Important Place of Preservation and Research**
- **Louis-Sampion Bouglione**, Co-director of Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione, in charge of communication and visual identity, President of Association Musée Émilien Bouglione and Director of Musée Émilien Bouglione (*France*): **Émilien Bouglione Museum in Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione, Creation, History and Future of a Collection**

- **Eszter Csonka-Takács**, Director of the Directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Hungarian Open Air Museum (*Hungary*): **Perspectives of the Common Heritage**
- **Amanda Gatewood**, PhD student, University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Medicine and Public Health (*USA*) and **Dr. LaReina Hingson**, Visiting Faculty Member, Linguistics at Brigham Young University (*USA*): **Developing a Circus Classification System**
- **Szandra Szonday**, museologist of the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts (*Hungary*): **What is a Horse Juggler? - Developing a Circus Genre Taxonomy**
- **Panel Discussion**. Participants: **Irina Zaitseva** (Regional Public Charitable Foundation "Circus and mercy" Y. V. Nikulin, Russia), **Nargiz Tamabekkyzy** (Kazakh State Circus Museum, Kazakhstan), **Gilles Maignant** (private collector, Circus Museum of Gilles Maignant, Association "CIRCUS PATRIMONIUM", France), **Roberto Fazzini** (private collector, printer, Dorotea and Roberto Fazzini CIRCUS HISTORICAL ARCHIVE, Italy), **Emese Joó** (Director of the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts, Hungary). Moderator: **Bruno Schütz** (*Hungary*)
- **Helmut Grosscurth**, Managing Director of the European Circus Association (*Germany*): **Closing Words**

Conferencer: Anna Vas

At the conference, 17 speakers from 9 countries presented their circus research findings in Hungarian, English, French, Russian, and German. The event, which featured simultaneous interpretation, was available to follow worldwide via a live stream.

In the morning session on **Circus Education and Training**, Helmuth Grosscurth reported on the goals and achievements of the ECA, while Annette Schwer illustrated the current state and best practices of education for traveling circus children. Our Hungarian speakers presented the new circus higher education programs, the audio description and mentoring programs at the Capital Circus of Budapest, and the networking and integration of circus pedagogy into university curricula.

The presentations in the afternoon **Circus Heritage and Museology** session were closely linked to the *Wonderful Circus World – International Circus History Exhibition* that opened that day, as the majority

of the speakers were owners or curators of the circus art collections featured in the exhibition. The experts presented the content, concept, methodological perspectives, and practices of their respective collections. Particular emphasis was placed on the professional organization of circus collections and the creation of a currently missing international circus genre dictionary based on scientific consensus. We achieved our goal of having authentic experts present their own practices: national and international approaches to circus heritage, and the methodological diversity of museological research, collection, processing, and presentation, thereby fostering a meaningful dialogue among participants.

During the conference's **closing discussion**, a position supported by the majority was emphasized: the primary task of every nation's circus arts collection is the research, collection, and preservation of its own national circus history heritage. We formulated a common goal: that the public should discover the diverse circus culture of the world in its numerous national birthplaces, through national circus history archives, authentically processed and presented by local experts as a comprehensive collection of unique national relics.

Conference Organizers:

Helmuth Grosscurth,

Managing Director of the European Circus Association (ECA)

Péter Fekete,

Director General of the National Circus Arts Centre and Chairman of the Organising Committee of the Budapest Circus Festival

Emese Joó,

Director of the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts

Tünde Kerülő,

Exhibition Manager of the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts

Andrea Horthy,

Leader of the Mentoring Programme of the National Circus Arts Centre

András Sándor,

Leader of the Educational Programme of the National Circus Arts Centre

CIRCUS,

Education, Heritage

ECA INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE



INVITATION

The Organising Committee of the 15th Budapest Circus Festival and
the European Circus Association (ECA) invites you to the

CIRCUS, EDUCATION, HERITAGE

ECA International Academic Conference.

DATE:

11 January 2024 10⁰⁰ – 17⁰⁰

VENUE:

Museum of Hungarian Agriculture

(Budapest, 14th district, Városliget, Vajdahunyad promenade)

1st floor Conference Hall

DETAILED PROGRAMME:

<https://budapestcircusfestival.hu/>

CONTACT:

conference@circus.hu





HELMUT GROSSCURTH

MANAGING DIRECTOR

European Circus Association (ECA)

(GERMANY)

BIOGRAPHY

He has always been an enthusiastic supporter of the circus arts. After working for many years for a leading consumer goods manufacturer he turned his long-standing hobby of circus into a career and has been Managing Director of the European Circus Association (ECA) since 2013. Through this association, he strives to bring Europe's circus companies together and to promote and preserve the art of circus as part of Europe's cultural heritage. Being stronger together, the ECA aims to ensure that the circus can continue to inspire and entertain children of all ages. This includes all forms of circus, traveling or in permanent buildings, large or small, and with different combinations of artistic performances, acrobats, comedy, and trained animals. Circus comes in many different forms. Together, they offer culture for millions!



The author suggests drinking
Mai Tai Cocktail
whilst reading his essay.

The author suggests listening to
Musical Hair (the music used
by the Marilee Flyers,
the first flying trapeze I witnessed in 1970)
whilst reading his essay.

ECA Goals and Achievements

Abstract

The European Circus Association (ECA) is the umbrella organisation representing professional circus in Europe. Since its foundation in 2002, the ECA has worked along four main lines: securing cultural recognition for circus as a performing art, defending appropriate animal welfare regulation, improving European Union regulations that affect touring circuses, and safeguarding access to education for children who live and travel with circuses. Building on more than two decades of advocacy and coordination, this article presents the ECA's mission, its principal goals from the beginning, and the main achievements to date. It outlines ECA's role as a membership-based network, the annual Circus Symposium in Monte-Carlo, key publications and an EU-commissioned study on circus, activities around intangible cultural heritage, the Big Top Label quality initiative and solidarity actions such as support for circuses in Ukraine. Finally, it introduces the new statutes and strategic priorities adopted in 2024, and reflects on the continuing need for a strong, unified European voice for circus.

Introduction: The European Circus Association

The European Circus Association (ECA) was founded in 2002 as a non-profit, international association to bring together

circus companies, festivals and related organisations across Europe. Today, ECA is recognised as the professional umbrella body for the traditional and contemporary circus sector in many European countries, representing more than 130 member circuses, festivals and associations.¹

Our mission is to promote and protect circus as a living performing art and as part of Europe's cultural heritage. ECA advocates for circus at the European level, provides a platform for information exchange between members, and works closely with partner organisations such as the Fédération Mondiale du Cirque and other European and national cultural networks.

From the beginning, our work has been guided by four central objectives: achieving cultural recognition for circus, securing fair and workable EU regulations for touring companies, defending circus with animals on the basis of high welfare standards, and supporting access to education for children who grow up and travel within circus communities. These four pillars continue to structure both our day-to-day activities and our long-term strategy.

1. Our Goals from the Beginning

1.1 Cultural recognition

For many decades, circus has entertained millions of spectators throughout Europe, yet its artistic and cultural value has often been underestimated. One of ECA's core goals has therefore been to secure explicit recognition of circus as a performing art within cultural policy frameworks at the national and European levels.

Cultural recognition means more than symbolic status. It opens the way to inclusion in funding programmes, cultural strategies, heritage policies and educational initiatives. ECA has consistently

argued that circus must be treated on an equal footing with theatre, dance and music – not only because of its artistic quality and technical excellence, but also because of its social, educational and intercultural contributions.



1.2 EU regulations and mobility

Circus is by definition a mobile art form. Touring across borders is essential for its economic viability and for the circulation of artists, companies and acts. Yet European Union regulations in areas such as visas, work permits, social security, road transport and safety are far from harmonised. For many circus organisations, navigating this regulatory landscape is a major practical challenge.²

From the outset, ECA has therefore aimed to represent the circus sector in discussions with EU institutions and member states on regulatory issues. Our goal is not to weaken standards, but to ensure that legislation takes into account the specific characteristics of touring circuses and remains workable in practice.

1.3 Animal welfare and the future of circus with animals

Animals have traditionally been an integral part of many European circuses. In recent years, however, the use of animals has become a highly politicised

1. <https://www.europeancircus.eu/culture/>

2. <https://www.europeancircus.eu/mobility/>

issue, with several countries introducing partial or total bans on specific species or on all animals in circuses.

ECA's position is clear: any circus that works with animals must respect high standards of animal welfare and comply with relevant legislation. At the same time, we advocate for a legal framework that allows circuses with animals to continue, provided that welfare standards are met and monitored. We work to counter generalised bans that are not based on scientific evidence, and we encourage our members to adopt best practice in animal husbandry, training and transport.³

1.4 Education for travelling children

Children who grow up in circus families face specific educational challenges. Continuous touring means frequent changes of location and school, which can lead to gaps in learning and social exclusion if not adequately addressed.

One of ECA's founding goals has been to improve access to quality education for travelling children. We support co-operation between circus families, specialised "travelling schools", local school authorities and education ministries, and we advocate for flexible solutions that combine educational continuity with the realities of circus life.⁴

2. Twenty-One Years of ECA: Goals and Achievements

2.1 The yearly Circus Symposium in Monte-Carlo

Since its early years, ECA has organised an annual Circus Symposium in Monte-Carlo, usually held alongside the Monte-Carlo International Circus Festival. This symposium has become a key meeting place for circus professionals, experts, policymakers and researchers.

Over more than two decades, the symposium has addressed a wide range of topics: cultural policy, animal welfare, artistic innovation, safety and risk, education, training and many more. The basic idea is simple but powerful: to bring together those who shape circus practice with those who shape circus policy, and to create a space for factual, informed discussion rather than polarised debate.

The continuity of the symposium is itself a notable achievement. It has helped to build trust between circus organi-

sations and public authorities, and has contributed to the emergence of a European community of practice around circus arts and related regulation.

2.2 Publications and documentation

A second area of achievement concerns publications and documentation. Over the years, ECA has produced position papers, briefing notes, reports and guidelines on topics such as animal welfare, safety regulations, education for travelling children and the socio-economic situation of circuses in Europe.

These documents serve several purposes. They help our members to understand complex legal frameworks, they provide evidence and arguments for advocacy at national and European levels, and they contribute to the wider documentation of circus as a social and cultural phenomenon. In collaboration with partner organisations, we also support research, conferences and knowledge exchange initiatives that deepen understanding of circus history, practice and policy.



2.3 EU studies on circus

One of the key milestones in this field were two EU-commissioned studies on the situation of circus arts in Europe, undertaken in 2003⁵ and 2020⁶ with the active participation of ECA. These studies examined the legal, economic and cultural context of circus in EU member states and formulated recommendations on how to support the sector more effectively.

The study 2020 confirmed several points that ECA had long emphasised: the importance of cultural recognition, the need for more coherent and proportionate regulation, the value of circus as family entertainment and as a training

3. <https://www.europeancircus.eu/animals/>

4. <https://www.europeancircus.eu/education/>

5. <https://op.europa.eu/s/Aa5j>

6. <https://op.europa.eu/s/Aa5k>

ground for high-level physical and artistic skills, and the vulnerability of the sector to sudden legal changes, for example in relation to animals.

For ECA, the study provided both a reference document and a tool for advocacy. It also marked an important step in making circus visible within European cultural policy debates.

2.4 Circus as intangible cultural heritage

In recent years, intangible cultural heritage (ICH) has become an important framework for recognising and safeguarding traditional practices, performing arts, social rituals and festive events. As part of the Fédération Mondiale du Cirque, the European Circus Association has been working on bringing circus on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. ECA has actively supported national initiatives to have circus traditions recognised as intangible cultural heritage on the national ICH inventories.

These listings do not fix circus in the past; rather, they acknowledge that circus is a living tradition, transmitted from generation to generation and continuously adapted. Recognition as intangible heritage can strengthen the position of circus in cultural policy, education and funding, and it also affirms the identity and pride of circus families and communities.

By pooling information and experiences from different countries, ECA helps its members to navi-

gate the nomination processes and to connect ICH recognition with broader strategies for cultural promotion and safeguarding. In recent years we have helped secure the inscription of circus on national lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage in several European countries – including the Netherlands, Hungary, Finland, Sweden, Wallonie (French-speaking Belgium), Ireland and Germany – as well as in Chile and Peru in South America.

2.5 Recognition for the best circuses: the Big Top Label⁷

Quality recognition is another strand of our work. Together with partner organisations, ECA has been involved in the creation and promotion of the Big Top Label, a quality label that highlights circuses which meet high professional standards and are committed to artistic excellence and responsible management.

In 2017 the Big Top Label was created by Hungarian MEP István Ujhelyi as a quality-assurance system for the circus sector in Europe. Supported by the ECA, the final decision on each label is taken by an independent committee, on the basis of personal inspections and a detailed checklist prepared by Mr Ujhelyi's cabinet. Since its inception, the Big Top Label has been awarded in 2018 to Circus Krone (*Germany*), Cirque Arlette Gruss (*France*) and Blackpool Tower Circus (*UK*); in 2019 to Circus Gebr. Knie (*Switzerland*), Sirkus Finlandia (*Finland*) and Circus Richter (*Hungary*); in 2022 to Circus Roncalli (*Germany*), Cirkus Brazil Jack (*Sweden*) and Circus Balkanski (*Bulgaria*); and in 2023 to Circo Raluy Legacy (*Spain*), Zippo's Circus (*UK*) and Richter Flórián Cirkusz (*Hungary*).

The label is not a competition prize in the traditional sense; it is more akin to a certification that signals reliability, quality and adherence to certain criteria. For audiences, it serves as a visible sign of trust. For circuses, it can help in discussions with municipalities, sponsors and regulators, and it encourages continuous improvement.



7. <https://www.facebook.com/BigTopLabel/>

In an increasingly competitive entertainment landscape, and at a time when circus is often subject to public scrutiny, initiatives such as the Big Top Label can support the reputation of the art form and those who practise it professionally.

2.6 Support for Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 had immediate and severe consequences for many Ukrainian circus artists and companies. Some lost their workplaces; others were forced to flee or found themselves stranded abroad without resources.

ECA responded by coordinating information, support and solidarity between its members and with partner organisations. Assistance took various forms: helping artists to find temporary engagements in European circuses, providing guidance on visas and residence permits, and mobilising financial and logistical support where possible.

While the circus sector itself faces economic challenges, this episode demonstrated the capacity of the European circus community to act in solidarity and to support colleagues in times of crisis. It also highlighted the need for flexible and humane migration and labour policies for artists at risk.

3. Core Areas of Ongoing Advocacy

The achievements described above are not endpoints; they are steps in a long-term process. In our daily work, the four core areas identified at the foundation of ECA remain at the centre of our advocacy.

3.1 Cultural recognition

We continue to work for the inclusion of circus in national arts councils, cultural funding schemes and cultural strategies, and for the explicit recognition of circus as a performing art in legal and policy documents. This includes dialogue with ministries of culture, participation in cultural forums, and collaboration with other European networks in the performing arts.

ECA also supports the integration of circus into education and training pathways, whether through higher education, conservatoires, vocational schools or non-formal learning programmes. The aim is to ensure that circus is recognised not only in heritage policy, but also in contemporary artistic and educational practice.

3.2 EU regulations and mobility

On the regulatory front, we engage with EU institutions on topics such as posted workers, social security coordination, transport rules, safety, and visa and work permit regimes for third-country nationals.

Our message is consistent: touring circuses must comply with the law, but the law must also be realistic for touring circuses. We advocate for clear, harmonised rules that take into account the specificities of mobile cultural enterprises. Where possible, we work in alliance with other sectors that face similar mobility issues, such as touring theatres, music festivals and live events.

3.3 Animal welfare

ECA will continue to defend the possibility of circuses with animals, as long as high welfare standards are guaranteed and enforced. We support the development and implementation of science-based welfare criteria and codes of conduct, and we encourage circuses to communicate transparently about their practices.

At the same time, we remain vigilant with regard to legislative initiatives that may effectively ban animals in circuses without due consideration of actual welfare conditions. Our aim is not to impose a single model on all circuses, but to preserve the diversity of circus forms – including circuses with and without animals – under a framework of responsibility and respect.

3.4 Education for children living and travelling in the circus

In the field of education, ECA promotes solutions that guarantee children's right to schooling while respecting the travelling lifestyle of circus families. These may include mobile teachers, distance learning, special agreements between schools in different regions or countries, and partnerships with specialised institutions that already have experience with itinerant communities.⁸

We also emphasise that education is not limited to formal schooling. Life in the circus offers rich opportunities for informal learning, skills development and intercultural experience. The challenge is to ensure that these strengths are recognised and complemented, rather than undermined, by the education system.

8. <https://www.europeancircus.eu/education/>



4. New Statutes - New Goals 2024

After more than two decades of activity, ECA adopted new statutes in 2024. The revision process offered an opportunity to clarify our legal structure, update our internal governance and refine our strategic goals in light of the current context. The new statutes reaffirm the four core objectives outlined above, but they also expand our mandate in several directions. They highlight, among other things, the importance of:

- strengthening cooperation with other European and international organisations in the field of culture and live performance;
- supporting research, documentation and museum initiatives related to circus;
- promoting training and professional development for circus artists and staff;
- encouraging sustainable practices and social responsibility within the sector.

In practical terms, the new statutes provide a more robust framework for membership, decision-making and financial management. They are intended to ensure that ECA remains a transparent, democratic and effective organisation capable of representing circus interests at European level.

Conclusion: Circus is Culture for Millions

The European Circus Association was founded with a clear conviction: circus is culture, and it must be recognised, supported and safeguarded as such. Over the past twenty-one years, we have made significant progress towards that goal. We have helped to secure cultural recognition for circus in various countries and at the European Parliament; we have contributed to more informed debates on animal welfare and regulation; we have produced and disseminated knowledge about circus; and we have supported education for travelling children and solidarity within the circus community.

At the same time, the challenges are far from over. Changing social attitudes, evolving EU legislation, economic pressures and the rapid transformation of the cultural sector all affect the future of circus. In this context, ECA's role as a collective voice and a platform for cooperation is more important than ever.

Circus continues to bring joy, wonder and shared experiences to millions of people across Europe. Our task, as the European Circus Association, is to ensure that this art form has a secure and respected place in Europe's cultural landscape – today and for future generations.



ANNETTE SCHWER

Assessor of
the European Network for Travellers (ENTE)
Education Officer of
the European Circus Association (ECA)
Former Headmistress of
the School for Circus Children NRW
Consultant at the Institute
for Individual Support (IfiF)
(GERMANY)

BIOGRAPHY

She is a consultant at the Institute for Individual Support (IfiF), specializing in the support of children of professionally traveling families and young people. In this role, she was elected Education Officer of the European Network for Travellers (ENTE) within the European Circus Association (ECA). In this capacity, she draws on her many years of experience (from 1998 to 2022) as headmistress of the school for circus children in North Rhine-Westphalia, run by the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland.

The author suggests drinking
Aperol Spritz
whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
End of Sky by *Hang Massive*
whilst reading her essay.



Institut für individuelle Förderung und Schulmanagement e.K. – IfiF e.K.,
Analyse•Beratung•Förderung•Online-Learning•Online-Verwaltung•Fortbildung

The Interaction Between Education and Culture as a Means of Securing the Future of the Circus

On the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which describes the child's right to education, a look is taken at the educational situation of children of professional travellers in Europe. In the UN Convention, the right to education has been enshrined as a general "cultural" human right, as described in Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (UN Social Covenant). In this way, an explicit link between education and culture is established. Equal opportunities for education on the journey, at and with the circus on the one hand, but on the other hand also the aspect of preserving culture through education for the circus is internationally linked and anchored.

In this sense, the question arises as to how this educational obligation will be fulfilled in Europe with regard to children who live in circuses and travel with them. In most European countries, compulsory education for children is enshrined in law. Ultimately, it is the parents who are responsi-

ble for this, and the state exercises some control. In Germany, schooling is compulsory! Here, all children have to attend a state-approved school.

Both the ECA and ENTE repeatedly note that children on the journey rarely receive an equal opportunity education and are therefore rarely able to achieve a higher degree or complete a course of study. For this reason, two "Best Practice" films are shown below, which are intended to illustrate what a successful education for children and young people on the journey can look like. In addition, a scientific project from Germany will be addressed, which will deal with the educational opportunities of children on the journey in a large-scale study in 2024.

The aim of this lecture is to take a look at the educational opportunities of children and young people travelling with the circus in order to motivate all European countries to follow the example of the Netherlands and Germany and thus strengthen circus culture from its roots!

Legal Basis and Educational Rights for Children Traveling with Circuses

The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child enshrines the right to education while taking cultural aspects into account—a right that is considered an enforceable legal claim. ECA and ENTE advocate for the implementation of this right specifically for children and young people traveling with circuses.

Challenges and Research Gaps in the Education of Children Traveling with Circuses

No valid figures exist regarding the number of children traveling with circuses in Europe; estimates for Germany are approximately 3,000. This heterogeneous group exists within a tension field between transnational mobility and institutional compulsory schooling, facing systemic disadvantages, institutional barriers, and a lack of recognition for family-based educational practices. Well-founded studies are lacking, while international research indicates discrimination, low school attendance rates, and bullying.

The Significance of Education and Family Recognition

Education is a central individual and social resource, as well as a prerequisite for social participation. The family, as an educational institution, provides familial educational experiences. The social recognition of these experiences is essential, as education alone is not enough; it also requires recognition.

Best Practice Examples and Educational Opportunities for Traveling Circus Children

In Europe, countries such as France (online instruction via CNED), Germany (School for Circus Children NRW), and the Netherlands (Stichting Rijdende School) provide access to education for traveling children. Various circuses finance their own educational offerings, and there are online A-level programs (Abitur) as well as distance learning degree programs (e.g., FernUniversität in Hagen, IU International University of Applied Sciences) for higher education.

Best practice videos on YouTube:

#LS2023: Schule für Circuskinder in NRW

Schooling for families on the move:

blended learning in the Rijdende School



STICHTING
RIJDENDE SCHOOL



Statutory Educational Obligation and Current Challenges

In most European countries, there is a statutory educational obligation for which parents are responsible and the state is accountable. In Germany, this is further reinforced by compulsory school attendance at state-recognized schools. Nevertheless, traveling circus children rarely receive equal educational opportunities and seldom achieve higher qualifications or university degrees.

PHOTOS:

ÁDÁM URBÁN

Goals and Activities to Improve Educational Opportunities for Circus Children

The objective is to enhance the educational prospects of traveling circus children and to strengthen circus culture, drawing inspiration from successful models in the Netherlands and Germany. ECA and ENTE advocate for educational rights, maintain contact with ministries of education, raise awareness within relevant committees, assist circus directors in securing state refinancing, and provide guidance to parents.





KAMILLA REIDL

RECTOR,
DANCER,
DANCE TEACHER

Budapest Circus Arts and
Contemporary Dance College
(HUNGARY)

BIOGRAPHY

She has been a key player in Hungarian dance and art education since 1998. She earned a dance teacher diploma and became a certified teacher and public education leader in 2016. Her teaching work has also been accompanied by leadership tasks since 2010: from 2020, she has been the coordinating vice-rector of BCKF, and rector from 2023. She has obtained an international qualification as a Hatha Yoga instructor and is currently pursuing an MA in sports mental training. Her research and development areas include the mental health of artistic practice, innovations in learning methodologies, and the development of circus arts training and higher education structures. Her work encompasses a wide spectrum of professional quality assurance, institutional management, and pedagogical renewal.

The author suggests drinking
Irsai Olivér dry white wine
whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
End of Sky by Hang Massive
whilst reading her essay.

The Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College is a space and community for the learning, teaching, research and development of time-based, movement-based performing arts. With the start of the Circus Arts degree courses in 2023, the College will continue the pioneering work in the new field of performing arts that began 40 years ago in contemporary dance.

Integration of Circus Arts Courses into the Hungarian Higher Education System

My name is Kamilla Reidl, Head and Acting Rector of the Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College. I have been working at the College since its foundation and studied at its predecessor institutions myself, so I have decades of experience and insight into the integration of contemporary dance into higher education.

Context

The Budapest Contemporary Dance College was established on 14 June 2004, its founder and rector until 14 June 2023 was Iván Angelus, and also until June 2023 it was funded by the New Performing Arts Foundation. The first courses started in a four-year college structure, with courses in Contemporary Dance Artist, Contemporary Dance Teacher and Contemporary Dance Choreographer. After the transition to the Bologna structure, the courses continued as Dance Artist BA and Dance Teacher MA both with Contemporary Dance specialisation. In response to the changes in the Hungarian educational and cultural policies, the College continued to operate as an international institution from 2014, making its courses available to foreign students.

In our country, Baross Imre Circus School has a long tradition of training circus artists at the institutional level.

The College's traditions, pedagogical methods and experience can help the process of bringing circus arts productions to an artistic level. It is the contemporary dance's fusionistic approach that allows circus arts courses to incorporate the pedagogical methods that make our College outstanding.

There is no doubt that one can think scientifically in the field of dance - the College has already been employing this approach - and now it can help the circus arts world to do so. Our strategic partner, the Capital Circus of Budapest, is already at the forefront of this. Among other things, they have established a library and a circus museum, and conduct research.

Transformation Process

In 2019, at the request of the National Centre for Circus Arts, we started to expand the training structure to ensure the long-term stability of the College. As a result of this process, since 1 August 2023 the institution has been operating under the name of Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College, funded by the Circus Arts Higher Education Non-Profit Limited Liability Company.



We went through a process of setting up and establishing courses and their specialisations, which was a bureaucratic process that took years. Of course, this has been backed up by a professional work involving a number of experts and producing a lot of valuable internal material.

In September 2023, the new higher education courses in circus arts were launched: the Circus Artist BA course with a specialisation in equestrian acrobatics and clowning, and the Dance and Rehearsal Coaching BA course with a specialisation in circus dance. In the expanded structure, the different training areas will be developed in cooperation with each other, sharing pedagogical experience in the fields of contemporary dance and circus arts.

We have also faced many challenges during the accreditation process, and since then we have been going through a complete organisational development process. Our single course profile has grown into a more complex course structure.

Presentation of the Training Structure

The genres and teachers of the Circus Arts BA degree course

In addition to the chosen genres, students also study other complementary genres and develop their skills, thus strengthening their main area of expertise. For this purpose, the different courses work closely together. In certain sessions, they participate in a matrix system with the dance artist students.

In September 2023 students could choose between the main disciplines of Equestrian Acrobatics and Clowning. From September 2024, students can also apply for our Aerial Dance and Aerial Acrobatics courses. From 2025, we will be offering individual training courses for all genres.

- Equestrian Acrobat BA degree course: The Equestrian Acrobat course aims to develop a way of life that follows the traditions of the circus arts and is based on the highly disciplined, humble, community-based, unconditional devotion to each other and to life, with knowledge and practice of Hungarian equestrian culture at its core. The training is time-consuming, so we encourage the presence of those students who will dedicate the next stage of their lives to living and experiencing this way of life.



- Clown BA degree course: During the course there is only one element that everyone is equally obliged to learn: the art of clowning. Although, in principle, a clown does not necessarily have to play music, dance, mime, do acrobatics or juggle, it is part of the tradition of this profession that a clown incorporates other art disciplines into his act. Our college offers a unique opportunity to develop individual skills within the institution. This provides interdisciplinary study opportunities for all our clown, circus arts and dance students wishing to develop skills related to other disciplines. These are available through compulsory and optional classes.





- *Aerial dance & Aerial Acrobatics course* **Aerial dance & Aerial Acrobatics course:** In addition to practical knowledge a BA degree from our College also develops an artistic analytical mindset. It enables circus artists with a bachelor of arts degree to be able to perform as individual aerial acrobats or as part of a group. They will be able to create a new, independent act but, in addition to the technical skills, they must also be aware of the artistic content and message-carrying potential of the skills acquired.

Dance BA courses

We train our students in two specialisations in dance.

The mission of the BA in Contemporary Dance is to foster the development and artistic growth of young talents who wish to become a performer in the field of contemporary dance. Our aim is for students to acquire up-to-date and diverse knowledge of dance techniques and the essential practice in performing and the process of creation during their three years of college, and to graduate with a BA de-

gree in Dance. The course also aims to provide those interested in becoming a professional dancer with orientation and preparation for the pathway to dance and a BA degree. This will be supported by preparatory programs and workshops for admission and the course itself. We hope that the pedagogical and educational activities of the course and the work of the teachers and former students using the tools of the arts bring core values to the cultural and social spheres of life.





- ***Dance & Rehearsal Coaching (theatre dance specialisation)***: The three-year, full-time course prepares students primarily for dancing in the circus world. Circus dancers are proficient in a wide range of dance styles, are able to capture and perform the stylistic and performance qualities of each genre, and dance not only on the ground but also in the air. They are also open to experimenting and developing themselves in different circus genres. They are able to contribute creatively to the realisation of the director/choreographer's concept. During the course, students will be mentally and practically prepared to conduct rehearsals, to coordinate the work of all participants in a re-

hearsal process. They will follow and convey an appropriate professional communication and behaviour. They will also learn the skills of self-marketing and communication with colleagues and the media which are necessary for a successful career. In addition to developing their dancing qualities, students will acquire the basics of aerial acrobatics, thus gaining a new profession that will give them a much better chance of entering the international cultural arena. They will also have the opportunity to see the work of the Dance Ensemble of the Capital Circus of Budapest and even follow the preparation process of one of their performances.

Teacher Training Courses

Currently, our teacher training program is taking place in the field of dance. In the academic year 2024, we will start our Circus Arts Teacher MA course, headed by Péter Fekete.

Head of Teacher Training Department and Head of Dance Teacher MA course is Iván Angelus, Ph.D. The two-year teacher training course prepares students for pedagogical work in contemporary dance and other movement-based arts. The main areas of training are:

- Teaching integrated experiential dance practice and theory
- Teaching creativity development
- Teaching the development of social skills

The two-year course is designed for those who, with a background and routine in the performing arts, are willing to undertake 100% intensive individual and group work in order to find their own pedagogical path.

Academic Progression Support

Our College has a high number of foreign students, with applicants coming from all over the world, from Mexico to Finland and China. Our common language of instruction is English.

All our students have a mentor to support them in their studies and to reduce drop-outs. We are developing our Teacher Support System based on the mentoring of our students, helping to maintain the mental health of our colleagues and supporting their continuous pedagogical and professional development.

The heads of year hold weekly meetings to discuss problems and tasks to be solved.

An academic year at the College consists of 5 periods with school breaks in between. We adapt our assessment system to these periods. At the beginning of each period, students submit a work plan and a plan for their creative work, and at the end of the period they write a summary of their progress. Each teacher sends a written evaluation to the student, and the mentor also helps with the summary of what to focus on for the next period.

The whole system of assessment of the student's performance and progress throughout the studies, as well as its individual elements, is designed solely to support the student. Therefore, the systems of assessment, feedback and support, orientation and assistance are intertwined. Such assessment is based on the use of personal, verbal communication and textual, graphic, photographic and video documents generated during the operation of the Mentoring System.

Our mentoring system: the role of the school is to provide the framework and background for this connection: the successful presence of the student - teacher - mentor triangle: it lists those who can be invited to do this, usually from among the school's former students and former or current teachers and staff. In some cases more experienced current students from senior years may also be asked to mentor. The mentor will provide support, encouragement based on their own personal experience and knowledge of the school's approach and help identify difficulties and find solutions. The mentor does not replace the teacher, does not solve the problems for the student, but "only" catalyses and helps the student's progress.

The mentor usually assists the student throughout the entire period of study. If necessary, the student, the mentor or the school will take the initiative to change the mentor or choose a new one. The mentor is usually a volunteer and provides unpaid support for the pedagogical and artistic work. In exceptional cases, the College may reimburse the mentor.

Our Additional Programs

Our activities are not limited to training our students. We offer educational activities for teachers and those interested in our courses through a range of other events. We offer a full academic year of preparatory courses for students in our "LEAP" program and we also visit vocational training institutions. We run an online mentoring program for rural and international students and organize open days to give them a personal insight into our work. Our 30-hour accredited Circus Pedagogy course is aimed at teachers in public education.

Future Plans

While respecting tradition, we want to move forward and progress in an innovative way.

In the field of infrastructure: completing the construction of our own campus.

In the field of education: launching new courses, raising the profile of the supporting professions: training circus directors, technicians and theoreticians, and supporting scientific work.

In the field of finance: our scholarship system is exceptional, helping to pay the high tuition fees.

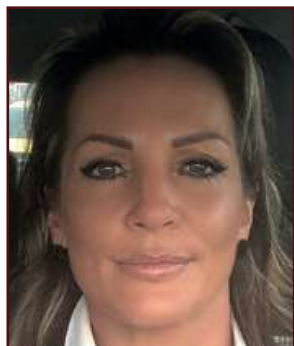
We would expand our circle of patrons. At present, the support of the Soroptimist Foundation and the Capital Circus of Budapest is outstanding, but private individuals also contribute to support students' tuition fees.

In the field of integration, one of our priorities continues to be attracting foreign students. Seeking opportunities for cooperation with other universities and professional training centres.

PHOTOS BY:
VIKTORIA DANYI



PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN



ANDREA HORTHY

HEAD OF THE MENTORING PROGRAM,
PROJECT MANAGER,
ENTREPRENEUR

National Circus Arts Centre
(HUNGARY)

BIOGRAPHY

The Mentoring Program leader, who was born in Budapest, began her studies in psychology, but eventually spent her early professional years in a family business. Later, she participated in municipal development and local-government projects as a consultant. As a student of MIIBS - Madison International Institute & Business School, she earned BA and MA degrees in educational sciences. She subsequently held several significant private-sector projects and marketing management positions, while also managing her own enterprises.

In 2023, she was appointed head of the Mentoring Program of the National Circus Arts Center. Under her leadership, the constantly growing network now connects 263 clubs and more than ten thousand amateur circus artists within and beyond the borders, in close cooperation with BIAK - Baross Imre Circus and Performing Arts Academy, BCDC - Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College, and the Capital Circus of Budapest.

From 2025, she has been a student of the Circus Arts Teacher MA program at the Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College.

The author suggests drinking
Cotton Candy Martini
whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
Az már nem én lennék (Elisabeth Musical)
whilst reading her essay.

The circus is an international performing art: its centuries-old terminology reflects this. Different sources often refer to the genres and categorize them in many different ways. The aim of science is to create a consensual, well-defined circus vocabulary, a language of circus science – which already exists for other arts – to enable circus phenomena to be professionally defined, described clearly and accurately for all, and thus linked to other disciplines.

Circus Mentoring Program

Mentoring Amateur, Self-organizing Circus Communities in Hungary

The Circus Mentoring Program, started by the National Circus Arts Center, was launched in September 2023 and our main goal was to gather amateur, self-organizing circus communities in Hungary, organize them into a network and support their work. Since no one else in the world - in the field of circus arts - had started to create a mentor pro-

gram of this size and completely free of charge, developing it was quite a challenge. The evolution of the program was particularly interesting; the first reactions of the mentees we approached and how the future operation of the Mentoring program was outlined day by day.



As a project manager, compiling the database was not an easy task either. Although I have been a fan and practitioner of circus arts for years, compiling the circus genres also held surprises for me. The question was what kind of circus arts branches amateur communities could practice in addition to the basic aerial gymnastics, equestrian acrobatics and juggling? I listed this first and was surprised to find that the range within which I could search for amateur clubs was very wide. Imagine, there is even an axe throwing association in Hungary.

When my basic database was compiled along the circus genres (which counted more than 150 (!) clubs in two weeks and has been continuously expanding since then), I contacted the future mentees one by one to reconcile the data I had with them. Moreover, the number of members of the

far from complete 150 clubs, when projected to the entire population of Hungary, means that approximately every 600th person practices some branch of circus art, even if they are infants or pensioners. The number of amateur aerial gymnasts alone in Hungary is converging towards 6,000 people.



The first reactions were very interesting, because they were extremely suspicious of the offered partnership assistance. What do we have to give in return? How much does this mentoring cost? - was the most frequently asked question. After we clarified that this program was dreamed up by the Director General as a free and one-sided support, the next question came: what exactly does this mentoring program consist of? I quickly realized that I should also have a clear idea in my head of what this partnership would actually look like. I obviously received some guidance from the management about our options, but in practice I had to constantly improvise and figure out without additional financial resources how we could most effectively build and operate the partnership relationships with our existing resources.

Interestingly, instead of just a few minutes of data reconciliation, in most cases our mentees immediately started talking about specifics. Through these conversations, I could write a separate study on how the opportunities for amateur clubs have changed in recent years, the rise or decline in each sport and art form, how the pandemic period affected clubs, who was affected the most, who survived, and which genres were most sensitive to Covid closures.

As a specific example, I would mention that in Hungary, for some reason, juggling clubs reacted the worst to the closures and most of them did not re-form even after the Covid period ended. Or the trampoline sections operating within gymnastics clubs and enjoying great popularity in recent years almost without exception were on the verge of extinction. They clearly explained this with financial reasons, which are understandable, since gymnastics clubs struggling with financial difficulties cannot replace a professional trampoline.



It was clear that clubs have completely different needs, demands, and problems to solve, not only by genre, but also by region. That is why it quickly became clear that we would develop this mentoring program together with our mentees, tailored to their needs.

The few minutes of data reconciliations in most cases turned into conversations that could have been tens of minutes of psychotherapy, so I practically flowed into the lives of most of the mentored clubs like a fairy godmother. On the one hand, the openness and trust they showed in me was very honorable, which I obviously owed to the Circus Arts Center, and on the other hand, it placed a great responsibility on me.

After the first data reconciliations, we held a mentor meeting with the Director General in the form of watching a circus performance and discussion. The leaders of the mentored clubs arrived from all over the country, and after the performance, we had a pleasant and constructive discussion with those present.

After the first personal conversation, we started receiving specific requests and ideas. It was interesting that our mentees asked for things that were absolutely achievable, and we received many ideas from them for future cooperation. To mention specifics; there is an acrobat club that is expanding its activities with aerial gymnastics. They asked for our help with rigging and also asked for safety training regarding suspensions. We were happy to receive the request, as unfortunately, tragic accidents resulting from suspensions have also occurred recently, even in professional circuses, so we decided that in the future we will provide free training in this direction to our mentees at the Baross Imre Artist training Academy and the Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College.



Based on the idea of the Director General, we also prepared our mentor plaques, which we handed over to our mentees. In addition to the fact that they considered it a great honor and proudly communicated on their social media platforms the fact that they had indeed become official partners of the National Circus Arts Center and the Capital Circus of Budapest, in some sports this also gave them absolute legitimacy.



For example, the case of highliners is unique in Hungary. In our country, the most forests are highly protected, and the local foresters are their “terrifying” guardians. These athletes started out as slackliners in smaller communities and parks. Professionals often teach young people for free and know exactly how to attach their equipment to the trees so that they don’t get damaged. If they tie higher, they also tie

themselves to their ropes, so accidents are rare. The braver ones want to go even higher, so they go out of the parks into the forests, where they spend a long time installing and securely attaching their equipment. Then, when the experience, the training, the adrenaline could finally come, the local forester appears and distracts them from the scene like criminals.





Our partnership gave them real legitimacy. Officially, as the head of the Mentoring program of the National Circus Arts Center, I contacted the forestry departments, we started a dialogue regarding which forests and where our mentees would be allowed to train. At the same time, we provided the highliners with the opportunity to practice in the winter at our own Circus Camp.

Since we launched our mentoring program before Christmas, several leaders asked to reward their best competitors with circus tickets. In some cases, the unexpected gift brought tears to the children's eyes. They felt it was a special honor.

We were there for the gala celebration of the head of the artistic cycling department – Martin Schön – retiring from active competition and we were

able to recognize his career so far with a ticket to the Budapest International Circus Festival. They asked us to teach them unique choreography as mentors, which they will be able to use in future events beyond competing.

Or we could hand out circus tickets in a charity raffle at the new riding school and petting zoo of the equestrian acrobats of Dabas, and we also checked out their winter training opportunities. They asked us for a vaulting harness for their new horse as a mentoring aid and that I vault with them again after a 40-year hiatus... Well, that included the little rascals laughing at me and the Director General can't pay me for that, but I'm proud to say that I didn't bring shame to the Circus.

This also describes the relationship that I have unintentionally developed with the leaders and members of the mentored clubs as the head of the Mentoring program. If we want to provide real help to our mentees, we need to get to know them closely and sometimes participate in their everyday lives, their difficulties and successes. We become close to each other unintentionally, which makes it very difficult to think objectively. Although the zero point of the program was barely 4 months ago, I am slowly getting to know the members of the clubs one by one, not just the leaders. I meet them, I love them. I know their family background, their opportunities, their goals, their desires, the obstacles and opportunities they face. As we move forward from partner to partner, the Mentoring program becomes more difficult, since every club has faces, stories, experiences and it is very difficult to remain objective.

In parallel, our Mentoring program was also included in the Regional Cultural Program of the National Institute of Culture, which is under the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Innovation. The state institution mainly focused on the catch-up and culture of the countryside, so we selected 20 mentored clubs from my own list, which we

prioritized, and now, with the help of the Hungarian state, we continued the work we had already started and jointly created 20 “pilot programs”.



In addition to all of this, we also provide all of our mentees with the opportunity for their leaders to participate in further training at the Baross Imre Artist training Academy or the Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College, to learn from highly qualified teachers and former circus artists, and thus to educate the circus artists of the future even more effectively and professionally.

It was also necessary to dispel the misconception that only students with special abilities or descendants of old circus families are admitted to the artist training. Thanks to the Mentoring program, more and more people in Hungary now know that with some talent, but mostly with perseverance, courage and diligence, almost anyone can become an outstanding circus artist. We believe that values that our young people can experience through circus art, such as interdependence in a good sense, trust, cohesion, humility, respect and creative art, will represent an increasingly greater value again. We are working on this, and we also learn by teaching our mentees to do this. Because helping is a privilege.



Updated to January 2024, the barely two and a half year old Mentoring Program is constantly growing, developing and changing its methodology keeping in mind the needs of the mentees. The program is growing exponentially both in terms of number and opportunities. Currently, 262 amateur clubs in 19 counties with over 10,000 students belong to the network.





ANDRÁS SÁNDOR

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM LEADER

National Circus Arts Centre
(HUNGARY)

The author suggests drinking
Fanta orange
whilst reading his essay.

The author suggests listening to
Sarà perché ti amo by *Ricchi e Poveri*
whilst reading his essay.

BIOGRAPHY

Since 2019, he has been working at the National Circus Arts Centre, first as Coordinator of Circus Education Programs, and later as Educational Program Manager. He has coordinated and led numerous circus-themed events. He has authored several articles and studies on circus pedagogy. Since 2021, he has been teaching at the Imre Baross Academy of Circus and Performing Arts. In 2025, on the occasion of the Hungarian Culture Day, he received a Certificate of Recognition from the Minister for Culture and Innovation. Since 2025, he has been a student at the Budapest College of Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance. His main field of research is the theory and practice of skill development in the circus arts.

Circus Network-Building in Hungary: "Learn Circus!"

Skill Development in Educational and Cultural Institutions

Introduction

Within the Hungarian arts scene—and increasingly among audiences—it has become widely recognized that the circus is no longer merely a form of entertainment. Today, circus arts are understood as a fully fledged artistic discipline, equal to other performing art forms. Circus possesses aesthetic value, conveys meaning, transmits cultural and ethical insights, and is capable of producing cathartic experiences. It has become a cultural axiom that the art of the circus artist is an integral branch of the performing arts: a distinctive bodily art form accompanied by music, shaped through choreographed movement, incorporating elements of acting, and placing physical mastery at its centre.

Far fewer people are aware that circus can also serve explicitly pedagogical purposes. Its unique movements and specialized equipment make it ideally suited for experiential, practice-based learning. Circus pedagogy employs circus phenomena with deliberate educational intent. This field, situated within cultural pedagogy, applies methods derived from arts education and develops competencies that are less emphasised in formal schooling, through engaging, participatory, and personally meaningful activities. Participation, interactivity, and play are core principles of

circus pedagogy. Circus-based skill development forms an integral part of the wider pedagogical approach in which the needs of circus arts, public education, and society intersect. Its characteristic features include accessibility free of charge, the absence of age limitations, and a high degree of temporal and spatial flexibility.



Circus skill development embodies a complex set of educational principles: it contributes to personal well-being, supports the mitigation of social disadvantages, and fosters cognitive, neurological, and motor development. It is directly connected to the institutional system of public education. Through foundational techniques, movement patterns, and the physical vocabulary of circus arts, participants acquire skills that play a substantial role in their broader development. Throughout these sessions, children and young people refine their fine motor coordination, concentration, social competence, and self-image, alongside their patience, empathy, and cooperative abilities. Circus-based learning has well-documented beneficial effects on cognitive development and nurtures both coordination and creative skills. Hungarian research has likewise demonstrated the developmental impact of circus equipment on the physical and intellectual growth of young people.

Circus skill development offers support in overcoming disadvantage and addressing learning or behavioural difficulties. Progress in circus equipment use is the product of the learning process itself, shaped by factors such as learning speed, memory, creativity, and the ability to apply knowledge independently. The diversity of tasks and the opportunity for personal expression enhance participants' confidence and motivation. Circus activities engage the whole personality—emotionally, mentally, and physically. Success in handling circus equipment relies on self-discipline, motivation, and focus. The most commonly used tools include spinning plates, juggling balls, and the tightwire. Participants learn not only the manipulation of these props but also their safe and responsible use. Older learners are given greater autonomy in selecting equipment, reinforcing decision-making, goal-setting, perseverance, teamwork, tolerance, trust-building, and self-confidence. As participants progress toward their individual goals, their competencies evolve simultaneously and continuously, while their emerging personalities and social roles within the group become increasingly visible.

For a decade, the National Circus Arts Centre has operated travelling circus-pedagogy workshops across Hungary. During this time, it has established professional partnerships with hundreds of primary educational institutions and provided thousands of children with opportunities to try circus equipment and acquire foundational technical skills. The “Learn Circus!” programme guarantees high-quality performing arts experiences and access to circus tools regardless of financial, social, or geographical circumstances, or the level of cultural capital available in a given region.

The programme began as an institutionally supported initiative, first by invitation and later through an application-based system. The National Circus Arts Centre assumed responsibility for all associated tasks: call management, organ-

isational logistics, partner communication, administration and operations, implementation, marketing, follow-up, and mentoring.



The 2023–2024 academic year brought significant momentum and national visibility to the programme through the Petőfi Cultural Programme, launched by the Government of Hungary and implemented by the National Institute of Culture. This initiative aimed to support complex, value-driven cultural services that enable citizens in the targeted regions to engage meaningfully with culture, while also delivering high-quality performing arts experiences at the micro-regional level through strategic cultural institutions. Following the successful application of the National Circus Arts Centre, the “Learn Circus!” programme reached participants across Hungary: in 19 counties, 42 settlements, through 126 sessions, engaging a total of 3,713 young people.

Comprehensive documentation exists, and the institution has already synthesised and systematised the professional insights gained. The large sample size generated by thousands of participants allows for empirically grounded, academically rigorous research. The aim of this study is to share these findings with interested readers; to our knowledge, this is the first extensive examination of the methodology and practice of circus-based skill development.

Theoretical Frameworks

Circus arts serve to satisfy innate human impulses for play and creativity. One of the medium’s most distinctive qualities lies in its capacity to provide immediate, first-hand experiences. Even children who have never attended a circus performance form mental images or ideas about the art form. Circus permeates childhood with a unique atmosphere and worldview, offering a rich cultural resource to participating children and an inexhaustible repertoire of activities and interpretive possibilities to the facilitator. Reception-oriented and arts-pedagogical approaches form the foundation of circus skills development. In line with constructivist pedagogy, children are encouraged to discover and shape knowledge independently, thereby becoming active agents in the learning process. While the knowledge base of circus pedagogy remains the facilitator’s domain, the direction of each session is always adjusted according to the participants’ mood, emotions, and prior circus-related experiences. It is therefore essential to generate interest and elicit relevant prior experiences before beginning practical circus skills exercises. Since most children possess some first-hand or imagined experience of the circus, it is advisable to allow sufficient space for them to express these experiences. The dual objective is to ensure that the session centres on the children while bringing to the surface knowledge and skills that the facilitator can reference and build upon.

Perspective-shifting, a key arts-pedagogical technique, is fundamental at this stage: the chosen circus theme is structured in response to participants’ reactions and feedback. Most methods employed draw from the traditions of reception-focused, competence-oriented teaching and form part of classical circus pedagogy integrated into complex circus-educational approaches. These methods

align with the methodologies of formal education, interpreting circus phenomena and basic concepts through subject-specific pedagogical tools while connecting them with broader areas of knowledge and competencies. Consequently, preliminary theoretical knowledge is inseparable from subsequent practical skill development, providing reference points and depth of understanding for organised sessions. Classical circus pedagogy emphasises the unity of thinking, intelligence, and competence, balancing theoretical understanding with practical skill development to meet

the needs of both circus practice and school-based teaching. At the same time, it provides children opportunities for self-discovery, exploration of their environment, and the development of hidden abilities. This approach is later complemented by non-formal arts-pedagogical methodologies that underpin circus skills development.



Circus skills development is unique in drawing simultaneously from three subfields of circus pedagogy. First, it provides playful engagement with circus movement, through which participants learn diligence, creativity, and cooperation. Second, it addresses social challenges, enhancing the chances of success for individuals or groups facing social disadvantage, while associating participation with encouragement, joy, and achievement. Third, it promotes cognitive and motor development, and contributes to the management of learning and behavioural difficulties. Circus skills development thus serves multiple pedagogical aims while facilitating self-understanding, uncovering hidden talents, and nurturing potential. The methodology evolved in Hungary during the 2000s, influenced by the contemporary circus approach developed by the Hungarian Juggling Association and institutionalised in 2019 at the Budapest Circus Arts Centre. This approach opened new avenues for sharing circus knowledge and

encouraging participation, making circus no longer the exclusive domain of circus professionals, but accessible to all. Its openness allows any circus genre—juggling, tightrope, acrobatics—to be learned, practiced, and performed through participatory and cooperative learning, generating joy and a sense of achievement for both individuals and communities.

The “Learn Circus!” programme represents a mobile circus pedagogy workshop for primary and secondary school students, introducing and practicing fundamental circus movements—such as juggling, balancing, and pyramid building—within educational and cultural institutions, tailored to the needs of schools and communities. Physical movement is central to the programme, transforming classical circus arts from passive observation into active participation, opening circus to everyone and inspiring engagement. Fine-motor skill development is prioritised, fostering affective and cognitive growth while simultaneously enhancing personal and social competencies essential both within and beyond the circus. Participation may also reveal talents leading to professional circus education. The programme emphasises the multiple intelligences approach, providing a tabula rasa where school grades and prior academic performance neither advantage nor disadvantage participants. The programme foregrounds less-developed areas of intelligence, ensuring success for all children, not only the academically strongest. The essence of circus skills development is to guarantee access to circus arts and the opportunity to participate, making the unique world of circus accessible, comprehensible, and appreciated by all. Sustainability is supported by the programme’s free-of-charge structure, flexible age range, timing, and location, with emphasis on physical activity, resulting in a balanced development across cognitive, affective, and motor domains. Circus skills development is unmatched in arts pedagogy for its capacity to stimulate all

domains of intelligence, temperaments, learning strategies, abilities, talents, and challenges, allowing everyone to participate. The integration of learning, emotional engagement, movement, participation, motivation, and joy creates a highly effective and valuable programme within public education and cultural engagement.



The warm-up phase employs a variety of widely used competence-development techniques grounded in arts-pedagogical ice-breaking methods. At the beginning of a session, a simple game, activity, or round of questions assesses participants' prior experiences and ideas, which serve as a basis for connecting with them throughout the programme. It is recommended to use a "less is more" approach during warm-up, selecting a single, meaningful circus-pedagogical technique to ensure depth and personal engagement, avoiding irrelevant or distracting elements. Designing this phase requires prior knowledge of the group and clear pedagogical objectives, ensuring the warm-up seamlessly transitions into practical skill development. Even if some games are borrowed from school pedagogy, the facilitator maintains a partnership approach, avoiding hierarchical or disciplinary methods, favouring dialogue and an expert-to-expert relationship with participants. Circus-specific language should be consistently employed, with terminology explained and repeated for understanding. Neutrality is crucial; the focus remains on participatory circus pedagogy.

Warm-up is indispensable prior to any physical activity, including circus skills development. A general warm-up pre-

pares muscular, joint, cardiovascular, sensory, and nervous systems, gradually transitioning the body from rest to activity. Its aims are to prepare children physically and mentally for the demands of circus practice, enhance performance, and reduce injury risk. The warm-up typically lasts 12-15 minutes and is divided into five sequential exercise blocks: mild stretching, circulation-enhancing exercises, primary stretching, specialised circulation enhancement, and strengthening. Exercises begin with loosening stiff muscles, including ankles, knees, and hips, followed by low-intensity movements such as hip circles, knee bends and extensions, alternating leg lifts, and ankle rotations, preparing the body for running, skipping, and jumping. Primary stretching extends all major muscles and increases joint mobility, including head rotations, shoulder and elbow circles, and wrist rotations. The fourth block supports cardiovascular readiness for running and jumping, using exercises such as four-count burpees and "Indian jumps." The final stage focuses on strengthening and local circulation, incorporating squats, lunges, back and hip lifts, and leg raises. Detailed descriptions can be found in the National Physical Education Curriculum for Grades 5-8.

Practical Considerations In the 2023-2024 school year, more than 800 domestic municipalities joined the Petöfi Cultural Program. Among them, 45 settlements were selected by the organizers of the National Circus Arts Center's "Learn Circus!" circus skills development program for educational and cultural institutions. The selection criteria included the geographical location of the settlement, the presence of a relevant target group, the objectives intended to be achieved with the program, the availability of necessary technical conditions, and the infrastructure of the host venue. A needs assessment was always justified, allowing the selection of municipalities most suitable for circus skills development.

From the institutional side, the participants were instructors whose profiles matched the expectations of the maintainer, the applicant, and the target group. They possessed sufficient circus technical skills, paid attention to safety, were in good physical condition, and had both performance and creative abilities. Their work also required essential pedagogical skills, such as structured thinking, thematic planning, observation and feedback, knowledge of group dynamics, and collaboration. Other important personal traits

and teaching styles included: allowing freedom and openness, adaptability, consistency, providing emotional and cognitive safety, empathy, accepting mistakes, avoiding over-personalization, acceptance, and leadership skills.

From the municipal side, the organizers maintained contact with school principals, class teachers, PE or other specialist teachers, staff from the county offices of the National Institute of Culture, and local cultural coordinators. The target group's profile and needs were highly diverse. Excellent cooperation, working relationships, and helpfulness developed between the circus instructors and the municipal representatives. According to the needs assessment forms, applicants' intentions were at least as diverse as the target groups themselves. These intentions could be at the individual, social, institutional, or societal level.



For example, one school principal simply wanted to provide more physical activity for their students. A PE teacher wished to introduce new movement forms and playful tools. A local community organizer wanted to strengthen group cohesion among local children through circus skills development. Some invited Roma youth from surrounding villages to the district center's cultural house to overcome disadvantages through circus activities. Many municipalities worked with Roma

adolescents and groups to restore their self-confidence and show them what they can achieve through perseverance. Another goal was to help participants find themselves and achieve their plans with sufficient self-confidence.

Circus skills development impacted the individual, the group, and society. Roma youth were motivated, their self-image improved, and group cohesion strengthened; non-Roma youth became more sensitive toward their Roma peers. The program was structured as a three-session series, with a maximum of thirty students per group. Two circus instructors were assigned per group. Participants were 5th–8th graders, i.e., adolescents, whose motor skills were suitable for learning to juggle three balls. Group composition remained fixed throughout the consecutive sessions to ensure continuous development.

In addition to the two circus instructors, a supervising adult (teacher, regional coordinator from the National Institute of Culture, or local cultural organizer) was usually present. Although they did not have circus skills, their presence was useful. Session duration was 60–90 minutes, depending on the group's concentration capacity. Venues varied, but most met the requirements regarding floor space, ceiling height, and infrastructure, such as school gyms or community centers. The National Circus Arts Center provided all circus props and equipment. Logistically, vehicles needed to be available continuously, municipalities had to be notified promptly and scheduled efficiently, and sessions were implemented cost-effectively and in an environmentally conscious way.

The program's goals were as colorful and complex as circus pedagogy itself: teaching circus skills, creating a sense of community, and providing artistic experience. Various methods can be used to engage and orient the group, such as mind maps, cluster diagrams, or spider diagrams. These allow students to record thoughts, concepts,

or prior experiences related to the circus. This phase usually elicits high student participation. Typical topics include well-known circus genres, artist skills, experiences related to traveling or stationary circuses, and associated feelings. Students may also explore circus venues (ring, audience area), creators (artists), and related activities (games, pantomime, juggling, magic tricks, applause, bowing), as well as famous domestic and international circuses.



Other warm-up exercises include sharing favorite or most surprising circus experiences through paired or small-group discussions, or the “Stand in Pairs!” method, where students walk around until instructed to form pairs and share their circus experiences.

During this phase, instructors can also introduce circus roles and teamwork, demonstrating that beyond visible performers (magicians, clowns, acrobats, aerialists, jugglers), many behind-the-scenes staff contribute to a production’s success (sound technicians, lighting, ticket sellers, directors, stage managers, costume and prop assistants). A preliminary discussion of artists’ emotions and thoughts (through drama techniques such as “inner voices”) helps students empathize and reflect. Students can then identify personal traits essential for circus performances, consider where these traits appear in circus scenarios, and reflect on their presence or absence in their own lives. This connects to broader life skills. Key values to explore include teamwork, attention, perseverance, physical fitness, responsibility, commitment, self-control, creativity, risk-taking, social skills, growth

mindset, and self-confidence. The first skill-building session introduces simple circus props like spinning plates, which develop wrist motion, rhythm, and body awareness. Students begin with plate handling on the stick, progressing through various tricks and variations. Success in spinning plates promotes motivation and confidence, reinforcing the program’s principle: everyone excels in something, and everyone has different strengths. The second session introduces a more complex skill: juggling three balls. Juggling has been part of human culture since ancient times, evidenced by Egyptian and Chinese artifacts. Juggling benefits cognitive and physical development, improves neural pathways, reduces anxiety, and enhances self-confidence. It develops goal-directed activity, holistic attention, rhythm, directional changes, and sensorimotor functions—critical for executive function and cognitive success.



A structured learning approach starts with one ball, then two, and finally three, gradually introducing the “cascade” pattern. Instructors provide individualized pacing and guidance, using visualization techniques such as imagining a square in front of the participant for trajectory control. Group exercises can include pair or team juggling, with variations according to session goals. The final activity involves tightrope walking. Using a low wire with safety supervision, beginners start by walking on the floor, gradually progressing to the rope with the support of a safety assistant. Focus, balance, and controlled movement are emphasized. Steps include single-leg balancing, adjusting hand and foot positions, and building confidence gradually. Once comfortable, students can walk alone. The exercise

enhances concentration, patience, and self-confidence, making it a valuable component of circus skills development.



Summary

The goal of the skill development program is, therefore, to foster a love of circus arts among as many children and adults as possible. It aims to share our professional expertise to the fullest with the next generations. At the same time, it draws attention to the usefulness of circus pedagogy and its applicability in public education.

Based on accumulated experience, attending one session per week over the course of a school year is sufficient to acquire basic circus techniques. In some cases, higher skill levels can be achieved with specific equipment. However, the value of the sessions is not measured solely by the tricks learned. The “Learn Circus!” program also introduces children to an open-minded perspective characteristic of the circus world, which they may not have encountered before. As a result, participants leave the sessions as more complex, mindful, physically and emotionally balanced individuals, with a positive attitude toward movement.

The photographs published in the study were taken in June 2024 at the Vác Waldorf Elementary School with the cooperation of Richárd Bontó.



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The author suggests drinking
Unicum whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
Smooth bossa nova
whilst reading her essay.

During the fall of 2023, Eötvös Loránd University published a volume of new studies on non-formal educational disciplines carried out by Hungarian cultural institutes. Circus in education was introduced as a development of the Capital Circus of Budapest in 2016 and was brought to the curriculum – and to scientific discussion in Hungary – as the newest discipline of non-formal education.

Circus Education is Circus and More

Is it a bold statement to say that circus everything? The name itself (coming from Latin “circus”) means circle, which stands for completeness on its own. *What gives its unique completeness to circus, how is it different from other genres in the world of culture?*

Circus is art, science, sport, and eurhythmics at the same time; it is sensible reality, and soaring fantasy; alongside with enthralling view, fascinating sounding, and peerless forms of series of individual and communal movement between humans, animals, and objects. The live performances of circus artists provide messages, feelings, and stories, direct, and without words. In the meantime, the sensation of personal connection is given to all in every single unreproducible moment; should it be spent in the height or the depth of the round, as if spherical public area of the circus tent or building. **The artistic mission of circus, which at the same time is the base of its very own sustainability, is that it can evoke emotions: excitement, fear, surprise, admiration, catharsis...**

A circus act is often unbelievable, yet it is true – as artists may be seen from all the angles –, while the circus pays equal attention to its audience; plays with them, gets them involved, and pushes boundaries, for which momentarily illusion and dazzling trick are tools as well as absurd humour or the comic relief of clumsiness. Everyone can imagine themselves doing circus acts, as everyone is good, moreover, exceptional in one thing or another! The miracle lies in everyone, and to activate this miracle, the expression of ourselves, the cultivation of our skills, the overcome of our disadvantages, circus in education now is available. *The educational mission of circus, which at the same time is the base of its very own sustainability, is that it can trigger the change in people's knowledge, abilities, and attitude.*

If the circus is everything, circus in education is everything plus one: because its core – the physical activity, and the practice of the never-ending variety of forms of circus-related movements – is not simply physical education, but a complex experience that affects feelings and thoughts. Circus genres – should they be acrobatics, training ani-

mals, or making people laugh – make one experience the (most) basic human attitudes through exercising together, by pointing out the lack of trust between each other, or prejudices on top of developing affective, cognitive, and motoric areas. The circus builds on the view “everyone is good at something, and everyone is good at something different,” and anyone participating in circus in education can first-handedly experience this. This self- and community-awareness helps personal empathy and tolerance to improve, to understand and accept differences of others, and, not in the least, inspires to help others in an active manner.

Although people with physical disabilities¹ were put on show and mocked a hundred years ago, today's circus does not only help its audience by providing accessible performances, but also treats the people, who take use of any kind of their disadvantages as a source of force and may even amaze the audience in the circus ring, as equal partners.² **The social mission of circus, which at the same time is the base of its very own sustainability, is that it is indeed for everyone.**



“LÁZÁR ERVIN” PROGRAM FOR STUDENTS IN THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST.

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

1. Vö. Weigel, J. & Weigel, R. (dir.) (2009): The Butterfly Circus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BUcVs09zFps>
2. Omnium Circus (2021): Omnium: A Bold New Circus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bMPDpX1OEw&t=2s>

Circus in Education: There Was, There is, There Will Be

Circus in education, in a broad sense, is the social use of circus phenomena, ever existent in every culture and historical era. Motions, tricks, comedic reliefs, and successes in animal training have been known since archaic era cultures up until this day, alongside with their ritual, sacral, or simply entertaining, either militaristic, or sporting purposes. One might see, for example, ball-jugglers on ancient Egyptian representations, knights twirling maces in caudexes from the middle-ages, and people on stilts, tight-rope equilibrists, snake charmers, and other side-shows may be seen on different works of fine art.³ Amazing the others with unmatched physical capabilities, skilful tricks, or the ability to communicate with animals – well, this has always been entertaining for both the artist and their admirers. The role of circus however has never been solely entertainment, as it was always educational as well: exotic animals in the ring, exciting acrobatic acts on stage, peoples and cultures from long distance, people with differences, technical and scientific innovations, and adaptations of historical events could all be seen. The sensation of the circus back then – consciously or unconsciously – formed the way of people's thinking, and raised their interest in the behaviour of animals, or of the human body.

Circus in Education: a Little Bit of This, a Little Bit of That

Circus in education is evolving at the same speed internationally, as well as in Hungary. Alongside the informal educational fields of circuses, there are more special, non-formal and formal disciplines of circus in education. These are circus in education methods specifically made and used for educational and pedagogical purposes. In every new discipline of circus in education, thus in every one of them, the once popular side-shows and new era circus artists play the

key role, but physical activity serves to achieve a different educational aim.

What are the different educational aims in the field of circus in education in leisure-time circus, social circus, therapy circus, and in classical circus in education?

- The so-called **leisure-time circus** is a natural part of well-being, it aims to play and entertain through the movements of circus. While participants learn about the boundaries of their bodies, and their skills, they can evaluate their endurance and creativity, and practice how to learn from and work with each other.
- **Social circus** aims to solve social problems, contributes to the well-being of persons or groups of physical, or any other disability by improving their social and mobile skills, providing them positive feedback, and the experience of joy, and success.
- **Therapy circus** means an innovative approach in medicine, aims for cognitive, neural, and motoric improvement. Its environment, first, is psychiatric, and is used among persons of physical or mental disability, or as part of treatment for learning and behaviour problems.⁴
- **Classical circus in education** connects directly to the public education system. It maintains balance between theoretical and physical development and stays aware of the needs of circus and school education. Classical circus in education explains the acts of circus art and makes learning materials more picturesque through the art of circus movements and detailed insight of circus phenomena. Similarly, to all the disciplines of circus in education, it helps us to learn of ourselves and our ambience, to discover our hidden abilities, and to unwrap our skills.

The different disciplines all share the **point of view of the “contemporary circus”** (the word is borrowed from the Hungarian Juggler Association [Magyar Zsonglőr Egyesület]), which carries **a radical way of opening to share circus knowledge, and to participate in the circus**. The openness of circus in education allows juggling, balance, acrobatics, or any circus genre to be taught, tried, practiced, and showcase based on cooperation and participation, either individually or in community, to cause joy and success to anyone.

3. National Circus Arts Centre, Capital Circus of Budapest (2020): Hungarian Circus Arts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHrBPY2XDI8&t=10s>



CIRCUS IN EDUCATION
PROGRAM OF THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST AT A WALDORF
SCHOOL.

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

theater
science
review

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Circus in Education Here and There

The spread of view and practice of circus in education can be seen since the mid-'90s. Similar initiatives were present in the '60s in the Netherlands by the **Circus Elleboog**⁵ company, and in Spain by the **Circo de Los Muchachos**⁶ company, who organised circus in education activities in which orphans, homeless, and other children and youngsters with different social disadvantages could participate. From the seventies onwards, the gradual social conquest of the circus, community forms based on participation, the determinability of leisure-time and social circuses became more apparent. **Mobile Mini Circus for Children**⁷, operating in war-torn Afghanistan affect children's lives coming from absolute poverty, and locked away from every possibility of consumption of culture. They develop self-esteem, and concentration, while raises attention, and discipline. **Circus Cirkör**⁸, located in Sweden, started their circus educational activity in 1995, who, in their programs offered entertaining ways to learn mathematics in detail, while success in development in self-determination, bravery, and risk-taking was also noted.

High-quality circus-educational activity in Hungary is provided by the **Hungarian Juggler Association**⁹, founded in 2000, which, as a civil organization, among juggling, is indeed active in raising awareness, publication, as well as in theoretical and practical education. Their program called *A cirkusz mindenkié* [*Circus is for everyone*] is outstanding as social activity¹⁰. In their understanding, in social circus, circus arts may be used as tools on their events in order to move social integration forward, for example among youngsters of the Roma community¹¹.

5. Circus Elleboog (2013): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H70-ZDCQhjc>

6. Circo de Los Muchachos (2011): 25 años. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=crpDfqtARqk>

7. MMCC Global (2021): Back to Life: Mobile Mini Circus for Children: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_XYhmis7js

8. Cirkus Cirkör: <https://cirkor.se/en>

9. Hungarian Juggling Association: <https://www.youtube.com/@MZsonglorEgyesulet>

10. The social circus mission of the Hungarian Juggling Association: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BGD30V470mo>

11. Hungarian Juggling Association, Ethnocirkusz, Sajókaza: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFxDMR8BuS0>

Specific shows of the **Hungarian National Circus**, which are connected to the public educational system, and are showcasing learning materials, can be brought up as domestic examples of classical circus in education. These shows, entitled *Tudomány a porondon*¹² [*Science in the ring*], run twice a year in Budapest and in Savaria.

Certain alternative schools – operating in the public education system – provide their own circus educational programs, which can be seen as an integrated solution in terms of formal and non-formal education. **Waldorf-schools** have been offering classes based on circuslike physical activity forms (project-weeks and summer camps) as fundamental parts of their educational program. Circus activities – juggling, plate-spinning, devil-sticks, diabolo, acrobatics etc... – indirectly develop students' learning abilities and social competences, which is presented to each other, their teachers, and their parents at the end of the school year.¹³



EXTERNAL SECONDARY SCHOOL CIRCUS IN EDUCATION PRESENTATION: CIRCUS ART, OF THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST.

PHOTO:

ÁDÁM URBÁN

12. Hungarian National Circus (2020): Science in the ring with the Hungarian National Circus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHSZSBWtTxQ>

13. Waldorf Fészek School (2017): WALDORF Fészek School Sixth Graders Circus Performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qv3ixOsGctQ>

Circus in Education in the Public Educational System

Domestic gifted and talented education (GATE) traces back to long past as it has been operating for more than 70 years. Its public and vocal education and training was renewed lately, the formal education and training program got more detailed. The **Baross Imre Artista- és Előadóművészeti Akadémia Szakgimnázium, Gimnázium, Technikum és Alapfokú Művészeti Iskola**¹⁴ welcomes gifted pupils wishing to become circus artists from the age of ten. Several other professions – that are connected to the circus – such as stage and ring technician, theatre technician, actor, and stage dancer are also taught here.

The Government of Hungary started the project called **Lázár Ervin Program** to make art, including circus art, available to every child in public education regardless of social status or physical location. The shows of the Capital Circus of Budapest welcome elementary and secondary school students. Classical circus in education events regarding the show are held afterwards in the schools. The **Department of Circus in Education** of The Capital Circus of Budapest provides task sheets, and online lectures¹⁵ to help this effort. The materials – of science subjects, which have already been, or will be taught to the students – come illustrated with pictures, figures, and animations connected to the circus performance, both in the shows and in the task sheets. Sixth graders, for example, are to solve an exercise of physics – connected to a trapeze act –, including questions about force, gravity, kinetic energy, and interactions, and are free to express opinions on questions such as responsible animal husbandry, or limits of the human body.

14. Imre Baross Circus Art School: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4oNbOPwhGc

15. Capital Circus of Budapest (2020): Broadcast of the Ervin Lázár Program: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=51HTBDh49eI&t=13s>

16. Erzsébet Camps (2020):

Practice with the circus! 1-6: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZ_rVfoF7Fw&list=PLHO7T-4NXJ3swxPlwFp6LW9hfpKWnJ2oC&index=2

The Capital Circus of Budapest provides classical circus in education to children in need, in the **Elizabeth Camps** at Zánka. For them, the program's experience is complete by learning circus-related skills: juggling, equilibria, field acrobatics, and all the materials are available in the form of online lectures.¹⁶

Online circus in education lectures and task sheets available as appendix of circus magazines are for pedagogists, as well: which means **materials, side-tasks**, and new inspiration for educators.

Circus in Education in Higher Education

National Circus Arts Centre offers circus in education – based on participation – in higher education for its cooperative partners, such as the **Department of Ethnology of the University of Debrecen**, and the **Moholy-Nagy University of Art and Design Budapest**, both for educators and for students. Temporary courses of circus history and of circus theory are led by the scientific members of the study group of the **Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts** (experts of history, ethnography, aesthetics, literature, and ethology), who inspire the critical way of thinking about circus, newest research, and creative development.

Cultural State Secretariat of the Ministry of Human Resources launched a new higher educational program in the academic year of 2020/21 called *A magyar kultúra felfedezése – Csontváry Program* [*The Discovery of Hungarian Culture – Csontváry Program*]. The program, as it consists of visiting cultural institute's shows, and participation-based arts in ed-

education events afterwards, can be chosen as elective courses. The aim of Csontváry Program is to educate people on the values of Hungarian cultural heritage – among which circus arts hold a place. The Capital Circus of Budapest hosts organised groups of students, who watch the show, then take part in a supplementary education in circus course according to their discipline given by a crew consisting of scientific, circus expert, and circus artist members.

Many are taken by surprise, or even doubt that every scientific field is present able to research at the circus. This triggered scientific members of the circus to share a scenic presentative video about the surprisingly rich constructive collaboration between circus and science, covering ethnography, physics, psychology, and ethology¹⁷.



EXTERNAL SECONDARY SCHOOL CIRCUS IN EDUCATION PRESENTATION: HUMOUR, OF THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST.

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

A new chapter begins in circus arts and tertiary education in the autumn of 2023, when a new, epoch-making faculty will open. Circus Arts BA will open its doors at **Budapest Circus Art and Contemporary Dance College**, offers courses for students who desire to become clowns, horse-acrobats, or circus dancers. Previously, in January 2023, Budapest Circus Art and Contemporary Dance College launched its first **Education in Circus** continuous education course for educators and circus experts. High quality, formal circus faculties are hoped to become an important pillar of resources for developments of education in circus, and a place of scientific discussions.

The initials of Circus in Education at the Capital Circus of Budapest

Circus in education program at the Capital Circus of Budapest kicked off on 21 October 2016, following the show entitled *Lúdas Matyi a cirkuszbán* [Mattie the Goose-Boy in the Circus], and appeared among domestic culture in education services. The first **irregular classes** were held by adventure-seeking physics, biology, chemistry, mathematics, Hungarian language and literature, history, and PE teachers, who succeeded at the 'circus marketplace of ideas' application¹⁸. Students participating in lectures were presented with interesting and surprising connections between performances of circus artists and the learning material: *What is the connection between the horses' movement and the circumference of the ring? What does the speed of oscillation of the trapeze depend on? How does friction affect the spin of the acrobat? How strong is the force weighing down the shoulders of the artist at the bottom of the man tower? What helps the handstand artist maintaining his balance? How many balls can a juggler throw in the air at one time?*

17. Capital Circus of Budapest (2021): Science and Circus: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2iNSau2-CCs&ab_channel=FővárosiNagycirkusz

18. Capital Circus of Budapest (2017): Circus education workshop at the Capital Circus of Budapest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kks5Vvxbhz4>

To answer these questions, naturally, one must see the circus show, try the circus movements, to discover, and to reinterpret these in the confines of the learning material. This knowledge and these skills may be applied later in a wider environment. The educational process, which usually goes on smoothly, is done very differently depending on age, competence, and social background. Emerging needs and requirements affected the educational services of the Capital Circus of Budapest. The classical circus in education program, which started in 2016 with irregular classes, and school educators, has contributed to social diversity, and developed according to diverse learning needs and aims. The number of programs provided within the confines of circus in education has increased, the emphasis shifted from learning materials to skill-development, arts in education, gifted and talented education, and the creation of equity, professionals of the circus gained the majority among providers of this kind of interpretation, while several other fields and co-operational institutions of the circus joined in. The Capital Circus of Budapest created **complex circus in education**, which can open-mindedly, and flexibly react to the needs of circus arts, public education, and society, and develop its services accordingly.

Complex Boundaries of Education in Circus at The Capital Circus of Budapest

As an institute of performing arts of **National Circus Arts Centre**, the **Capital Circus of Budapest** provides the most prominent issues and fundamental field for education in circus. The **Section of Education in Circus** operates under the unit of scientific methods of the National Circus Arts Centre, and its main task is to develop complex education in circus programs, to organise and lead group projects, to generate and coordinate certain education in circus initiatives in different disciplines of the circus, and to manage external education in circus programs¹⁹.

19. Capital Circus of Budapest (2023):
Circus Commando: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5qbtFO1Jvo0>

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SKILL-DEVELOPMENT IN THE RING AT THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST.

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

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The Section of Education in Circus' work, among others, is aided by the **Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts** (part of the unit of scientific methods of the National Circus Arts Centre), whose aim is to enrich the public collection²⁰, and to conduct research, but also to create exhibitions which are to be used for the sake of education in circus²¹, to make interpretational developments²², to organise programs for education in museum²³, and last, but not least, to provide support and an adaptational base for development in methods of education in circus.



INTERACTIVE, MUSEUM IN EDUCATION TABLEAU AT THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION OF THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST.

PHOTO:
EMESE JOÓ

20. Capital Circus of Budapest (2023): 1,000 books. Science Day and Book Festival at the Capital Circus of Budapest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pd2RRYPtae0>

21. Capital Circus of Budapest (2023): Circus Museum Flash N.001.: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwL5yYgr3JI>

22. Capital Circus of Budapest (2023): Pictures brought to life: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YTBek9KWYg8>

23. Múzeumjáró (2020): Múzeumjáró 115. Circus Museum, circus education: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zEaJaaD7aMA&t=389s>

The method-developmental, managerial, and coordinational work of the Section of Education in Circus to the complex education in circus program of the Capital Circus of Budapest develops and co-ordinates the following types of practices:

- **Irregular class**²⁴ – classical education in circus program, made for elementary and secondary school students, consisting of interconnected material connected equally to circus arts and public education inside the ring of the circus before or after the show.
- **Learn Circus!**²⁵ – travelling education in circus workshop, aiming at skill-development for elementary and secondary school students. Basic forms of movement used in the circus (juggling, equilibria, human tower, etc...) are introduced to and practiced by students in schools, according to the school's needs.
- **Audio narration** – an integrated circus program of compensation and of equal opportunity, limitless of age. The program is created for blind and visually impaired persons and their accompanying personnel. The aim of the program is let blind and visually impaired people to "watch" the show, while listening to audio narration, after providing tactile detection in the ring in an hour's span beforehand.
- **Responsible animal husbandry** – sensitising ethologic class with animals participating – can be held before or after the show – made for elementary and secondary school students.
- **Education in museum** – interactive, interpretative, and analytic, museum education class held for elementary and secondary school students on artifacts connected to the circus, at the circus exhibitions before the show.
- **Movie-aesthetics** – interactive, interpretative class held at schools for secondary school students, consisting of showcasing excerpts of movies connected to the world of circus.
- **Humour** – humorous, interactive, role-playing program connected to the world of circus held by circus artists for secondary school students at schools.
- **Path-orientation** – made for secondary school students, to present the universality of the circus, and the possible professions and life-path through the presentation of available secondary and tertiary educational choices, at schools.

24. Capital Circus of Budapest (2019): Unusual singing lesson in the ring!: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULo6WtpguBE>

25. Fészek Waldorf School (2021): Learn circus skills! Grade 7 at Fészek Waldorf School: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZSKGvAj-0gM&t=50s>



RESPONSIBLE ANIMAL HUSBANDRY PROGRAM IN THE SHARED AREA OF CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST.

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

Complex Circus in Education as Such

The Capital Circus of Budapest provides the newest service of all in terms of domestic cultural and circus fields. Its typical characteristic is that it is **free** for participants, has **no limits of age**, and it is **flexible** regarding of time and place.

One of the main conditions of complex circus in education is **watching the circus show, the circus experience**, for which the reason and the goal is to understand and progress it. Performances of circus artists, which can be seen on the stage, are analysed on programs provided by the Capital Circus of Budapest, by the audience and by our organised groups. This is done through direct conversation in the wide historic system of domestic and international web of nexus of circus phenomena but approached from the present. We offer the experience of learning about the circus with a differentiated, chance-creating approach through theoretical and practical knowledge for everyone, this way we can see how well prepared our audience is about the circus.

The centre of complex education in circus is **circus exercise**. Conventional circus arts turn from view into action in classical education in circus. Circus opens for everyone, and does not only allow, but also encourages others to participate: to try to learn and present more forms of circus movements. In circus in education, conscious development of motoric skills is prioritised, which, of course, brings the improvement of affective and cognitive skills, while affects personal and social traits, such as working together, teamwork, measurement, precision, bravery, risk-taking, balance, trust, and creativity, all of which is necessary in and outside of the circus world. Circus in education is not a hidden way to train future circus artists, but anyone participating could find a set of skills in themselves that can eventually lead to formal circus in education.

Alongside with physical education, knowledge and personal experience of **special circus activities** based on participation is important, for example, sensitising educational class with domesticated animals kept in the circus held by circus ethologists, interactive role-play with circus comics and clowns, organising circus requisites or analysing circus related pieces of art with circus

museologists, musical or dance rehearsals with the circus orchestra and the ballet, light and sound testing with technicians, costume try-outs with circus designers, communicational course with circus marketing experts, etc...

Complex circus in education includes classical circus in education, whose main profile is its **connection to public education**: circus phenomena are used to present and deepen school materials and are embedded into subjects to better understand them – this can be, if needed, connected to fields of education and competence accordingly. Theoretical and practical material (such as educational videos, quizzes, additional task sheets, etc...) is made to help the work of fellow educators, and to give students tasks they can work effectively on together and individually²⁶.

Complex circus in education is a **non-formal pedagogy** form that connects directly or indirectly to public education, whose practice is not school pedagogical, but – similarly to museum in education – is a form of art in education. Spontaneous efforts to create forms of **art in education** is prevalent on circus in education events in both the Capital Circus of Budapest and in external public education locations. Those fellow circus workers, who work on such events are usually not practiced in non-formal educational environment, while museum-educators are usually not familiar with the circus, the following techniques of art in education may be instructive from both points of view:

- **changing points of view**: let us choose a present day, contemporary circus topic that affects the life of participants, or that may be important to them (an issue or an activity), and build the process on their reactions, progress accordingly to their questions.
- **preparation**: use concrete examples, interesting stories, entertaining anecdotes in the form of objects, photographs, billboards, or films, rather than general ones. Also, preferably, involve circus artists or experienced circus experts.
- **less is more**: meeting is for once and is short. To create a better personal experience, have one well-defined topic, action, or issue – and reduce elements of no importance.
- **neutrality**: avoid expressing our subjective opinions

and feelings that can influence participants' expressions, moreover, at times, we may even stop them from forming their own opinions.

- **multiplied intelligence**: students start their circus in education program with a "clean sheet," which means that none of their previous studies mean neither an advantage nor a disadvantage. The program brings forward the fields of intelligence that are not that prevalent in public education, thus not only the best students can achieve their goals.
- **breaking the ice**: initially, start with a game, activity, or opening question to get informed about their preliminary knowledge and experience: we can build on this knowledge later and refer to it during the program.
- **partnership**: avoid the frontal way of classical school education, hierarchic gestures, and maintaining discipline. Replace these factors by conversation and the offer to see students as fellow professionals of the field. It is also important to change the program element when students look uninterested in it.
- **open questions**: ask open questions instead of claims, and always connect to topics that brought up.
- **in the language of the circus**: use the specific language of the circus, but in an understandable way, explain and repeat technical terms to let participants understand and learn them.
- **obscurity**: do not ask questions we cannot be sure they know the answer to.
- **provocation**: ask questions we know the participants will have an answer to, a prejudice about, or an opinion on.
- **humour**: let all of us make mistakes misunderstandings, and the fact that one may not know everything, deal these situations with humour and kindness.
- **concluding punchline**: keep an interesting fact, surprise that participants are not ready for that can make them face a challenge or cheer up – a magic trick or a giant artistic requisite they can try as well.

The development of circus in education at The Capital Circus of Budapest has become an **extraordinarily complex and versatile discipline**, in a noticeably brief period, only six years. Different professions, audience correspondence, and professional programs, talent-mentoring and equal treatment of persons of disabilities are equally important, and run on an exceptional level – as the following examples

26. Erzsébet Camps (2020): Practice with the circus! 1–6.: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HZ_rVfoF7Fw&list=PLHO7T-4NXJ3swxPlwF-p6LW9hfpKWnJ2oC&index=2

and the usual online videos available in footnotes present:

Talent-mentoring is an integral part of complex circus in education, in which youngsters that are

enthusiastic about the circus are given the opportunity to debut²⁷, and to develop their circus competences within the confines of the School Community Service.



AUDIO NARRATED SHOW OF THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST.

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

27. Talent management: Capital Circus of Budapest (2022): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmgGGwwUnIo>

The most prominent of the activities of complex circus in education of The Capital Circus of Budapest is its **complex program of accessibility and equal opportunity**, which treats persons with different physical and/or social disadvantages equally. The newest, and fastest developing one among these is the method of audio narration²⁸, in the confines of which, blind and visually impaired persons can enjoy circus shows accompanied by audio narration. *"Its purpose is that, with the help of a narrator, the view and the visual messages are given, and given to help visually impaired people have a more entire experience. The visually impaired viewer listens to the sounds of the show with one ear, while the narrator helps them following the show in the other."* (Péter Fekete 2023.) The audio narration starts after a unique tactile sensitising event, the so-called Tapi (Touchy) program held for partici-

pants and circus contributors: *"The circus, as it is a nonverbal artistic field, has no storyline, no words, no provided information based on sound between performers (actors, circus artists) and the audience. This is why previous information is strongly needed to understand the show, to experience the atmosphere, and to feel its emotional charge. [...] The centre of the circus dome has special acoustic echo. Trying and experiencing it is exciting and helps the viewer to understand the space around them. We must let the visitors in one by one to enter the centre of the space and let them find the centremost point of the ring using only the echo of their own voice."* (Péter Fekete 2023.) The internationally unique complex audio narrational program of the Capital Circus of Budapest provides a lifelong experience for participants according to feedback²⁹.



**TOUCHY PROGRAM IN PROGRESS
CONNECTED TO
AN AUDIO NARRATED SHOW OF
THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST.**

**PHOTO:
ATTILA NAGY**

28. Capital Circus of Budapest (2022): Audio narration at the Capital Circus of Budapest (Kossuth Radio: Napközben.): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2w94ITZ-BAE>

29. Association of Blind and Visually Impaired People of Békés County (2022): Visit to the Capital Circus of Budapest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KibQV1jVwIA&t=9s>

There are **extra circus in education activities** within the confines of complex circus in education as well, which, similarly to the ones mentioned above – including but not limited to – are presented by the online videos³⁰.

These are, for example, the management of certain **circus applications**, such as the creative application entitled *A cylinder titka [The Secret of the Cylinder]*³¹, which was connected to the exhibition called *Nincs mááásik! 130 éves a Fővárosi Nagycirkusz [There's no oother! 130 years of the Capital Circus of Budapest]*, or the creative application *Micsoda cirkusz! [What a Circus!]*³² of the National Secondary School Academic Competition, or the *Múzeumi karantén pályázat [Quarantine Museum Application]*³³ created by the Hungarian National Museum during the time of the pandemic, in which circus in education was present with a mysterious story of a fakir and could hand out four special awards. It was also a very exciting circus in education program to participate in the 30th **Valley of Arts Festival** and to entertain audience in MANK Porta leisure-time art in education program with circus skill development, interactive clown show, acrobatic acts, requisite presentations, creative art exhibitions, and art and circus history quizzes³⁴. Last but not least, within the confines of Budapest Circus Festival, an extravagant circus in education program, the **Circus in Education Conference** is held biannually, in the presence of national and international educators³⁵.

30. "Beware, I'm cheating!" (Rodolfo). One of the videos is misleading because only its title matches the title of the extra circus education program, while its content is about something else...

31. Capital Circus of Budapest (2019): The Secret of the Top Hat Creative Contest: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxLGh4SjYuc&t=20s>

32. What a circus! (excerpt from the 1974 recording. Published by: Capital Circus of Budapest): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QGw4tivuP4>

33. National Circus Arts Center, Capital Circus of Budapest (2020): Museum Quarantine Competition. Special prizes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykJv193d7I>

34. Creative Arts MANK (2021): MANK ArtPorta at the 30th Valley of Arts Festival: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zX-BQA1WhiM>

35. Circus Education Conference: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aj3goWc8_Ro



INTERACTIVE, MUSEUM IN
EDUCATION PROGRAM, WITHIN
THE CONFINES OF
A LEISURE-TIME PROGRAM
PROVIDED BY THE CAPITAL
CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST,
AT VALLEY OF ARTS FESTIVAL.

PHOTO:
NIKOL FUSZKA

Circus in Education Brought to a Square: Mission and Sustainability

This large-scale resume may be enough to support the claim "circus (in) education is everything plus one," and to fill the phrase with meaning. One debt, however, is yet to be paid: what is the mission of circus in education, and how is it going to be sustainable? Especially now that we know that the artistic mission of circus, which at the same

time is the base of its very own sustainability, is that it can evoke emotions; the educational mission of circus, which at the same time is the base of its very own sustainability, is that it can trigger the change in people's knowledge, abilities, and attitude; the social mission of circus, which at the same time is the base of its very own sustainability, is that it is indeed for everyone. *Then what can be the mission and the base of its very own sustainability of complex circus in education, one of the newest disciplines of domestic cultural education in the 21st century?*

In my **opinion the mission of complex circus in education is to connect, and make people participate in the circus, thus, to teach about the real world of the circus, and how to appreciate the unique values of circus arts.** The field of circus in education may be easier to sustain because it is free, flexible on age, time, and location, but primarily because it highlights the importance of physical education, which can balance the three basic functions of humans: cognitive, affective, and motoric fields. This sustainability is backed by another balancing factor: **the institute of circus and people learn from each other.** Circus in education is an open, and indeed not a one-way process. People's feedback, honest opinions, and needs mean a significant amount of help to develop circus arts and circus services, and to widen the social base of circus. If circus in education learns at least the amount it teaches, then its educational success is indeed worth double. Thus, circus in education is everything, brought to a square.

Conclusion

On the field of non-formal cultural education, the unique trait of circus in education is that it can cover and motivate all fields of intelligence, temperament, learning-style, competence, gift, and disadvantage: it is for everyone. Knowledge, feeling, moving, participating, source of motivation and joy: it can be all. It can be connected to the public education directly or loosely, entertaining, learning, and equal chances – on all fields of life – can be successful and effective.

The circus in education program of the Capital Circus of Budapest, running since 2016, in its current complex form and versatile methods, is unmatched both domestically and internationally, even if seen in historical context. Precedents and parallels known in the circus and education are valuable sources that is rethought, applied to, and further improved for contemporary cultural and social expectations by circus in education, in any environment. The continuous development and safe sustainability of circus in education relies in conversation with different disciplines of art in education, participants, and the audience, which is backed up by intense interaction in between. As of a new discipline – either in circus and in education – the purpose of this large-scale summary is to determine the concept of complex circus in education, the presentation of connections between its schools (tendencies), analysis of its wide range of actions and cooperations, and showing of practical examples and adaptive art in education techniques. This is presented through references to audiovisual sources that can certify and vivify 40.499 character (spaces included).



PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

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PÉTER FEKETE

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EMESE JOÓ

DIRECTOR,
CHIEF MUSEOLOGIST,
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CINTIA BORSI

HEAD OF THE TRADE DEPARTMENT
& HEAD OF THE INTERNATIONAL
DEPARTMENT

National Circus Arts Centre
(HUNGARY)

BIOGRAPHY

She was appointed Head of Communications at the Capital Circus of Budapest in 2015 and has been a key member of the institution for over ten years. She currently serves as Head of the Trade Department and the International Department at the National Circus Arts Center. In this role, she leads the organization of major national and international events, including the Budapest Circus Festival, the Budapest Aerial Festival, and the circus programs at the Sziget Festival. She has also overseen the repositioning of the Capital Circus's audience services, the establishment and ongoing development of a welcoming and inclusive guest experience, and the management of the circus audio narration program from its inception to the present. Her professional contributions were recognized in 2025 with the Hungarian Bronze Cross of Merit.



DÁNIEL LEVENTE PÁL

POET, WRITER,
LITERARY TRANSLATOR,
THEATRE AND CIRCUS
DRAMATURG-DIRECTOR

National Circus Arts Centre
(HUNGARY)

BIOGRAPHY

He has authored 8 books in Hungarian, which have been translated and published abroad sixteen times, other works of his have been translated into more than 20 languages. Since 2016, he has been the dramaturge, showwriter, and librettist at the Capital Circus of Budapest, where he has contributed to more than 60 productions, including work for the Budapest International Circus Festival. He is a frequent guest at international literary and poetry festivals, as well as multidisciplinary academic conferences. He has received numerous literary, artistic, and professional awards in Hungary, Brazil, France, Romania, Serbia, Azerbaijan, and the United States.



ANNA VAS

PRESENTER,
EMCEE,
AUDIO NARRATOR

National Circus Arts Centre
(HUNGARY)

BIOGRAPHY

She has worked in the field of culture for the past 15 years. She has hosted numerous galas, press conferences, conferences and auctions, including the Organ Night program, the 2025 Cultural Diplomacy Conference, and the Hungarian Theatre Gala.

For three years, she has been leading audio narrated performances of the Capital Circus of Budapest for blind and visually impaired groups.

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jasmine tea
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The authors suggests listening to
Vangelis
whilst reading theirs essay.



The Methodology of Circus Audio Description

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The Methodology of Circus Audio Description

Theoretical and Practical Foundations of the Audio Description Program at the Capital Circus of Budapest

Abstract

Since 2016, the Capital Circus of Budapest (Fővárosi Nagycirkusz), Hungary's state-funded national circus institution, has run a regular program of audio-described (AD) performances for blind and partially sighted audiences. Over the years, the experience and knowledge accumulated in this field has been systematized and shared within the circus profession. The Capital Circus has become one of the first circus institutions worldwide to develop a comprehensive, transferable protocol for live audio description in a non-verbal performance genre.¹

This paper situates this work within the broader context of accessibility in the performing arts, outlines the specific challenges of providing audio description in circus – a predominantly non-verbal, movement-based form – and presents the methodology and practice developed at the Capital Circus. The article describes the institutional strategy; the preparatory and tactile pre-show activities; live audio description during the performance; and the subsequent evaluation and refinement processes. It also highlights how this practice contributes to equal access, inclusion and full participation in cultural life for blind and partially sighted people, and how the methodology has begun to influence circus practice in other countries.

1. This article is an expanded, further developed, and in places revised and updated English version of the study by Fekete et al. (2024), which was previously published in Hungarian.

The Capital Circus of Budapest is among the first circus institutions in the world to introduce a systematic, in-house practice of circus audio description. As a national performing arts institution and one of Europe's leading circuses, it has set itself the goal of reducing access barriers for blind and partially sighted people and supporting equal access to cultural experiences. By removing communication barriers at performances, the Circus offers a specialized form of access service that also contributes to reshaping social attitudes and, not least, to improving the social image of circus arts (Fekete, 2023).

This work is grounded in the recognition that blind and partially sighted people are equal members of society, entitled to the same fundamental rights and to high-quality leisure and cultural experiences as anyone else.²

Developing an appropriate program took several years of intensive work and experimentation. Audio description is well established in verbal art forms such as theater, film and television, but is much less common in non-verbal performance genres. The director general of the Capital Circus, Péter Fekete, began experimenting with circus audio description years ago, drawing on theater practice but adapting it to the specific characteristics of circus performances, in collaboration with professional actors and other experts.

During performances, communication is provided via a mobile audio system. Blind and partially sighted spectators wear a single-ear headset: through one ear they receive the live commentary of the audio describer, who, much like a sports commentator, conveys what is happening from moment to moment; through the uncovered ear

they hear the music, voices and the atmosphere of the audience. The aim is not to replace the shared experience of the live performance, but to make that experience fully accessible.

From Accesible Performing Arts to Audio-described Circus Performances

In the professional vocabulary of theater and the performing arts, the notion of the "fourth wall" is frequently used. The "fourth wall" is an imaginary, invisible wall separating the audience from the events unfolding on stage.

For sighted audiences, this convention is one of the foundations of the theater experience: they are allowed to "peek in" exactly where and when the drama happens, unseen and in the present moment. From the perspective of staging, the fourth wall is also essential: the interior of the stage remains an interior; a whispered confession is heard only by the character on stage, not by the hundreds of spectators in the auditorium.

For most of us, then, the fourth wall is a metaphorical tool of theatrical illusion. For blind and partially sighted people, however, the "fourth wall" can be understood in a much more literal sense: there is in fact an impenetrable barrier between them and what unfolds visually on stage or in the ring. Without appropriate access services, it is extremely difficult – and in some cases impossible – for them to form a complete aesthetic experience or achieve catharsis in the same way as sighted spectators.

2. Two of the most important legal foundations are (1) Act XXVI of 1998 on the Rights and Equal Opportunities of Persons with Disabilities (with particular reference to Section 4(h)), and (2) Article 30 ("Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport") of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, adopted on 13 December 2006, which has also been ratified by the European Union and serves as one of the starting points for the European Disability Strategy (2010–2020), a key EU policy document, as well as for Directive (EU) 2019/882 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019.



Film, theater and museum access services have a longer history and a more extensive and systematized literature.³ In circus and contemporary circus, by contrast, this type of communication accessibility is still in its early stages. Primary sources consist mainly of documented personal experiences and a scattering of articles, blog posts, short reports and social media entries – only a handful in Hungarian, and more in other languages (primarily English), but even there without a coherent systematizing framework.

The general situation in the circus world – and the surprise, confusion and curiosity that surround it – is well illustrated by a personal account published on the website of the American Council of the Blind in September 2020, written by Linda Goodspeed, who is blind. She describes the following experience (Goodspeed, 2020):

“You know the landscape has shifted when two people stand up after a live show and the sighted one asks the blind one, ‘What was that all about?’ and the blind attendee proceeds to explain what just took place on stage.

That’s what happened at a Cirque du Soleil performance of Michael Jackson 1 that my daughter and I attended at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino in Las Vegas. I was the first blind person Cirque had described the MJ1 performance for, and as a result could talk knowledgeably about what we just saw.

Thanks to the American Council of the Blind’s Audio Description Project, audio description (AD) has become more common for movies, television, museums and live theater. But when I called the Cirque box office at the Mandalay Bay to ask if an AD narrator would be available for our Cirque show, the answer was, ‘What is audio description?’

‘I’m blind,’ I explained. ‘A narrator describes visual elements of a performance – set, costumes, body language and movement, facial expressions, etc. – to help me understand what is happening.’

‘Never heard of it.’”

With persistent and targeted internet searches, one can find many similar stories, blog posts and public social media entries from all over the world. Taken together, they paint a picture of how, in performance forms with a strong visual language and an emphasis on movement – such as circus and contemporary circus, as well as many genres of dance and physical theater– the process of making performances experientially accessible to blind and partially sighted audiences has only really begun in recent years.

This raises a central question: how can we dismantle this wall in their case as well? Closely related to this is a practical challenge: by what means and with which tools can a theater or other performing arts production be made fully accessible and enjoyable for people with disabilities? What aspects of a performance’s visual world can be conveyed to a blind or partially sighted spectator, and how can a sign language interpreter or interpreter team convey the style and tone of a play’s text to deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors? How can a performing arts institution make its productions not only understandable but truly engaging and emotionally resonant for audiences who face significant sensory barriers?

Over the past decades, a number of answers, methods and good practices have been developed in response to these questions. We no longer need to invent accessibility from scratch, but we do need to constantly update and refine it. In many countries around the world, including across Europe and in Hungary, a wide range of cultural and artistic institutions have implemented exemplary programs and practices. These are often described as “good practices” precisely because they can be adopted, adapted and implemented elsewhere.

3. TWithin the scope of this article, it is neither possible nor necessary to offer a detailed review of the historical development of audio description (AD) practices across different art forms, whether internationally or in Hungary. For such overviews, see, for example: (1) in English: Audio Description Solutions (n.d.); Snyder 2014; Packer-Vizenor-Miele 2015; Fryer 2016; and (2) in Hungarian: Zalán 2016; Zalán 2018; Gombás-Baráth 2018; Murányi 2018.



It is important to add that this process, in our view, is inherently two-sided. In film, television, museums and theater, audiences began to demand access services decades ago; institutions gradually responded, developed solutions, and over time turned these into widely adopted methods and standards. In the case of circus, we suspect that many potential audience members who require communication accessibility may have excluded circus from their cultural horizon altogether. Without articulated demand, there was nothing for institutions to respond to; without direct requests, there appeared to be no urgency to develop specific techniques and technologies. Compared to other visual or performative art forms, circus remained a field in which there simply was no clearly articulated question to which an answer – let alone a good, well-developed answer – was expected.

In this context, the Capital Circus of Budapest has taken on a pioneering role in accessibility and equal access within its artistic field. Not only in Hungary but also internationally, the Circus has been among the first to systematically develop both the background technology and the methodology of circus audio description and to implement it in a conscious, concept-driven way. The first audio-described performance at the Capital Circus took place on December 7, 2016, when Péter

Fekete – initiator and leader of the project – described the Christmas show Dima's Christmas (Dima karácsonya) for members of the Central Hungarian Regional Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted (Vakok és Gyengénlátók Közép-Magyarországi Regionális Egyesülete).

Like any pioneering initiative and methodological development, designing audio description for circus performances has posed particular challenges. While theater is a verbal art form in which words carry much of the information, circus is largely non-verbal. In circus, a significant part of the narrative and meaning is conveyed through movement, physical risk, virtuosity and visual imagery. For blind and partially sighted spectators, audio description therefore carries a large share of the information load. At the same time, the soundscape of a circus performance includes not only the describer's voice, but also the noise and reactions of the audience, the music and ambient sounds, and, importantly, the information acquired during pre-show tactile visits.



Before certain performances, audiences are invited to explore the performance environment through touch, guided by the audio describer and supported by circus staff and performers. They visit and get to know the ring, the equipment and apparatus, as well as the people and animals performing in the show. This hands-on experience provides a concrete foundation for what they will later hear and sense during the performance.

Over the past years, and over the course of more than seventy audio-described performances, the Capital Circus has developed and refined a rich toolkit and methodology for communication accessibility. This methodology has proven effective in transforming circus performances into full-fledged, enjoyable aesthetic experiences for audiences for whom the “fourth wall” previously seemed unbreakable.⁴

The Methodology of Circus Audio Description at the Capital Circus Budapest

The audio description practice developed at the Capital Circus since 2016 has several distinctive features:

1. Non-verbal performance genre

Audio description techniques are applied in a predominantly non-verbal performing arts genre. Good practices and methodological insights from theater and other verbal fields are adapted and implemented in the specific context of circus performances.

4. Since December 2016, the audio-described circus performances have been developed and implemented in close cooperation with a wide range of organisations of and for blind and partially sighted people, including, among others: MGVYOSZ – Magyar Vakok és Gyengénlátók Országos Szövetsége (the national umbrella association of blind and partially sighted people in Hungary); Vakok és Gyengénlátók Közép-Magyarországi Regionális Egyesülete; Vakok és Gyengénlátók Békés Megyei Egyesülete; Vakok és Gyengénlátók Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok Megyei Egyesülete; Vakok és Gyengénlátók Hermina Egyesülete; Vakok és Gyengénlátók Heves Megyei Egyesülete; Magyar Vakok és Gyengénlátók Bács-Kiskun Megyei Egyesülete; Vakok és Gyengénlátók Csongrád-Csanád Megyei Egyesülete; Vakok és Gyengénlátók Vas Megyei Egyesülete; as well as Vakrepülés Szintársulat (a theatre company working in close collaboration with blind and partially sighted people), and groups of visitors from Békéscsaba, Kecskemét and Szeged. Ongoing, close collaboration with these partners has been crucial both for reaching potential audiences and for continuously refining the audio description methodology in practice.

5. Act CXXXV of 2003 on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities. LINK: <https://net.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=a0300125.tv> (Last accessed: 27 November 2025)

2. Legally and ethically grounded equity work

The work on equal access is grounded in research and carried out in line with Hungary’s equal treatment legislation (2003)⁵, comparable in spirit to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) framework in the United States. The approach emphasizes rights, equity and full cultural participation.

3. Part of a broader accessibility program

Audio description is one of the main components of a complex accessibility program. The Circus also works to ensure equitable treatment and access for other groups, including wheelchair users, people with intellectual disabilities, deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences, people living with psychiatric conditions and people experiencing homelessness.

4. Live, personal and relational practice

Circus audio description at the Capital Circus is always live, personal and relational. The audio-described performances are preceded by live, in-person tactile introductions and opportunities for interaction.

5. Development of a transferable protocol

The Circus is developing a formal “audio description protocol”: a set of procedures, guidelines and a handbook that can be adapted and implemented by other circuses and performing arts institutions.



Main Elements of the “Audio Description Protocol”

The Capital Circus’s protocol can be presented in six main phases, each with several practical steps.

1. PLANNING

1. Developing an institutional audio description strategy and program

- Mapping and reviewing existing research and practice (both formal and informal sources).
- Collecting domestic and international examples of good practice from circus, other performing arts, and cultural institutions.
- Conducting needs assessments and situational analyses.
- Defining goals and target groups.

2. Raising awareness and training staff and collaborators

- Ongoing training and professional development for audio describers.
- Direct experiential learning: for example, staff members watching parts of a performance with their eyes closed to better understand the experience of blind and partially sighted audiences.

3. Pilot testing

- Testing the technical system and the narrative approach in small-scale or trial contexts.

4. Defining the basic participant data to be collected

- Establishing what general information is needed for communication and coordination with participants.

5. Designing the form and content of communication with participants

- Deciding how to invite, inform and stay in touch with participants (tone, channels, timing).



6. Designing participant self-report questionnaires

- Preparing self-administered questionnaires for participants.
- Planning how the questionnaires will be distributed, collected and analyzed.

2. PREPARATION

1. Organizational arrangements

- Identifying staff members who will be involved in coordination and on-site support.
- Assigning personal guides when needed.

2. Performance-related arrangements

- Reserving easily accessible seats for blind and partially sighted audience members.
- Ensuring that members of the same group or family can sit together.

3. Participant-related arrangements

- Informing staff involved in the event about the participants and relevant needs, based on the information collected in advance (without breaching privacy).



4. Comfort and logistics

- Preparing, charging and checking audio description devices.
- Preparing staff and personal guides to adopt a supportive, respectful, flexible and solution-oriented approach.
- Ensuring that blind and sighted members of the visiting group receive equitable treatment.

5. Audio describer preparation

- Preparing for the specific performance in “non-live” conditions (e.g. watching recordings or rehearsals and practicing audio description).
- Reviewing participant information to tailor the description appropriately.

6. Preparation of other contributors

- Briefing the performers (acrobats, dancers, musicians), ring crew, technicians and other staff involved in pre-show tactile activities and in assisting participants.

7. Preparing equipment and props

- Setting up apparatus, props, costumes and musical instruments that will be presented during the pre-show tactile tour.
- Preparing the circus ring, access routes, platforms and steps to ensure safe, accessible movement and seating, often in a circle within or around the ring.

8. Preparing additional services

- Arranging personal guidance or other individual support as needed (e.g. escorting participants from the entrance to the ring and back).

9. Communication

- Providing advance information to circus staff about the audio-described performance.
- Informing the general audience at the beginning of the performance that audio description is being provided for a group of guests.
- Sharing information with the media when appropriate, to raise awareness of accessibility work.

3. IMPLEMENTATION⁶

1. Reminder and arrival

- Sending reminders to all involved (participants, staff, collaborators) before the performance.
- Organizing an interactive program – the tactile pre-show – typically one hour before the performance.

2. Carrying out and checking preparations

- Ensuring all planned preparations are in place and functioning prior to the arrival of participants.

3. Interactive tactile program (touch tour)

- Escorting participants into the circus ring and seating them, often in a circle.
- Providing one-to-one assistance when needed.
- Introducing staff and performers; initiating conversation.
- Offering both a broader introduction to the circus and the program, and a more focused description of the tactile experience itself.
- Giving a concrete introduction to the performance and to how audio description will work during the show.

At this point, it is helpful to illustrate the practice more vividly with excerpts from previous reports. The first comes from an audio-described performance of *Atlantic Flight – Nagy Cirkuszi Utazás (Atlantic Flight – A Grand Circus Journey)* in 2018:

“Before the five o’clock performance, narrated by actress Bianka Tatár, József Graeser, Head of Artistic Direction at the Capital Circus of Budapest, welcomed members of the Central Hungarian Regional Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted and their families. He first gave them a behind-the-scenes look at the workings and cleaning of the special water ring. Once the

⁶ The methodology developed at the Capital Circus of Budapest also closely parallels several European initiatives in communication accessibility and equity-oriented circus audio description that we are aware of and that have emerged independently of our work, including, for example, Circus Starr in the United Kingdom, which operates in close partnership with the VocalEyes audio description program (VocalEyes, 2016).

ring had dried, our blind and partially sighted visitors were introduced to the stars of Atlantic Flight – Nagy Cirkuszi Utazás, juggler Iurii Serebrennikov and acrobat Kristina Kudzina, as well as their apparatus and costumes.

As part of this exciting program, they were also able to explore additional apparatus used in the performance: the Dosov troupe's springboard – which some of the braver guests tried out with assistance – the stilts used in the show, Kudzina's hula hoops, and the specially modified motorbike used by the Uronov troupe. József Graeser provided a comprehensive explanation of the main tricks performed, and of the materials, shapes, sizes and uses of the apparatus. Blind and partially sighted guests could explore these elements through touch. With Serebrennikov's juggling balls, one of our bold blind guests, Ádám Matics, immediately started to juggle. He told us that when he moved into the Váci Mihály Dormitory in 2005, he and seven circus artist friends started an acrobatics club in which they performed lifts and balances. At the same time he began to learn juggling with specially adapted techniques using clubs, rings and balls, including from artists Zoli Szőcs and Renátó Illés. From 2011 to 2015 he took part in circus arts training at Tanext Academy, supported by the Nem Adom Fel (I Won't Give Up) Foundation, where he tried aerial silk, trapeze, rolla bolla and the German wheel. They practiced in a controlled way, always maintaining contact with the



apparatus; only the bravest attempted somersaults. For the past year and a half, Ádám has been working as a clown doctor at the Vidám Segítők Foundation, where he also performs juggling routines. He said that his love for circus is limitless – something he mainly owes to his circus artist friends – and that being able to experience the springboard up close before the performance was a tremendous joy for him.”

(Capital Circus of Budapest, 2018)

4. Gestures and relational practices

- Building the audio description and tactile tour around concepts that are meaningful and concrete for participants (space, stage layout, clear descriptions).
- Having staff and performers move around the circle in both directions, greeting participants individually, shaking hands, introducing themselves, and inviting guests to touch their clothing, props, hair, faces, etc., while engaging in conversation.
- Offering opportunities to try out larger pieces of apparatus in a safe, supervised way, creating extra experiences that are not available to other audience members.

The following account comes from an audio-described performance of the 2018 Christmas show Szikramanók (Spark Elves):

“One hundred and fifty people came from the Central Hungarian Regional Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted, who, together with their family members, were divided into two groups. With the help of József Graeser, Head of Artistic Direction at the Capital Circus of Budapest, they explored one of the Spark Elves, the Head Elf, and their special costumes through touch. They also got to know juggler Danil Lysenko's rings, the badminton rackets and shuttlecocks used by the clowns, and the unicycle they ride on stage.

József Graeser introduced the thirteen-meter-diameter circus ring, explaining that its surface, designed

to protect performers' joints, is made of material similar to a running track. The bravest guests, under supervision, could try the sensation of being lifted into the air on the aerial hoops, and, with the help of members of the Troupe Aliev, could also experiment with the springboard used in their act. After a detailed demonstration of the operation and use of the apparatus, animal trainer Tatjana Pelekh led one of her friendly mastiff dogs around the ring, so that guests sitting along the edge of the ring could meet and pet the dog, who gratefully returned their affection with kisses."

(Szekáry, 2018)

5. Audio description during the performance

- At the beginning of the performance, the audio describer offers an overview of what the audience will hear and experience: the structure of the show, key artists, central images and elements that may not be obvious from sound alone.
- During the show, the describer provides concise but vivid descriptions of visible and invisible details, insider "behind-the-scenes" information, and comparisons and metaphors that help build a mental image.
- The describer uses consistent terminology, particularly for movements, apparatus and spatial relations.
- Physical and bodily descriptions (height, build, costume colors, hair, movement quality, etc.) are provided in a respectful, non-stereotyped way.
- The language is clear, with short sentences and everyday vocabulary; the aim is not to interpret the performance, but to provide visual information.
- When performers are speaking or there is important dialogue or music, or when the audience is applauding, the audio description pauses, so that participants can fully hear and engage with the primary soundscape.

The following description by Enikő K. Gurzó in the daily newspaper Magyar Nemzet gives a sense of how this works in practice in the 2022 Christmas show *Melyiket a 9 közül?* ("Which One of the Nine?"):

"As the first chords of the organ sound, the show's director and audio describer, Péter Fekete, lets the audience in on backstage secrets. He introduces the story, the characters, the costumes and the circus apparatus and props, so that when the time comes for the audio description – which is delivered through radio-based

headphones – the audience has a foundation to build on and doesn't have to feel as though they are groping in total darkness. (...)

The first to arrive is Henrik Ádám, a 190-centimeter-tall, blond, slim, extraordinarily dynamic and focused acrobat. 'Picture him in a burgundy shirt decorated with sequins. This young man will perform acrobatic feats on an eight-meter-long wire stretched across the ring,' the director explains. 'Next I call in Noémi Novákovics, a recently graduated aerial acrobat from our circus school; she has long brown hair and a dancer's build, and she will be performing on a ten-meter-long, snake-like swinging rope. And here with us is Dima, whom we invited from Russia. In one of his acts he stands on his hands, and in another on his head, on top of a long, thin pole that another acrobat balances on his forehead or on his shoulder,' continues the director."

(Gurzó, 2022)



6. Closure and farewell

- After the performance, staff and audio describers remain available for conversation.
- Participants are invited to share feedback and impressions in an informal setting.
- Guests are accompanied out of the venue with the same care and attention as at arrival.

The following quote from theater artist Kriszta Máj, head of the Vakrepülés Theater Company, gives a sense of the emotional impact of such performances:

"I can hardly find the words. I very rarely feel this moved. I loved the performance; it was simply astonishing, and it addressed a very topical subject. The audio description provided by Péter Fekete was fantastic: he shared his own feelings and conveyed things that we, as blind people, could not have experienced otherwise. Before the show we had the chance to get to know the circus props through touch, and we were honored to meet the performers and the little dogs. That brought us very close to the circus. When a blind person goes to a circus performance without audio description, they may hear the music and the applause, but very little of the actual content. With the backstage tour and the audio description, the experience was completely lifelike," she said."

(Capital Circus of Budapest, 2022)

4. EVALUATION

Although this article does not present detailed statistical analysis, the evaluation framework has generated a growing body of feedback that informs the ongoing refinement of the protocol.

1. Empirical research and documentation

- Recording organizers' and audio describers' observations in a structured way.
- Completing internal questionnaires and compiling basic statistics.
- Analyzing participants' evaluations and feedback, drawing on the self-administered questionnaires completed after performances.

2. Processing and sharing research findings

- Synthesizing and interpreting results both orally (internal debriefings, professional discussions) and in written form.
- Ensuring that all stakeholders, including management, staff and partners, are informed of the findings.

5. ADJUSTMENT AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

1. Correcting errors and refining the method

- Identifying weaknesses or gaps in the protocol based on evaluation findings.
- Documenting proposed adjustments and new methodological elements.
- Implementing changes in subsequent performances, and monitoring their effects.

6. DISSEMINATION

1. Professional dialogue and conferences

- Presenting the methodology and experiences primarily at circus and circus industry events and conferences.
- Secondly, contributing to professional forums and conferences on accessibility, equality and inclusion.

2. Education and knowledge sharing

- Sharing knowledge and experiences in circus, performing arts, cultural and social fields, and in professional training programs for audio describers and access coordinators.



CONCLUSION

The audio description work developed and continuously refined at the Capital Circus of Budapest since 2016 is directed not only at Hungarian audiences; through accumulated research, empirical practice and methodological systematization, it has begun to attract attention and serve as a reference point in many parts of the world, from European circus scenes to Chinese circuses.

The techniques and technologies developed in the “workshop” of the Capital Circus, in close cooperation with professional partner organizations, are of growing interest internationally. Each year, more circuses adopt, adapt and apply the methodology in light of their own needs and productions.

In the twenty-first century, the role of circus is no longer confined to entertainment. As an art form, it increasingly embraces social responsibility – whether in modeling responsible animal care, in the examples offered by its artists, or in its commitment to equity and inclusion. Within this broader shift, the Capital Circus of Budapest has taken on a pioneering role, both in Hungary and in Europe, in making circus performances accessible for blind and partially sighted audiences and in advancing equal access more generally.

By sharing its audio description protocol and experiences, the Circus contributes not only to the professionalization of circus audio description, but also to a wider international dialogue on how non-verbal and movement-based performance genres can become fully accessible, enjoyable and meaningful for people with disabilities.



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EMESE JOÓ

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Museum, Library and Archives of
Hungarian Circus Arts
(HUNGARY)

The author suggests drinking
apple spritz whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
Liliputien by *David Yengibarjan*
whilst reading her essay.

Wonderful Circus World - International Circus History Exhibition

Grand Opening and International Agreement Signing Ceremony

January 11, 2024, at high noon, as part of the professional program of the 15th Budapest Circus Festival, the grand opening of the exhibition titled *“Wonderful Circus World – International Circus History Exhibition”* took place in the impressive exhibition hall of the Museum of Hungarian Agriculture.

At the ceremony, Máté Vincze, Deputy State Secretary for Public Collections and Cultural Development, and Péter Fekete, Director-General, delivered welcoming speeches. This was followed by the signing of an international cooperation agreement.

The present representatives of the national circus arts collections – who are also our exhibiting partners – unanimously declared their intent to cooperate in order to explore, preserve, and pass on the universal heritage of circus arts to future generations, as follows:



PRO MEMORIA - MEMORANDUM OF COOPERATION

The undersigned, on behalf of our national circus art collections, make the following joint declaration today in the spirit of working together to promote the exploration, preservation and transmission of the universal circus heritage for future generations.

We believe that the circus performing arts are an outstanding component of our universal cultural heritage, and therefore it is our common interest and duty to conduct the highest level of scientific research into the intellectual and material treasures of this art form, to collect and systematically process its memories in a responsible manner, to conscientiously preserve them and to present

them to everyone in a form that is accessible to all. We are convinced that the future of circus arts depends on the most complete knowledge and dissemination of the history of this art form.



DECLARATION


FOR THE PURPOSE OF SAVING TANGIBLE AND
INTANGIBLE ASSETS OF THE CIRCUS HERITAGE


*„Feeling the responsibility we have
towards the future generations
of artists and audiences,
we want to build the future
of the circus world
on dialogue.”*

15TH BUDAPEST INTERNATIONAL CIRCUS FESTIVAL
CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST


Budapest, 11 January 2024

*In the firm belief in the justification of the cooperation and ideals set out above,
we solemnly sign this document of cultural and historical importance.*


Maxat Maratbekovich Zhaiikov / Жаңқос Маратбекұлы
Director of the Qazaq State Circus
Директор Казахский государственный цирк


Nargiz Tazymbekkyzy / Тазымбекқызы Наргиз
Head of the Qazaq State Circus Museum
Заведующая музеем цирка Казахский государственный цирк


Maxim Yurievich Nikulin / Максим Юрьевич Никулин
CEO and Artistic Director
Nikulin Moscow Circus on Tsvetnoy Boulevard
Генеральный директор Московский цирк. Никулина на Цветном бульваре


Irina Ivanovna Zaitseva / Ирина Ивановна Зайцева
Director, Regional Public Charitable Foundation for the Artists of the Circus
„Circus and mercy” Yu. V. Nikulin
директор, Общественный благотворительный фонд помощи артистам цирка «ЦИРК И МИЛОСЕРДИЕ»


Odette Bouglione
President of Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione
Présidente du Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione


Louis-Sampon Bouglione
President of Association Musée Emilien Bouglione and Director of Musée
Emilien Bouglione, Emilien Bouglione Museum
Président de l'Association Musée Emilien Bouglione et
Directeur du Musée Emilien Bouglione, Musée Emilien Bouglione



Antonio Giarola, M.D. / Dott. Antonio Giarola
President of the CEDAC
Circus Arts Documentation Educational Center (Verona)
Presidente ANSAC - CEDAC
CEDAC - Centro Educativo Arti Circensi di Verona


Davio Casartelli
Director, Fiablandia Educational Museum of Circus Art
Direttore, Fiablandia Museo didattico dell'Arte Circense,
Circo Medrano


Gilles Maignant
Director and Curator of the Circus Museum
Circus Museum of Gilles Maignant (Association „CIRCUS PATRIMONIUM”)
Musée du cirque Gilles Maignant („CIRCUS PATRIMONIUM” Association)



Roberto Fazzini
Collector, Founder
Dorothea and Roberto Fazzini Circus Historical Archive
Collezionista, fondatore
Dorothea e Roberto Fazzini Archivio Storico del Circo


Cor Martens
Private Collector, Circus Archive (private collection)
Particuliere Verzamelaar, Circusarchief (privécollectie)


Michael Swatosch M.A.
Director of the Circus & Clown Museum Vienna
Museumsleiter Circus & Clown Museum Wien


Frank J. Keller
Artistic Director, Archive Collection of Circus Krone
Künstlerischer Leiter, Archiv-Sammlung des Circus Krone


Péter Fekete / Fekete Péter
General Director of the Capital Circus of Budapest
Főigazgató, Fővárosi Nagycirkusz


Emese Jóó / Jóó Emese
Head of the Science Department
Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts
Tudományos tár vezető
Magyar Cirkuszművészeti Múzeum, Könyvtár és Archivum

We believe that the only way to create lasting and future-oriented value is to preserve the heritage and develop national circus art collections.

Feeling the responsibility we have towards the future generations of artists and audiences, we want to build the future of the circus world on dialogue and intensive networking.

Recognising the importance of mutually sharing information, by signing this declaration we express our intention to promote the important cause of circus arts in the future in partnership at the highest professional level.

In this context, we will extend our highly successful artistic cooperation to the fields of scientific research and (public) collections.

In the partnership, we will further develop the scientific dissemination, education and research work in our countries, and we will emphasise the importance of documenting the results in a time-resistant way.

With this declaration, we commit ourselves to the principle of reciprocity in the research and processing of our national circus cultural heritage: we will make the material, written, visual and cinematographic documents of circus performing arts available and accessible to each other.

We are committed to providing regular opportunities for our researchers and professionals to share their findings and experiences through in-person and/or online conferences.

We also make every effort to ensure that our collections are open community institutions – accessible to the international circus professionals and the general public.

We believe that each car of our imaginary circus caravan, representing universal artistic values, is owned by a national circus art collection, whose representatives have signed this agreement today. This caravan is now being forged closer together to become a strong and unbreakable community

to spread the word about the wonderful and irreplaceable art of circus throughout the world.

Our collaboration is designed to strengthen the cohesion of the circus community and to promote the appreciation of circus arts worldwide.

In the firm belief in the realisation of the cooperation and ideals set out above, we solemnly sign this document of cultural and historical importance.

The signatories of the international cooperation agreement:

- **Maxat Maratbekovich Zhaikov and Nargiz Tamabekkyzy** – KAZAKH STATE CIRCUS MUSEUM (*Almaty, Kazakhstan*)
- **Maxim Yurievich Nikulin and Irina Ivanovna Zaitseva** – YURI V. NIKULIN MUSEUM (*Moscow, Russia*)
- **Antonio Giarola M.D.** – CEDAC / CENTRE FOR CIRCUS ARTS DOCUMENTATION AND EDUCATION (*Verona, Italy*)
- **Davio Casartelli** – FIABILANDIA MUSEUM OF CIRCUS ARTS STUDIES (*Rimini, Italy*)
- **Gilles Maignant** – GILLES MAIGNANT CIRCUS MUSEUM (*Levens, France*)
- **Odette Bouglione and Louis-Sampion Bouglione** – ÉMILIEN BOUGLIONE MUSEUM (*Paris, France*)
- **Cor Martens** – COR MARTENS CIRCUS ARCHIVE (*Aarle-Rixtel, Netherlands*)
- **Michael Swatosch M.A.** – CIRCUS & CLOWN MUSEUM VIENNA (*Vienna, Austria*)
- **Frank J. Keller** – CIRCUS KRONE ARCHIVE COLLECTION (*Munich, Germany*)
- **Roberto Fazzini** – DOROTEA AND ROBERTO FAZZINI CIRCUS HISTORY ARCHIVE (*Modena, Italy*)
- **Péter Fekete and Emese Joó** – MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS (*Budapest, Hungary*)





The Wonderful Circus World - International Circus History Exhibition

The exhibition titled “The Wonderful Circus World – International Circus History Exhibition” featured the circus history and circus arts collections of nine nations alongside Hungary. A total of **15 private and public circus collections** contributed selected materials to the showcase:

- **Educational and Documentation Center for Circus Arts – CEDAC** (*Verona, Italy*)
- **Dorotea and Roberto Fazzini Circus History Archive** (*Modena, Italy*)
- **Fiabilandia Circus Arts Study Museum** (*Rimini, Italy*)
- **Cor Martens Circus Archive** (*Aarle-Rixtel, Netherlands*)
- **Circus & Clown Museum Wien** (*Vienna, Austria*)
- **Krone Circus Archive Collection** (*Munich, Germany*)
- **Roncalli Circus Museum** (*Cologne, Germany*)
- **Kazakh State Circus Museum** (*Almaty, Kazakhstan*)
- **Yuri V. Nikulin Museum** (*Moscow, Russia*)
- **Museum of Circus Arts** (*Saint Petersburg, Russia*)
- **Gilles Maignant Circus Museum** (*Levens, France*)
- **Émilien Bouglione Museum** (*Paris, France*)
- **Musée du Cirque Alain Frère** (*Tourrette-Levens, France*)
- **Cirque du Soleil** (*Montreal, Canada*)
- **Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts** (*Budapest, Hungary*)



Exhibition Highlights

The wonders of the circus world were illustrated by **nearly 1,000 artifacts**, including costumes, props, musical instruments, films, posters, photographs, documents, spectacular installations, and lifelike scale models. International institutions and partners loaned more than **300 items**, while nearly **700 artifacts** were provided by Hungarian exhibitors—the majority coming from the collection of the **Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts**, with additional pieces on loan from Hungarian circus artists.

This exhibition marked the first time in Hungary that the relics of Hungarian circus artists and dynasties, significant works of circus-related fine arts and cinema, and the most prestigious foreign collections of international circus heritage were displayed together.

One of the main attractions of the exhibition was the “**Danube Crossing**” (**Átmentem!**) project, illustrating **László Simet’s crossing of the Danube**. This was a multi-faceted presentation of the unique performance where the excellent Hungarian tightrope artist crossed the Danube on April 15, 2023. He completed the feat at a height of **40 meters**, walking across a **300-meter-long wire rope without any safety harness**.

The Visitor Experience

The visitor experience was significantly enhanced by immersive elements (such as a **100-year-old carousel**) and interactive tools (including **VR tightrope walking** and a **balance pole lifting** simulation). The program also featured regular guided tours, university lectures, professional workshops, the “**What a Circus!**” family day, and an unconventional circus-literature evening for the closing ceremony (finissage).

A unique feature was the daily **circus pedagogy** program: a total of 30 group sessions were held on topics such as circus history, circus drama games, juggling, and responsible animal ownership. Furthermore, the continuous presence of **circus artist exhibition assistants** provided an extraordinary added value, as they validated the displays with their personal stories and transformed the exhibition into a living environment.



Key Statistics & Curators

The large-scale exhibition was hosted at the **Museum of Hungarian Agriculture** and remained open for **44 days** between **January 11 and February 29, 2024**, attracting nearly **10,000 visitors**.

The highly successful circus history exhibition was curated by **Péter Fekete**, Director General of the National Circus Arts Center, and **Emese Joó**, Chief Museologist and Head of the Hungarian Museum, Library and Archives of Circus Arts. Senior Staff: **Tünde Kerülő**, **Szandra Irina Szonday**, and **Susy Eötvös**.





Circus History Exhibition

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Circus History Exhibition

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PHOTOS:
ÁDÁM URBÁN





DR. ALAIN FRÈRE
CIRCUS HISTORIAN AND
CIRCUS HERITAGE COLLECTOR
Musée du Cirque Alain Frère
(FRANCE)

BIOGRAPHY

Doctor of Medicine, General Practitioner in Tourrette-Levens from 1967 to 1998.

Mayor of Tourrette-Levens since 1983, General Councillor of the Alpes-Maritimes since 1991.

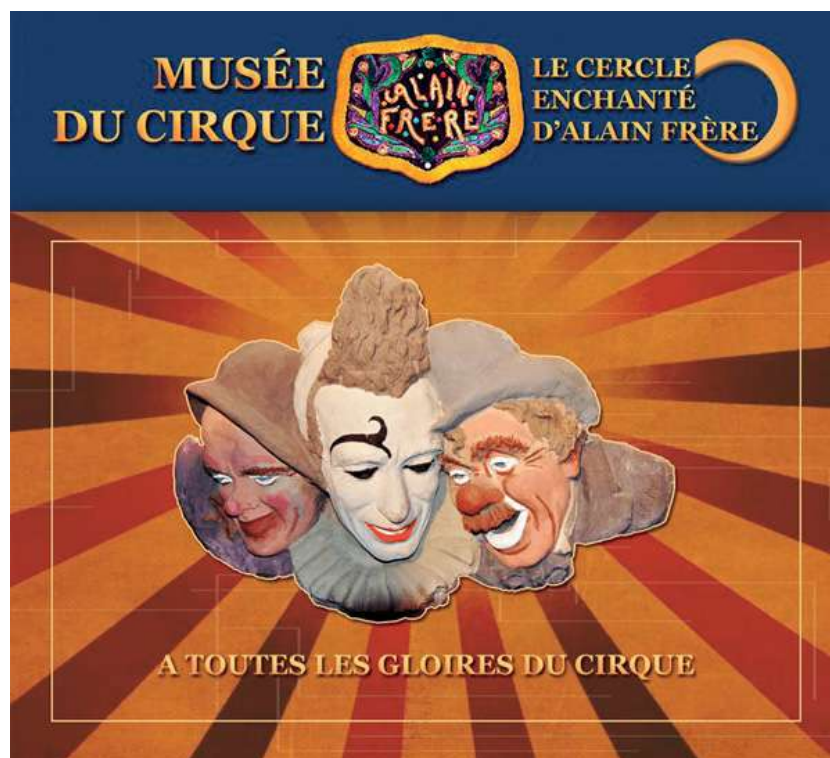
Co-founder, at the behest of Prince Rainier III of Monaco, of the International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo in 1974, Artistic Advisor to the International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo since its inception in 1974.

In the town of Tourrette-Levens, he created "My Village is an Open-Air Museum," installing works of art throughout the town.

Curator and Owner of the Musée du Cirque Alain Frère.

Dr. Alain Frère: The Living Memory of the Circus

Dr. Alain Frère is one of the most influential and respected figures in the international circus world, whose life has been defined by a unique duality: a professional career in medicine and a profound, lifelong passion for the circus arts. A physician by profession, he practiced for decades while simultaneously serving as the Mayor of Tourrette-Levens, France, for over thirty years. In recognition of his tireless public and professional service, he has been honored with the highest distinctions from both the French state and the Principality of Monaco. His decorations include being a Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters in France and a Commander of Cultural Merit in Monaco, alongside the prestigious Golden Clown award from the International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo.



Dr. Frère's legacy is inextricably linked to the formal recognition of the circus as a serious form of cultural heritage. In 1974, as a close friend and advisor to Prince Rainier III of Monaco, he played a pivotal role in founding the International Circus Festival of Monte-Carlo. For decades, he served as the festival's artistic advisor, scouting the world's finest performers and shaping the event's unparalleled prestige. His advocacy reached a historic milestone in 1978 when, with the support of Prince Rainier III and Minister Jean-Philippe Lecat, he succeeded in having the circus officially recognized as a cultural spectacle in France.



Beyond his role as an organizer, Dr. Frère is a dedicated chronicler of the genre. In Tourrette-Levens, near Nice, he curates the Musée du Cirque, one of the world's most significant private archives of circus history. This vibrant "treasure trove" is built on the principles of preservation and respect, saving the legacies of great circus dynasties from being lost to time. The collection's "crown jewel" is its vast array of authentic gala costumes, including the iconic red tunic of Charlie Rivel, the outfits of Oleg Popov, and the legendary attire of the Russian clown Yuri Nikulin. These pieces, often crafted by master tailors like Vicaire in Paris, represent a pinnacle of artisanship adorned with jewels and hand embroidery.





The archive's historical depth is staggering, featuring tens of thousands of photographs, meticulously crafted models, and rare lithographs dating back to the 18th century. It serves as a vital resource for researchers and historians, fulfilling Dr. Frère's mission to prove that circus is a universal cultural heritage on par with fine arts and theater. Although he has stepped back from operational duties, Dr. Frère remains an honorary member of the Monte-Carlo Festival and maintains a close friendship with its current president, Princess Stéphanie of Monaco. He continues to be regarded as the "living memory" of the circus world, personally guiding visitors through his collection and sharing the stories behind every artifact preserved for eternity.







PHOTOS:
SUSY EÖTVÖS
EMESE JOÓ



PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN



ANTONIO GIAROLA

PRESIDENT, CIRCUS HISTORIAN,
POET AND DIRECTOR SPECIALIZED IN
CIRCUS AND EQUESTRIAN SHOWS

Educational Center for Documentation
of Circus Arts
(ITALY)

BIOGRAPHY

He graduated in dramaturgy at the DAMS University in Bologna and has worked as a professional in the field of entertainment since 1984, when he created the Clown's Circus, the first Italian experiment of a "classical" circus with a theatrical dramaturgy. His many activities are related to the circus, the theatre and the equestrian environment. Co-founder of the Accademia d'Arte Circense in Verona. Director of many equestrian shows in Europe and of some editions of the famous Carnival in Venice. Director and artistic advisor to many circuses including Herman Renz (Netherlands), Ringling Barnum & Bailey (USA), Circus Nikulin (Moscow), Darix Togni, Embell Riva, Nando Orfei and art companies such as Holiday On Ice. He is often invited to sit on the judging panels of the world's leading circus festivals and, as a speaker, at international conferences related to live entertainment. He has written extensively on the history of the circus. Actually he is also the artistic director of the Salieri Circus Award.

The author suggests drinking
Aperol spritz (obviously made with Prosecco)
whilst reading his essay.

The author suggests listening to
Tema Celeste (Solo piano version) by
Roberto Cacciapaglia
whilst reading his essay.

Abstract

In this article I present the *Centro Educativo di Documentazione Arti Circensi* (CEDAC - Educational Centre for Documentation on Circus Arts; <https://www.cedacverona.org/>) in Verona as a model for circus heritage management. Founded in 2003 on the initiative of ANSAC - *Associazione Nazionale Sviluppo Arti Circensi* (National Association for the Development of Circus Arts; <https://www.artircensi.org/>), CEDAC was created to fill a long-standing gap in Italy in the systematic study and preservation of documentation on circus arts, particularly that relating to itinerant shows (*spettacolo viaggiante*). Today it constitutes a unique archive in the national context, recognised by the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali (Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities) and by the Regione del Veneto (Region of Veneto) as an institution of "local interest". It holds and manages a growing body of bibliographic, archival, audiovisual and iconographic material relating to the circus arts, structured in around twenty distinct collections and family archives, including important personal holdings that would otherwise have been at risk of dispersion or export.

I describe the institutional framework, collections and working methods of CEDAC, and outline how we have progressively developed an integrated documentation system combining library, archive and media resources. Particular attention is devoted to our digital catalogue (ArchiCEDAC), which gradually interlinks bibliographic and archival data according to international description standards, and to our educational and research activities aimed at scholars, students, professionals and the wider public. I also recall the inclusion of CEDAC, through the Fédération Mondiale du Cirque (World Circus Federation), in the World Digital Library programme promoted by the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Finally, I sketch some future directions for the Centre, with a view to consolidating CEDAC as a living, participatory heritage hub for circus memory and practice.

CEDAC: A Circus Heritage Management Model

1. Introduction

The circus arts have long occupied a paradoxical position in European cultural life. On the one hand, circus is deeply rooted in the collective imagination: it is associated with family dynasties, itinerant communities, travelling shows and a distinctive visual and musical iconography. On the other hand, precisely because of its itinerant and ephemeral nature, circus has often left fragile and scattered documentary traces. Posters, programmes, photographs, press cuttings and private correspondence have tended to remain in personal hands, distributed among families or small private collections and therefore highly exposed to the risk of loss, damage or simple oblivion.

When we founded CEDAC in 2003, our starting point was the conviction that circus, as both tangible and intangible heritage, requires a dedicated documentary infrastructure. It is not sufficient to preserve isolated documents; it is necessary to build a context in which they can be catalogued, interpreted and made accessible to different communities of users. From the beginning, we conceived CEDAC not only as a physical archive, but as a methodological model for managing circus heritage in a systematic and historically informed way. Our aim has been to create a reference point for anyone wishing to approach circus tradition from any perspective, whether historical, artistic, sociological, anthropological or educational.

2. Genesis and Institutional Framework

CEDAC was established in Verona in 2003 under the aegis of ANSAC – Associazione Nazionale Sviluppo Arti Circensi (National Association for the Development of Circus Arts). At that time no specialised Italian centre existed that was devoted to the documentation of circus arts and related itinerant forms of spectacle. The founding aim was therefore twofold: on the one hand, to safeguard existing documentary materials that were at risk of being destroyed, dispersed or exported; on the other, to make them available for research, education and cultural programming.

The opening of CEDAC received institutional support from the Ministero dei Beni e delle Attività Culturali (Italian Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities), and the Centre was subsequently recognised by the Regione del Veneto (Region of Veneto) as an institution of “local interest”. This recognition confirmed the public value of circus documentation and positioned CEDAC within the regional library and archive network. The Centre later joined the



Polo Bibliotecario Regionale del Veneto (Regional Library Network of Veneto), which allowed us to adopt the SOL – Sebina Open Library integrated library system. Thanks to this step, our entire library component could be catalogued according to professional standards and made visible through the online search tools of the Verona civic library system.

Further international recognition came in 2011, when the Fédération Mondiale du Cirque (World Circus Federation) identified CEDAC as the only Italian organisation specifically dedicated to preserving the history of circus and proposed its inclusion in the World Digital Library (WDL) project. The WDL, promoted by the Library of Congress in Washington in collaboration with UNESCO, aims to create a global digital platform through which libraries and archives around the world can share significant cultural and historical documents. Our participation in this initiative underlined the particular status of CEDAC within the broader constellation of circus memory institutions.

CEDAC is physically located in Via Santa Teresa 12, Verona. Its organisational structure is deliberately lean, but strongly connected to a network of external collaborators, donors, researchers, universities and circus professionals. This networked configuration allows us to combine the rigour of heritage management with the flexibility required by a living, evolving art form such as circus.

3. Collections and Archival Model

Over the past two decades CEDAC's holdings have grown steadily. Today the Centre conserves some three thousand volumes dedicated to circus and the broader world of spectacle, alongside a substantial number of periodicals, posters, programmes, photographs, postcards, audiovisual recordings and other forms of ephemera. The heritage value of the Centre lies not only in the quantity of these materials, but also in the way they are structured and contextualised.

We have organised the collections along several complementary axes. One is typological: the *Biblioteca* (library) gathers monographs and reference works; the *Emeroteca* holds newspapers and magazines; the *Mediateca* covers

video and audio materials; while the *Fototeca* and *Iconoteca* bring together photographic, graphic and illustrative documents. Another axis is archival: the *Carteggi* preserve correspondence and working files; the philatelic section (*Filatelìa*) deals with stamps and postal material; other subsections cover programmes, posters and diverse printed ephemera.

A further, crucial axis is the provenance-based organisation of *fondi* and family archives. CEDAC conserves, among others, the Fondo Massimo Alberini, Fondo Edgardo Meda, Fondo Alain Frère, Fondo Compagnia de Calza "I Antichi", Fondo Alessandro Serena, Fondo Guido De Bianchi, Fondo Alessandro Cervellati and several others, alongside the archives of important circus families such as Belley, Togni, Zavatta and many more. Each fund reflects the perspective and professional trajectory of a particular critic, historian, director, artist or family, and thus offers a specific angle on the history of circus arts.

In heritage-management terms, this configuration makes CEDAC an "archive of archives": a place where many different documentary universes are preserved together, while their internal coherence and original context are respected. A clear example is the acquisition of the Fondo Alessandro Cervellati. This exceptional private collection was at concrete risk of being dispersed or exported; its purchase and conservation by ANSAC and CEDAC not only prevented its loss, but also made it possible to study it in relation to other Italian and international sources. In this way, the Centre functions at once as a guardian of individual memories and as a laboratory for reconstructing the broader historical tapestry of circus arts.



4. Documentation System and Working Methodology

The management model developed at CEDAC is grounded in the idea that documentation is not a passive accumulation of materials, but an active and ongoing process of selection, description and contextualisation. This process begins with the acquisition of new documents, whether through donations, purchases or targeted archival “rescue” operations aimed at collections in danger. Every time a fund enters the Centre, it is subject to a series of coordinated operations that include physical conservation, sorting, cataloguing and thematic indexing.

We have chosen to adopt international standards of description for both bibliographic and archival materials. This choice ensures interoperability with other heritage institutions and facilitates potential data exchange and joint projects. The same logic informs the choice of professional cataloguing software and the structure of our internal databases. For each item or dossier we record essential descriptive metadata (author, title, date, format, provenance), but we also assign thematic descriptors relating to circus genres, disciplines, companies, geographical areas and historical periods.

Over time, we have begun to construct controlled vocabularies and specialised thesauri for the circus field. Terms such as *trapezio volante*, *illusionismo*, *circo equestre*, *clownerie* or *nuovo circo* require precise and consistent usage if researchers are to retrieve relevant materials across different collections. The same applies to personal and corporate names: the names of artists, dynasties, companies and festivals are standardised and cross-referenced in order to avoid fragmentation. In practical terms, this means that a researcher interested in, for example, the Togni family or the history of

equestrian acts can navigate the catalogue using a combination of subject headings, personal names and material types, and obtain in a single search books, periodical articles, posters, photographs and video recordings linked to the chosen topic.

By cataloguing, collecting and, where possible, digitising documents of many different kinds, we seek to counteract the loss of a heritage that, by its very nature, is highly exposed to destruction or deterioration. Our efforts have led to the creation of a unique archive, composed of around twenty structured collections and a wide range of heterogeneous documents, and to the development of a coherent documentation system that supports both scholarly research and broader cultural initiatives.



5. Digital Access and the ArchiCEDAC Platform

The digital dimension has become increasingly central to our heritage management model. CEDAC's catalogue is progressively being made available online through ArchiCEDAC, the digital portal that allows users to consult the documentation preserved at the Centre more easily and remotely. The documents currently uploaded have been catalogued with the software Archiui and are described according to the main international archival description standards.

At this stage, ArchiCEDAC covers only certain fondi and types of material, but the project is explicitly conceived as a long-term, incremental undertaking. As we continue to describe and, where appropriate, digitise further holdings, the corpus accessible via ArchiCEDAC will grow in both breadth and depth. One of our key objectives is to create a progressive interconnection between bibliographic data and archival data, so that the portal functions not simply as a list of records, but as a system that allows users to filter and combine information by type of subject (institutions, persons, families), by themes and by historiographical lines of enquiry.

In practice, this approach makes it possible to reconstruct networks of relations between artists, companies, critics, festivals and venues; to follow the evolution of a particular circus family over time; or to analyse the circulation of specific acts or shows across countries. The integration of our catalogue into the Polo Bibliotecario Regionale del Veneto further amplifies access. Through the regional library network's online search interface, users can identify CEDAC holdings alongside those of other cultural institutions in Verona and beyond. This networked visibility is essential if circus documentation is to be fully recognised as part of the wider documentary heritage of the region and of Italy as a whole.

6. Educational, Research and Outreach Functions

CEDAC's mission is not restricted to preservation and cataloguing. From the outset we have regarded the Centre as an educational and research hub. Agreements concluded with several universities have made it possible to offer students different forms of internship and training placements, allowing them to discover in practice the activities of a documentation centre and to develop specific skills in the field of heritage management. Through these collaborations we seek both to stimulate interest in circus studies and to provide concrete learning and working opportunities for the younger generations.

We regularly welcome students and scholars from universities and specialised schools in Italy and abroad, offering assistance in identifying relevant sources and consulting materials on site. Over the years, numerous theses and dissertations have been based on research conducted at CEDAC; we maintain an alphabetical index of these works and make it available online as a resource for future researchers. In parallel, the Centre carries out its own editorial and dissemination activities. The series *Quaderno Documenti-Attività* periodically documents our projects and provides thematic dossiers on aspects of circus history and documentation, while other publications, such as *Corpo Animali Meraviglie*, explore the iconography and imaginaries of circus bodies and animals, often in connection with exhibitions, conferences or festivals.

CEDAC also collaborates closely with the specialist journal *Circo*, whose archive can be consulted via our website, and contributes documentation and expertise to various external publications and cultural initiatives. Public outreach constitutes another fundamental dimension of our work. Guided visits, thematic presentations and collaborations with local schools and cultural associations help to make the archive visible and meaningful beyond the academic community. By showing original documents, explaining the history of circus families or illustrating how programmes and posters were produced, we invite audiences to understand circus not only as entertainment, but as a complex cultural phenomenon with deep historical roots.

CEDAC is always at the disposal of researchers who, for professional or study reasons, wish to broaden their knowledge of the world of circus. The extent and organisation of our archive allow for systematic and in-depth research, which in turn generates new interpretations and narratives of circus history.

7. Perspectives and Future Directions

The heritage management model outlined above is the result of two decades of continuous experimentation and refinement. Nevertheless, from my perspective as director, CEDAC remains very much a work in progress. Several lines of development are particularly important for the future.

First, we intend to continue strengthening the integration between our different data environments. The interweaving of bibliographic and archival information in ArchiCEDAC is an ongoing endeavour. As more *fondi* are catalogued and more fields are harmonised, the portal will become an increasingly powerful tool for historiographical research, able to support more complex queries and visualisations of the circus field over time.



Second, the digital environment opens up further possibilities for international collaboration. By aligning our description practices with international standards, we facilitate the creation of shared projects with archives, libraries and museums in other countries. In the medium term, I envisage the development of interoperable catalogues, joint virtual exhibitions and comparative research projects that connect CEDAC's holdings with those of other documentation centres dedicated to circus and the performing arts. Our earlier involvement, through the Fédération Mondiale du Cirque, in the World Digital Library project promoted by the Library of Congress has already pointed in this direction, suggesting how circus materials can find a place within broader global platforms for cultural heritage.

Third, there is still considerable potential in the area of public engagement. We plan to elaborate more thematic pathways and online resources aimed at non-specialist audiences, including teachers, pupils and circus professionals themselves. The aim is to transform the archive ever more clearly into a space where different communities can recognise their own histories and narratives, and where the documentation stimulates new creative and educational projects.

Finally, our preservation and acquisition policy itself is evolving. As contemporary circus continues to develop new forms, aesthetics and modes of production, CEDAC must increasingly collect not only printed matter and audiovisual documents, but also born-digital materials, websites, social media content and other traces of current practice. This shift implies new technical and methodological challenges, from digital preservation to the ethics of web archiving, but it is essential if the archive is to reflect the living and changing nature of the circus arts.

8. Conclusion

CEDAC was born from a simple yet ambitious idea: that the circus arts deserved a dedicated documentary centre capable of safeguarding their memory and supporting their study. Over the past twenty years, this idea has taken concrete shape in the form of a unique archival institution, recognised by national and regional authorities and integrated into the broader heritage infrastructure of the Veneto region.

Through the systematic organisation of collections, the adoption of international standards, the development of the ArchiCEDAC digital portal and an ongoing programme of educational, editorial and outreach activities, we have sought to construct a coherent “circus heritage management model”. This model is firmly rooted in the specificity of our local context – Verona, Veneto, Italy – but it aspires to dialogue with the wider international community of researchers, archivists and practitioners who are engaged in preserving and interpreting the memory of circus.

The work is far from complete. New collections will arrive, new technologies will emerge, and new questions will be asked of the materials we preserve. However, the experience gained so far suggests that a dedicated, methodologically grounded documentation centre can play a decisive role in ensuring that the circus arts are not only remembered, but also understood, interpreted and reimagined by future generations.





PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN



The author suggests drinking
black tea with milk
whilst reading his essay.

The author suggests listening to
Entry of Gladiators of Julius Fucick
whilst reading his essay.

GENÍS MATABOSCH GIMENEZ
PRESIDENT OF CIRCUS ARTS FOUNDATION
Director of the International Circus Festival
Gold Elephant of Girona
(SPAIN)

BIOGRAPHY

He is an internationally recognised circus professional, historian, collector and museologist. He is the Founder and President of **Circusland – International Circus Palace**, as well as President of the **Circus Arts Foundation**. In addition, he serves as Director of the **International Circus Festival “Gold Elephant” of Girona**. For several decades, his work has focused on the research, preservation and interpretation of circus heritage, with particular attention to European circus history and iconography. As a passionate collector, he has built one of Europe’s most significant private circus collections, comprising posters, artefacts and archival materials. Through his curatorial and scholarly activities, he promotes the circus as a living cultural heritage, creating a bridge between academic research, museum practice and contemporary circus arts.

CIRCUS ARTS
FOUNDATION

CIRCUSLAND: The European House for the Professional Conservation of Circus Heritage

Abstract

In this article I present Circusland (Besalú, Girona, Spain) and the Circus Arts Foundation as a comprehensive model for the professional conservation of circus heritage in Europe. The Foundation, a private non-profit cultural organisation created in 2011, combines the production of high-quality circus festivals and shows with the systematic preservation, study and dissemination of circus memory and documentation. Building on the International Circus Festival, the Great Christmas Circus of Girona and other major productions, we have progressively developed an integrated system that includes collections, archives, a research centre and, since 2020, Circusland – a permanent museum space devoted to the history and aesthetics of the circus. I outline the Foundation’s mission and governance, the evolution from festival to documentation centre, our heritage policy and research infrastructure, and the narrative and visitor experience offered by Circusland. Particular attention is given to the professional cataloguing and digitalisation of key collections, and to our transnational ambitions, especially in relation to Iberoamerica and the wider European circus community. I conclude by sketching future directions towards a fully articulated European house for circus heritage and research.

Introduction: Circus as Cultural Heritage

The circus occupies a singular position in contemporary culture. It is at once a live performing art, a popular form of entertainment and a complex historical phenomenon that has accompanied social and technological change over more than two and a half centuries. Its material traces – posters, costumes, programmes, photographs, models, props – and its immaterial legacies – techniques, lineages, family histories, repertoires – together form a fragile, heterogeneous and often undervalued heritage.

In much of Europe, the itinerant nature of circus life and its traditional marginalisation within cultural policy have meant that documents and artefacts have remained in private hands, at risk of dispersion or destruction. At the same time, the renewed artistic vitality of circus and its growing presence within festivals, theatres and academic research have created an urgent need for professional infrastructures capable of preserving, contextualising and making accessible this heritage in a systematic way.

It is in this context that the Circus Arts Foundation and Circusland have taken shape. Our aim is not simply to exhibit nostalgic images of “circus



yesterday”, but to construct a living house for “circus yesterday – today”, where memory, research, artistic creation and public enjoyment are interwoven. In what follows I outline how we have sought to build, step by step, a model of professional conservation that is at once locally rooted, internationally connected and deeply embedded in the contemporary circus ecosystem.

The Circus Arts Foundation: Mission and Dual Model

The Circus Arts Foundation (Circus Arts Foundation – CAF) was legally constituted in Figueres on 7 October 2011 as a private, non-profit cultural foundation. Its founding impetus came from the possibility, offered by the city of Figueres, of hosting a major international circus festival in the Castell de Sant Ferran and, in parallel, of projecting a large European museum devoted to the circus arts.

Our statutes define the main purpose of the Foundation as follows: to promote, foster, disseminate, enhance, protect and defend, in Spain and in any other country, the circus show understood as a performing art, a form of play, an integral part of our culture and a paradigm of multiculturalism – together with its artists, its memory and its heritage. This mission statement is not a rhetorical formula: it articulates the double horizon that guides our work. On the one hand, we engage with circus as a contemporary live art; on the other, we assume responsibility for its past and its archival traces.

In practical terms, the Foundation seeks to reconcile two sets of tasks. One set is typically associated with museums and documentation centres: recovering, conserving, studying and disseminating circus heritage, with particular attention to Spain but always within a global frame; safe-



guarding and cataloguing the major collections entrusted to us; stimulating research on circus history and on the current configurations of the field; and promoting the creation of a space for conservation, dissemination and study that could become a great European circus museum linked, in the future, to a Conservatory of Circus Arts.

The second set concerns activities with a broader, often paying, audience: festivals, Christmas shows and summer productions that reach tens of thousands of spectators. These activities are not merely financial tools; they are also artistic and cultural events in their own right. However, from the perspective of heritage management, they play a crucial role in generating resources that can be reinvested in the more specialised, less visible work of conservation and research.

This dual model – combining high-level circus production with professional documentation and museology – underpins the entire trajectory of the Foundation and provides the framework within which Circusland has emerged.

From Festival to Documentation Centre

The first International Circus Festival at the Castell de Sant Ferran in March 2012 marked a decisive starting point. Under a large tent planted in the parade ground of the fortress, fifty-two artists from thirteen countries presented twenty-two attractions never before seen in Europe. The artistic quality, the architectural setting and the enthusiastic re-

sponse of more than fourteen thousand spectators over four days signalled that a new circus project with international scope was possible from a small city in northern Catalonia.

In the years that followed, the Festival – later known as the International Circus Festival “Elefante de Oro” – grew rapidly in scale and reputation. It moved from the castle to the fairground of Figueres, welcomed ever larger audiences and was soon recognised among the most important festivals of its kind worldwide. Parallel productions such as the Great Christmas Circus of Girona and, later, the Three Kings’ Circus in Tarragona diversified our presence and allowed us to offer high-quality circus programmes at key moments in the cultural calendar.

At the same time, we took a decisive step towards fulfilling our heritage mission with the inauguration, on 21 April 2012 – World Circus Day – of the International Centre for Circus Studies (Centro Internacional de Estudios del Circo) in Figueres. Located just a few metres from the Dalí Theatre-Museum, this space brought together what was at that time the largest circus documentation archive in Spain, and one of the most significant in Europe. Designed as a working environment for researchers, it combined offices, storage and a consultation room.



From the outset, therefore, the Foundation's history has followed a double line: the construction of a strong artistic and public platform through festivals and shows, and the patient, long-term work of building up a documentation centre capable of supporting serious research and conservation. Circusland, opened in Besalú at the end of 2020, is the latest and most visible expression of this trajectory.

Collections and Heritage Policy

Our heritage work rests fundamentally on the collections assembled over decades by two Figueres-based collectors: Ramón Bech and myself. These collections, which the Foundation is mandated to hold and manage, form the nucleus around which we have built an increasingly rich corpus of circus material.

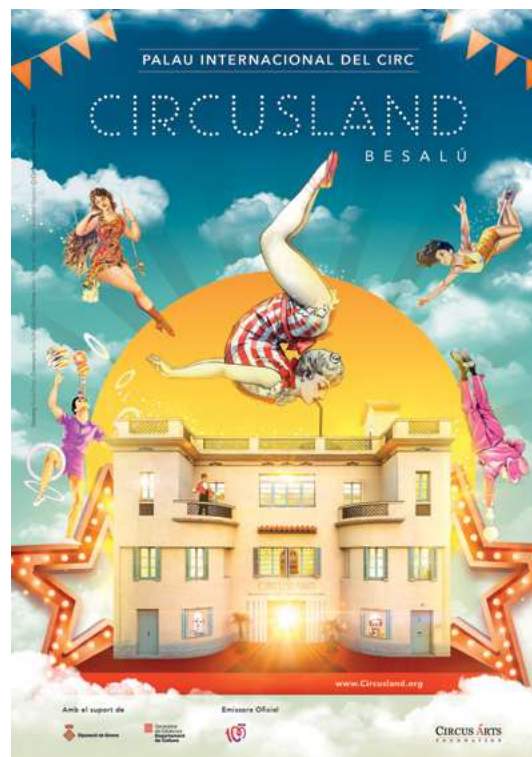
The scope of the holdings is broad. It includes printed matter (posters, programmes, handbills), photographs, postcards, press cuttings, books and periodicals, as well as models, costumes, props and other artefacts. Among the most emblematic acquisitions are the donation of seventy-six posters and ten original drawings by the Madrid lithographer and poster artist Fernández-Ardavín, produced between 1910 and 1930; and the large-scale model of the German circus Gleich, covering some fifty square metres and depicting tents, vehicles, animals and characters in miniature.

Our heritage policy is guided by a number of principles. First, we seek to recover, conserve and study circus heritage on a global scale, with particular attention to Spanish materials but always in dialogue with international developments. This implies active work against what might be called "heritage at risk": collections threatened by dispersion, export or simple neglect. The purchase of major collections, when possible, is one way of

avoiding such loss; donations and deposits, formalised through agreements with families and collectors, are another.

Second, we place great emphasis on professional conservation and cataloguing. Materials entering the Foundation pass through processes of inventory, classification and, where necessary, restoration. We adopt standards that are compatible with other heritage institutions, with a view to future interoperability and joint projects.

Third, we understand heritage not only as a matter of objects but also of narratives. Many of our collections are intimately linked to circus families, companies and artists. Preserving their memory involves documenting lineages, routes and artistic trajectories, and making these available to researchers and to the families themselves. In this sense, the archive is not only a repository of the past but also a tool for the reconstruction and transmission of histories that might otherwise remain fragmented or forgotten.



The International Centre for Circus Studies

The International Centre for Circus Studies was conceived as the research arm of the Foundation. Its purpose is to provide an appropriate environment for scholars, students, journalists and other interested parties to explore circus history and contemporary practice in depth.

The Centre offers access to an extensive specialised library, periodicals, archives and iconographic materials. Over the years it has supported a wide range of academic work – final projects, master's theses, doctoral dissertations – and has collaborated with universities in Spain and abroad to host internships and research stays. These collaborations allow students to become familiar with the functioning of a documentation centre, while contributing to the organisation and study of the collections.

Beyond individual research, the Centre seeks to stimulate broader reflection on circus as an object of historical, sociological, aesthetic and cultural analysis. Exhibitions such as “Dalí and the Circus”, lectures, publications and partnerships with local cultural actors form part of this effort. In Europe, there are only a handful of centres with a comparable degree of specialisation; thus the International Centre for Circus Studies contributes to filling a gap in the research infrastructure for circus arts.



Circusland in Besalú: Museum Space and Visitor Experience

Circusland, the European Circus Museum, opened its doors in the medieval town of Besalú at the end of 2020, in what I consider the first stage of a long-term project. Located in the historic Cal Coro building, formerly the Abbot's House of the Monastery of Sant Pere, Circusland invites visitors to embark on a journey through the origins, history and evolution of the circus.

The museum is organised over three floors, each offering a sequence of rooms dedicated to different circus disciplines – acrobatics, balance, magic, juggling, trapeze and others. The narrative spans more than 250 years of modern circus, but also looks further back, connecting the ancient acrobatics of China and the minstrels of the Middle Ages to contemporary jugglers and companies such as Cirque du Soleil. The aim is to combine historical depth with an attractive, immersive presentation that speaks to both specialised visitors and the general public.

Circusland is currently in the process of expansion. In addition to the initial Cal Coro building, we are incorporating the rest of the Benedictine monastery of Sant Pere de Besalú, including the former monastic living quarters and the vegetable gardens. These spaces will allow us to almost triple the exhibition surface, reaching close to 4,000 square metres indoors and around 10,000 square metres of exterior areas. Part of the garden will be used to house and present restored wooden circus caravans, such as those from the Spanish circus Ranqueter, which visitors will be able to enter and explore.

One of the distinctive features of Circusland is the way in which we integrate collections and digital technologies. The museum hosts what is probably the largest circus library in the world, with more than 5,000 volumes, as well as what we believe to be the most extensive collection of circus programmes, particularly through the Alain Simonnet collection, now under our care. This collection alone comprises some 32,000 programmes. Week after week, a specialised digitisation company works on these materials using text-recognition techniques. Our aim is that, in parallel with the physical expansion of Circusland, we will be able to offer online access to this corpus, in a way similar

to historical press archives, so that researchers and enthusiasts around the world can consult and search them.

The same approach applies to photographs and other iconographic materials. The Villar photo collection, associated with the Circo Price, and other archives such as those of José Pouyé are being scanned and will progressively be incorporated into our digital resources. In the exhibition, we experiment with augmented reality tools – for example, making posters “come alive” through the Flash-Play application, or allowing visitors to virtually enter historical circus spaces, such as the Cirque d’Hiver, by pointing their phones at plans or images.

Finally, Circusland is not only a museum in the traditional sense, but also a place for live experience. In the monastery gardens we present open-air circus shows, especially aimed at younger audiences, and we continue to develop activities that link the museum with the Foundation’s festivals and productions. In this way, the visitor can experience circus both as a historical object and as a living art form.



Networks, Outreach and Transnational Ambitions

From the beginning, the Circus Arts Foundation has understood circus heritage as a transnational phenomenon. The mobility of companies, the circulation of acts and the international composition of festival line-ups make it impossible to think of circus purely in national terms. Our mission explicitly refers to the global dimension of circus heritage, while giving special attention to the Spanish context.

One of our specific goals is to build bridges between the diverse circus realities of Iberoamerican countries, making use of the shared Spanish language. The Festival and Circusland serve as points of encounter where artists, producers, researchers and collectors from Latin America and Europe can meet, exchange and collaborate. In many cases, we accompany high-quality artists in the early stages of their careers in Europe, both those who are beginning professionally and those from outside the continent who wish to open a path in the European scene.

At the same time, we seek to support initiatives beyond the strict framework of the Foundation, whenever they are aligned with the objectives of heritage preservation, research and artistic excellence. This includes collaborations with local associations, merchants and institutions in Figueres, Girona, Roses, Besalú and other municipalities, as well as relationships with international organisations and documentation centres.

Our long-term ambition is to contribute decisively to the creation of a true European international circus museum and documentation hub, capable of working in consortium with other archives, libraries and museums. Circusland is a concrete step in that direction. The idea of associating the

museum with a Conservatory of Circus Arts – a training institution for circus disciplines – points towards an integrated ecosystem in which conservation, education, research and artistic creation are mutually reinforcing.

Conclusion

Circusland and the Circus Arts Foundation emerged from a conviction: that the circus, as a performing art and as a cultural phenomenon, deserves professional infrastructures for the conservation and study of its heritage, comparable to those enjoyed by other arts. From the initial festival in Figueres to the creation of the International Centre for Circus Studies, from the patient growth of our collections to the opening and expansion of Circusland in Besalú, we have worked to translate that conviction into concrete institutional forms.

The model we have developed is necessarily hybrid. It relies on the vitality of live performance to sustain, financially and symbolically, a demanding heritage and research project. It combines local roots with international networks, and integrates physical spaces with digital resources. Above all, it seeks to honour the memory of circus people – artists, families, entrepreneurs, technicians – not by freezing it in nostalgia, but by making it available as a living resource for new generations of researchers, professionals and audiences.

The work is ongoing. New collections will arrive, new technologies will reshape the ways in which archives are accessed and interpreted, and new questions will be posed about the history and meanings of circus. My hope is that Circusland, as a European house for the professional conservation of circus heritage, will continue to be a place where these developments can be observed, accompanied and, in some cases, anticipated – ensuring that the richness of circus yesterday informs and inspires the circus of today and tomorrow.





PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

Genís Matabosch Gimenez

theater
science
review
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01/02 2025



JULIA OSIPOVA

DIRECTOR,
CURATOR,
MUSEOLOGIST

Museum of Circus Art
Bolshoi St. Petersburg State Circus
(RUSSIA)

BIOGRAPHY

She graduated from the University of Culture and Arts in 2010. In 2013, she defended her master's thesis entitled Information Support for the Excursion Activities of the Museum of Circus Art. Since 2012, she has been working at a branch of the Rosgoscirk company, the Bolshoi St. Petersburg State Circus, where she serves as Head of the Museum of Circus Art. She is the author of numerous guided tour and educational programs, including Circus Life of St. Petersburg, Circus Lexicon (the etymology of circus terminology), Circus Without Embellishment: Writer Alexander Kuprin in the Arena, Reflection of a Clown, The Aesthetics of the Equestrian Circus, The History of Circus Costume, and Kaleidoscope of Circus Genres, as well as children's educational programs on the history of the circus. Since 2019, she has actively incorporated theatrical techniques into the museum's work, focusing on inclusive practices for visitors of different ages.

The author suggests drinking
mulled wine with black pepper
whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
Microcosmos by *BTS (Bangtan Boys)*
whilst reading her essay.

Museum of Circus Art: Heritage Preservation and Creative Laboratory

The Circus Art Museum in St. Petersburg (originally the Circus and Variety Museum, founded when the city was known as Leningrad) was established on the basis of the personal collections of Vasily Yakovlevich Andreev, a State Circus collector, theatre critic, and researcher of circus arts. His long-term collecting activity in the fields of circus art and the art of movement formed the core of the Museum's holdings.

The principles of acquisition and thematic classification developed by the Museum's first staff members continue to guide the organisation of collections and archival materials. Since its foundation, the Museum has pursued active exhibition and educational programmes, with a particular focus on engaging broader audiences and preserving social memory. Collection work is carried out in cooperation with specialists and cultural figures.

The museum was established on August 8, 1928, directly in the building of the Leningrad Circus (now St. Petersburg Circus). The museum's original name was Museum of Circus and Estrada. Its founder, Vasiliy Andreev, was a collector, scientific colleague of the Hermitage and the Theater Museum, an expert in fencing, who taught in theatrical educational institutions and later taught in theaters as well.



Exterior of the Ciniselli Circus.
Source: Library of Congress

The basis of the museum's funds is private collections of the founder Vasiliy Andreev and of former, 1920s artistic director of the Leningrad Circus, Yevgeniy Gershuni. Circus performers took an active part in collecting the funds, bringing a variety of materials reflecting their work. To this day, this source is the most valuable one, especially if it provides archives of dynasties, collections, research works. Other important sources are amateurs of circus art, collectors, scientific figures who donate their collections or individual items to the Museum.

Currently, the collection of the Museum counts more than 135 thousand items and consists of fifteen funds containing domestic and foreign materials: library, photo library, video library, collections of paintings and graphics, sculpture and

small plastics, costumes and props, posters, programs and promotional products, souvenirs, manuscript and archive departments.

The library has one of the largest collections of the Museum. It represents circus subjects by historical and research works, textbooks, reference books, memoirs of artists, fiction.

The first book registered in the library inventory was presented by its author, clown Vitaliy Lazarenko, on the fourth day of the museum's foundation - August 12, 1928. Lazarenko published his short book *Makeup Stains* in 1922, dedicated to the memory of the famous clown and trainer Anatoliy Durov.

The oldest edition in the library dates to 1680. It is a folio containing programs and librettos of theatrical street acts in medieval Europe. The book was published in Nuremberg in German language and printed in Gothic script.

The Museum has a separate card index on circus genres, which includes both educational literature and memoirs of artists talking about their work and life. Regarding the fundamental genre of circus - equestrian - the library contains about two hundred books in Russian and in foreign languages. Among such books are the works of the expert in equestrian dressage François Bouchet *Guide to the Art of Riding*, published in Paris in 1844, as well as the 1856 edition of the book *Carousel and Horse Cadrille*.

The Museum's library is replenished with publications based on the materials of its collections. For example, in 2023, memoirs of museum founder Vasiliy Andreev were published entitled *The house of living circus history (sic!)*. In addition, the museum staff publishes articles on circus art in various periodicals.

Currently, the library of the museum has about five thousand books in different languages, including booklets about famous artists.

In addition to books, the library inventory includes magazines and newspapers, which have also been collected since the foundation. The range of topics covered in these publications is vast: creative and production issues, historical materials, biographies of artists, interviews, reviews of individual programs and much more. In the lifespan of the museum, titles of more than 150 magazines have been included in the catalog, covering activities of circuses, variety shows and other entertainment organizations. Materials in the section are classified using geographical and chronological signs. Information on different topics touched upon in the articles is entered into the card index. This way, the printed material becomes available to researchers. This type of source can often help to clarify and date an event or reveal the views of contemporaries on it.



Dzhigit Irbek Kantemirov with a horse Buyan A. Z. Levin, head of the Circus Museum

The collection of photo documents is one of the museum's significant collections. Currently, the museum has about thirty-thousand photo documents on paper, reflecting the history of domestic and foreign circuses. Photos of the 19th century brought us the image of the founder of the circus in St. Petersburg, rider, and horse trainer Gaetano Ciniselli. For years, professional photojournalists and photographers gave their works to the museum. The main collection of photographic documents was formed from the gifts of circus artists and their families. Thanks to contacts with for-

eign circus artists, the museum has created a fund of photographic materials on foreign circus. Thus, the general fund of photographs consists of domestic and foreign sections. The systematization of photographic materials is based on genre. In addition, the catalog has a personal card for each artist with a list of his photos, description of images on them and inventory data.

At the end of the 20th century the museum began to form a new department – **the department of video materials**. It contains more than eight hundred cassettes and 850 DVDs, which, in total, adds up to more than twenty-five thousand numbers. Taking the requirements of modernity into account, digitization of materials is currently underway. The video library also consists of a collection of domestic and foreign circus art. Each part has sections – festivals, programs, television programs, individual numbers, video recordings related indirectly to the circus, but related to the spectacular arts (e.g., silent cinema, water, ice, music, and dance shows and the like).



Marcel Marceau and A.Z.Levin, head of the Circus Museum, 1968



The interior of the Circus Museum 2008

All videos are cataloged both by the performer's name and genre, allowing quick searching. Also, the museum can offer artists a selection of multi-genre numbers united by one theme: marine, chef, oriental style, boxing scenes, and so on.

Circus art, as one of the most expressive, bright, and eccentric of all, has always attracted artists. The funds of the Museum reflect the theme "the artist and the circus" **in the collection of paintings and graphic works**. Currently, in the museum's exhibition, there is a painting entitled *Behind the Circus* (1925) by artist Alexander Semyonov. Its dimensions are 197x255 cm, as well as the image of the rider Lucia Ciniselli (wife to Cipione Ciniselli) by an unknown artist, from the end of the 19th century.

Among the graphic works contained in the collection, the museum holds a collection of 19th century engravings. There are thirty items of this kind. A lithograph of the early 1820s, which was in the possession of the museum's founder Vasily Andreev, depicts episodes of the equestrian mimic-transformation, and is entitled *Soldiers' Life*. The painted lithograph depicts an acrobat on horseback performing a leap through hoops wrapped with roses. The figure represents Annato Palmira. She shone in the mid-19th century in various

genres (school rider, horse dancer, equestrian acrobat). In 1852, she performed in St. Petersburg in the building of the Imperial Theater Circus.

In the section of graphics, sketches of circus costumes, scenery, props found their place. Among other authors, there are Rimma Yunosheva, Roman Levitskiy, Herta Nemenov, Ivan Tarasyuk. The fund of paintings and graphics is replenished both by gifts of the artists themselves or their relatives, and by the acquisition of works by the museum. For example, in the 1960s, the museum purchased a rare facsimile edition of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec's drawings.

The museum's collection of sculpture and fine plastics gives a three-dimensional insight into the image of a particular artist and offers the author's embodied fantasy. In one of the expositions there are marble busts of the married couple Ciniselli - Wilhelmina and Gaetano by master Enrico Butti, as well as a bronze bust of Vasilii Kenel, the architect of the St. Petersburg Circus, by sculptor Nikolai Lavretsky. There is an interesting marble portrait of the clown Oleg Popov, presented by the artist to the museum. The right side of the face is the clown image of the artist, the left side is without the clown mask.



The interior of the Circus Museum 2014



The interior of the Circus Museum, 2012

The Museum of Circus Arts keeps costumes of artists of different genres who performed at various times. Besides, the museum carefully preserves details of costumes, such as the cap of clown "Pencil" (Mikhail Rumyantsev), and the first cap of clown Oleg Popov. The slide shows a unique exhibit – the costume of clone Vitaly Lazarenko, made according to the sketch of theater artist Boris Erdman. Next to it is a dress of an equestrian Kayana Kantemirova from the North Ossetian dzhigit troupe "Ali-Bek" but created according to the sketch of the artist herself, it preserves the style of the national dress of the peoples of the Caucasus.

Props, unlike a costume, do not always look attractive at the museum exposition. But their history helps us to better understand the individual tricks. For example, the roller-copfstein for rappelling on the head on an inclined cable of equilibrist Vladimir Arzumanov, was donated to the museum in 1950. The annotation to the item contains the words of the artist: "I rehearsed with this roller for four years and worked with it for twenty years". The device is simple at first glance, but the trick, born so difficult, had a deep impression on the audience.

In the neighboring exposition are the rings of Albert Petrovsky. In 1963 he managed to throw up and catch eleven such rings, and, before him, such a trick had never been record-

ed. Nearby are the sticks of the virtuoso juggler Alexander Kiss. Their shape conveys the style and aesthetics of circus art in the 1930s.

Circus posters are of undoubted value for the museum collection, as one can easily recognize the time, place, and character of a circus performance by a poster. The best samples always reflect the aesthetics and artistic style of a certain period.

The museum started its collection of domestic and foreign posters on the third day of its foundation. Like other funds, the fund of posters has two sections – domestic and foreign. Within each of them posters are systematized by genre, and within genre selections are collected by artists' names.

One of the most important circus documents is the **program** of a performance. The fund of circus programs and advertising products of the museum lists over five thousand items of this kind. It is represented by separate collections, such as:

- Domestic programs
- Foreign programs
- Programs of domestic circus tours abroad and foreign circuses in the CIS countries.
- Programs of circus festivals
- Circus advertising production

The main source of replenishment of this fund is the gifts of visitors. One of the first additions were gifts from the founders of the museum, Vasiliy Andreev and Evgeniy Gershuni.



Boris Oskotsky, the clown, and Y. B. Osipova, head of the Circus Museum, 2018



The interior of the Circus Museum, 2025

In addition to their informational value, the programs are a rich source of iconographic material. The photographs on them are recorded in the card index of illustrations. In some cases, the image of the artist in the program is the only one in the museum's holdings.

Small advertising products in the museum's collections are represented by brochures, leaflets, postcards, and others. This type of material is also of interest as an informational and iconographic source.

The fund of souvenirs, in addition to souvenirs produced by circuses, also contains products of other organizations, but dedicated to circus art, for example: labels on matchboxes, postage signs (envelopes, stamps), pocket calendars, badges.

The archive department collects documentary materials related to the economic and organizational work of the St. Petersburg Circus, as well as those related to the work of the Museum. In addition, books of record and feedback of visitors are kept here. The everyday life of artists and creative figures of circus art is reflected in family archives and separate documents. They were handed over to the Museum by the artists themselves or their relatives. This material gives the possibility of a wider study of history and personal biographies.

The interior of the Circus Museum 2025

There are more than three hundred cards in the card catalog of the archive, each of which is devoted to a separate theme or person, these archives are kept in personal folders. The archive of the museum is a rich source of information for historians, writers, researchers of circus art, journalists, and cinematographers.

The manuscript department contains more than four hundred folders with such material as:

- Scripts of productions (from the 1920s onward)
- Artists' repertoires
- Props drawings
- Schedules of artistic councils, conferences
- Diplomas and dissertations
- Manuscripts of articles on circus art
- Memoirs of artists and their creative biographies



Already in the first years of its work, the museum began to organize **exhibitions** devoted to circus programs, individual genres, and personalities. For example, there are photos of the exhibition entitled *Clownade*, held in 1929-1930, the exhibition entitled *Horse Circus* in 1930, the exhibition dedicated to trainer Ivan Lerry in 1956, as well as the exhibition *Circus Poster* in 1961 – the photo shows the artist Mikhail Gordon.

Currently, there are three exhibition areas **on the circus's territory**.

On the first floor of the circus, an exposition is dedicated to the family of the founder of the St. Petersburg Circus Ciniselli. In the foyer of the second floor, a thematic exhibition was created for each new program of the circus. On the third floor there is an extensive exposition called *Colors of the arena*, dedicated to the history of the national circus costume, and has thematic sections by genres of circus art. In total, there are more than fifty costumes and more than 150 sketches by famous artists of 1930-1970, as well as props of artists, paintings, and sculptures.

The tradition of introducing the museum's expositions to a wide audience was established by its founder and chief curator Vasiliy Andreev. Since then, the excursion activity has acquired a regular character. Nowadays the visitors have an opportunity not only to get information on the proposed topic (now the museum has seven different excursion programs), but also to participate in the process. A game is offered, during which, those who wish can try themselves in the genre of juggling, equilibrium, and illusion.

For 95 years, the museum's funds have served as a base for scientific research, information center and source of creative ideas.

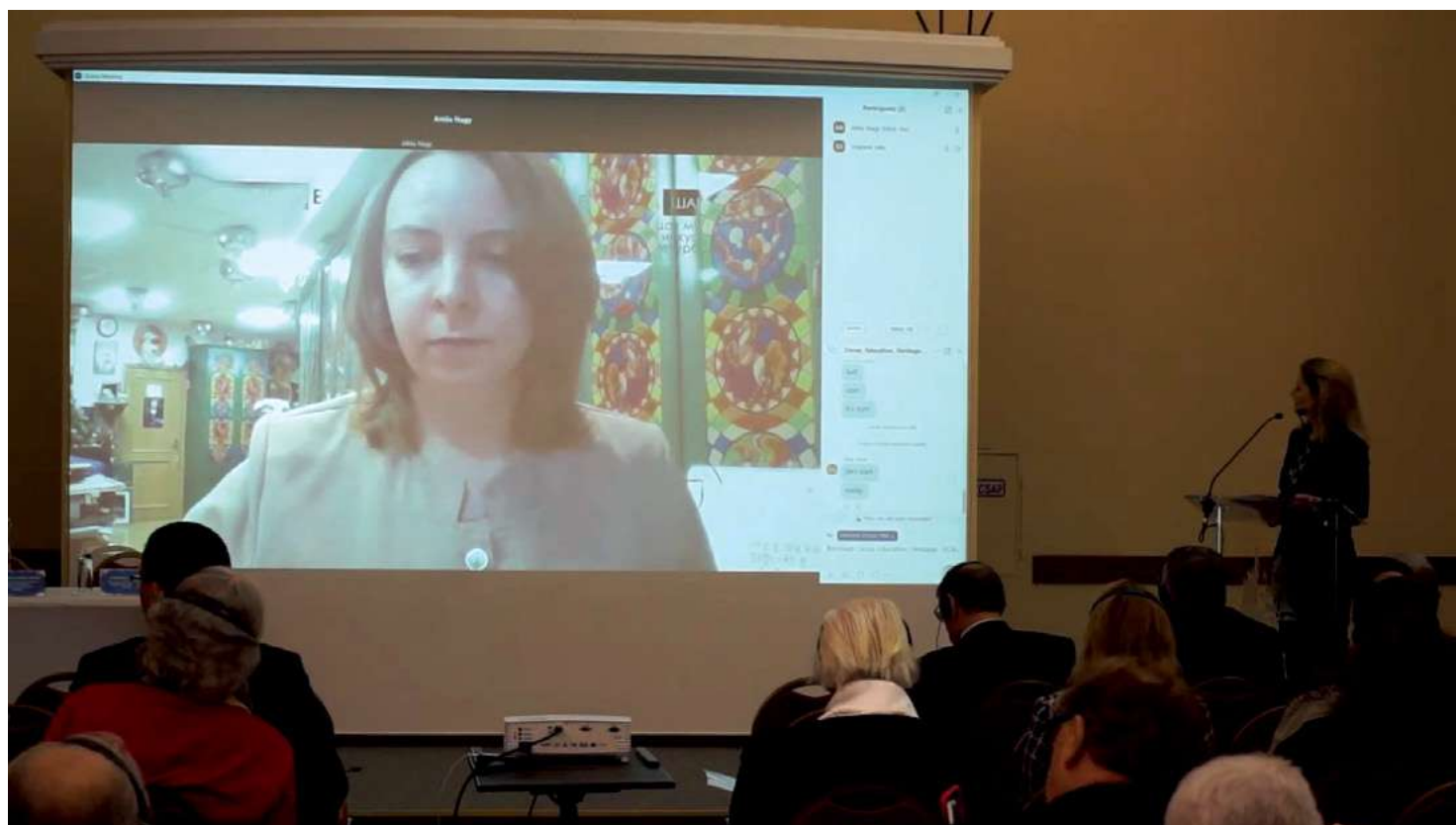


The museum's library 2025



The museum's Scientific File 2025

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN





MICHAEL SWATOSCH

CULTURAL MANAGER,
MAGICIAN,
MUSEUM DIRECTOR

Circus & Clown Museum Vienna
(AUSTRIA)

BIOGRAPHY

He completed his secondary education in 1977 and went on to study history and mathematics at the Pädagogische Akademie in Vienna, beginning his career as a teacher in 1982. From 2002 to 2005 he earned a Master's degree in Educational Science at the University of Derby and later pursued doctoral studies at the University of Vienna. Today he works as a cultural manager and performer, combining education, culture, and the art of magic.

Together with Robert Kaldy, he founded the 1st Vienna Magic Theatre and organized several Austrian Magic Congresses. As co-founder of the Kadotheum Institute, he is committed to researching and documenting the art of magic. He has long played a key role at the Circus & Clown Museum Vienna and has served as its director since 2022; under his leadership, the museum has been renewed and now welcomes around 13,000 visitors annually.

The author suggests drinking
Campari Soda
whilst reading his essay.

The author suggests listening to
Dreamer by *Supertramp*
whilst reading his essay.

Circus YESTERDAY - TODAY

The Circus & Clown Museum Wien as an Important Place of Preservation and Research

In this article I present the Circus- & Clownmuseum Wien (Circus & Clown Museum Vienna) as a specific model of circus-heritage preservation and research. Originating in the private collection of the Viennese writer and editor Heino Seitler and opened to the public as early as 1927, the museum has developed over nearly a century from a personal passion project into a recognised cultural institution within the city of Vienna. Today it operates as a specialised museum and archive devoted to the history of circus, clowns, variety and related popular entertainments, and is run by a voluntary team under the legal form of a cultural association.





I outline the historical development and institutional framework of the museum, describe the composition and management of the collections, and discuss our current activities in conservation, documentation, research, education and public engagement. Particular attention is paid to our self-understanding as an “archive of real dreams and dreamt reality” (André Heller), and to the way in which we position circus “yesterday” in dialogue with circus “today”: through exhibitions, events, oral history work and an increasingly important programme of digitisation. Finally, I indicate some perspectives for future development, including intensified digital access, expanded research cooperation and a stronger emphasis on contemporary circus practices.

An Archive of Dreams

The Circus- & Clownmuseum Wien describes itself, in the words of the Austrian artist André Heller, as an “*Archiv der wirklichen Träume und geräumten Wirklichkeit*” – an archive of real dreams and dreamt reality¹. This poetic formulation captures the double function of a circus museum. On the one hand, we preserve material traces of a performative art form that is by nature ephemeral: once the curtain falls and the tent is dismantled, what remains are costumes, props, posters, photographs, programmes, press cuttings and personal

memories. On the other hand, these very objects continue to nourish the imagination of new generations of artists and audiences.

In this sense, circus heritage is never purely “past”; it constantly informs contemporary practice. The guiding idea of *Circus YESTERDAY – TODAY* is therefore not simply chronological, but dialogical. Our museum seeks to connect historical artefacts with living performance, archival research with artistic experimentation, and nostalgic memories with critical reflection on the cultural, social and economic contexts of circus in the present. Within this framework, the Circus & Clown Museum Vienna functions as what I would call an important place of preservation and research for the circus world – a local institution with international reach.

From Private Collection to Public Museum

The origins of the museum lie in the private collecting activity of **Heino Seitler** (1910–1974), a Viennese writer and editor who began to assemble circus and clown memorabilia in the 1920s. In 1927 he opened what is regarded as the first *Clownmuseum* in Vienna, making parts of his col-



1. <https://www.circus-clownmuseum.at/>

lection accessible to the public.² Over the following decades the collection expanded, but also suffered losses: after the Second World War, significant parts were sold to a museum in Berlin.



In 1968, following renewed efforts by Seitler, the **Österreichisches Circus- und Clownmuseum** (Austrian Circus and Clown Museum) was formally established as part of the **Bezirksmuseum Leopoldstadt** (District Museum of Vienna's Second District). From that point on, the museum belonged to the **ARGE der Wiener Bezirks- und Sondermuseen** (Working Group of Vienna District and Special Museums), a cooperative structure that still frames our institutional position today. The museum has always been operated on a voluntary basis, with a high level of personal commitment from directors and staff.

2. <https://www.circus-clownmuseum.at/%C3%BCber-uns/>

After Seitler's death in 1974, **Berthold Lang** took over as director. In 1983 he was joined by **Robert Kaldy-Karo** – historian, magician and later director – as well as by myself and other volunteers. A major step in the museum's history came in the early 2000s, when the ARGE enabled us to move out of the small rooms of the district museum into an independent space. In 2011 the museum reopened in a former shop at **Ilgplatz 7, 1020 Vienna**, offering around 400 square metres of exhibition and storage area.

Since 2022 I have served as director, heading a team of volunteer collaborators with the support of the Kulturverein Circus- & Clownmuseum (Cultural Association Circus & Clown Museum). During the COVID-19 pandemic we undertook a comprehensive refurbishment and redesign of the permanent exhibition. Today the museum is open to the public every Sunday with free admission, while also hosting special events, guided tours and educational programmes on other days. With around 13.000 visitors per year and guests from more than thirty-five countries, it has become a recognised cultural institution in Vienna's Leopoldstadt district and beyond.

Collections and Heritage Management

The core of our work lies in the **collection, preservation and presentation** of circus-related materials. Over the years, our efforts have resulted in a unique archive featuring around **twenty distinct collections**, including personal legacies of artists and impresarios, thematic collections on specific disciplines and a wide range of ephemera.

The museum collects and preserves historical artefacts, costumes, props, posters, photographs, documents, newspapers and other objects that document the development of circus and clown arts over the years.³ As a result, we have become a *guardian of cultural heritage*, safeguarding unique aspects of circus and clown traditions and ensuring their accessibility for future generations. Our holdings encompass classical circus dynasties, Viennese clown traditions, variety and cabaret, as well as related domains such as fair-ground culture and magic.

3. https://budapestcircusfestival.hu/images/ang_pdf/11_Swatosch-Presentation%20Budapest%202024%20Circus-%20%26%20Clownmuseum%20Vienna_en_kicsi.pdf



As in any heritage institution, **conservation and restoration** are central tasks. We pay close attention to maintaining the originality and physical condition of historical costumes and props in order to preserve their authenticity over time. When necessary, restoration measures are carried out in cooperation with specialised conservators to repair damaged items and to stabilise fragile materials. At the same time, we must ensure appropriate security measures to protect the collection from theft, environmental damage and wear, especially in the context of an active, visitor-oriented museum.



Our **library** forms an integral part of the collection profile. It includes books, journals, articles and other written materials on various aspects of circus history and performance. In addition to general works, we have deliberately developed thematic focuses on the **Prater** amusement park, on **variety shows** and on the **magic arts**, reflecting the close historical connections between these forms of popular entertainment in Vienna.

Documentation, Oral History and Research

Beyond the material objects themselves, we consider **documentation** to be a key dimension of our heritage work. We systematically document the history of circus and clowns, including significant events, developments and milestones. Written and audiovisual records – films, newspaper articles, programmes, photographs and internal documents – all contribute to this effort.

A special emphasis is placed on **eyewitness interviews** and oral history. Within formats such as the “Artists’ Roundtable”, we invite performers and other professionals to share their personal stories in front of an audience. These conversations are recorded and archived, adding a layer of lived experience to the collection and giving voice to perspectives that might otherwise be lost. In a field where many careers unfolded in travelling companies and family businesses, such testimony is indispensable for understanding the social fabric of circus communities.

The museum functions explicitly as a **research and educational facility**. By providing a comprehensive source of information, we enable researchers and historians to study the rich history of the circus world. At the same time, students have the opportunity to explore not only artistic aspects but also the social, cultural and historical contexts

of circus, using our collections as a foundation for academic work. In recent decades, numerous theses and dissertations at Austrian universities have drawn on our archives and library, especially in the fields of theatre studies, cultural history and popular culture.

The museum also engages in **publishing activities**. We regularly contribute to journals and catalogues, and at the time of writing we are preparing a volume entitled *The Austrian National Circus* by Christoph Enzinger, based in large part on materials preserved at the museum. Such publications help to translate archival work into broader historiographical narratives and to position circus studies within academic discourse.



Digitisation and Access

In the twenty-first century, no heritage institution can ignore the importance of the digital realm. **Digitisation** offers numerous advantages, above all by facilitating access for researchers and the public. For our museum, it has become a key strategic focus, especially from 2024 onwards.

The digitisation of photographs, posters, programmes and selected objects enables us to reduce handling of fragile originals while increasing their visibility. Digital records can be enriched with metadata, cross-referenced with other items and made searchable by name, company, venue or

theme. In this way, digitisation does not simply reproduce analogue materials, but also enhances the analytical possibilities of the collection.

Our website serves as an important **gateway** to the museum. It provides essential information about opening hours, exhibitions and events, and increasingly offers visual and textual resources that give a first impression of the holdings. Looking ahead, we aim to develop the digital part of our work into a more structured online catalogue, with selected highlights of the collections and thematic “paths” for both specialists and non-specialists.

Such developments also open up new opportunities for **international collaboration**. By aligning our description practices with international standards and by creating interoperable datasets, we hope to participate in broader networks of circus archives, libraries and museums, and to contribute Viennese materials to comparative research on circus history.



Education, Exhibitions and Public Engagement

From its beginnings, the Circus & Clown Museum Vienna has never been conceived as a purely “closed” archive. It is a **public museum** and an active cultural venue. For the general public, the museum serves as an educational facility that promotes understanding of circus arts and highlights their cultural significance.



We offer **guided tours and educational programmes** tailored to different age groups. School classes, youth groups and adult visitors can experience the material history of circus at close range: they see original costumes and props, learn about famous artists and families, and discover how circus posters and publicity were designed. Interactive elements, such as demonstrations of simple tricks or explanations of technical equipment, help to create an accessible and enjoyable learning environment.

The museum organises a variety of **events and exhibitions** that bring the circus world to life. Special exhibitions focus on particular artists, companies, themes or anniversaries, often accompanied by talks and performances. Events such as "Nachts im Circus- & Clownmuseum" (Nights in the Circus & Clown Museum) or small-scale shows on our in-house stage allow visitors to encounter circus and magic artists live, in direct proximity to the historical artefacts. Children's birthday parties, workshops and collaborations with local cultural associations further extend our reach into the community.

These activities also have an economic dimension. The museum contributes to **tourism and the local economy** by attracting visitors interested in circus and popular culture. Visitor statistics from 2023 indicate guests from thirty-five nations, confirming the museum's international appeal. At the same time, many of our regular visitors come from Vienna and the surrounding region, for whom the museum has become a familiar and beloved place.

Networking and the Museum as Hub

In the broader circus field, the Circus & Clown Museum Vienna functions as a **central hub** for enthusiasts, researchers, artists and professionals. By bringing together these different publics, we foster networks that promote the exchange of ideas and collaboration. Events such as the annual meeting of the **Gesellschaft der Circusfreunde Deutschlands (GCD - Society of Circus Friends of Germany)** in Vienna in 2023 exemplify this networking function: participants from several countries used the museum both as a venue and as a reference archive for their discussions.



Our role as hub also extends into the **artistic sphere**. Many well-known artists have visited the museum over the years – among them singers, circus directors, clowns and magicians – some of whom have donated personal items or entire collections. Visual artists have likewise drawn inspiration from our holdings for their own work. In this way, the museum does not simply preserve an existing heritage, but actively stimulates new cultural production.

Given this position, one of our ongoing tasks is to **strengthen partnerships** with academic institutions, circus companies, festivals and other museums. We aim to contribute documentation and expertise to conferences and symposia, to support research projects and exhibitions, and to ensure that Austrian circus history is represented in international debates on circus heritage and circus studies.



Perspectives and Future Directions

Although the Circus & Clown Museum Vienna already plays an important role as a place of preservation and research, our work is far from complete. From my perspective as director, several lines of development are particularly significant for the future.

First, we will continue to expand and systematise our **digitisation efforts**. The goal is not only to digitise more materials, but also to build a coherent digital structure that re-

flects the complex relationships within the collection. This implies the development of controlled vocabularies and metadata schemes specifically adapted to circus, clowning and popular entertainment, in dialogue with international standards.

Second, we intend to deepen our **research collaborations**. By encouraging more students and scholars to use the museum as a primary source, and by participating in joint projects with other institutions, we can situate Viennese circus history within larger European and global narratives. Here, fields such as performance studies, memory studies, cultural heritage and urban history offer promising interfaces.

Third, we are aware of the need to strengthen our engagement with **contemporary circus and clowning**. While the historical dimension will remain central, it is important that today's artists also see the museum as "their" place: a site where their work is documented and where they can enter into dialogue with the traditions that precede them. Acquiring born-digital materials, documenting new companies and hosting artist talks and residencies are possible paths in this direction.

Fourth, we must address the **long-term sustainability** of a volunteer-run institution. Ensuring stable funding, improving storage conditions and investing in professional conservation expertise are all essential if the collections are to remain accessible to future generations.





Summary

The Circus- & Clownmuseum Wien emerged from the passion of a single collector, **Heino Seitler**, and has grown into a museum that preserves and interprets a significant part of Austria's circus and clowning heritage. Through its collections, documentation work, digitisation efforts, educational programmes and public events, it exemplifies



how a specialised museum can function as an *important place of preservation and research* for a performative art form that is at once fragile and deeply anchored in cultural memory.

In pursuing the guiding theme *Circus YESTERDAY – TODAY*, we seek to build bridges between past and present, between artefacts and living performance, between scholarly research and popular fascination. The museum thereby contributes not only to safeguarding the history of circus and clowns, but also to ensuring that this history remains a source of inspiration, reflection and joy for audiences and artists in the years to come.





LOUIS-SAMPION BOUGLIONE

DIRECTOR,
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

Cirque d'Hiver Emilien Bouglione Museum
(FRANCE)

BIOGRAPHY

He is a member of the Bouglione circus dynasty. His father, Emilien Bouglione, was a master horseman and circus artist, and his mother, Christiane Bouglione, is a circus artist. His siblings include Joseph Jacques Bouglione, a circus artist, director, and Artistic Director of the Cirque d'Hiver, as well as Regina and Odette Bouglione, both circus artists. From a very young age, he was immersed in the world of circus arts. During the summer holidays, he joined the touring family circus, where he trained in juggling, animal training, and acrobatics.

For many years, he worked as a production manager, initially at the Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione and later internationally. He collaborated with leading figures and institutions in the circus world, including Cirque Scott in Sweden (1987), the Festival du Cirque de Demain (1988–1997), and the Louis Knie Circus (1997–1998).

Driven by a deep passion for history and the circus, he founded the private Bouglione family museum. Located within the Cirque d'Hiver, the museum brings together costumes, photographs, bronze sculptures, paintings, documents, and posters that preserve the legacy of this legendary venue and its iconic family. He also co-authored the book celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Cirque d'Hiver. He currently oversees the management and communications of the Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione Museum.

The author suggests drinking
champagne
whilst reading his essay.

The author suggests listening to
La Vie En Rose
whilst reading his essay.



The Emilien Bouglione Museum is located in the heart of the Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione in Paris, the oldest circus in the world. From a young age, Emilien Bouglione understood the importance of preserving both the history of circus arts and this iconic monument. He began collecting objects that were destined to be discarded or even destroyed, creating a unique collection. This collection was later entrusted to his son, Louis Sampion Bouglione, who has been curating and expanding it for over 20 years. Preserving and maintaining a family collection is a challenge that requires daily dedication. The traditional circus is about the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. The objects in this collection remind us of the artists and workers who have handled them and the audiences who have witnessed them. Thus, their memories continue to live on and will never be forgotten.

Let me introduce myself: my name is Louis Sampion Bouglione, I am co-director of the Cirque d'Hiver Bouglione in Paris, head of communications, founder of the Musée Emilien Bouglione and president of the association of the same name!

The museum I have come to talk to you about embodies the passion and transmission that have driven my family for 5 generations.





Tradition is Important

"Tradition is perpetual motion", wrote Jean Cocteau. It sums up the spirit of the circus.

The fact this museum exists today is due to my father's activity.

To find out how it all began, you have to go back in time!

He was just fifteen when his father ordered him to tidy up the winter circus offices and throw everything away! The whole history of Cirque d'Hiver is there. Before his very eyes, despite his early age, he could see the value of the documents, photos and objects crammed into these boxes. He immediately grasped the extent of this priceless heritage. He understood that this treasure trove would change his life forever.

Before, "he says", I did the circus out of habit; now I know what it means to do the circus!

Since then, he has never ceased to attend sales and travel the world to enrich it with new pieces. Artists offer him their treasures, patiently and relentlessly, every day, he watches over this fabulous heritage. He preserved and safeguarded it.

My father passed on his passion to me, having grown up in the world of the circus, surrounded by collectors' items. It is my turn to quickly become aware of what this represents: his life, those of the artists and of all circus people! That is why I want to preserve our heritage through objects, so that their memory never dies out.



So, to keep this passion alive, 15 years ago, I opened a museum inside the Cirque d'Hiver. Visits are on request and by reservation, in small groups, as we are short of space. In the near future, I hope to enlarge it to enable a wider public to admire more treasures in better condition.

1 year ago, I created the Association du Musée du Cirque Emilien Bouglione.

To bring together enthusiasts and help the museum. To date, the acquisition, conservation, and restoration of exhibits, both ancient and modern, have been financed solely by the association and me.





Louis-Sampson Bouglione

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Needless to say, we receive no support or subsidies from any source, and yet the circus is an integral part of Europe's cultural heritage.



My wish: to have the necessary funds and space, where the objects in the collection can be presented in their own right, at the crossroads of history and the collective imagination. So that these objects of light, which have a soul, can have a second life.

This collection is not just the passion of a lifetime, or the story of a dynasty... it is quite simply the legend of Cirque!





PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN



The author suggests drinking
red wine
whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
Beatles
whilst reading her essay.

DR. ESZTER CSONKA-TAKÁCS

ETHNOGRAPHER,
DIRECTOR

Directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage
at the Hungarian Open Air Museum
(HUNGARY)

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Eszter Csonka-Takács began her career in 1994 as a research fellow at the Institute of Ethnography of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, where she played a significant role in various scientific working groups, organized conferences, and edited academic publications. From 1999, she served as Deputy Director of the European Folklore Institute for ten years, gaining substantial experience in coordinating tasks related to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

She actively contributed to the preparation of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in Hungary, particularly in developing the national implementation framework and concept.

Since 2009, she has been leading the Directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Hungarian Open Air Museum, which serves as the professional background institution for the 2003 Convention in Hungary.

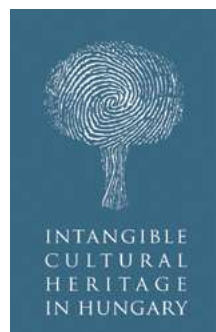
She is a member of several professional organizations and the Vice Chair of the Cultural Heritage Subcommittee of the Hungarikum Committee. Since 2012, she has held the position of Chair of the Hungarian National Commission for Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Since 2009, she has regularly represented Hungary at the meetings of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and at the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention. She is the National Focal Point for 2003 Convention.

Circus Arts as Shared Heritage - International Cooperation for the Nomination of Circus Arts to the Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage

As a consequence of the international discourse on cultural property that evolved during the 20th century, the World Heritage Convention (Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage) was formulated in 1972 within the framework of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (hereinafter UNESCO). Only one year after the adoption of this international document, the idea emerged that there was a need for the legal protection of oral tradition and folklore.

In 1973, in a memorandum addressed to the Director-General of UNESCO, the Bolivian Minister responsible for foreign relations called on the countries of the world to provide international support for taking measures against the exploitation and appropriation of folklore-folk music, folk dance, and handicrafts-while proposing the creation of an instrument that would list these forms of cultural expression and protect them from misuse (such as commercial use, export, and appropriation by third parties).



By placing at the centre those cultural practices that are intangible—that is, those that exist in spoken form, in skills, and in activities, and are linked to communities—the concept of heritage was broadened. Following extensive preparation and numerous negotiations and conferences, on 17 October 2003, at UNESCO's 32nd General Conference, the representatives of the Member States adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Hungary ratified the Convention in 2006, and UNESCO Member States continue to join it. In 2025, 185 States Parties to the Convention are recorded (out of UNESCO's 195 Member States). (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=EN&pg=home>)

The aim of the UNESCO Convention is to safeguard the knowledge, skills and forms of expression created and practiced by communities, groups and individuals, which form part of their identity and are transmitted from generation to generation, as well as to develop and implement related safeguarding measures at the local, national and international levels.

1. The Concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage

The expression intangible cultural heritage (French: patrimoine culturel immatériel) took its definitive form with the adoption of the Convention. The expressions “untouchable,” “non-material,” or “immaterial,” in a literal sense. The phenomena or practices referred to as intangible cultural heritage—those that in Hungarian usage fall under the category of “traditions”—are essentially rooted in their existence within a community. Their foundation lies in the knowledge acquired as members of the community, the activities performed within it, and the intergenerational transmission of heritage, that is, the living nature of the cultural practice.

The role of the community, however, extends not only to the “creation,” maintenance and transmission of the heritage, but also to its oversight. Community control periodically filters out practices or individual experiments and innovations that are not acceptable to it. The community determines who may participate (if this is regulated), how transmission takes place, the rules of the practice, and the form of interpretation. Intangible cultural heritage is therefore a process—the ongoing practice of experiencing, acknowledging and taking ownership of one's own culture.

How does intangible cultural heritage differ from tangible heritage? While tangible heritage emphasizes physical authenticity and “outstanding universal value” (without which heritage sites or monuments cannot be inscribed on the World Heritage List), intangible cultural heritage focuses more on emotional and memory-based values. Its principal characteristics are not rooted in authenticity, but in dynamism, transformation, recreation, popularization, and revitalization by the communities that practice and transmit these traditions.



PHOTO:
BALÁZS FARKAS-MOHI

1.1 Areas in Which Intangible Cultural Heritage is Manifested

Intangible cultural heritage is both traditional and living; it is continuously recreated and transmitted orally. Intangible cultural practices are never static – they constitute knowledge that develops and persists through its passage from generation to generation.

According to the definition of the Convention, intangible cultural heritage is:

“the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.”

Intangible cultural heritage manifests itself, among others, in the following areas:

- a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage;
- b) performing arts;
- c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- e) traditional craftsmanship.

1.2 Management of Intangible Cultural Heritage

By establishing the Convention, UNESCO seeks to encourage the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, the respect for the intangible heritage of the communities concerned, and the raising of awareness of the significance of this heritage at local, national and international levels. Its aim

is also to draw the attention of communities to the importance of their own cultural values and intangible heritage, to the sustaining power of local intellectual resources and capacities, to their identity-strengthening effects, and to their role in survival and in shaping the future. At the same time, it seeks to secure recognition from national and international public opinion as well as from various responsible bodies of the importance of local heritage and the need for its safeguarding.

For this purpose, the Convention recommends various safeguarding strategies to the States Parties (such as the identification, inventorying, registration and documentation of such heritage, as well as related legislation, education, research, archiving, the establishment of support systems, dissemination, promotion, and the revitalization of various aspects of heritage).

In addition to international safeguarding measures, the Convention defines the responsibilities of the States Parties:

1. identification and definition of elements of intangible cultural heritage
2. their registration and the preparation and public availability of inventories
3. incorporation of heritage safeguarding into planning programmes
4. establishment of responsible expert bodies (national committees, heritage-protection expert systems, professional networks)
5. development of research methods for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage
6. training of intangible-heritage experts (university training, accredited further training)
7. ensuring access to intangible cultural heritage (websites, media, publications, festivals, presentations)
8. establishment of documentation institutions for intangible cultural heritage (archives, databases)
9. education, awareness-raising and development of professional skills: – educational and information programmes aimed at the public (awareness-raising activities) – local curricula and training programmes – capacity-building activities (management, scientific research) – transmission of knowledge outside the formal school system



PHOTO:
BALÁZS FARKAS-MOHI

2. Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage

By joining the Convention, the States Parties undertake to implement the obligations and tasks set out in the international document. One of the most important among these is the identification, definition, and inventorying of the intangible cultural heritage found within their territory.

The content, structure, and character of national inventories largely depend on how the inventory is created. The Convention grants full freedom to the States Parties by not prescribing specific methods or procedures for implementation. As a result, a variety of practices have developed among the States Parties, reflecting national specificities rather than regional or continental harmonization based on shared heritage.

In some states, experts from professional institutions, commissioned by the responsible ministry, prepare studies resembling ethnographic encyclopedia entries on heritage elements, identifying the

communities concerned. Sometimes these take the form of thematic monographs. It is generally common for ethnographic or folk-art-oriented institutions to provide the foundation and data sources for the compilation of national inventories. In some European countries, we can also see direct forms of community participation. In certain cases, civil organizations themselves act as the bodies responsible for the implementation of the Convention; elsewhere, the widest possible public is invited to submit proposals-via online platforms or directly from communities suggesting their own heritage. Overall, the general trend is the institutionalization and, indeed, the administrative (i.e., public-authority) management of heritage safeguarding.

The implementation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention involves a two-step nomination mechanism: following the identification of intangible cultural heritage, States Parties create inventory(ies) that are then made public. National inventories contain the intangible cultural heritage elements present within the territory of the State Party. In Hungary, the National Inventory of

Intangible Cultural Heritage was established in September 2008. In addition, a collection of “transmitting models” was launched, listing exemplary safeguarding practices in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

A State Party may nominate to the UNESCO lists only those heritage elements that appear in its national inventory, with the involvement of the community concerned.

The Convention states that, in order to enhance visibility and raise awareness of the importance of intangible heritage, the Intergovernmental Committee has established the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. In December of 2025, the Representative List includes 716 heritage elements from 5 regions and 152 countries. The Committee also established the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, which includes heritage elements that are endangered for various reasons, including those threatened with disappearance. Such elements may receive financial assistance from the dedicated fund. Examples include Mongolian epic singing, Mali’s collective fishing ceremony, and traditional Syrian glass-blowing. Currently, 90 heritage elements from 5 regions and 47 countries are inscribed on the Urgent Safeguarding List.

The Committee likewise created the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices, comprising programmes, projects, and activities that exemplify the principles and objectives of the Convention. By 2025, a total of 43 good practices from 36 countries across 5 regions had been selected for inclusion in the Register—for example, the pedagogical programme of the school-museum in Spain or the School of Living Traditions in the Philippines.

Hungary is represented on the Representative List with a total of eight heritage elements, four of which are multinational nominations, meaning that the heritage concerned was jointly submitted by several countries. In the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices, Hungary has two programs listed: the Dance House (Táncház) Method and the Kodály Methodology.

2.1 The Nomination Process

By ratifying the Convention, States Parties undertake to establish one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in their territory and to keep them continuously up to date. The Convention does not provide detailed guidance on how to compile a national inventory; it merely sets out general guidelines. Therefore, along these recommendations, countries may design the procedure for submitting elements to the national list according to their own approach.

Since 2008, Hungary has maintained a register of heritage elements found within its territory—as provided by the Convention 2003. From the outset, Hungarian practice has sought to follow the spirit of the Convention with regard to the communities concerned. In this spirit, the communities themselves—those who create, maintain, transmit, and recognize the heritage as part of their own identity—prepare the nomination documentation. This documentation is submitted to the Directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Skanzen (Open-Air Museum), which manages the nominations: it checks them for formal compliance, sends them to experts for review, prepares a summary, and then forwards them to the Hungarian National Committee of Intangible Cultural Heritage, where the submissions are discussed and recommendations are made regarding which heritage elements should be added to the National Inventory.



PHOTO:
BALÁZS FARKAS-MOHI

To implement this, based on the call issued by the minister responsible for culture, communities, groups, or individuals living in Hungary may propose for inclusion on the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage those elements they recognize as part of their own intangible cultural heritage. The purpose of the inventory is to record and make widely accessible all cultural expressions that communities regard as their heritage and that they continue to practice today. Communities may submit proposals for inclusion by completing the required nomination form and attaching mandatory documentation, consisting partly of archival material but mainly photographs and film recordings that document and illustrate the current state of the heritage. Preparing the nomination therefore requires significant professional competence and a multifaceted presentation of the heritage element. Consequently, the widest possible circle of local professional and civil organizations, as well as the relevant groups, must be involved in assembling the nomination. The intention to nominate must be communicated to the practicing community in advance, and their consent and participation must be sought in the process. The Hungarian mechanism for documenting intangible heritage, as presented here, is exemplary in international comparison and, with few exceptions, unique. Community-initiated but professionally supervised and supported identification, interpretation, and safeguarding planning all reflect the spirit of the Convention to the fullest extent. The Convention does not aim to create top-down inventories of national symbols during the documentation process.

Communities submitting a nomination send the complete documentation, in the required format, to the Directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage at the Open-Air Museum. The Directorate examines whether the nomination meets the prescribed formal criteria and then evaluates it with the involvement of two independent experts. After fur-

ther processing and preparation, the Directorate forwards the nominations to the Hungarian National Committee of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO, which reviews them at its next meeting and makes recommendations to the minister responsible for culture on which nominations should be added to the national inventory. The list of elements included in the national inventory and their full nomination files are available at www.szellemiorokseg.hu.

The Hungarian mechanism for documenting intangible heritage also means that registration is an open and ongoing procedure. There are currently no numerical or temporal limits on building the inventory. This also means that the present content of the national inventory is “incidental,” not planned (and certainly not complete in terms of themes): its composition and growth depend on how communities access the relevant information and whether they are prepared to assemble a nomination-and, indeed, whether they are aware of the existence and importance of their heritage, and whether the necessary capacities and community will are available.

It is important to emphasize that inclusion in the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage is not an award, distinction, or financial support. It is an inventory that offers the community the opportunity to widely present and share its heritage, which (at present) primarily provides moral recognition. The nomination documentation includes a dedicated section on safeguarding strategies. One of the criteria for inclusion is that the community has demonstrated readiness for future safeguarding actions and has already taken effective steps to preserve the heritage. Thus, the work begins-or at least does not end-with inclusion in the national inventory. The community assumes increased responsibility for the care of its heritage, while the state must also pay special attention to these heritage elements.

New elements previously used to be announced during the opening ceremony of the European Heritage Days (KÖN). Since 2023, when the UNESCO General Assembly on the 20th anniversary of the Convention-declared 17 October the International Day of Intangible Cultural Heritage, the official announcement takes place on this day.

The Hungarian National Committee of Intangible Cultural Heritage selects from among the elements included in the national inventory those that Hungary may nominate annually for the UNESCO Representative List. At present, eight Hungarian heritage elements are inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and two safeguarding methods are included in the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices.

The Hungarian National Committee of Intangible Cultural Heritage was established in September 2008 and functions as an advisory body to the minister responsible for culture. Government Decree 299/2021 (VI.1.) on the Hungarian National Commission for UNESCO provides that it continues to operate as one of the Commission's expert committees. Its members are delegated by institutions, organizations, and ministries involved in intangible cultural heritage. The 22-member committee is responsible for developing steps related to the national implementation of the Convention, making recommendations to the minister on adding heritage elements to the national inventory, selecting Hungarian nominations for UNESCO's lists, and developing programmes and educational projects for implementation of the Convention.

3. Intangible cultural heritage communities

At present, 58 heritage elements are listed in the National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Hungary. Behind this stand a wide variety of communities, representing the active participation and networks of several thousand people. Communities initially come into contact with the Directorate at the level of expressed interest. This process is characterized by professional consultation, the provision of recommendations, personal visits, and the direct familiarization with the community and its heritage.

The administrative preparation of the nomination is followed by the organization of a ceremonial announcement of the newly inscribed heritage elements. This is the most important and highlighted moment of celebration for the communities, during which representatives of the community bearing the heritage element inscribed on the national inventory receive the ministerial document certifying the inscription. This plays a significant role in raising awareness of the importance of the heritage both within the community itself and for the wider public.

It is often observed that inscription on the list leads to an increased appreciation of the heritage within the community. There have been cases where city leadership or younger generations became aware of the significance of the heritage present in their environment as a result. Inclusion in the national inventory has, in several instances, led to concrete positive decisions or actions within the local community (for example, the establishment of a permanent exhibition space or collection involving significant investment, the renovation of a church serving as the venue of the custom, the organization of an annual gala performance to celebrate inscription on the UNESCO list, the collection and exhibition of photographic documentation, an increase in the number of practitioners of the heritage, the publication of materials, or the launch of training programs).

The impact of inscription on the national inventory on the community and on the practice of the heritage element itself is almost always observable. Scientific research examining this phenomenon as an ongoing process is an important and instructive task, as it enables the preparation of change analyses that help reveal meaningful connections in a broader context of contemporary social and identity-seeking community practices. The Directorate supports such research by encouraging and supervising the preparation of university theses and dissertations.

4. Circus arts as cultural heritage

If we examine the phenomenon of the circus more closely, it becomes clear how many elements it encompasses that make it possible to treat it as cultural heritage:

- tradition
- practitioners/performers

- personal and community memory
- written, visual and film documentation
- tangible artefacts
- buildings, other structures and constructions

And how can we view circus arts as a community practice and as intangible cultural heritage?

Circus arts can be viewed as a community practice and as intangible cultural heritage through several interrelated aspects:

- Intergenerational transmission: Circus knowledge, skills, and values are often passed down within families or close-knit professional communities through long-term practice, apprenticeship, and oral tradition.
- Shared identity and belonging: Circus communities-artists, trainers, technicians, and support staff-form strong social networks with a distinct professional culture, traditions, and sense of belonging.
- Living practice: Circus arts are continuously recreated through performance, training, and innovation, while maintaining links to historical forms, techniques, and aesthetics.
- Collective knowledge and skills: The practice relies on specialized embodied knowledge, cooperation, trust, and mutual dependence among performers and crews.
- Cultural memory: Stories, rituals, performances, and documented histories preserve both individual and collective memories of the circus world.
- Community participation and recognition: Audiences, local communities, and institutions also play a role in sustaining circus arts by attending performances, supporting venues, and recognizing their cultural value.

Through these characteristics, circus arts function not only as a performing art form, but also as a living, community-based cultural practice that fits well within the framework of intangible cultural heritage.

4.1 Circus Arts as a Community Practice

Circus arts are fundamentally community-based in nature. Their creation and continued existence are inconceivable without the close cooperation of practitioners-acrobats, animal trainers, musicians, technicians, and organizers. Performances are not the sum of individual achievements, but are built on collective knowledge, mutual trust, and coordinated work. This community dimension is one of the fundamental characteristics of intangible cultural heritage.

Circus also represents a distinctive way of life, involving travel, the formation of temporary communities, and constant adaptation to diverse social and cultural environments. Personal and community memory-stories, legends, rituals, and narratives connected to masters and mentors—plays an important role in ensuring that circus arts possess strong identity-forming power for those who live and work within this world.

4.2 The Relationship of Tangible and Documented Elements to Intangible Cultural Heritage

Although the 2003 Convention focuses on intangible cultural heritage, it does not exclude the role of tangible elements. In the case of circus arts, props, costumes, tents, other structures and constructions, as well as written, visual, and audiovisual documents are all closely linked to the continuity of the practice. However, these elements do not constitute heritage in themselves; they become part of it through the knowledge, use, and meanings associated with them.

Documentation-such as photographs, film recordings, posters, and programme booklets-serves not only as a historical source but also as a carrier of collective memory, supporting the awareness and transmission of the tradition.

5. Criteria for Nomination

Definition of the Community: One of the most important elements of a nomination is the precise identification of the communities that consider the given cultural practice to be part of their own intangible cultural heritage. This includes all groups and individuals who actively participate in the practice, maintenance, and transmission of the heritage. Defining the community is not merely a professional exercise but a process based on self-identification: those concerned must themselves express their sense of belonging to the heritage and their responsibility for its safeguarding.

Geographical Distribution: The nomination presents the geographical context in which the heritage element is practiced, whether it is associated with a particular settlement, region, country, or a practice spanning several countries. In the case of a multinational nomination, it is especially important to emphasize that the heritage is linked to communities living in the territories of multiple states and can be interpreted as a shared tradition through historical and cultural connections.

Modes, Actors, and Responsibility of Knowledge Transmission: The survival of intangible cultural heritage depends on the transmission of knowledge and practice. The nomination provides a detailed description of how this transmission takes place: through informal learning, imitation, master-apprentice relationships, family traditions, institutional education, or a combination of these. It is also important to identify the main actors involved in transmission and to describe the responsibilities they assume in passing on the heritage.

Its Current Social Function: The nomination is not limited to presenting the past, but also examines the role the heritage element plays in contemporary society. It explores how it contributes to strengthening community identity, social cohesion, and intergenerational relationships, as well as the cultural, educational, or economic functions it fulfils today.

The Impact of Inscription at Local, National, and International Levels: The nomination assesses the potential effects of inscription on the UNESCO list for the communities concerned and their wider environment. At the local level, it may strengthen self-esteem and appreciation of the heritage; at the national level, it may enhance the visibility of cultural diversity; and at the international level, it may foster dialogue and cooperation with communities in other countries.

6. The Aim of the Joint Nomination

The aim of the joint (multinational) nomination is to emphasize that the given element of intangible cultural heritage is not the exclusive property of a single nation, but a tradition jointly experienced and practiced by communities in several countries. The joint submission strengthens cooperation between nations, promotes the exchange of experiences, and highlights the connecting, cross-border nature of the heritage.

6.1 Expected Outcomes of Inscription

The expected outcome of inscription on the Representative List is an increase in the social recognition of the heritage, the strengthening of the communities concerned, and the wider adoption of conscious safeguarding practices. International attention may contribute to longterm sustainability, the development of new forms of cooperation, and the continued presence of the heritage as a living, dynamic practice for future generations.

6.2 International Cooperation and the Concept of Shared Heritage

A distinctive feature of circus arts is that they have historically been-and continue to be-a strongly international phenomenon. The development of the genre is the result of in-

fluences spanning countries and continents, while circus communities have traditionally been mobile and operate within transnational networks of relationships. This corresponds with the provisions of the UNESCO Convention that encourage multinational nominations in the case of elements that can be interpreted as shared heritage.

The nomination of circus arts for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity should therefore be understood not only in a national but also in an international framework of cooperation. Such a nomination draws attention to the fact that circus, as a living cultural practice, constitutes a shared European and global heritage whose safeguarding is only possible through the active participation of communities and cooperation between states.

Conclusion

The 2003 UNESCO Convention provides an appropriate framework for interpreting circus arts as intangible cultural heritage and as a community-based practice. Circus is built on living knowledge, community cooperation, intergenerational transmission, and continuous renewal, while also fulfilling a strong identity-forming and social role. Recognizing circus arts as heritage not only affirms the value of the tradition but also contributes to its long-term sustainability and to the visibility of the communities within the contemporary cultural landscape.



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She is a Visiting Faculty Member in Linguistics at Brigham Young University (USA).

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The authors suggests drinking
soda water with cherries
whilst reading their essay.

The authors suggests listening to
Diga, Diga Doo” by *the Mills Brothers*
whilst reading their essay.

Developing a Circus Classification System

Abstract

Statistician George Box wrote, „*All models are wrong but some are useful.*” Classification systems are never perfectly exhaustive or precise. However, a thoughtful classification system can inspire viewers to think more deeply about a concept, its history, and its interconnections. We profile one classification system that organizes over 300 circus skills, apparatus, and disciplines. We discuss 1) why and how the system was created, 2) successes and shortcomings of the system, and 3) a set of questions that can help a reader better understand and use circus organizational systems generally. We encourage viewers of circus classification systems to consider the purpose of the system and the positionality of their authors in relation to circus performance, teaching, academia, history, and geography. We lastly encourage classification systems to remain flexible and dynamic. As circus arts expand and grow, so must circus classification systems.

Introduction: Why Classify Circus?

Circus techniques have always had uncertain boundaries. They blend into one another, borrow from dance, theatre and sport, and change rapidly as artists invent new apparatus and hybrid forms. From this perspective, any attempt to arrange circus acts into discrete categories may seem futile or even constraining.

We take the opposite view. Precisely because circus is fluid, the effort to classify can be productive. It makes visible the relationships between skills, highlights historical continuities and breaks, and offers shared language for artists, students and

scholars who often work in different countries and traditions. Classification does not fix circus in place; instead, it opens up new ways of understanding what already exists and imagining what might come next.

The work we present here began from a simple practical observation. Many recreational students and even experienced performers know only a small portion of what we might call the “circus universe.” They are familiar with the disciplines practised in their own school or company, but unaware of parallel techniques elsewhere. We therefore set out to create a map – necessarily selective and imperfect – that would help people see the breadth of modern circus and navigate it more consciously.

Existing Major Circus Classification Systems

Before designing a new system, we examined a number of earlier attempts to organize circus knowledge. For the purposes of this article, we focus on six prominent examples that are well known among at least some communities of artists and researchers. Although they differ in language, format and scope, together they illustrate the range of existing approaches.

These systems can be grouped into three broad types. First, there are **pedagogical systems**. These were created primarily to structure teaching curricula, sequence skills for students, or outline the programme of a circus school. They tend to emphasise progressions, levels and safety considerations, and often reflect the specific repertoire of a given institution.

Second, there are **academic-practitioner systems**. These have usually been developed by circus artists or coaches who also work in research or higher education. They aim to document circus practices in a more systematic way, sometimes combining historical information, technical descriptions and visual diagrams. They rarely claim to be exhaustive, but they make their theoretical assumptions explicit and invite critical discussion.

Third, there are what we call **implicit systems**. These can be found in books, exhibitions or museum catalogues that present circus materials according to an underlying logic – for example by period, genre, company or star performer – without explicitly theorising their classification choices. Similarly, when a curator arranges a show so that certain acts follow others, this reflects an implicit understanding of how disciplines relate, even if it is not written down as a taxonomy.

Looking across these examples, several patterns emerge. Many systems have been developed independently of one another, with little awareness of parallel work. Most are available only in their language of origin – for example Russian, Spanish, French or Portuguese – which limits international exchange. Naming practices vary widely: an apparatus that is called “Washington trapeze” in one system might appear under a different term in another. Some systems de-

vote much space to animal acts; others omit them entirely. Few of the systems make explicit the historical lineages of skills, beyond occasional labels such as “Russian swing” or “Korean plank”. Most importantly, existing taxonomies reflect the positionality of their creators. A juggler will almost inevitably draw finer distinctions in object manipulation than in clowning; a scholar of physical theatre may foreground character work and downplay technical categories.

These observations led us to two conclusions. First, no single system can claim to be neutral or definitive. Second, classification is most useful when it foregrounds its own assumptions and invites readers to reflect on them.

Guiding Questions for Reading and Creating Systems

In order to analyse existing taxonomies – and to design our own – we developed a set of guiding questions. We offer them here as a practical framework for anyone who encounters or constructs a circus classification system.

1. What is the purpose of the system?

A diagram designed to support show curation or museum display will look different from one intended for pedagogy, research or funding applications. Clarity about purpose helps users to interpret what they see, and reminds designers that no system needs to serve every function at once.

2. How are the groups organized?

Skills and apparatus can be arranged according to many logics: visual appearance; shared movement vocabulary; spatial orientation (vertical, horizontal, ground-based); risk level; historical lineage; or the type of relationship to the audience. Each choice highlights some connections and obscures others.

3. What is included or excluded?

Every taxonomy has boundaries. Do we count stage crew, lighting and sound as part of circus practice? Where do we place sideshow, magic or variety arts? What about allied sports such as parkour or cheerleading that often feed performers into circus? Explicit decisions about inclusion make it easier to see whose work is being recognised and whose is missing.

4. How are relationships represented?

Classification is not only about lists, but about the relations between items. Are connections shown through hierarchy (parent and child categories), spatial proximity, colour coding, cross-references, or verbal description? Do we acknowledge that some disciplines sit at the intersection of several domains?

5. How flexible is the system?

Circus innovation is constant. New apparatus and hybrid acts appear every year. A useful system must allow for revision and expansion rather than freezing circus at a single historical moment. This may involve digital rather than printed formats, collaborative rather than individual authorship, and a commitment to iterative updating.

We used these questions to examine earlier systems and to hold ourselves accountable as we moved into designing our own map of modern circus arts.

A Contemporary Map of Modern Circus Arts: Case Study

The classification system we present here was developed between 2019 and 2023. It originated in a desire to update a mid-twentieth-century Russian scheme attributed to N. Gurevich, known to many Western readers through Hovey Burgess's English translation. That earlier system was historically important, but from the perspective of contemporary practice it had two main limitations. It did not capture the proliferation of new apparatus and hybrid forms that have emerged since the 1960s, and it devoted a large proportion of space to animal acts in a way that no longer reflects the centre of gravity of modern circus.

Initially, the aim was simply to revise and extend the Gurevich model: to add contemporary disciplines while preserving the overall structure. In practice, the project gradually became something more independent. As we worked, we recognised that our own experiences as recreational and semi-professional artists shaped our sense of what "belonged" together and how disciplines were related. The final system therefore stands in dialogue with Gurevich but is not a direct descendant.

The map is organized around four large domains: **aerial apparatus**, **acrobatics**, **object manipulation and character**. Within each domain, we distinguish further subfields. For example, aerial work is divided into vertical apparatus (such as silks, corde lisse, straps and rope) and bar apparatus (including static trapeze, swinging trapeze, lyra, Washington trapeze and aerial ladder). Ground acrobatics encompasses tumbling, partner and group acrobatics, human pyramids, handbalancing, and acrobatic dance, as well as apparatus-based disciplines such as teeterboard, trampoline and Russian swing. Object manipulation ranges from classical juggling with balls, clubs and rings to diabolo, devil sticks, poi, hula hoop, contact juggling and contemporary flow arts. The character domain includes clowning, mime, "whiteface" and "auguste" traditions, eccentric characters, as well as magic, ventriloquism and associated stage genres.

One feature that distinguishes this system from many others is the decision to include areas that are often omitted from circus taxonomies, notably **sideshow** and **crew**. In the sideshow cluster we place practices such as fire performance, sword swallowing, human blockhead acts and other disciplines historically associated with the "freak show" or variety stages. In the crew cluster we locate roles such as riggers, stage managers, technicians and dressers whose work is essential to the functioning of circus but rarely appears in skill

maps. Our rationale is simple: a taxonomy that claims to describe the circus field should acknowledge the full ecology of labour that makes a production possible.

The relationships between categories are represented visually and hierarchically. Larger font size signals broader groupings; smaller font identifies more specific skills. Lines connect related items, showing implied pathways for training and creative development. For instance, the trapeze node is linked not only to other bar apparatus but also to double-point aerial pole and corde lisse, suggesting that an artist fluent in one of these vocabularies may more easily transition to the others. The spatial layout reflects perceived affinity: disciplines that share similar movement patterns or apparatus architecture are placed in closer proximity, whereas more distant skills occupy separate regions of the map.

In total, the system lists and connects more than three hundred skills, apparatus and disciplines. This makes it, to our knowledge, one of the most detailed contemporary attempts to visualise the diversity of modern circus arts in a single view.

Strengths, Limitations and Positionality

Using the guiding questions outlined above, we can now critically reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of our own system.

In terms of purpose, the primary goal was educational. We wanted a tool that would help recreational students and emerging artists discover disciplines beyond their immediate practice; assist teachers in explaining the wider circus landscape; and support researchers, festival programmers and museum curators in orienting themselves within a complex field. The map has already been used in these ways in workshops, classrooms and online forums.

As an organisational scheme, the map combines visual similarity and shared movement vocabulary. This is both a strength and a limitation. On the one hand, it helps non-specialists to intuitively grasp why certain apparatus “go together.” On the other, it may obscure historical or cul-

tural lineages that cut across visual categories. For example, some contemporary object-manipulation forms grew directly out of specific regional traditions, yet in our system they are grouped primarily by movement type rather than by geographic origin.

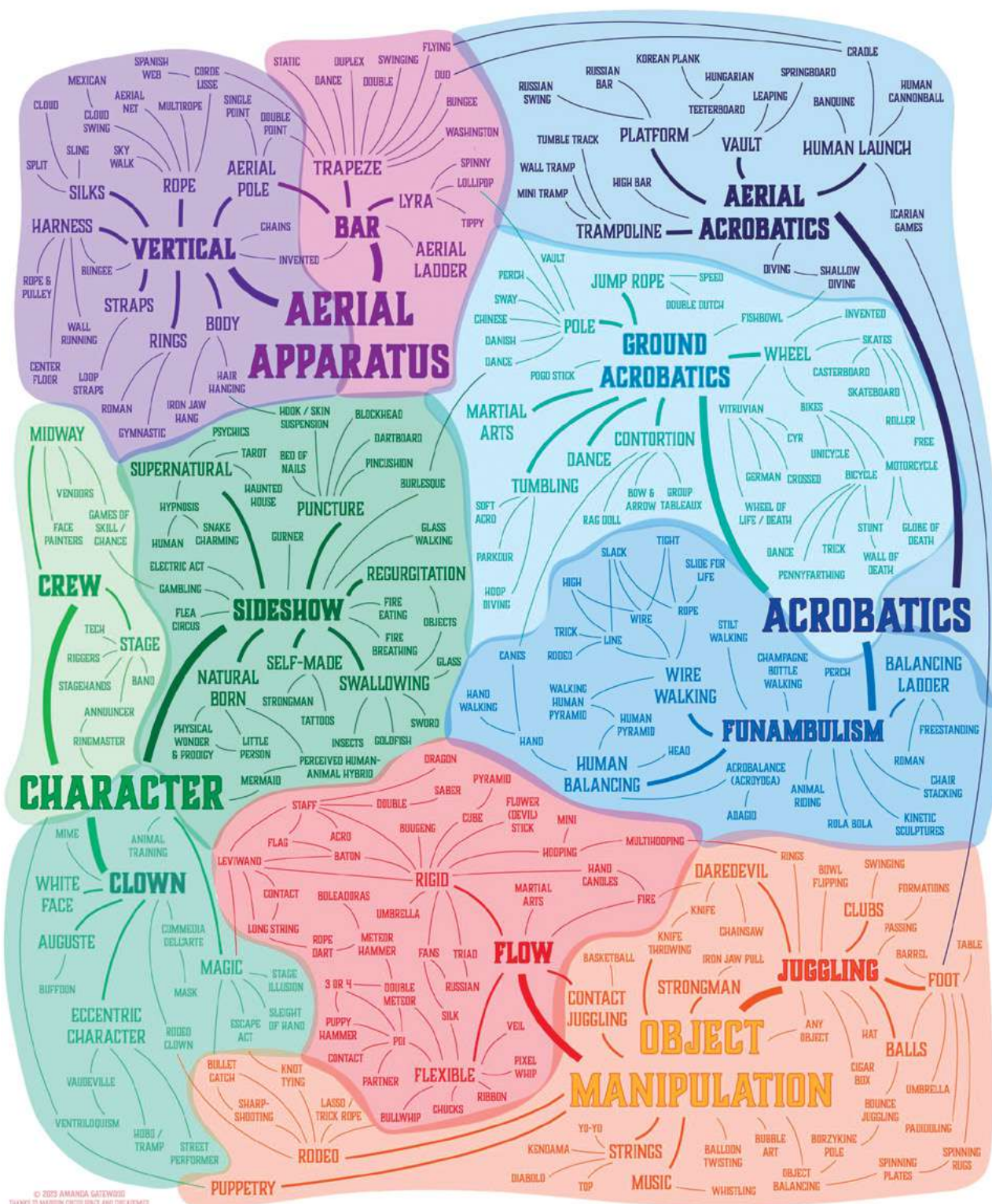
The question of inclusion reveals another tension. By incorporating sideshow and crew, the system broadens the notion of who counts as a circus practitioner. Yet there remain gaps. Some allied disciplines – such as parkour, cheerleading or certain forms of martial arts – are represented only at the margins, even though they contribute performers and movement vocabularies to circus. In addition, the map reflects primarily European and North American practices; we were not able to draw on a comprehensive set of Asian or Global South classification systems, and we suspect that important perspectives are therefore missing.

The relationships between skills are represented through a parent-child hierarchy and spatial layout, but the map does not yet encode temporal or genealogical information. A viewer cannot, for example, trace how a specific apparatus evolved from an earlier form, or how techniques migrated between countries. Nor does the visual format allow for easy annotation with references, dates or video links.

Finally, the flexibility of the system is constrained by its current medium. The map exists as a large printed poster and a static digital image. While we solicited extensive feedback from members of the Circademics online community and from colleagues at Madison Circus Space during its development, ongoing updates are difficult. The visual field is already dense; adding new items risks making it unreadable. Ideally, a future iteration would take the form of an interactive digital platform in which users could zoom, filter, and propose modifications, and where multiple languages and regional variants could coexist.

Throughout, our own positionality has shaped the system. We write as artists and coaches situated in the United States, trained mainly in contemporary circus schools, and with strong connections to English-speaking academic networks. We do not claim that our map is neutral or universal. Rather, we present it as one situated attempt to make sense of a field we care about, in the hope that others will critique, adapt and extend it from their own vantage points.

MODERN CIRCUS ARTS



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THANKS TO MARSH CIRCUS SENSE AND CIRCUSMICE

Amanda Gatewood
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Future Directions for Circus Taxonomy

The case study suggests several broader directions for the development of circus classification systems.

First, we see a need for greater **international dialogue**. Many taxonomies have been created in relative isolation, with limited awareness of work in other languages or regions. We hope that future projects will build bridges between systems, perhaps by constructing meta-classifications or concordances that show how terms and categories correspond across contexts.

Second, we advocate for the **inclusion of diverse voices** in the design process. Recreational students, professional performers, teachers, historians, curators and technicians all interact with circus in different ways. Their perspectives can illuminate blind spots and challenge implicit hierarchies embedded in existing classifications.

Third, we encourage **experimentation with digital and interactive formats**. Static charts have value, especially as teaching aids, but they struggle to keep pace with a rapidly evolving art form. Digital platforms could allow for tagging, multimedia links, user-generated annotations and version history, making circus taxonomies more transparent and collaborative.

Finally, we return to the idea that classification itself can be a **creative practice**. Mapping relationships between skills may suggest new act combinations, pedagogical pathways or dramaturgical structures. In this sense, taxonomies are not only tools for description, but also engines for invention.

Conclusion

All models are wrong, but some are useful. We have argued that circus classification systems, despite their inevitable imperfections, can be highly useful when they are explicit about their purposes, transparent about their assumptions and open to revision. Our own map of modern circus arts is one such attempt. It is partial, situated and unfinished, yet it has already sparked conversations among artists, teach-

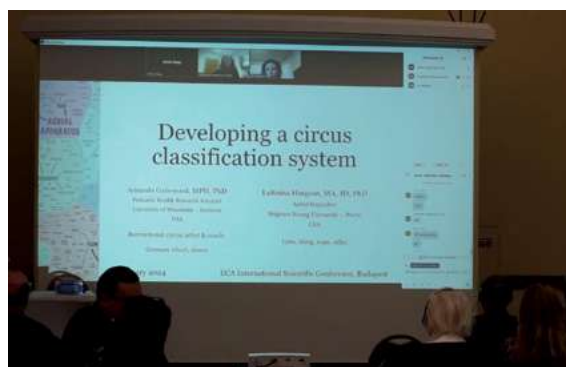
ers and researchers about how they understand their place within the wider circus ecosystem.

We invite readers not to accept any classification – ours or others’ – as final, but to treat it as a starting point for further inquiry. What disciplines are missing? Which relationships feel intuitive, and which feel strange? How does your own practice fit into, resist or transform the categories on offer? By asking such questions, we can use classification not to limit circus, but to honour its diversity and support its ongoing evolution.

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She is a Hungarian circus researcher, museologist, poet, writer, aesthetician, and blogger born in Budapest. Coming from a theatrical family, she holds two degrees from ELTE, in Hungarian Language and Literature and in Aesthetics, and chose circus arts as the topic of her doctoral dissertation. She taught circus history for several years at the Baross Imre Artist Training School, a subject on which she also wrote a book. She works as a museologist at the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts, where she has been involved in the institution's diverse tasks from the very beginning: research, institutional development, collection development, exhibition organization, and museum education programs. She was the curator of the permanent circus history exhibition "*There Is No Other! 130 Years of the Capital Circus of Budapest*", which was on display at the Capital Circus of Budapest from 2019 to 2025. Her latest poetry collection, "*Exodus: Notes of a Hermit*", was published in 2022.

The author recommends drinking
chili-spiced raspberry tea
while reading her study.

The author recommends listening to
Electric Light Orchestra's album Time
while reading her study.

The circus is an international performing art: its centuries-old terminology reflects this. Different sources often refer to the genres and categorize them in many different ways. The aim of science is to create a consensual, well-defined circus vocabulary, a language of circus science – which already exists for other arts – to enable circus phenomena to be professionally defined, described clearly and accurately for all, and thus linked to other disciplines.

What is an Equestrian Juggler Like? Developing a Circus Genre Classification System



ETHE FOUR DUNAIS, EQUESTRIAN JUGGLERS.

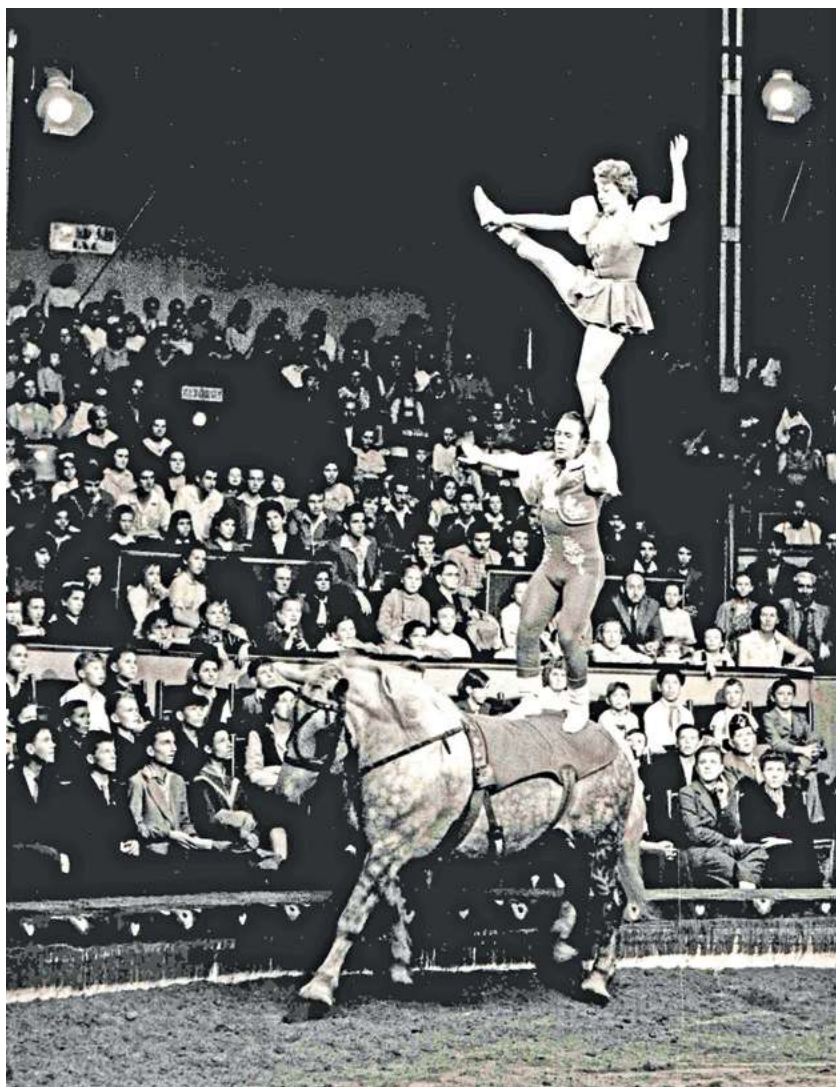
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MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

The Scientific Repository of the National Circus Arts Centre – the Museum, Library and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts – has been engaged for years in the systematic collection and study of circus genres. This work includes the selection, recording, definition, and interpretation of both traditional and contemporary circus terms, primarily in Hungarian and English.

The long-term aim of this research is to develop a complex and applicable classification system that can be used across the performing arts, education, and public collections such as museums, libraries, and archives. The professional description of collection objects requires the development of

specific special dictionaries. A museum artifact, for example, can be described using the following categories:

- Circuses: Capital Circus of Budapest
- Events: e.g., festivals
- Circus workers: performer, acrobat, acrobat on horseback, untermann, obermann, ringmaster, groom
- Persons: Mrs József Picard, Ferenc Picard
- Groups: The Six Picards
- Props: panneau, bit, bridle
- Animals: horse
- Acts: animal acts, equestrian acts, acrobatics, equestrian acrobatics, jockeys, pas-de-deux



THE SIX PICARDS EQUESTRIAN ACROBATS.

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

CONTORTIONIST RICH METIKU BEHIND THE SCENES AT THE CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST IN 2015.

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

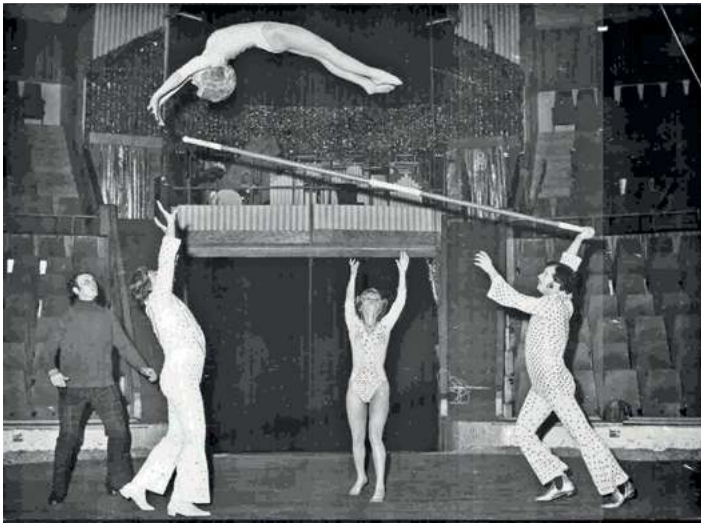


However, the goal of the research extends beyond producing a simple list of genres or a dictionary. It aims to develop a coherent taxonomic system. The first step in this process is to define each genre and identify its key features. Comparative analysis of international examples and existing classification initiatives plays a significant role.

Across the systems examined, genres were typically categorized using the following criteria:

1. Skills: What skills are required to perform the genre?
E.g., flexibility, sense of balance.

2. Movement types: What kinds of movements or elements constitute the act? E.g., jumps, throwing or balancing objects.



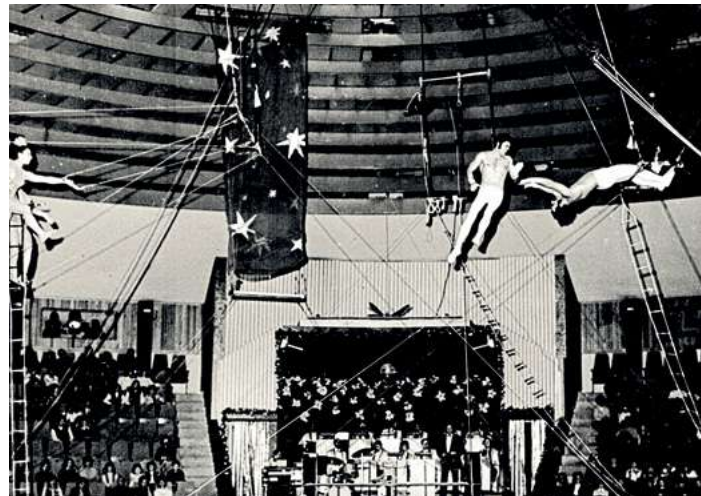
**THE RUSSIAN BAR ACT
BY THE FOUR EÖTVÖSES.**

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

3. Location of the presentation: Where is the act performed? E.g., on the ground, in the air.



4. Props, apparatus: What props and tools does the performer use? E.g., clubs, unicycle, trapeze.



**THE FLYING TRAPEZE ACT
BY THE FOUR HUNORS.**

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

**LEVENTE HELLENPÁRT'S
TIGHTWIRE ACT AT THE CAPITAL
CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST IN 2024.**

PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

5. Style: What characteristic feature does the act have? E.g. lyrical, comical, elegant)



**THE TWO NÉGYESSYS'
ACROBATIC DANCE DUO.**

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

6. Animals: Are animals involved in the act, and in what way? E.g., dog training, acrobatics performed on animals.



**THE RICHTER TROUPE'S
ACROBATIC ELEPHANT ACT.**

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

7. Level of risk: How dangerous is the genre for the performer? E.g., ball juggling – low risk; high wire – high risk.



**CHRISTOPH, THE FRENCH HERCULES,
ALSO KNOWN AS
THE STRONGMAN ISTVÁN KRISTÓF.**

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

8. Relating arts: What other art forms are integrated? E.g., theatre, singing, dance.



Based on museum requirements and an analysis of international genre systems, the following proposed genre system was developed, combining aspects of both:

I. CIRCUS ACROBATICS – Any genres requiring acrobatic skills or knowledge:

- 1) Floor acrobatics: a) Performing figures on the floor or starting and finishing on it. b) Performed with apparatus fixed on the floor.
- 2) Aerial acrobatics: The figures are presented on apparatus fixed at high altitude.
- 3) Equilibristic (balancing): Balancing plays a key role in the presentation of the figures.
- 4) Object manipulation: The presentation is based on throwing and balancing with objects.

II. ANIMAL ACTS – All genres involving animals:

- 1) Animal training – The emphasis is on the performance of the animals and the skills of the trainer.
- 2) Circus acrobatics performed with animals – The emphasis is on the acrobatic performance presented by the performer.

THE THREE COLIBRI MUSIC PARODY TROUPE.

PHOTO:

MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES
OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

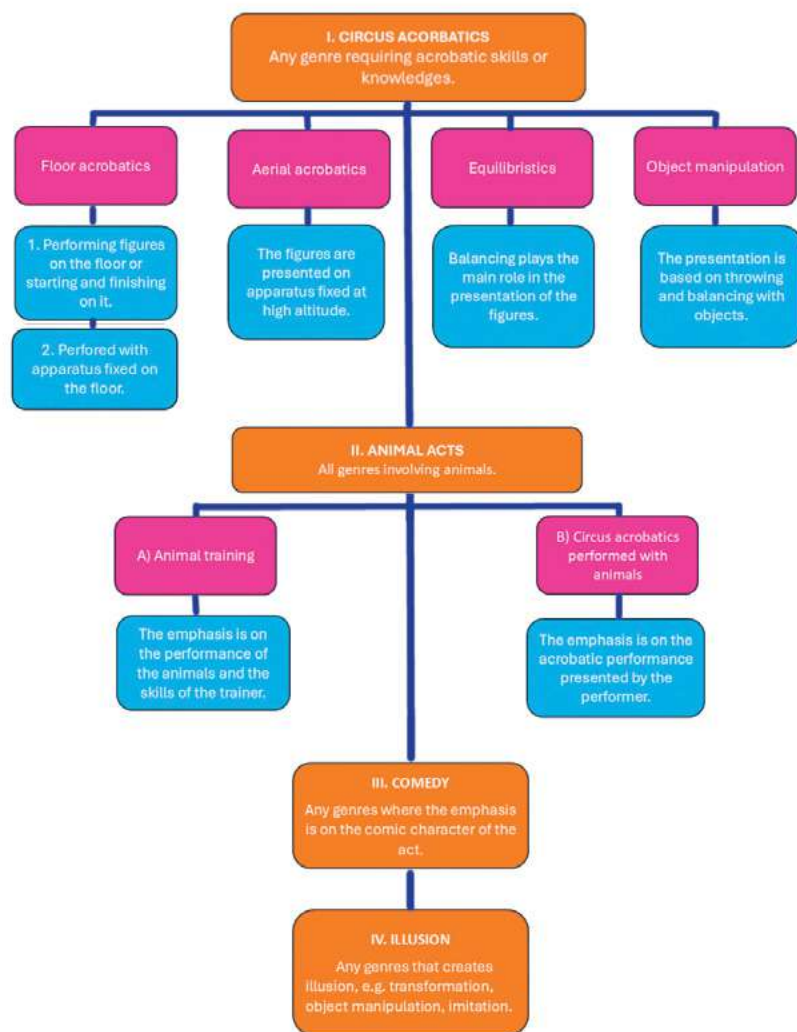


DIAGRAM OF THE CIRCUS GENRE SYSTEM - MAIN CATEGORIES.

MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

With this system in mind, the question arises: how can the genre of equestrian juggling be classified, considering that it combines animal training, equestrian acrobatics, and juggling?

Suggestion:

II. ANIMAL ACTS ► 2) Circus acrobatics performed with animals ► Circus acrobatics ► Object manipulation



THE FOUR DUNAIS, EQUESTRIAN JUGGLERS.

PHOTO:
MUSEUM, LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES OF HUNGARIAN CIRCUS ARTS

III. COMEDY – Any genres where the emphasis is on the comic character of the act.

IV. ILLUSION – Any genres that creates illusion, e.g. transformation, object manipulation, imitation.

Although these areas have received relatively little attention in most existing classification systems, it nevertheless seems necessary to introduce two additional categories:

VI. DRAMATIC UNITS – Dramaturgical elements of a complete act which cannot be classified as one of the above genres, e.g. parade, charivari, finale.

V. OTHER CIRCUS PERFORMERS: Other actors in the circus show and their performance, e.g. master of ceremonies, band, dance troupe, ringmaster, assistant.

The suggestion is, of course, still under development, and a number of further considerations require careful and systematic examination. One such question concerns the degree of detail with which individual genres should be distinguished – for instance, whether it is necessary to differentiate as finely as between cradle and double cradle, or between trapeze and triple trapeze. Another aspect that must be taken into account is the system's suitability for describing historical collection items, which makes it essential to include genres that have become rare, such as the liliput act or the human fly. It must also be considered whether borderline areas of circus art – such as the menagerie, cabaret, or sideshow – should be incorporated into the taxonomy. In addition, the spelling and definitions of genre terms need to be standardized, and it must likewise be assessed how foreign genres that are less familiar in Hungary can be integrated and how appropriate Hungarian equivalents can be developed for them, as in the case of daredevil acts (vakmerő mutatványos) or side show (mutatványos).



PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

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- (Includes review of Lehmann, Rolf. 1979. *Circus: Magie der Manege*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe.)

Panel Discussion

The panel discussion explored the differences between public and private circus collections, strategies for collection development, and opportunities for international collaboration. Participants shared experiences in preserving circus heritage, managing collections, and organizing exhibitions, highlighting the importance of storytelling and research-based methodology. The discussion emphasized that meaningful progress in the field relies on rigorous scholarship, careful preservation, and respectful international cooperation.

PHOTOS:

ÁDÁM URBÁN

Following the presentations, a panel discussion with exhibitors was held. Participants included **Irina Zaitseva** (*Regional Public Charitable Foundation "Circus and Mercy" Y. V. Nikulin, Russia*), **Nargiz Tamabekkyzy** (*Kazakh State Circus Museum, Kazakhstan*), **Gilles Maignant** (*private collector, Circus Museum of Gilles Maignant, Association "CIRCUS PATRIMONIUM", France*), **Roberto Fazzini** (*private collector and printer*), **Dorotea and Roberto Fazzini** (*Circus Historical Archive, Italy*), and **Emese Joó** (*Director of the Museum, Library, and Archives of Hungarian Circus Arts, Hungary*). The session was moderated by **Bruno Schütz** (*Hungary*).

The discussion focused on differences between public and private collections, strategies for expanding collections, and opportunities for international cooperation.

Irina Zaitseva introduced her foundation and its collection, which preserves the legacy of the Nikulin family. She highlighted programs promoting circus arts, such as international youth camps, and stressed the need for a dedicated space to fully display their collection. She also expressed a desire to raise the profile of Y. V. Nikulin's work internationally.

Nargiz Tamabekkyzy emphasized that every object once 'alive' in circus performance holds significant museological value. Since 2016, the Kazakh Circus Museum has acquired nearly 500 items, but the lack of a well-equipped exhibition space remains a major challenge. She appreciated the opportunity to participate in the XV Budapest International Circus Festival and the conference and welcomed further exchanges of experience.

Gilles Maignant shared that his private collection, developed over more than 40 years, now includes over 350 circus costumes dating back to the 1900s. He sees international collaboration as a way to diversify and enrich collections. Highlighting the limited accessibility of circus arts in Central Europe, he invited artists and museologists from the region to contribute objects. He noted the collaboration evident in the current exhibition and expressed hopes to present more artifacts at future festivals, including a 50m² circus model and an early 1900s costume.

Roberto Fazzini, whose collection spans 50 years and now comprises 26.000 posters, highlighted the recent opening of the Italian National Circus Arts Museum in Modena as a significant achievement. While his collection contains items from around the world, he regards Italian circus posters as the most valuable. He actively supports international cooperation by lending pieces to foreign exhibitions.

Emese Joó underscored that the Hungarian Circus Museum's strength as a public institution lies in its scientific methodology, combining qualitative research and observation. The collection of Hungarian circus heritage began only 4.5 years ago, as previous public collections in Hungary included few or no circus artifacts. Her focus is not merely on collecting old objects but on presenting the personal stories behind them.

She highlighted the importance of a permanent exhibition space and clarified a common misconception: an exhibition is not the same as a museum. The museum is a research institution with a 40.000-piece collection. In contrast, the current international exhibition, Wonderful Circus World, displays only a few dozen selected artifacts. The exhibition aims to strengthen the Hungarian circus community by showing what a national public institution needs to preserve and present its heritage.

Responding to Gilles Maignant's call for contributions, she firmly stated: *"I will be the first to say no... because I would not like to see Hungarian circus historical material abroad."* She emphasized that meaningful progress arises from collaborations grounded in rigorous scientific methodology, which allow collectors and researchers to explore and showcase their own nation's circus arts.





Panel Discussion



theater
science
review
48

01/02 2025



DÁNIEL LEVENTE PÁL

POET, WRITER,
LITERARY TRANSLATOR,
THEATRE AND CIRCUS
DRAMATURG-DIRECTOR

National Circus Arts Centre
(HUNGARY)

The author suggests drinking
sparkling mineral water
whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
Vangelis
whilst reading her essay.

The Caravan of Knowledge: On Education, Heritage, and the Future Tense of Circus

afterword

A conference is, at best, a temporary structure: a day raised like a tent, bright with voices, then folded away again before the weather turns. Then the canvas comes down. The ground looks the same. You know it isn't. And yet some conferences don't really end when the chairs are stacked and the interpreters' headsets are packed. They stay with you. Something more lasting has happened – something closer to a shared decision than a schedule. The **"Circus, Education, Heritage – ECA International Academic Conference"** was that rarer kind. It wasn't simply an academic program alongside a festival. It set out, instead, to find a common grammar for a field that has long relied on improvisation, apprenticeship, and the intimate passing-on of craft.

This volume isn't trying to be a monument. It reads more like a working archive: a record of agreements and productive frictions, of methods offered and methods still missing. Above all, it tries to keep the conversation **portable** – something you can carry with you, packed for the road, then passed on. That feels right. Circus has always travelled light: knowledge moving faster than institutions, tradition crossing borders, a family name arriving before the passport does. Which is why the question that returns on almost every page feels quietly urgent: **how does a travelling art secure durable recognition without losing the suppleness that keeps it alive?** And how do we speak of "heritage" without sealing what still needs air?

In a way, the conference offered its own answer simply through its shape. The day moved with a clear arc – **Education & Training** first, **Heritage & Museology** later – and the passage between the two was marked not by a routine break, but by a public act: the opening of the **"Wonderful Circus World"** exhibition, and the signing of a **Memorandum of Cooperation** on heritage preservation. It was the moment when the conversation stepped out of the room and into the world of calendars, signatures, and shared obligations. And it changed the temperature.

Circus is sometimes accused – unfairly – of being all spectacle and no argument. These proceedings make a strong case for the opposite. Behind the spectacle there is careful work going on: how people teach, document, classify, conserve, and open doors. And running through the papers is a recurring triad – **past, present, future** – not as three separate boxes, but as one continuous line of thought, always on the move.

I. Framing the Field: Recognition as a Form of Care

The day opens in a calm key. In **Péter Fekete's** welcome, the conference is placed inside a longer European continuity – Budapest as a recurring meeting point, a place the circus world returns to when it wants to take stock of itself. The speech is careful about emphasis. Circus is named as an art form and as a cultural ecosystem, while the pressures shaping the sector are acknowledged without drama: education, accessibility, regulation, and – inevitably – the complicated question of animals. The strength here is restraint. Nothing is denied; nothing is sensationalized. The future is approached through rules people can actually live with, and responsibilities that can be shared.

Emese Joó's overview does a different kind of essential work: it makes the day readable as a whole. Proceedings always need a cartographer, and Joó provides one. She maps the gathering not only in terms of scale and international scope, but in its inner logic: the two halves of the program answering the same question from different sides – continuity. She also preserves one of the conference's most valuable outcomes: the emerging consensus that **each nation bears a primary responsibility to research, collect, and preserve its own circus heritage**, so that global circus culture becomes discoverable through many well-processed national archives, in dialogue. It's a quiet principle,

but it has real force. It avoids both isolation and homogenization. It argues for cooperation without flattening difference.

Helmut Grosscurth's presentation of ECA goals and achievements gives the volume its backbone. Recognition isn't treated as a decorative prize; it is described as a form of care – something built, maintained, and tested in practice. His four pillars – cultural recognition; workable European regulation and mobility; animal welfare; and education access for children and young people living and travelling with circuses – are presented as interdependent rather than competing concerns. That framing keeps the conversation honest: you cannot strengthen one part of the field while neglecting the others. Even tools like the **Big Top Label** appear here not as trophies, but as trust marks: a clear signal for municipalities, sponsors, regulators, and audiences.

Taken together, these texts establish a tone that carries through the volume: circus is treated as a living art that deserves precise language, workable institutions, and ethical seriousness – without losing joy.



II. Education: The Future as Daily Practice

In the first part of the day, the future stops being an idea and becomes a timetable. Education appears here not as a charitable add-on to circus life, but as a moral and professional necessity.

Annette Schwer names the central tension with rights-based clarity: children's access to education is not simply a bureaucratic demand – it is a cultural human right. In the travelling life of circus families, schooling becomes the bridge between tradition and equal opportunity, between a life inherited and a life chosen. Schwer's argument is practical as well as principled: Europe contains both the legal ideal (compulsory education for all) and the lived gaps (unequal access for children on the move). The paper refuses to romanticize mobility, and it refuses to punish it. Education here is not assimilation; it is continuity made fair.



Kamilla Reidl adds an institutional dimension by documenting the integration of circus arts into Hungarian higher education. This matters beyond national pride. It changes what circus is “allowed to be” in the public imagination: not only a craft passed down through lineage and rehearsal, but a discipline whose knowledge can be accredited, structured, and recognized alongside other arts. If heritage is often imagined as something behind glass, Reidl shows heritage becoming curriculum – organized, assessed, and legible to the broader educational sphere.

The Hungarian program texts – **Andrea Horthy** on the Circus Mentoring Programme and **András Sándor** on “**Learn Circus!**” – push “education” outward into the social field. Horthy's mentoring model is generous by design: amateur and self-organizing communities are treated not as marginal, but as essential reservoirs of practice and potential.



Talent does not always begin inside institutions; it often begins in gyms, clubs, and improvised spaces, carried by dedication rather than certification. Sándor's program description, meanwhile, translates circus pedagogy into language educational institutions can recognize: motor development, cognition, social belonging, group cohesion. The point is not that circus should become a servant of schooling. It is that circus can sit at the same table with schooling – and still sound like itself.



Emese Joó's paper sets the terms with one clean provocation: circus education is not a mere add-on – it is circus, and then something added to it. Her “complex circus in education” names a non-formal, arts-in-education practice that keeps its own tempo and can speak to schools and cultural institutions. The **Budapest model**, she notes, began in 2016



with irregular classes in the ring after performances, **built on a simple sequence: watch, try, discover – then return to what you thought you knew with new eyes** – and has since grown into a portable set of practices: in-ring and post-performance sessions, travelling formats like “Learn Circus!”, and audio description as an equal-access practice. The conclusion is quietly bold: it has to stay open, revisable, and responsive, committed to welcoming in not an abstract audience, but real, diverse participants, with different ways of learning, different thresholds of courage, and different reasons for stepping into the circle – because that is how a living art teaches, and stays generous, without turning into a lesson plan.

There is an ethical implication running through these papers, and it’s worth saying directly: when circus education is made accessible – open, inclusive, networked – it becomes a public good. It builds cultural literacy about circus, and cultural literacy supports legitimacy. Influence is not only won by headline acts; it is grown by communities.

The volume’s accessibility work – the **Audio Description** methodology and protocol – fits naturally into this educational arc. It expands what “learning” means beyond training. It insists that audiences, too, have a right to encounter circus fully, and that cultural participation is part of the

field’s future. Inclusion is not treated as a symbolic gesture here. It is practical and detailed: preparation, coordination, tactile and contextual introduction, feedback, improvement. And, crucially, it is transferable. It is offered not as a Budapest exception, but as a model others can take home and adapt.

III. Heritage: The Past as Working Material

Later in the day, “heritage” stops being a word of praise and becomes a set of tasks. The papers gather around a shared premise: circus heritage is unusually fragile – performance vanishes, material artefacts disperse, and knowledge often lives in private holdings, family trunks, and half-remembered stories. Safeguarding circus heritage is therefore not simply a matter of collecting. It is a matter of professionalizing collecting, so that the past becomes usable, searchable, teachable, and ethically preserved.

Across the museum and collection contributions, you hear one question answered in several accents: **what is a circus museum for?** Not in theory, but in daily practice – on worktables, in storage rooms, in catalogues, on screens, and in the way visitors are invited to look.

- **Dr. Alain Frère gives heritage its most human face:** a life spent not only collecting, but arguing, quietly and stubbornly, for circus to be treated as art, from his role in shaping the Monte-Carlo circus festival to the long work of recognition in France. In Tourrette-Levens, he curates the Musée du Cirque, a private archive built on care and respect, where costumes, photographs, scale models, and rare prints don’t sit as trophies so much as evidence that circus is a shared cultural inheritance. **The point lands with a simple elegance: heritage survives when someone can still walk you through it, name by name, artifact by artifact – and make the past speak in the present.**



- In **Antonio Giarola's** management model (CEDAC), the museum becomes a working tool: cataloguing, interpretation, access, rights management – heritage as steady professional practice, not occasional commemoration.
- In **Genís Matabosch's** Circusland vision, heritage opens onto public experience at scale: conservation and visitation are presented as allies, while digitization becomes a clear responsibility.
- **Julia Osipova** portrays the museum as a creative laboratory, where preservation and new work feed each other through research and interpretation.
- **Michael Swatosch** frames the museum as “Yesterday-To-day,” showing how digitization, oral history, education, and long-term planning become the conditions of preservation, not administrative side-notes.
- **Louis-Sampion Bouglione** offers an “embedded” perspective: heritage inside a living venue, where collection and identity intertwine, and where memory is both family inheritance and public responsibility.

What these papers resist, collectively, is a sentimental view of heritage. They insist on method. They also insist – sometimes quietly, sometimes explicitly – that heritage is not merely a backward gaze. It is a resource for the present: for education, creation, research, and for a public that needs more than nostalgia if it is to understand what circus has been and what it might still become.

Eszter Csonka-Takács brings the clearest policy lens through the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage framework. The strength of her approach is its emphasis on com-

munity identification, safeguarding responsibility, and the careful distinction between an “award” and an inventory-based commitment. Most importantly, she argues for the multinational logic of circus heritage: a transnational practice demands transnational thinking. Her paper doesn't promise an easy route. It offers a rigorous one – which is exactly what heritage work requires if it is not to be misused or reduced to branding.

IV. A Shared Language: Classification as the Bridge Between Education and Heritage

Then the papers turn to language itself. The taxonomy and classification cluster – **Amanda Gatewood & LaReina Hingson**, and **Szandra Szonday** – can look, at first glance, like technical interludes. In fact, they are among the proceedings' most future-oriented contributions, because they address a problem that quietly undermines both education and heritage: the lack of a shared, flexible vocabulary.

Without controlled terms, museum catalogues stay isolated. Without shared genre language, archives cannot speak to each other. And without systematic mappings of skills and disciplines, curricula drift into local habits that don't travel well. Classification is imperfect – and that is precisely why it has to stay collaborative. It has to be revised as the field changes, and alert to bias without freezing the language in place.

Szonday's guiding question – “What is a ‘horse juggler’?” – is more than a witty title. It catches the deeper issue: inherited labels can be ambiguous, misleading, historically loaded, or simply insufficient for contemporary description. Naming precisely doesn't constrain circus. It makes circus legible – to scholarship, to the public, and to the institutions that shape visibility.

If the conference has one infrastructural ambition that deserves to be carried forward explicitly, it is this: **an international, multilingual circus genre dictionary grounded in consensus, but built for change**. That tool would be more than a reference. It would be cultural power: the ability to describe the field in its own terms, across borders and across institutions.

V. What the Proceedings Reveal - and What They Ask of Us

Step back from the individual papers, and a picture emerges: a circus world at a decisive moment. The field is no longer content to be defended only by admiration. It is building the practical means by which admiration becomes recognition: education pathways, accessibility protocols, heritage stewardship, museum work, shared vocabularies. So where is circus now? In transition. Still rooted in apprenticeship and embodied knowledge, but increasingly supported by documentation, teaching, classification, and institutional protection – not to replace older forms of transmission, but to secure them against the vulnerabilities of the present.

And where do Education and Heritage sit in this picture? Not in separate departments anymore. Education is increasingly understood as the engine of heritage transmission; heritage is increasingly understood as a resource for education and creation. The past-present-future triad isn't a theme here. It's the working model: the past is made accessible through present methods, so the future can inherit without rupture.

Circus studies, in that context, doesn't appear as an ornamental academic interest. It looks like necessary public work. Research, writing, classification, museology – these are the tools that allow circus to enter wider cultural systems: universities, museums, policy frameworks, funding structures, international cooperation. In the end, scholarship is another form of care.

There are also clear lessons for Hungary in the international examples presented here: the value of professional heritage management models, the urgency of digitization strategies, and the ethical discipline of rights-based educational frameworks that take mobility seriously. **There is a stylistic**

lesson, too: the most difficult questions – regulation, welfare, public trust – can be addressed with precision and calm, without slipping into polarizing rhetoric. And there is a strategic one: institutions become influential when they can offer not only performances, but methods.

Read through these papers, Hungary's strengths come into focus in a way that feels concrete rather than rhetorical: the integration of circus into formal education structures, the breadth of mentoring and networking, the clarity of intangible heritage safeguarding, and the development of accessibility as a transferable practice rather than a local exception. **If Budapest has become a meeting point, it isn't only because it hosts a festival. It is because it demonstrates how a circus institution can act as a civic cultural actor – connecting art, education, heritage, and research in one ecosystem.**

A final word about tone. The volume's editorial choices – those small human gestures placed beside scholarship – quietly remind us of something circus has always known: knowledge is carried by bodies, voices, and attention. Seriousness doesn't have to exclude warmth. And the most durable institutions are often the ones that remember why they were built.

In that spirit, this afterword doesn't so much close the book as open a door. The proceedings are an invitation: to keep the caravan of ideas moving beyond one city, one day, one volume – into the next meeting, the next archive, the next classroom. Let future conferences, whenever possible, be more than gatherings – to be makers of tools; more than stages – to be workshops; more than celebrations of what circus has been – to be careful, collaborative work on what circus can still become.

When the tent comes down, what remains is the method – and the will to meet again.

PHOTOS:

ÁDÁM URBÁN

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PHOTO:
ÁDÁM URBÁN

Wonderful CIRCUS WORLD

Circus History Exhibition

PHOTO: Ádám Urbán
CAPITAL CIRCUS OF BUDAPEST



CONTACT:
museum@circus.hu

INVITATION

The Organising Committee of the 15th Budapest Circus Festival
invites you to the opening ceremony of the

WONDERFUL CIRCUS WORLD International Circus History Exhibition.

DATE:

11 January 2024 12⁰⁰

VENUE:

Museum of Hungarian Agriculture

(Budapest, 14th district, Városliget, Vajdahunyad promenade)

DETAILED PROGRAMME:

<https://budapestcircusfestival.hu/>



„Az idei ECA-konferencia minden eddiginél sokszínűbb és összetettebb. Egy élénk, nemzetközi kutatói és szakmai közösséget hoz össze, és világosan jelzi, hogy az itt tárgyalt kérdések messze túlmutatnak egy szűk szakmai kör érdeklődésén: közös kultúránk jövőjének alapvető kérdéseiről van szó.”

Fekete Péter

“This year’s ECA conference is perhaps more diverse and complex than ever before. It brings together a vibrant international community of researchers and practitioners, demonstrating that the questions we address here are not the concern of a narrow professional circle alone. They reach far beyond that sphere and are fundamental to the future of our shared culture.”

Péter Fekete



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