

JACOB'S PILLOW

PRESENTS **CIRCA**

Doris Duke Theatre
June 19-23, 2019

DIRECTOR Yaron Lifschitz

VIOLINIST Lachlan O'Donnell

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR/
LIGHTING DESIGNER Jason Organ

CO-LIGHTING DESIGNER Richard Clarke

INTERNATIONAL
REPRESENTATION Allen Moon/David Lieberman
Artists' Representatives

PERFORMERS Hamish McCourty
Daniel O'Brien
Kimberly O'Brien

PROGRAM

What Will Have Been (2015)

CHOREOGRAPHY Created by Yaron Lifschitz with the Circa Ensemble

MUSIC Bach and Philip Glass

VIOLINIST Lachlan O'Donnell

LIGHTING DESIGN Jason Organ

CO-LIGHTING DESIGN Richard Clarke

COSTUME DESIGN Libby McDonnell

PERFORMERS Hamish McCourty

Daniel O'Brien

Kimberly O'Brien

NYC: 73 - 78, 1957: Award Montage, November 25: Ichigaya by Philip Glass
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Jacob's Pillow is committed to providing an environment that cultivates the celebration of the art of dance and its positive impact on community.

While in our theaters, please refrain from behavior that could disturb other patrons and performers during the performance. We ask that you silence your cell phone; do not photograph or video record performances; keep your ticket with you at all times; observe that other than water, food and beverages are not allowed in the theaters; and please let a staff member know if you need help. Thank you for observing these House Rules so that everyone can have an enjoyable experience.

We are so glad you are here. Enjoy the show!

COMPANY

ABOUT CIRCA

Circa Contemporary Circus is one of the world's leading performance companies. Since 2004, from its base in Brisbane, Australia, Circa has toured the world—performing in 40 countries to over a million people. Circa's works have been greeted with standing ovations, rave reviews, and sold-out houses across six continents.

Circa is at the forefront of the new wave of contemporary Australian circus pioneering how extreme physicality can create powerful and moving performances. It continues to push the boundaries of the art form, blurring the lines between movement, dance, theatre, and circus, and is leading the way with a diverse range of thrilling creations that "redraw the limits to which circus can aspire" (*The Age*).

Under the direction of circus visionary Yaron Lifschitz, Circa features an ensemble of exceptional, multi-skilled circus artists who have been a regular fixture at leading festivals in Berlin and Montreal with seasons at Brooklyn Academy of Music, The Barbican Centre, Les Nuits de Fourvière, and Chamäleon Theatre, as well as major Australian Festivals.

YARON LIFSCHITZ (Artistic Director) is a graduate of the University of New South Wales, University of Queensland, and National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA), where he was the youngest director ever accepted into its prestigious graduate director's course. Since graduating, Lifschitz has directed over 60 productions including large-scale events, opera,

theatre, physical theatre, and circus. His works have been seen in 40 countries and across six continents by over one million people and won numerous awards including six Helpmann awards and the Australia Council Theatre Award. His productions have been presented at major festivals and venues around the world including Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Barbican, Les Nuits de Fourvière, Chamäleon, and all the major Australian festivals. His film work was selected for the Berlin and Melbourne Film Festivals. He was founding Artistic Director of the Australian Museum's Theatre Unit, Head Tutor in Directing at Australian Theatre for Young People, and has been a regular guest tutor in directing at NIDA.

He is currently Artistic Director and CEO of Circa, and was Creative

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Director of Festival 2018: the arts and cultural program of the 21st Commonwealth Games. In 2018, Lifschitz directed four new Circa creations, and directed a new production of *Idomeneo* which opened in Lisbon at The Teatro Nacional de São Carlos.

LIBBY MCDONNELL (Associate Director) works across disciplines as a designer, choreographer, director, and performer and has an Associate Degree in Dance from the Queensland University of Technology. McDonnell has co-directed for Ballet Theatre of Queensland and has been resident choreographer and designer for Blue Roo Theatre Company. As Associate Director with Circa, McDonnell has designed costumes for all of Circa's major creations since 2010 and has show directed and managed tours in Australia and abroad.

HAMISH MCCOURTY (Performer) is an acrobat and musician. He began his circus journey at Cirkidz in Adelaide when he was eight years old, and since graduating from the performance program he's been creating his own work, touring nationally and internationally. McCourty is currently working on fusing together his passion for music and circus on stage. His main specialties are tumbling and basing pair and group acrobatics, and he prides himself on making people laugh and being a loon onstage. McCourty is a keen performer and multi-talented acrobat with his sights set on leaving his mark in the world of circus.

DANIEL O'BRIEN (Performer) has been physically active throughout his whole life, primarily focusing on his gymnastics training in his hometown and a few small gyms along the Queensland coastline. After high school, O'Brien made a decision to transition from the sport of gymnastics to a possible career in circus performance. O'Brien decided to move to Melbourne and study at the National Institute of

Circus Arts, specializing in hand-balancing and aerial straps, where he gained his first experiences as a performer. He spends his spare time feeding his unhealthy addiction to video games or reading whatever he can get his hands on. After attending NICA for three years, O'Brien fostered an immense passion for circus and honed his skills to a level that allowed him to join Circa as an ensemble member in 2015. He has since performed in the many iconic Circa works including *What Will Have Been*, *Closer*, and *Humans*.

KIMBERLY O'BRIEN (Performer) grew up competing in athletics and playing representative AFL. After seeing one of Circa's shows, O'Brien joined the Circa youth performance troupe Circa Zoo. After two years of training and performing, O'Brien was given the opportunity to be the very first member of fast track, a program designed for young and aspiring performers within Circa. In 2011, O'Brien left Circa Zoo and fast track to become a full-time ensemble member. Since then, O'Brien has toured numerous shows in various countries and participated in the creation of many new Circa works. One of her highlights was performing *Wunderkammer* at the Sydney Opera House.

LACHLAN O'DONNELL (Violinist) is a Sydney-based violinist/violist who regularly performs throughout Australia and abroad as a soloist, chamber musician, and orchestral leader. Ensembles with which he appears on a regular basis include the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the Sydney, Melbourne, and Queensland Symphony Orchestras, Orchestra Victoria, the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra, and the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (as guest Associate Concertmaster). As a soloist, O'Donnell has appeared at major concert halls throughout Europe and Australia, performed live broadcasts for ABC Classic FM, 3MBS, WQXR New York, and SRF2 Swiss radio, and has performed

concerts with the Lucerne Festival Academy Orchestra, Queensland Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Victoria, and ACO Collective, the Australian Chamber Orchestra's regional touring ensemble. He has appeared at major international festivals including the Lucerne Festival (Switzerland), the Aldeburgh Festival (U.K.), Pisteur d'Etoiles (France), the Melbourne Festival, the Queensland Music Festival, and the Musica Viva Chamber Music Festival (Australia). In 2017, he performed solo works of J.S. Bach and H.I.F. Biber at festivals and concert venues throughout Europe as part of *What Will Have Been*, a production by the Australian contemporary circus company Circa. A keen advocate of new music, O'Donnell is a regular guest performer with Ensemble Offspring (Sydney) and Kupka's Piano (Brisbane), and has worked closely as a soloist/chamber musician with Boulez, Phillippe Manoury, Isabel Mundry, Brett Dean, Elena Kats-Chernin, Chris Dench, and Anthony Pateras. He has a strong interest in music education, regularly conducting workshops at regional conservatoriums throughout the eastern states, and has guest-lectured in contemporary music and extended performance techniques at the Australian National University, Canberra. O'Donnell holds a B.Mus in Advanced Performance (Hon.) from Griffith University and a M.Phil from the University of Queensland.

PILLOWNOTES

by Maura Keefe

The PillowNotes series comprises essays commissioned from our Scholars-in-Residence to provide audiences with a broader context for viewing dance.

Circa's works are embodied explanations of physics—such as balance and counterbalance, pressure, gravity, momentum, and inertia. Bodies at rest, bodies in motion. The performers are not dispassionate scientists, coolly observing the outcomes of experimentation. They are active investigators of the theoretical. But like the best scientists, they do not seek to revisit the known, rather to explore the unknown. No white lab coats of the scientist, but no circus trappings either. There's no clown makeup, no top hat and whip, nor any sparkling costumes to lead us into a fantasy world. On the contrary, these performers are stripped down—in trousers and button-down shirts, or muted leotards and bare chests. No matter what these performers are doing, they make no attempt to hide their human-ness. A woman dangles from the ceiling. Moving up and tumbling down. Caught. Tumble again. Upside down, now sideways, now supported only by one arm.

Circa, the company, is based in Brisbane, Australia, and led by artistic director Yaron Lifschitz. Lifschitz, who trained as a director and has worked in opera, theater, and physical theater, found his theatrical home with circus, stating that his “passion is creating works of philosophical and poetic depth from the traditional languages of circus.” Different paths of training, all extremely physical, have shaped the Circa performers. Some in expected ways, some less so. Training in gymnastics and acrobatics is put to use, as are backgrounds in break dancing, synchronized swimming, and modern dance. Skills on a trampoline serve alongside excellence in handstands and on teeterboards.

Circa performers engage in silent conversations: “If I arch my back in an exaggerated manner while standing upright, does the back of my pelvic girdle become a surface on which you can stand?” one asks another. “I can stand on it, sure, but I think I can also fall backwards out of a handstand and meet your pelvis with mine,” says a second. Their pelvises meet. Hair tangles as they unfurl their limbs. “Can I launch myself at you and use you as a springboard?” Feet hit chest with a solid thump. “What happens if we both fling ourselves into the air? Who will catch us?” Midair catch and fall, spring up and do it again.

Circa made its Pillow debut in 2012 with the eponymous *CIRCA*, returning in 2014 with the work simply known as *S*. With *What Will Have Been*, again, they bring no elephants, no clowns, no ringmaster, but this time a violinist who joins them onstage. In an interview with *Dance Informa*, Lifschitz talked about the relationship between circus and music, starting off with the observation that, “There's almost always music present in circus, but it's often not thought about very much. Thinking back to my earliest works with circus was to think about what the music was doing.” *What Will Have Been* is one of three works thus far that Circa performs to Bach. For Lifschitz, it makes sense as “circus and classical music seem to work really well together because there's a kind of mutual respect for each other's virtuosity, but it's so different.” Oh, someone just dove in from the wings.

Despite Lifschitz's current interest in classical music, he thinks that circus performances are essentially different from the classics, stating in the same *Dance Informa* interview, “For me, circus exists for its musical heart, which is more like jazz.” Like Circa performers' creative exploration, the connection to jazz suggests the importance of improvisation and play, and investigation, as well as risk taking, with absolute trust in the ensemble.

Over here, a woman holds herself actively still. She, too, is in a handstand, balanced on the hands of a man who seems to be resting flat on his back. She reaches up through her pointed feet toward the ceiling and presses down into his hands. She doesn't speak, but he knows. He sits up. She presses down in encouragement. He shifts to his knees. She lengthens through her spine impelling him upward. He stands up on his feet. She reaches even further down to him and up from him. Circa strips away our expectations of the circus, and even the circus as it relates to dance. Once they've removed all of the expected trappings of the circus, what's left? What Circa keeps is their starting point, which is simply the human body. They trust the body's ability to make meaning, grounding their work most assuredly in the world of concert dance. Two people diving on. A woman launches from nowhere visible into the space and then slides on her belly. A man tumbles floorward, bouncing softly off his own shoulder, rebounding and tumbling sideways. Another man balances, and arcs. Stable and moving, stretching and yielding. On the edge of control. Sometimes they watch each other. Often, they glance at each other. They always look out for each other.

“We're in this together.”

“I'm ready for you.”

“I promise I'll be there for you. I'll be there even if it was unplanned.”

What Will Have Been, what is Circa. Physically improbable, deeply human.

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Dance writer Maura Keefe has led audience programs at various venues around the country and is the Associate Director of Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, where she was named the Dorothy G. Madden Professor of Dance in 2018.

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