

# gravity & levity

## 'Dissecting Aerial'

In partnership with One Dance UK & Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts  
2 - day healthier aerial/dance symposium - Jan 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> 2023

Practice, pedagogical and personal approach presentations from aerial artists, researchers, body workers, medical and sports science practitioners.

### Day 1 - Sat 14<sup>th</sup> Jan - presentations

#### **1, Alex Allan**

Presentation: *'The Theory of Beats'*

In this workshop I will share techniques and theories to help you discover or improve upon your fundamental beats. These beats are the building blocks of everything dynamic on rope and can unlock dynamic pathways, uncover the path of least resistance and help you move through the air with power and fluidity.

NB All the material in this workshop is applicable to other aerial apparatus.

#### **2, Debbie Robbins**

Presentation/practical: *'Aerial focused Pilates - a short sweet shot with Debbie' (Practical)*

An in-person/online 40-minute active moving session, specifically for Aerialists and movers using the Pilates method. Debbie is super passionate about sharing some magical keys and content to make your journey as an Aerialist and within aerial training on the path of ease. She'll share knowledge so that you understand why and how you can make your training easier going forwards. It's so much more than what you do in this one session, it's about planting seeds that will continue to grow once you leave.... Don't miss this session!

What you'll get:

- Specific Pilates movement class for Aerialists and Aerial training
- Ask questions in real time in a Q & A at the end
- Top tips to support your aerial training including a PDF full of valuable content
- Find out how to save energy and learn the path of ease in your training!

#### **3, Jess Abouzeid**

Presentation: *'Psychology for Circus Artists: Injuries, risk, and getting back on stage.'*

An interactive session on the psychology of injuries, with original research on how circus artists view risk, and discussion on how to support artists back to performance, with techniques from sport psychology.

#### **4, Laura Pero**

Presentation/practical: The Kinstretch® method

Kinstretch® (born from Functional Range conditioning®) is training the internal environment of the body to help it better serve its chosen physical skill.

Starting with learning controlled articular rotations (CARs) which is how to self-assess, activate and maintain our current functional joint workspace, kinstretch trains each joint in isolation to help it build a specific load bearing capacity and better handle the demands of its discipline.

In this upper body specific introduction Laura will teach the fundamentals of kinstretch and take the shoulders through a specific training session to share what kind of internal strengthening aerialists can use to open up the anatomy, giving it more variability and increased performance. Kinstretch can help de-patternise repetitive movements that contribute to the over adaptation and fatigue of tissue (which often results in injury) and over time, advance your physical skills at the level of your instrument which is the body.

Suggested props - For online participants, for the symposium it will be useful to have 2 yoga blocks, a pole/stick to use for balance and a couple of tennis balls if you have them.

Further information on Kinstretch origins:

[functionalanatomyseminars.com](http://functionalanatomyseminars.com)

What is Kinstretch? video made by Dr Andreo Spina, founder of Functional Range Systems®

<https://youtu.be/lAr91F7sOa8>

For a deeper delve: Podcast conversation about internal training with Functional Range Systems founder Dr Andreo Spina:

<https://youtu.be/QjPfPSrbjos>

#### **5, Natalie Thompson**

Presentation/practical: *'What is Physical Literacy?...holistic coaching & physical literacy'*

This workshop aims to develop trainers/coaches understanding of the term 'physical literacy' and its impact in the development of the whole person whilst using circus as a tool.

#### **6, Danielle K Garrison**

Presentation/practical: *'Tethering/layering touch - Co-sensing the nervous system and consent in aerial practice.'*

Tethering is an inclusive, horizontal aerial fabric technique that explores a concept I call mediated touch, which engages an awareness to hone more sensitivity to how our bodies co-sense and respond to one another in an aerial practice. My workshop includes virtually leading participants through an experiential practice of tethering beginning with a somatic preparation I call layering, which guides sensing internal to external layers of touch with our own bodies and available materials. The idea is to create an environment where we become more attuned to our somatic sensations, and through permission to move slowly and be within these ever-evolving shifts, ask what we need in the moment. The sharing will conclude with an exchange of experiences, questions, and considerations of what we can do through the information cultivated in our session. This research involves somatic curiosity around contemporary concerns of touch, consent, agency, ableness and choice, honouring different rhythms, perspectives, and needs when considering these topics within our practices.

## **Day 2 - Sun 15<sup>th</sup> Jan - presentations**

### **1, Dr Fleur Van Rens**

Presentation: *'Circus psychology: mental health under the big top'*

The lives of circus artists can be mentally and physically demanding. This presentation will focus on what we know about the mental health of circus artists, specifically focussing on their experiences of stress, anxiety, depression, and disordered eating. Practical advice is given on how to talk about mental health, and how to seek for help. The presentation will conclude with hints and tips on how to set up your circus environment in such a way that promotes high levels of mental health among artists and students.

### **2, \*Aerial Mel Stevens**

Presentation: *'Empowering the magic of a neuro-diverse mind'*

Exploring and understanding neuro diversity and the marginalised groups living under that umbrella who bump up against the barriers of learning.

As someone with lived experience and late diagnosis of autism, Mel has learnt to embrace their learning style and will share practical tools you can use to bring everyone into the room equitably for the benefit of everybody.

### **3, Mish Weaver**

Presentation: *'How can the aerial world respond to Climate Change?'*

By taking a brief look at how performing artists have been engaging in Climate discussions, Mish Weaver asks what, as aerialists, we can do and what the point is.

### **4, Dr. Dean Kriellaars PhD CEP**

Presentation: *'Physical literacy as the engine for well-being.'*

Physical literacy provides a unique view of any movement context, and quite distinct from a physical activity perspective. Physical literacy examines movement from an intrinsic valuation standpoint and recognizes the importance of the person/context interaction. The physical literacy engine will be described as a tool for improving pedagogical practices leading to the development of psychological, social, creative and physical competencies by intentional construction of challenges to generate positive movement experiences for all.

### **5, Serenity Smith Forchion**

Presentation/practical: *'Join the Upside Down: Why handstand training is injury prevention for aerialists (and vice versa)'*

Part theory and part activity, we'll consider why the push and pull of handstands opposite aerials are important (even key) to injury prevention and progress. And we'll get off our feet and onto our hands with some practical and scalable exercises for developing a holistic practice that includes the upside down.

## 6, Dr Emily Scherb

Presentation: *'The biomechanics of Inversions'*

Learn how your core, hips, and shoulders work together to turn your body upside down. Figuring out what muscles need to be working, and in what order can revolutionize the way you think about turning upside down.

From bent arm to long arm inversions we will break down the process and learn to spot common mistakes. Once we understand them we can discuss ways to correct the mechanics through strength, mobility or timing.

We'll learn why hips drop, knees bend, shoulders hurt, and how to invert with more efficiency in the process!

### Day 1 - Presenters Biogs:

1. Biography: **Alex Allan** is a Corde Lisse Artist and Dancer best known for his performative work that blends the boundaries of circus, dance and theatre. Originally from Sydney, Australia, Alex graduated with a Bachelor of Communications – Theatre & Media. Here he began exploring Circus techniques through the lens of Theatre. He then continued his formal Circus training in the Professional Aerial Program at the San Francisco Circus Center.

As an aerial and movement coach, Alex helps his students to develop a powerful yet graceful aesthetic in the air by conveying an understanding of momentum and efficient movement pathways. In his creative practice he is currently most drawn to developing research tools to create movement and choreography that isn't restricted to the air but that can explore the horizontal space as well as the entire architecture of the 'stage'.

He has both performed and taught workshops, retreats and teacher trainings across Europe, North America, and Australia. Alex also currently teaches remotely through online 1-1 coaching from his current home in Bristol, UK.

**Website:** <https://www.instagram.com/alexjamesallan/?hl=en>

**Website:** <https://www.bornstoflyteachers.com/alex-allan.html>

2. Biography: **Debbie Robbins** is the *founder and Artistic Director of Air Control Pilates*® and has taught Pilates since 2003, training initially as a dance artist in 2006 and training in aerial arts since 2008. As a professional aerialist, she toured a personal show **'In Her Shadows'** which was an aerial dance show with projections, across Scotland in 2015 as part of the Scottish Mental Health Arts and Film Festival.

Combining all of these passions together, she naturally started to create a syllabus, style and method. Debbie says 'I'm deeply grateful to share the power of aerial arts, the Pilates method and using the aerial hammock with you. I'm proud to be running education to teachers & movement lovers, all over the world!'

**Website:** <https://www.aircontrolpilates.com/>

**3, Biography: Jess Abouzeid.** With a specialism in high-risk activity, her research aims to collaborate and share knowledge from traditional sports, to people working in circus, stunts and other high pressure performance areas. With nearly 10 years training in aerial across multiple apparatus, she has worked internationally in a wide range of media, alongside working as a circus rigger and rope access technician.

She has recently completed her Masters Sport and Exercise Psychology (MSc, GMBPsS) which builds on her background in Psychology (BSc) and previous work as a circus artist.

Instagram: @jesscircus

**4, Biography: Laura Pero.** A born Londoner, Laura has roots in dance, aerial circus and Ashtanga Yoga and currently specialises in a joint mobility & strength training method: Kinstretch®.

Working with physical discipline through training, practice and performance since 1995 Laura has travelled and performed corde lisse in the UK, Australia and where she subsequently settled in Toulouse, France.

Alongside aerial circus Laura developed an Ashtanga Yoga practice and travelled 6 times to Mysore, India to deepen her practice and pursue her authorisation to teach.

In 2010 she opened her Ashtanga Yoga practice space where she now lives in Limoges.

She was introduced to Kinstretch by a yoga colleague and has since completed 3 certifications (FRC® FRA® and Kinstretch®) as a mobility specialist through Functional Range Systems®. One of only 3 licensed coaches in France, she currently specialises in teaching Kinstretch® online and in person both in French and English.

Instagram: @kinstretch.with.laura

Website: [laurapero.com](http://laurapero.com)

**5, Biography: Natalie Thompson** is an experienced circus trainer and a Lecturer in Sport & Exercise Science, Health & Fitness at Belfast Metropolitan College. She is co-owner of Stripey Socks Circus and also works for Circusful (formerly Belfast Community Circus School) as a lead trainer on various outreach projects and in-house classes and workshops.

Her enthusiasm for circus has no bounds and she is a regular contributor to the CircusWorks conferences and working groups.

**Twitter:** [https://twitter.com/stripeysocks\\_ni](https://twitter.com/stripeysocks_ni)

**6, Biography: Danielle K Garrison** creates interactive, provocative, and somatic aerial experiences to re-ignite embodied interaction in a post-touch era questioning who and how we can do aerial. While pursuing her MFA in Dance (somatics/aerial arts) from the University of Colorado Boulder, Danielle was granted a Fulbright to France to artistically research and create a dance film and a series of interactive aerial performances. Recent aerial residencies include Nils Obstrat (Paris), SBCAST (Santa Barbara Center for Arts, Science and Technology) and the Circus Dialogues Project's 4<sup>th</sup> encounter.

Danielle has performed and/or taught for Aerial Dance Chicago, Frequent Flyers Productions, Les Rencontres de Danse Aérienne, the Berlin Circus Festival, Frequent Flyers Aerial Dance Festival, Santa Barbara Floor to Air Festival, Aerial Greece, and the San Francisco Aerial Dance Festival.

In 2020, she co-created Aerial Reflexionando (virtual aerial arts colloque) with Ana Prada to support critical exchange on contemporary aerial arts in the Americas. Currently, Danielle is a PhD student in research-creation at Concordia University (Montréal) and the University of Montpellier 3 (France), as well as a 4-year Fulbright Specialist artist.

**Website:** <https://daniellegarrison.com/>

## **Day 2 - Presenters Biogs:**

**Biography:** **Dr Fleur van Rens** is a senior lecturer in sports psychology at Murdoch University (Australia), and holds a BSc, MSc, and PhD degree in psychology. Fleur is the author of 'Circus psychology, an applied guide to thriving under the big top'. Fleur's research focuses on the mental health of circus artists, with her research she aims to empower circus artists so they can thrive in the big top and beyond. In her free time, Fleur enjoys training lyra and Chinese pole.

**Website:** <https://circuspsychology.com/>

**Biography:** **\*Aerial Mel Stevens** is a deaf, disabled, Queer, N-B., BIPOC aerial artist, rigger, and circus show director, and Accessibility and Inclusion Consultant with NoFit State Circus and Artistic Directors of The Future (ADF) CircusWorks Director & NASAUK Director and Board Member and Founder of Aim to Fly UK.

They began their performing career in the early '80s as a dancer.

After breaking their back, Mel initially believed that they would have to let go of performance. They trained in Holistic Therapy \*NVQ, Sports \*BTEC, Teacher training \*City and Guilds levels 3-5, and became a Health and Social Care Consultant with West Berkshire council and advising nationally with Skills for Care and The Grey Matter Learning, as well as Chair Person for west Berkshire Councils' HealthWatch England. A decade later, Mel was invited by Graeae to perform aerially for the GIDF in 2012, and PALI 3013 as part of the Paralympic aerial troupe. In 2014 they gained their aerial teacher training qualifications, as well as their rigging certification, & founded Aim to Fly UK. Later that year they trained full time at Circomedia, & then began teaching accessible aerial with Circomedia's ICAN classes.

More recently Aerial Mel has written risk assessments for NASAUK and Outdoor Arts UK (OAUK) and works with Bristol Old Vic (BOV) with Empowering Black Female Voices.

**Facebook:** [Facebook.com/aimtoflyuk](https://www.facebook.com/aimtoflyuk)

**Twitter:** @aerialmel & @aimtoflyuk

**Biography:** **Mish Weaver** is a Circus-maker; directing, writing and designing. As an aerialist she specialised in Cloudswing and Doubles Trapeze, before going off-piste towards dance theatre and circus dance. She focuses on climate psychology - investigating ways in which to have difficult conversations. In the past few years Mish has directed all her own practice towards an engagement project called Parade of Horribles - taking circus performance devices onto the street to kick start conversations with strangers and to gain an understanding of how people's mental health is being impacted by their attitudes towards Climate Change.

**Website:** <https://www.paradeofhorribles.co.uk/mish-weaver>

**Biography:** **Dr. Dean Kriellaars** Scientific Director, Center for Circus Arts Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer, Ecole nationale de cirque, Montreal Canada.

His research is directed to physical literacy for wellness, in rehabilitation as well as in high performance circus and sport. He has pioneered physical literacy tools and programs that have been adopted internationally.

**Biography:** **Serenity Smith Forchion** and her twin sister are award winning aerialists & founders of the New England Centre for Circus Arts and Nimble Arts. Serenity's resume includes Cirque du Soleil, Ringling Bros and Barnum and Bailey, Special Award at Wujiao Festival, Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts and American Circus Educators Award for Excellence in Education. Her students grace the stages of the world including Circa, 7 Fingers, Soap, Pippin and Cirque du Soleil. Serenity's expertise brings detailed concepts of technique to each student focusing on fundamental body awareness in order to expand the student's capacity to explore new movements and accomplish higher level skills and creativity.

Through their award-winning production company, Nimble Arts, Serenity and her twin tour the world as aerial performers while continuing to work at NECCA. Serenity hopes to inspire the current and next generations of circus performers and teachers with authenticity and grace.

Serenity lives on a tree farm with her 3 children who pick her up and carry her around when she tries to maintain structure and recently won an award for an aerial film series Juno Singles.

**Website:** [www.nimblearts.org](http://www.nimblearts.org)

**Biography:** Dr. Emily Scherb is a physical therapist with a lifelong passion for understanding human movement.

She's been a practicing aerialist for almost 30 years and has dangled from balloons, danced in the air, and swung from trapezes. That background inspired her to specialize her practice on circus and aerial artists. She has a proven track record of helping patients who have not seen results with traditional physical therapy due to her unique perspective on how the body works both on the ground and in the air.

As an educator, she travels the world teaching circus artists, instructors, and healthcare professionals about the unique physical demands and challenges of training the body to do incredible feats.

She received her doctorate degree from Washington University in St. Louis and now lives in Seattle, where she works with professional and pre-professional circus artists. She is the Resident Physical Therapist at the [School of Acrobatics and New Circus Arts](#) and the Company Physical Therapist for the contemporary circus company [Acrobatic Conundrum](#). Emily is on the board of [Seattle Dance and Performing Arts Medicine](#) which helps Seattle performing artists get the healthcare they need and the specialized care they deserve. Emily is also on the board of American Youth Circus Organization/American Circus Educators (AYCO/ACE)

Her bestselling book, [Applied Anatomy of Aerial Artists](#), was published in August 2018.

Emily is an internationally recognized lecturer and has presented at conferences for organizations including [Performing Arts Medicine Association](#), [International Association of Dance Medicine and Science](#), [American Circus Educators](#), and [American Physical Therapy Association](#).