

DA2025 - Presenter topics and bios

Day One - Saturday 12th April:

Speaker no 1, Dr Carolyn Ailsa Watt, (in-person)

Topic - The 'feltness' of circus training & coaching: reflections & practical applications in flexibility & contortion.

Duration - 75mins + Q&A

Presentation - This combined presentation and practical session explores the 'feltness' of circus training and coaching in flexibility and contortion. Drawing on her lived experience as an academic, cabaret circus performer, and instructor specialising in aerial, contortion and flexibility, Carolyn will reflect on bodily awareness, emotional regulation and sensory processing.

Carolyn will discuss her lived experience of hypermobility, neurodivergence and anxiety in relation to her circus training. She will offer observations from a coaching perspective, reflecting on the dialogue between instructor and student and exchange of embodied knowledge. Carolyn will share some of exercises and sequences that she has found to be most effective in her teaching and training, as well as cueing methods and approach to teaching.

Bio - Carolyn is a cabaret circus practitioner with 15 years of experience in the cabaret and circus industry and a lecturer in Historical and Critical Studies for Fashion and Textiles (University of Brighton). She has mainly trained contortion under Allison Schieler, Hannah Finn and Claudia Hughes. Carolyn taught pole and burlesque before apprenticing with High Top Circus to develop her aerial and flexibility instruction skills and now teaches regular classes at The Pole Lab (Brighton). Carolyn has attended numerous workshops and conferences on flexibility teaching, anatomy, injury awareness, and healthier bodies in the aerial arts and is committed to professional development.

Carolyn specialises in working with adults who wish to increase their strength and flexibility for pole and aerial arts and finds students with hypermobility come to her searching for safe ways to train their flexibility and strength.

She completed her practice-based PhD exploring female experience of aerial circus in 2020 and applies this knowledge to her teaching. Carolyn's research interests include community-based arts, practice-based research, sensory experience and tactility. She is interested in developing her PhD research which explored her lived experience of hypermobility, anxiety and bodily control.

Speaker no 2, Dr Matilde Sassani, (in-person)

Topic - 'Concussion in the aerial arts: what you need to know'

Duration - 35 mins +Q&A

Presentation - Concussions, or mild traumatic brain injuries (mTBI), are more common than many realize, with 1.2 million hospital visits annually in the UK. While classified as "mild," their impact can be life-altering-30% of patients remain unable to work a year post-injury. Symptoms such as headaches, balance issues, fatigue, and memory disturbances can persist long-term.

This presentation will explore what a concussion is, how to recognise it, when to seek help, and where to find the right support. It will also introduce mTBI Predict, the UK's largest head injury study, which aims to improve predictions of recovery outcomes. Based in Birmingham, this paid research study assesses vision, balance, hearing, and brain function, offering clinical input where needed.

For more details on participation, watch this video: [Vimeo Link](#).

Bio - Dr Matilde Sassani is a Neurology Resident Doctor in the UK with a unique background in both medicine and the performing arts. Born in Italy, she grew up in Rome, Perugia, and Milan. Before

pursuing neurology, Matilde trained as a professional ballet dancer at La Scala Ballet School in Milan and the English National Ballet School in London, later performing with the Zurich Ballet Company and Hungarian National Ballet.

With a passion for both science and movement, she graduated in medicine and obtained a PhD in Neuroscience. She now works in hospitals in the West Midlands and is involved in mTBI Predict, the UK's largest head injury study, based in Birmingham.

Speaker no 3, Kate Edwards (recording)

Topic - Flying through pregnancy - ante and post-natal training for aerialists

Duration - 30 mins

Presentation - Pregnancy is a topic that most of us will come across in some form in our careers as aerialists; either personally or within our student body. However, research within this field is limited. In this workshop, Kate Edwards will present insights from her three-year research project, which culminated in the publication of her book, *Flying Through Pregnancy*. This session will cover both the theoretical and practical aspects of pregnancy, providing a well-rounded perspective on how to safely and effectively support yourself or your students through pregnancy, birth, and recovery. The aim of the workshop is to recognize the diverse nature of each pregnancy journey, empowering attendees with the knowledge to make informed and educated decisions about working with pregnant individuals. Whether you're a performer, instructor or a practitioner, this workshop will equip you with the key information to navigate the complexities of pregnancy in the aerial world.

Bio - Kate Edwards is a pole dancer and aerialist with over 20 years of experience. She has trained with organisations such as Circomedia and NECCA, amongst others. As the founder and Director of Spin City, Kate specialises in instructor training, mentoring and resource creation for recreational pole and aerial instructors. With a background in fitness as a certified personal trainer and pilates instructor, Kate became a certified pre and post natal specialist in 2008. She has collaborated extensively with the guild of pre- and post-natal exercise instructors to help develop standards of exercise for pregnancy. Today, Kate devotes much of her time to developing resources for Spin City, training for long-distance triathlons and raising her three children - Eli, Iris and Quinn.

www.spincityaerialfitness.com

Speaker no, 4, Brooke Winder, (remote)

Topic - 'Up in the Air, Strong Down There': Pelvic Floor Health for Aerialists

Duration - 40 mins +Q&A

Presentation - This presentation will focus on the basic anatomy and functions of the pelvic floor and how it integrates with the demands of aerial arts. This talk will also address the most common pelvic floor concerns that circus artists typically experience (including recently published research on pelvic floor issues in female aerialists), and provide practical strategies and resources to help aerial artists optimize pelvic floor health and address issues that may arise.

Bio - Brooke Winder, PT, DPT, OCS, CSCS

Dr. Brooke Winder is a Southern California-based physiotherapist who specializes in addressing issues within and surrounding the pelvic floor for performing artists. She is an Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Dance Science degree program at California State University Long Beach, and also serves patients through her clinical practice, Renew Motion Physical Therapy Inc. She is adept at helping artistic athletes navigate pelvic floor, orthopedic, and hypermobility-related concerns.

Dr. Winder has presented at several national and international conferences, and her research has been published in the Journal of Women's & Pelvic Health Physical Therapy, Journal of Dance Medicine & Science, Clinical Biomechanics, Journal of Electromyography and Kinesiology, and Orthopedic Physical Therapy Practice.

Dr. Winder teaches continuing education courses and workshops on pelvic floor health for rehab professionals and artistic athletes. She has also authored pelvic floor-focused chapters in recent books including "Myths of Menopause: A Guide to Increasing Your Menopause Wisdom," "The 'Female' Dancer: A Soma-scientific Approach," and "Dance Injuries: Reducing Risk and Maximizing Performance." She is a Board-Certified Specialist in Orthopedic Physical Therapy, a BASI-Certified Pilates Instructor, and a Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist through the NSCA. She has a Doctorate in Physical Therapy from the University of Southern California, and a BFA in Dance from Chapman University. She formerly danced professionally with Orange County-based Backhausdance.

Speaker no 5, Jacques Palardy-Dion, (remote)

Topic - Using physics to improve aerials. Part 1 - static

Duration - 60 mins +Q&A

Presentation - Part 1: Using Physics to Improve Aerials - Static

Part 1 -The static' presentation will focus on notions that are useful in disciplines like trapeze (static), silk, rope, lyra, straps. In this presentation we will discuss how to improve beats/tempos, how to give rotation (contact or hula) to achieve movements in many situations, how to find balance in some positions, etc. After some introductory theory we will analyze videos to better understand what factors can influence the success of many movements.

Bio - Jacques Palardy-Dion has performed acrobatic disciplines for many years, before returning to a passion he started to develop 20 years ago: teaching circus arts. Since Jacques had also studied science alongside attending engineering classes, he began transferring many of these theories into his coaching and realised that it accelerated the learning curve of most of his students. He is currently teaching various circus disciplines and biomechanics at École de cirque de Québec in Canada.

Speaker no 6, Nicole Malbeuf (remote)

Topic - 'Debunking Hair Suspension Myths: Rethinking Our Approach to Hair Hang'

Duration - 60 mins+Q&A

Presentation - Are you curious about the newly popular discipline of hair suspension? Are there rumours you've heard that make you concerned or of the belief that it's only for select people? In this talk, Nicole will share her personal experiences, research and conversations with other practicing artists to elaborate on the common misconceptions in hair suspension and to expose more nuanced truths. We'll discuss suitable hair types, prerequisites, expected physical sensations, progressing towards self-suspension, industry needs and hair damage. Whether you are interested in hair health or are a prospective student, a producer or a studio owner, this talk will teach you about many of the specific needs of- and common experiences in hair suspension.

Bio - Nicole Malbeuf is a Canadian circus artist specializing in aerial arts and hair suspension. She has performed solo works across Canada and the US with companies like Cirque Dreams, Wonderbolt Circus, and FireFly Theatre & Circus, and has collaborated in a variety of aerial-theatre projects with groups such as Hercinia Arts, Balancing on the Edge and Public Energy. Nicole's company, Trellis Arts is recognized across North America for its comprehensive program Intro to Hair Suspension: A Holistic Course, created in collaboration with specialists in physical therapy and core/pelvic floor health and with advice from various experts in rigging and hair science. Nicole has 7 years of hair hang experience, a broad network of practicing hair hangers and associated anecdotal research. She has undergone teacher training in NCCP Gymnastics, Acrobatic Arts, Aerial Arts and Flying Footless. She

strives to create learning environments that are empathetic, welcoming of all identities and supportive of individual needs and abilities. Nicole is an advocate for safety and sustainability in movement arts.

www.trellisarts.ca

Instagram: @trellisarts

Day two - Sunday 13th April

Speaker no 1, Dr Jessica Eccles, AKA Dr Bendy Brain (in-house)

Topic - 'Bendy bodies, bendy brains'

Duration - 45 mins +Q&A

Presentation - Brain and body are dynamically coupled. Dr Eccles believes that the false dichotomy between body and brain hinders our holistic understanding of human experience, holds back clinical practice and research and further perpetuates stigma. She will use the presence of a common bodily variant of connective tissue (joint hypermobility) to demonstrate such brain-body links and how they this may relate to neurodivergent conditions including ADHD and Autism. She will draw on her prize-winning work in the field of hypermobility/EDS. She hopes to encourage curiosity and challenge stereotypes.

Bio - Dr Eccles is a researcher and a neurodevelopmental psychiatrist specialising in the links between brain and body, especially as they relate to flexible joints (hypermobility). As well as her University position she works in the Sussex NHS Neurodevelopmental Service where she and colleagues have set up the world's first Neurodivergent Brain Body Clinic. She has been working on the intersect between hypermobility and neurodivergence since she first came to work at Brighton and Sussex medical school in Neuroscience in 2009. Alongside all things brain and body she is interested in photography

<https://www.instagram.com/drbandybrain>

Linktree - www.linktr.ee/bendybrain

Speaker no 2, Tilly Lee Kronnick, Jonny Leitch (in-person)

Topic - 'Creating aerial performance with access at the core'

Duration - 45 mins +Q&A

Presentation - From the start of working together as an aerial duo, Head Over Wheels have based their aerial practice on creative access tools. As a disabled-led duo we have approached generating aerial vocabulary specifically on our individual bodies and the possibilities that arise when we put them together. This talk will give insight into the creative problem-solving exercises we use to accommodate our own access needs when we create aerial choreography- which we feel develops richer and more unusual aerial possibilities.

Bio - Head Over Wheels is a duo of multidisciplinary artists, primarily focusing on creating circus work. As a disabled and non-disabled duo, we are dedicated to challenging misconceptions around disability, and breaking the stereotypes of what a 'circus body' should look or move like.

Co-artistic directors Tilly and Jonny met in 2017. Tilly coming from a background of dance and circus and Jonny from drumming and walking on his hands, they merged their prior artistic experience to create exciting innovative aerial work. They have gone on to perform their doubles trapeze act on various prestigious stages, including Glastonbury Festival, National Circus Festival of Ireland, Bristol Old Vic. In 2023 they formed Head Over Wheels- and went on to make their debut aerial theatre show Anchored in Air which has toured nationally and internationally.

Speaker no 3, Karina Jones, Kate Lawrence TBC, (in-person)

Topic - 'Creative audio description in movement practices' - welcoming the VIP community

Duration - 40 mins + Q&A

Presentation - Karina and Kate collaborate regularly on approaches to creative audio description in both performance and workshop scenarios. In this session we will share some of our experiences and use some practical examples to get our descriptive juices flowing. We will focus on approaches to access and description in a teaching scenario. Examples of topics we will consider include: how to create and maintain a safe environment, how to use language to communicate effectively and efficiently, using touch to inform and guide and looking at ways to translate physicality into a language which is accessible for visually impaired people.

Bios - Kate Lawrence is a choreographer of vertical dance and director of Vertical Dance Kate Lawrence based in Snowdonia (North Wales). In the past 10 years she has been exploring creative approaches to access with and for visually impaired people in workshops, performance, film and training.

Karina Jones is an actor and aerial circus artist, She is registered blind and has worked extensively on how to make physical approaches to theatre and circus accessible to her and other visually impaired people. She has worked at length on creative audio description for theatre and circus and also with performers to help them audio describe their own work in their own words. She is passionate about making the world of dance, aerial and all physicality accessible to all VIP's.

Speaker no 4, Izzy Kessner (remote)

Topic - 'Chest binding in Circus'

Duration - 35 mins +Q&A

Presentation - Chest binding is a common, gender- affirming practice of restricting the chest often utilized by trans-masculine individuals to reduce gender dysphoria. Circus and aerial arts can often be a source of community for gender-diverse individuals to express themselves creatively. While there is a common dogma to not chest bind while exercising, this practice continues to occur, with little to no information on the safety of it. Izzy Kessner's presentation will provide an in-depth guide on the safety of chest binding in circus arts, based on a comprehensive year-long research project with HUPR (the research centre affiliated with ENC). They will provide pertinent information for transgender circus artists curious about safe chest binding practices, circus educators looking to better support transgender artists, and training centers eager to create an inclusive space.

Bio - Izzy Kessner (they/them) is a multidisciplinary circus artist originally from Los Angeles, and is currently a third-year aerial rope student at Ecole de Cirque de Québec. They are a student researcher with HUPR, a circus-specific research institution associated with Ecole Nationale de Cirque in Montreal, focusing on the intersection between circus studies and transgender identity. Izzy is interested in questioning traditional form and practice in their circus storytelling, and exploring how aspects of their transgender identity inform their creation. Through their work, Izzy has performed and coached circus across the United States, Canada, and beyond; and partnered with major brands such as Nike.
@cirquessner

Speaker no 5, Jacques Palardy-Dion (remote)

Topic - 'Using physics to improve aerials. Part 2 - swinging'

Duration - 60 mins +Q&A

Presentation - Part 2 -The 'swinging' presentation will focus on notions that are useful in disciplines like flying trapeze, swinging trapeze, cloud swing, or a "static" aerial that swings around the stage. Among other things, we will discuss the two ways to gain height in any swinging discipline, how to achieve many movements that require rotation in these disciplines, how the height of a ceiling influences a static aerial that swings around a stage.

Bio - Jacques Palardy-Dion has performed acrobatic disciplines for many years, before returning to a passion he started to develop 20 years ago: teaching circus arts. Since Jacques had also studied science alongside attending engineering classes, he began transferring many of these theories into his coaching and realised that it accelerated the learning curve of most of his students.

He is currently teaching various circus disciplines and biomechanics at École de cirque de Québec in Canada.

Speaker no 6, Janelle Peters

Topic - Beyond Rest Days - active physical and mental health recovery practices for aerial artists

Duration - 60 mins+Q&A

Presentation - Rest/Recovery is more than simply 'not doing' - and we all need different things from our active recovery practice. This workshop helps disambiguate rest and recovery activities for aerial artists in particular, with attention to more than just our muscles and joints. Participants will leave having had the opportunity for deep reflection on their relationship with their body, their training, their creative/generative work, and their values/priorities. We will explore the connection between rest/recovery and systems with which aerial artists engage, and participants will leave with the starting point for a clearer, more purposeful active recovery plan.

Biography - Janelle Peters (they/them) is a queer circus artist, circus coach, and psychotherapist who devotes their work to the wholeness and humanity of everyone involved. Janelle shares their time between Denver Colorado where they are the founder and host of Denver Scratch Works in Progress Showings, and the San Francisco Bay Area where they are a member of Hypothetical Circus. In addition to therapeutic, performing and coaching work, Janelle offers workshops and facilitates conversations about mental health, wellbeing, and systemic change in circus and performing arts.

Instagram:

@cirque_psych

@janelledinosaurs