

A person is performing aerial silks, suspended horizontally in the air. They are wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. The silks are numerous vertical ropes of varying thicknesses, some of which the person is holding onto. The background is solid black. A white diagonal line is visible in the upper left corner.

# UPSWING

Creative Programme  
2016-18

### **Mission**

Upswing aspires to produce exceptional work that transforms the perception of contemporary circus into an art form that is diverse in its audience, ideology and practice.

We stimulate new thinking in Circus and challenge cultural assumptions by literally turning the world upside down, using the poetic potency of physical skill and risk taking of the form to give a voice to ideas that words alone can't.

An experimental company by nature, Upswing utilises physicality to explore themes of place, identity and our relationships with each other. We translate ideas using a circus language fused with text, dance and multimedia to create unique multidisciplinary work.

We develop our work through a process of participatory research periods, experimentation and playful encounters with our audiences and creative accomplices.

Our work is inspired by universal questions and contemporary issues and driven by our ethos of respect, inclusion and innovation.

### **Objectives**

Develop innovative, contemporary work of high caliber that contributes to the evolution of the sector that has a long lasting impact on audiences and participants.

Enable and develop systems for critical discourse on our work and the work of others in the sector.

Collaborate with exceptional artists, practitioners, teachers, scientists and researchers to bring new learning and practices into the circus community.

Bring new and diverse audiences in touch with circus that crosses over with the forms and themes that mean something to them.

Provide opportunities for other artists to enrich their artistic practice.

### **Strategy**

New Touring work

Building participation

Developing audiences

Partnerships

Sustainable growth

## 2016-18 THEMES

We believe passionately in the universal and empowering effect of circus and our purpose is to reach out and engage participants who might not otherwise partake in this experience.

**FAMILIES**

A circular process is integral to the development of our work: participants and professional artists explore ideas; professionals develop these ideas, returning to participants to review the process; the work is made and the audience is invited to engage in an outreach programme designed from the engagement process.

**OLDER PEOPLE**

**YOUNG PEOPLE**

### **Touring production: *Bedtime Stories***

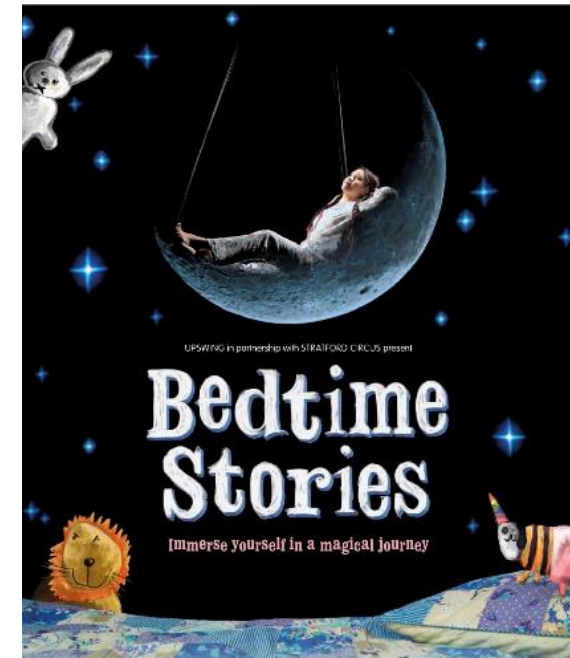
*Bedtime Stories* encourages us to take time out from our busy lives and explore the importance of the connection between carers and children, achieving a work-life balance and managing priorities within the family. Suitable for everyone ages 3+, the show is a transporting and highly immersive experience that combines awe-inspiring aerial feats with storytelling, physical theatre, dance and stunning projections. Upon entering the theatre space, audiences are invited to relax and feel at home in the environment of a child's bedroom and view the show from the comfort of family beds, tucked up and surrounded by cushions, teddies and blankets.

### **Production in development: *Between the Stacks***

*Between the Stacks* seeks to engage families with young children in an activity that promotes literacy, creativity, play and communication as well as positive parenting.

Working in partnership with Islington Libraries, we aim to create accessible sessions for families that draws inspiration from our current touring production *Bedtime Stories*.

Drawing from this work we want to offer more families an opportunity to try a new art form and to experience the library environment in a different way. *Between the Stacks* will use contemporary circus performance and play activities which explore stories based on night time, fantasy and journeys. We want to engage children and parents/carers with immersive performance, games and task to complete together.



## **Production in development: *New Family production***

The show will engage playfully with themes of environmental change using physical metaphors, beautiful design and epic music to illuminate and delight. This will be the starting point but much of the story will be discovered with participants through research and development residencies and workshops to ensure it truly engages those audiences touching on meaningful concerns whilst creating something that entertains and inspires.

*to open autumn 2017*

## **Creative engagement programme: *Family Stories***

*Family Stories* seeks to engage families who do not normally access the arts in activities that promote literacy, play and creativity. We offer free family workshops in acrobatics and acrobalance at performance venues and other family-friendly locations, (e.g.: shopping centres) to engage families through this fun, challenging and affirming experience.

We have developed, delivered and refined our family workshop in which parents work in partnership with their children to cover a range of acrobalance and aerial positions together. Much in keeping with the themes of the shows, this workshop builds on the attachment of parent and child, encouraging families to work together to rise to the challenge and master fears.

## **Research project: *Can an intensive participatory circus experience leave a lasting impact on the wellbeing and arts engagement levels of hard to reach families?***

This two-year research examines whether circus activities in which families participate together can significantly increase wellbeing and arts engagement amongst targeted hard to reach communities.



## OLDER PEOPLE

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### **Touring Production: *What Happens In The Winter***

*What Happens In The Winter* is an entertaining and arresting mix of aerial, theatre and dance that treads a humorous path through the minds and bodies of two women who still want to fly.

Using the lives of physical performers as inspiration, Upswing asks what happens as you get older, when your profession requires super human strength and skills but ageing has gradually taken away the tools of your trade?

### **Production in development: *Falling and Flying***

*Falling/Flying* will be a multi-part performance/ experience. Developed with film maker Edwin Mingard, poet Simon Mole, technologist Malcolm Buchanan-Dick and a group of older people that attend Meet Me at The Albany, the work will explore technology, ageing and our physical environment. The shape of the final production will likely be somewhere between an experiential arts space and a performance with components of the production that can be presented in other contexts such as care homes, hospital wards, libraries and streets. Through 2016/17 we will be creating elements of the show under the umbrella *Falling/Flying* including a short film commission by Channel 4/Random Acts and a travelling installation performed by a seventy-year old titled "Bed" commissioned by Without Walls.

Part allegorical quest, part documentary, part space adventure, part conversation piece the final performance will involve a group of older theatre-makers who will act as guides and navigators supporting audiences to physically move through this immersive theatre experience.



## OLDER PEOPLE

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### **Creative engagement programmes**

***In Balance:*** In partnership with Entelechy Arts and Dance in Devon Upswing have developed and refined an aerial, juggling and acrobalance workshop program aimed at older participants aged 60 and above (our oldest participant to date is 83 ). Piloted by Entelechy Arts in 2010 we have delivered the workshop in a range of contexts from festivals to care homes and community centre. The workshops are designed to be adaptable to the needs of the participants using the core principles of circus disciplines – balance, stability and awareness. A fundamentally important element of the workshop is space created at the end for discussion and feedback, in which participants share their impressions and explore how the work has impacted them.

### ***Care Home Residency: Magic Me***

Starting in August 2016, Upswing will begin a residency in a care home, run by Anchor - England's largest not-for-profit provider of housing and care to older people, including those with dementia. During the 4 months residency we will run activities with residents, their families and care home staff, working together towards a new site specific performance. We will be working with staff and residents exploring object manipulation and magic / sleight of hand. We are interested in making circus as accessible as possible by discovering the "circus" in everyday activities, whether it's the transfer of weight as a care worker helps a resident to rise off a chair, or exploring the weightlessness that a hoist or sling can offer. We are also interested in the power of touch as compared to words as a medium for communication and exploring the strength of muscle memory over verbal memory when working with dementia.



## YOUNG PEOPLE

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### **Production in Development: 20/20 (working title)**

20/20 will be a touring production in 2017-18 using circus, dance and comedy around the themes of ethnicity, culture and identity.

The creative team will develop the show with young people during conversations focused on topics or preoccupations they wish to bring to the table. The initial provocation will be:

*Three quarters of us say we have no racial prejudices whatsoever, but is this really true?*

A number of streams will weave in and out of these themes such as class and a shifting national cultural identity. The upcoming generation will have to deal with these emerging intersections where race, gender and class work together in a complex process of inclusion and exclusion.

In tandem with these conversations we will begin structuring and devising the production with four young artists (3 circus artists and one comedian/actor).

The production will make room for the individual narratives and will be part comedy gig, part circus, part protest and part collective autobiography.

Circus and comedy, when at their best, are immediate and populist art forms. They are risky and have broad appeal. Comedy allows us to approach this difficult conversation in a way that won't alienate audiences.

The production will appeal to a young audience without excluding others. The choice of style, the cross popular culture and the period of creative collaboration with young people will culminate in making something that address the 'gap' in the market for thoughtful, fun, contemporary shows that are relevant to young audiences (14-30).

Upswing's core mission is to give voice to the disenfranchised and promote diversity. This project will enable us to push forward that agenda by employing and profiling a new generation of culturally diverse artists.





# YOUNG PEOPLE

## Creative engagement programme

### *Circus & Writing workshops*

Using Circus, dance, spoken word and creative writing through which participants are encouraged to create and share their stories through movement and/or text. The workshop gives young people the chance to directly influence the performance production of 20-20 (working title) in 2017/18).

### *Roundtable debates: “Courageous conversations”*

At a time when race and class are occupying every headline and every mind we will host mediated debates about diversity led by current issues. The conversation will use a news article or recent quote to encourage participants to engage with difficult questions in ways that are fun and interactive. The discussion will follow four agreements:

Staying engaged

Speaking your truth

Experiencing discomfort

Expecting and accepting non-closure

