

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: E. Wallis Cain Carbonell

Heartfelt Showmen

by **E. Wallis Cain Carbonell**

"Journey through time to learn a little about circus with us!"

"Clap! Holler! We want all the attention from you guys tonight!"

Extra chairs are set up for the oversold audience waiting for the start of *Time Loops* at the Circus Campus. Inside the largest room of the old Catholic church, excitement buzzes. The program features spectacular staff (and friends!) of the Philadelphia School of Circus Arts, Philly's home for recreational circus.

Chelsea Thompson works on a solo. As she contemplates her next move, we swirl into the past. A hoopskirt clad woman emerges and another woman ducks out from under her skirt. Thompson tells us that the pair represents the, "greatest circus act of the 1890s." The duo delights, dropping skirts and mounting twin trapezes. This is a timewarp.

Our time travel begins in 1890, a time when circuses were phasing out of equestrian-focused shows and shepherding in a new era of excess and one-upmanship. Tonight's show progresses through over 100 years of circus history with performers representing key events and superstars of circuses past. The journey to 1890 concludes with a suave and comedic strong man, complete with faux mustache. We swing along to the 1940s for a joyous trapeze, passed down through generations, and bop into the '50s, pin-up style, with an impressive rope solo.

Grooving into the 1970s, [Circadium](#) circus school graduate, Joshua Lee, treats us to a dance of juggling rings set to the music of Led Zeppelin. Partner and fellow Circadium graduate, Jenny Kinzel follows, bringing the '80s glitz as she balances in high heels atop bottles. Josie Sepe's dazzling theatrical trapeze act transports us to 1995 Montreal, channeling the origins of Cirque du Soleil.

A whip cracks! Here come the lions (Rachel Lancaster & Wei-Wei Weintraub). It is 2017. The final Ringling Brothers circus show is over. The only trained animals we want to see are these fiercely technical aerial queens of the jungle.

Finally, a combined pole and lyra duet ushers in 2025. The duet seems to remind Thompson of the technique and showmanship which together, alongside comedy, make a circus successful. She shouts, "I think I know what's missing in my act!" before spinning on her flying ropes counterclockwise (she typically goes clockwise). The reversal magically transports us back to the beginning, Thompson now sure of the next move in her solo from the top of the show. Her stunning aerial act brings forth another key circus element, embodied so fully by her predecessors— heart.

[Time Loops](#), Philadelphia Fringe Festival, Circus Campus, Philadelphia, PA, September 28.

Homepage Image Description: *A female circus artist with a brown ponytail leans back over a trapeze and stretches her arms. She wears a shiny blue leotard and flies high above a full audience.*

Article Page Image Description: *A lean, muscular, white circus artist with a dark brown ponytail wears a white ruffly leotard and hooks bare feet around a rope to climb a rope into the tall ceiling of Circus Campus (the building was once a church). The performer's shadow also climbs ever higher , the scene illuminated from below by hints of green LED lights.*

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