

About Aloft Circus Arts

Founded in 2005, Aloft Circus Arts brings heart and artistry to a performance art usually associated with physical strength and fearlessness. The resulting shows highlight more than just the physical capacity to fly, twist, balance, and spin - we celebrate the human capacity for sensitivity as well as strength, beauty as well as bravery, empathy as well as pure creative fire. Our performers are some of the premier athletes in the world, from a diverse range of circus acts - but when we work together, the stories we share with the audience are always about the feelings and experiences that unite us all. We look to have a direct emotional dialogue with our audience, and due to our accessible nature, everyone regardless of education, age, culture or background can be engaged.

Aloft has produced 8 full length shows and performed countless one-off performances around the world. Our ongoing shows "El Circo Cheapo Cabaret" and "Sanctuary" have gained a cult following in Chicago, selling out every monthly show for the last 11 years! In addition to performances, Aloft runs one of the largest circus schools in the United States, creating a training center for new artists so that we always have exciting new talent to bring our productions to life.

About The Artistic Director

Shayna Swanson is an award-winning circus artist, director and founder of Aloft Circus Arts. Her artistic work pushes the limits of physicality and emotion, described by the Chicago Reader as "truly heartfelt and creative". As a former competitive gymnast and diver, her work naturally fuses difficulty, strength and intricacy with thoughtfulness and surprise. Shayna developed her circus voice in the land before social media, in the "Circus Wild West", a world of shoddy trapezes hung from trees and sneaking into warehouses for shows. While she's learned better safety practices, the punk rock ethos still nips at her heels.

After slogging through a sociology degree, and 7 months in Circus School she was ready to transform her raw energy into art. In 2005 she received the Glenn P Davis Scholarship, for excellence in aerial choreography, to the Aerial Dance Festival in Boulder. That same year she formed Aloft and, with a grant from the City of Chicago, produced her first full-length show "Rolling Blackouts". In 2006 her choreography was selected into the repertory of Thodos Dance Chicago and featured in the Best of Dance Chicago Showcase. Also that year the Chicago Reader named her a "Mover and Shaker" of the Chicago dance scene. She has been acclaimed at national and international aerial and circus festivals. Her unique rope act won the "Best Performance of Festival" Award at the 2011 American Aerial Acrobatic Festival, a Special Prize at the 2011 Circuba Festival in Havana, Cuba and was featured at the Huishan Acrobatic Festival in Taiwan and Collision Arts Asia Festival in Malaysia. She is also the 2012 US National women's Cyr Wheel Champion.

Shayna formed the Aloft Loft in April 2006 to provide a supportive and vibrant community training space for physical artists of all sorts. Ten years later, Aloft purchased a 109 year old church that is now an inspiring and beautifully equipped training and performance space. Since founding Aloft Circus Arts, Shayna has created 8 full length shows including "El Circo Cheapo Cabaret" which has toured across America, and sold out shows weeks in advance every month in Chicago for the last 8 years. Seeing the need for a world class circus festival in the USA, Shayna founded the Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival, which brought 10 national and international shows to Chicago in 2014. In addition to producing and creating her own shows and festivals, Shayna's work has been seen in Circus Flora, Pegasus Variete in Germany, the Kim Tom Clown Festival in Shanghai, Mint Fest in England, Olympic festivities in Hong Kong, Vivendi Cabaret in the Cayman Islands, resorts in the Caribbean and with productions like the Lyric Opera of Chicago.