



La Tarumba, from Lima, Perú

# Dance and circus go chatting

Circus has a much more significant artistic presence in Latin America than in Europe. **Cori Cruz** and **Geraldine Sakuda** of La Tarumba Circus Company in Lima, Perú, illustrate the importance of dance in their educational and performance programmes

**From the very beginning, circus has included Latin American dance as a complementary discipline in its training processes.** Iconic schools, like some Russian or Cuban ones, include ballet in their curricula. European schools, instead, include contemporary dance.

The Professional La Tarumba Social Circus School from Lima, Perú, is an artistic and technical training space that fosters merges with other artistic disciplines, aims at training multidisciplinary artists conscious of their social role and participates in the contemporary circus movement.

There is not only artistic training at the school, it also includes training in values and management. In this way, people trained at the school become artists ready to create and manage different ventures while they lead their own lives and their personal and community projects. Thanks to circus

art and training, these young people improve their personal esteem and go back to their communities feeling they can achieve their dreams as much as they conquer the airspace with the trapezium. Over 50% of the school students took part on at least one La Tarumba show. Over 98% make their living from circus, either on a stage or as a trainer, either in Perú or abroad.

Since those La Tarumba School trainees come from different neighbourhoods, while performing circus, they gradually become agents for change. They are quite young and most of them are from vulnerable groups. Quite unexpectedly, circus becomes a means to change their individual and community future. Dance and circus allow young people coming from different cultural and social backgrounds to work together, developing an intercultural language and exercising their communication

and team working capacities.

“A girl from a high social neighbourhood, held by a boy from the suburbs, need to trust each other, they need to give in, and so, differences diminish abruptly,” Carlos Olivera, School Coordinator.

Contemporary dance is a complementary movement language that allows our trainees to amplify their extra-sensory communication capacity, as much as their scenic presence, while offering a different aesthetic meaning of the body. It also allows a deeper body knowledge, more movement consciousness and plasticity.

Cori Cruz, Dance Teacher at the Professional Circus School: “I started teaching at La Tarumba ten years ago and since then, many things have happened... many of my students are now teachers and artists at La Tarumba Circus. Those who are not, >



Above and right: La Tarumba, from Lima, Perú

are now managing their own projects connected to circus or education. Some of them live in Europe: two are working actively in circus and another one is a well-known dancer.

I saw them grow. They saw me grow too. I work side by side with many of them to keep building the school we once started, full of doubts, and of hopes too. Those who became artists make me smile and give warmth to my heart. I fly with them when they fly, I admire them from a distance while I remember their first steps, their uncertainties and resistances. I do believe that dance has presented them with valuable information: some had hard times, some didn't. Some hated me, dance was not as thrilling as circus, they couldn't understand why they had to spend so much time on the floor, touching their bodies, talking about their bodies... they wanted to 'do' things with their bodies.

Ten years later, I can say for sure that dance at La Tarumba is an exploration and acknowledging, rapprochement and sensitisation, contact and creation, chatting and reflecting space. We are not training dancers, we are training better circus performers who may consciously speak from their bodies. We are training a sensitivity and a way of expressing from and with the body towards the circus, and from there, we hope that each person discovers their identity and their own voice".

During dance lessons, working on the floor has been one of the axis of the technical work. Through it, we help students find and develop

consciousness about body weight distribution and the development of strength as much as the search for lightness and freedom.

Circus students are generally shaped by extremely solid techniques, which sometimes stiffen them not only physically, but mentally too. Through dance training, we tend to sensitise the body, discovering organic and physical links to integrate into their circus disciplines, broadening their physical and creative consciousness, not only for personal training but also to enrich their composing ideas and show creation.

Floor work and contact improvisation are the prioritised techniques aimed at allowing the students to develop a common language as well as re-interpret it. This means, establishing a consciousness of certain basic principles, starting from the floor and from there, connecting to other principles, as the relationship with space and other bodies as support and scenic construction. We also propose to observe which are the relationships that students find from these principles, and how they move into their disciplines, which relationships they find and feel, that may be taken into their own practices.

It's also a question of helping students permanently face creation and research spaces through their bodies and the circus chosen discipline. Dance grants an additional language with which to experiment.

Armando Palacios, Student at Professional La Tarumba Social Circus



School: "Coming from contemporary dance training, prior to this school, from my perspective I dare say that dance is the best circus complement, and vice versa. Not only due to the technical and gestural aspects that are enhanced by dance, but mainly because of the huge contribution to the circus imagery. Thus, the circus technique can be endlessly traversed, and this is where its real value can be found. I could not have experienced circus technique's growth, without the specific dance input: body consciousness, line and imagery offered by dance, set the basis for my current circus growth.

Circus permanently reminds us that we can move beyond reality, dance lets us move towards that border."

Some time ago, we were invited to two completely different festivals:



Above: Geraldine Sakuda and Cori Cruz  
Left: La Tarumba, from Lima, Perú

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The Contemporary Dance Open Space Festival, organised by a private university located in one of the richest neighbourhoods and the Open Streets Theatre Festival (FITECA), a community festival carried out in one of the suburban Lima districts with high rates of poverty. We found the invitations a good opportunity to present our students' work in two absolutely different contexts. We also decided to generate a creative process to check with them the dance/circus relationship. We identified different challenges that helped us ponder about the dialogue between these artforms.

In the first place, we had to remind ourselves that the school objective

is not to produce dancers. So circus should be prioritised, while dance should be a supporting tool.

Another important challenge is that dance proposes a fluid, light movement, while circus disciplines, mainly acrobatics, require tonicity and permanent consciousness, since it is a discipline where people are thrown against each other in the air – a mental and corporal challenge for the acrobat/dancer. Circus means compromising bodies up to the extreme, to conquer the air space, to surpass bi-dimensionality, attaining a true tri-dimensional space.

The new dimension that circus provides dance, taking movements that are basically performed on

the floor, into the air, preserves its composition and plasticity. This also has an impact on social transformation, since young people experiment with this new dimension, and so their individual and community visions are broadened. They start looking at their chances, not only at ground level, but they can start thinking about conquering the air, the space, a wider dimension.

Since circus is a popular art in Latin America, that reaches everyone, regardless of any social or cultural condition, this exercise helped us confirm that circus has the capacity to grant dance certain spectacular components that captivate audiences, turning dance into a more accessible language. Both 'rich' and 'poor' audiences enjoyed and applauded the show and young people's vitality.

At La Tarumba, art becomes education. From its very beginning, 30 years ago, it keeps on developing a unique pedagogical and artistic proposal, aimed at contributing with Peruvian human development through its workshops, social programmes and shows. Its underlying philosophy attempts to rescue individuals' identity and to create an internationally recognised Peruvian Circus.

La Tarumba shows are meant to rescue Peruvian traditions, with a particular interest in the Afro-Andean culture, mainly recovering its music and dances.

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