

THE MINISON PROJECT
PRESENTS

TMP MAGAZINE

CARNIVAL ISSUE 5

Cover Art by
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TMP Magazine

The Minison Project

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Sun City Border

Casey Aimer

Ninety feet from El Paso's border wall flares a Mexican carnival.
Yesterday this steel curtain yesterday was raised to thirty feet and yet
it's time to party. Monochromatic construction contrasts
against ecstatic celebrations. The Big Tops are twice the
wall's height, collated with prismatic color. Border Patrol
adds razor wire, but revelers counter with reverse bungees
showcasing their ability to skirt the Texas Wall if desired.
Trump adds additional segments of steel, the masses add
a Ferris wheel. They spiral around American savagery
breaking apart one city's heart spread across two nations.
The riders dare to be stopped—festivity facing adversity.



boy I'll tell you What
I came in on this thing in pain
and the cheapest Kind of Holy I could find
is this right here



PLASTIC BREATH
Alfredo Salvatore Arcilesi

After seven days of intolerable confinement, Izzy decided that this foggy afternoon was the right time to free herself. And, if she could manage, Clara.

She had been testing her crippled body since the morning darkness, inundating her extremities with signals to flex, and, with any hard-earned luck, *move*. Her weak arms appeared up to the task; she guessed her weight to be just shy of one-hundred pounds. Her legs, however, remained stubborn, anchoring her to the bed. For all the training she had subscribed to these counterparts, none was more rigorous, more vital than her breathing regimen.

Izzy's relationship with oxygen had always been of a toxic nature. A university athlete who had relied upon her immaculate lungs for victory, it had been an unreliable ankle that decided ten metres from an important finish line was the time to snap, end her career, sink her into the depths of depression, and enroll her in a new, lifelong sport: smoking. Three packs a day, four when she was feeling particularly good (or bad), for fifty years.

And now the ghosts of cigarettes past were preventing her, in spite of her cooperative arms, from liberating herself, and, more importantly, Clara.

Izzy exhaled a laboured breath, painfully inhaled another. She should have been accustomed to it by now, but the air filtering throughout her sanctuary still tasted as artificial as it smelled. She felt the rather stale intake race through her mouth and nostrils, hoping to reach the pair of black bags that kept her going for no real purpose.

Save for Clara.

The clean dose of oxygen reached her ashen lungs, then exited her mouth and nose in another laboured exhalation. Izzy imagined the polluted molecules warning the new wave of respiration about what corruption lay within her.

She looked to her right, locked eyes with the never-blinking Clara, and, with a look that said “Don't you dare move now”—she couldn't risk precious breaths on her roommate's deaf ears—began the arduous journey.

Izzy watched as she willed her right arm across the centimetres that felt like kilometres of bed. The feeble limb made pitiful progress before stopping entirely so she may regain what energy she could.

A surge of anger propelled her arm against the plastic sheet dividing her and Clara. Her hand slid down the thick material until it landed in the crevice between the sheet and edge of the bed. Using this newfound leverage, Izzy began pulling her weight with her right arm, while pushing against the mattress with her left. The juicy idea of giving up had crossed her mind, just as it had when her former severely fit self, besieged by physical and psychological cramps, had desired to slow her run to a crawl at the three-thousand-metre mark. Her conditioned lungs had burned then. Now they were volcanic.

But the agony and certain death would be worth it. Not only for herself, but Clara, who had never felt a pang in her endless life.

Izzy now found herself at a ninety-degree angle: the top half of her body sprawled laterally across the bed; the bottom half remained affixed to where it had been since she embarked upon this suicide mission of sorts. After a quick mental team huddle with her barely-working parts, she used her right hand to push against the plastic sheet. The damn thing was like a wall of concrete. Her reluctant body threatened to pull the plug on the

whole operation, but a little bit of that wholesome anger, and a lot of thinking about what would happen to Clara if she failed, helped free the bottom of the plastic sheet from between the mattresses. Izzy exhaled so deeply, the fog outside of her only window found its way to her eyes.

One breath.

Her vision slowly...

Two breaths.

...slowly...

Three breaths.

...returned.

She felt her old nemesis oxygen assisting her rushing blood to restore her vision. But she knew better; death had brushed past her.

Move it, she urged herself.

Izzy hadn't intended to escape by falling on her head, but as she shimmied herself closer... closer... closer, then over... over... over the edge of the bed, it seemed the only way. Her head free of the plastic sheet, the faint aroma of cooking bombarded her olfactory. She couldn't help but sacrifice a valuable breath to take in the recipe she had shared with her daughter long ago. *You're using too much garlic powder*, she thought, the seasoning burning her sinuses. But that was Isabelle: too much or too little of everything.

Her shoulders hanging over the edge of the bed, thinned blood rushing to her head, Izzy wondered—not for the first time—what Isabelle would think when the time came to trudge upstairs, check on her dying mother, and find her however she ended up. *Hopefully, with Clara in my arms*, she thought.

She wondered if her daughter would even care.

The pair of Izzy's had lived a life of few kisses and plenty of bites. Izzy had made the cliché attempts to live via her namesake (Isabelle's ankles were still intact, after all). Her daughter had indeed run; not on the track, but away from home, turning the typical one-off act of rebellion into a quarterly sport. When she was home, Isabelle would blame Izzy for all of her life's unwanted biographic details: the casting out of her father, the selfish act of naming her after herself (never mind the tradition), the reason for her isolating unattractiveness, the asthma and other varieties of respiratory ailments courtesy of her chain-smoking. That her only child had decided to punish her by never marrying, never having children, was not lost on Izzy. Still, when Izzy had become too ill to breathe on her own, it was Isabelle who rushed her to the hospital; and it was Isabelle who brought her home, tucked her into bed, and made sure the oxygen tent kept her alive.

But after seven days of intolerable confinement, seven days of embarrassing baths and changes, seven days of no words exchanged save for begrudged greetings and farewells, Izzy had decided that this foggy afternoon was the right time to free herself. And, if she could manage, Clara.

Beloved Clara.

She could no longer see her only friend, but knew she was right where she had left her. *I'm coming*, she thought, hoping the suffocating air out here wouldn't render her a liar.

Like in the old days, when slower competitors somehow cruised past her, good old-fashioned anger fueled her cause, and she writhed her dangling body further over the edge of the bed like a fish out of water. *A fish that wants out of her damn bowl!* she goaded herself, and grew angrier at her handicap. The fingertips on her right hand touched

something cold, hard. It took her a moment to realize she had touched the floor. Her left hand, still pushing against the bunched-up comforter, worked alone to send her over the rest of the way.

In the space of seconds, Izzy saw the ceiling, then her abdomen, then her legs, the latter two crashing down on her. Within the same seconds, she had felt emptiness beneath her, then the same cold, hard floor forcing itself into her neck and spine. Precious breaths were knocked out of her, and the fog returned, this time most certainly accompanied by death.

It took her a few moments to realize that death smelled an awful lot like garlic. A few more moments, and Izzy understood she hadn't died... and that her daughter wouldn't have heard a thing if she had. She remained alone. On the floor. Alive. For now.

Alive enough to save Clara.

Slowly, surely, Izzy wriggled away from the bed until her dumb legs hit the floor. Still, her daughter remained downstairs, oblivious, or willfully so. But in case obliviousness turned to awareness, Izzy needed to move as quickly as her lame body would allow at this late stage in the race. *Last one-hundred metres*, she implored.

Since sitting herself up was impossible, she needed to figure out how to get Clara to come down to her level. *Could've just grabbed her, and brought her into the tent*, she scolded herself, *save yourself this stupidity*. But she knew it wouldn't have been fair to Clara, to have her lifelong companion go from breathing one brand of plastic air to another. No. She wanted Clara's first breath to be one-hundred percent, certifiable oxygen... even if it was tinged with garlic.

Izzy flexed the fingers on her left hand, expecting to feel a break, akin to that long-ago ankle, that would prevent her from crossing *this* finish line. Everything felt in working order. Hand shaped like a spider, the fingers crawled along the floor until they found the nightstand's feet. They climbed past the bottom drawer, then the middle, then-

She stopped, having reached as high as she could go. She looked at the progress her hand had made, and was angered and disappointed to see the tips of her fingers so close to the top. So close to Clara.

No longer able to uphold itself, her arm fell to the floor for her daughter not to hear. Her shallow, disparate breathing became shallower, more disparate. The retinal fog grew thicker. And she was certain the last time she would see Clara was in the memories she had very limited time to relive:

Sneaking into her late mother's bedroom—this very same bedroom—to sneak a peek at Clara, high on her shelf.

Receiving Clara on the eve of her mother's passing—in this very same bedroom—on the condition that she pass Clara on to *her* daughter, should she have one, when her own end was near.

Asking Isabelle to take Clara off the shelf, and sit her on the nightstand; the plan to release Clara had been confirmed, all the more so by her daughter's routine sneer and remark: “Ugly thing.” Even had Isabelle loved Clara as much as she had, Izzy felt it *her* duty to finally free her.

Come on, you useless cigarette-holder. Last fifty metres.

Her nicotine-stained spider-hand rediscovered the nightstand's feet, and, once more, began its ascent.

Past the bottom drawer.

Forty metres.

Past the middle drawer.

Thirty metres.

Past the bottom of the top drawer.

Twenty metres.

Finding the top drawer's knob...

Ten metres.

...where it hung...

Come on.

...unwilling to move.

COME ON!

Her hand sprang back, the drawer with it.

Sliding.

Sliding.

Sliding.

Until the heavy piece abruptly stopped, having reached its limit. The nightstand leaned slightly forward, and Izzy glimpsed her legacy as the dead meat filling of a floor-and-nightstand sandwich. But the nightstand had other plans; before it settled back into place, it made sure to shake free the tall, glossy box.

The impact was painful, a sharp corner hitting her perfectly in the eye, but nothing compared to the torture her lungs were putting her through. Instead of fog, there was rain. Izzy blinked the burning tears away, bringing not the nightstand into focus, but a face.

And what a beautiful face it was. Skin made of meringue. A faint smile on pink lips barely formed. Rosy cheeks forever pinched into dimples. Black eyebrows arching over a pair of unblinking bejeweled eyes. Had they seen Izzy? *All* the Izzy's? From Grandma Izzy to this sorry-excuse-for-an-Izzy?

They stared at each other for some time, Izzy refusing to blink, like her little friend, lest she slip into death during one of those slivers of blackness. The smell of garlic was fading. She couldn't tell if her daughter was altering the recipe in some way, or if her senses were gradually shutting down.

Last ten metres, she thought. Perhaps her final thought.

Izzy used the left hand that made this final reunion possible to locate the pristine cardboard flap above Clara's head. Not with anger, but love, Izzy tore open the lid that had sealed the doll in her prison for three generations, and watched as Clara took in her first-ever breath of fresh air.



Here's where
the tough get
tender
are given wings
and poem bones
and the shadow of a cross
and zeros
and fragments of song
and a pinprick of light



© Raya B.

Dreamscape

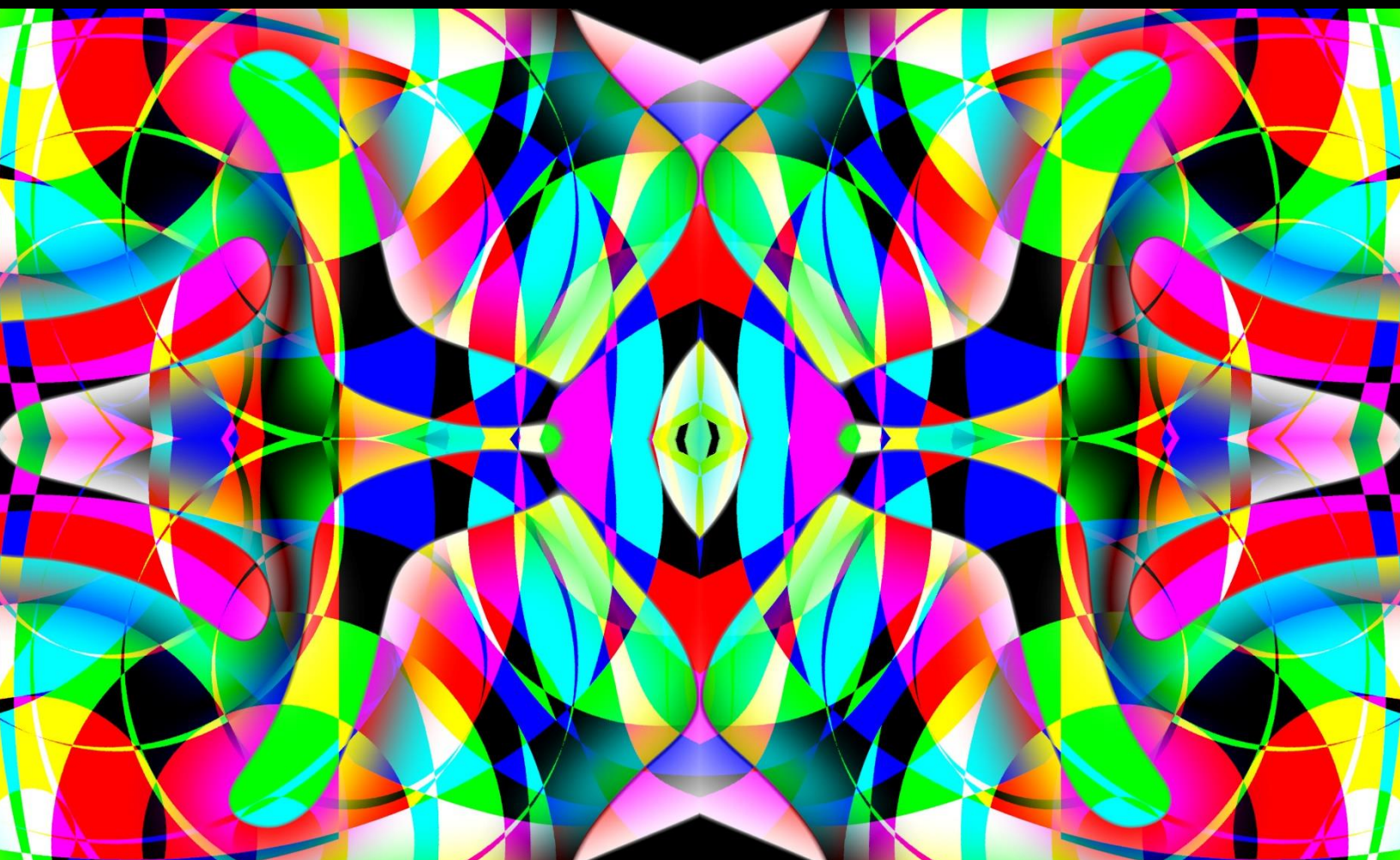
Melissa Nuñez

This boy and I are sealed inside the compartment of the Zipper
Rhomboids of light render glimpses of the world beyond

The scrutiny of my crushes and my kisses, my body, my hopes obscured as
We begin to spin, and nothing exists outside this soaking darkness

Fingers linked and lips fumbling to engage until G-force kicks in
And we are pinned in uncertainty and the sweat of summer and the

Shrieking over and under and as we rock requiem of moment in motion and out
Of time we agree to float fantasy and ride again



Interview with Lexi Everland

by Melissa Ashley Hernandez

Lexi Everland is a professional fire spinner and wildland fire fighter, among many other things. She has been performing for a little over 5 years but has been practicing for about 10. For Lexi, it is hard to find the time to balance a very demanding full-time job and performing, but not impossible! She aspires to inspire the creative who is balancing their love of their art and a full-time job.



Lexi is a long time lover of fire. This love has brought her down many related paths in life, including learning how to perform fire spinning, dancing, and performing, and securing a job as a New Jersey Wildlands Firefighter.

Performing for a living is a dream not many are able to realize, so, like many creatives, performers have to balance booking performances with the realities of everyday life. In this interview, Lexi talks about her love for fire performance, the balancing act of having a more demanding job while trying to maintain your creative outlets, and advice on how to begin the foray into fire arts!



Lexi Everland on Fire Spinning

1. Fire Spinning. Wow! Of all the skills to pursue, how did you choose that one? How did it start?

LE: Well, I've tried out many many hobbies but this one really stuck! I went through phases where my artistic expression showed itself as jewelry making, painting, drawing, and even writing – but this one allowed me to move my body while expressing myself, and also showcase the hard work I put into my performances. Sometimes I even get to make money by doing it! And the work I put in to get good enough to not burn myself and feel confident performing didn't feel difficult at all. Before I realized it, years had gone by and I had gotten pretty good, and I had kind of forgotten all the hours I put into it. I think that's just because I love doing it so much, and it offers me an amazing outlet so it didn't feel like work at all.

2. In our previous conversations, you've mentioned other skills, hula hooping, aerial performance, acroyoga — have you ever married any of those skills with your fire spinning?

LE: Yes! I have. A fire hula hoop is one of the many fire props I use and probably the one I am most proficient at. It is also where my love for the art really started. My performing partner and I will also throw in a couple basic acroyoga moves into an act, which is sort of like partner acrobatics.

3. What was the biggest struggle when learning how to fire spin?

LE: I would say the biggest struggle was lighting my fire prop on fire for the very first time. I practiced for quite a while without the wicks lit until one day I said, I think I'm ready. And my brother was there as my "safety," a term we use to describe the person usually standing off stage with a towel or fire resistant duvaline cloth just in case we catch something (or ourselves) on fire. I guess it was mostly getting over the fear of getting burned. And I'm not going to say that you don't get burned while performing: you take the proper precautions, wear the proper clothing (natural fibers because synthetics melt to your skin, fire resistant material, and/or fire resisting spray), but you still frequently get burned. But that's the nature of the art. Hey, if you play with fire, you are going to get burned! But if you are well practiced, the burns are usually very minor and almost feel like a small patch of sunburn. Sometimes you may mess up, and then they're a little more than a sun burn, but over time and with much practice and many mistakes, you fear getting burned less and less and less and you get better and better and better. I feel it's a great analogy for life in that way.

4. Is there a fire skill you prefer? Do you have a favorite prop you like to use?

LE: I certainly have my go-to props, and the fire hoop is the one I have practiced the most, but I love them all for different reasons. There's almost a completely different flow to each one. Some have similar moves that translate, but overall

it's almost like playing completely different instruments associated with completely different genres of music. Sometimes I am just in the mood for my dragon staff, which is a long staff with four wicks at either end that you manipulate by rolling down your arms and body and legs for the most part. And sometimes a different song will come on my playlist and it's a song I just HAVE to pick up my fire fans and groove to. There's also a common philosophy in the fire spinning world that certain props are similar to dancing with a partner, like the fire hoop, dragon staff, contact staff, etc. The prop moves around you and you move around it. While other props are like extensions of yourself while you dance, like fire fans, double hoops, buugeng, etc. The props accentuate your movement. So it depends on whatever I'm in the mood for!

5. What was the hardest trick for you to learn, and what is the hardest trick for you to perform?

LE: Currently, the hardest tricks for me to learn are anything with my fire dart. Which is a large ball shaped wick attached to a very long rope. It is so hard for me, and takes me the most time when learning tricks because it is a prop not like any other prop I have used before. The flow is different, the way you move your body in relation to the prop is different, the foot work is different, the parts of your body you use to manipulate the prop are different. And therefore, it is also the hardest for me to perform.



6. Pyro Noir Productions. Let's talk about it: what is it? How did it start? Where do you want it to go?

LE: Pyro Noir Productions is a performance group based in South Jersey specializing in fire performing that my best friend and I started when we both had more time on our hands to book gigs. For a while there, we were booking gigs every other weekend around our normal jobs during the spring and summer and had a lot of fun! We performed at local festivals, car shows, bike shows, backyard BBQs, birthdays, weddings, and even at bars while bands were playing. Then Covid hit and we couldn't perform for quite a while. Then we both got really busy with our jobs but we are looking forward to hopping back into the groove soon!



7. So, you work as a New Jersey Wildland Firefighter now — how did you make the leap from starting fires to putting them out?

LE: I guess my affinity for fire manifested itself in a couple ways! Fire spinning came first, and probably did influence my decision to take a career in fire. Since graduating high school, I knew I wanted to work outdoors in the environmental field. I went to school for environmental sciences and began taking the forestry route. It was then that I learned about the field of wildland firefighting. Initially I started out in the research realm, and then made the transition into the operational side where instead of studying wildland fire and its effects, I now get to fight fires and sometimes light them for prescribed burning purposes! From dancing with, to studying, to fighting and lighting, I can say I have come to intimately know the nature of fire. This reaffirms just how amazing a phenomenon it is, making it even more exciting to me.

8. A lot of our readers are creatives, not unlike you, attempting to make their creative life work with the reality of their everyday. Do you have any advice on how to manage that balancing act?

LE: It is HARD! Especially when you are passionate about both. At times, one will overtake the other. For the past two years I haven't gotten to perform much at all because of my new job. But things will slow down soon, and I will be able to get back into it eventually, and that is okay. I still practice at home when I get the chance and it serves as such a great stress

reliever! It helps ground me and reminds me of why I do what I do. It gives me a moment to myself, to slow down, to move my body, to express my emotions, to feel my emotions, to process, to create! And that keeps me going at my other job. Especially when my other job gets hard, when it hasn't rained for weeks, it's dry as hell, and fires are happening left and right. It helps soothe the fires in my own life. And I feel like that's why creatives create! So you have to make time for it. It's how we self-care.

9. Any tips for beginners wanting to get into fire spinning?

LE: Yes! I would say buy a prop you are interested in and spend a lot of time with it UNLIT. You will most likely have to begin your search for a prop online. Watch a ton of YouTube videos to figure out which props you are interested in (you will probably have to order it online.) And then watch a ton more YouTube videos to learn how to move with the prop. There's a bit of a learning curve, so don't get discouraged! But also, don't be afraid to try another prop. Certain ones might just click for you. There is also a huge fire spinning community in the country, and the world! Connect with them! There are groups on Facebook and Instagram, find local ones, find out where they meet for spin jams, and just show up! You will learn a lot from watching people, and they are also always more than happy to teach.

10. Anything I haven't asked that you want to talk about?

LE: As much as I love my full time job, it does make it very hard for me to spend as

much time practicing and performing as I would like. It's so very hard to find a balance. Part of me thinks that If I could make performing my full time job, I wouldn't work a day in my life. The other

part recognizes the reality of what it would take to do performing full time. Probably gigs every weekend and a lot of scouting for gigs at first. A lot of marketing, maybe getting into teaching fire spinning. Maybe

traveling the country hosting workshops. Probably a lot of time spent content creating, which does sound amazing. But after some time, I know it would become

mundane at time, and become a job like any other job. I like not having to sell my art. Not having to sell my creativity. I wish I could spend more time doing it, and hopefully I will be able to. The ideal



balance is probably different for everybody, and maybe so worth it for other people to put the work in to make it a full-time job. And some would probably rather have a bad day doing what they love, than a good day doing anything

else. But for those like me, with so many different passions and hobbies, I think it's okay to not have to sell your art and to do it purely just for you.



FIRE SPINNING LIGHTNING ROUND

1. Favorite genre of music to perform to?

LE: it really depends on whatever I am in the mood for. Sometimes it's really techy stuff if I want to move fast. Sometimes it's soulful music if I want to move with intensity and passion. Sometimes it's reggae or jam bands if I want to just flow like the wind!

2. What was your favorite costume?

LE: So all of our costumes have to be fire resistant and very unrestrictive, and that can make costume creation a little tough. But putting together a theme specific costume is another aspect I truly enjoy about performing. Halloween events are always fun because you can get really creative. Circus clown costumes are super fitting and usually allow a great deal of movement. But I think my favorite costume so far was this skeleton catsuit with skull face paint. The material was so flexible and comfortable, and painting the skull face was fun!

3. Biggest inspirations in the industry?

LE: My biggest inspirations in the industry were definitely my friends in the

industry that introduced me, the local community I was lucky to have access to, as well as very influential content creators online.

4. Most challenging/uncommon place you've performed?

LE: I've performed in very tight spaces and on very small stages. But the most challenging is when it's hot out, and you're on asphalt, and the sun is cooking you and so are the flames! Just have to remember to hydrate and take breaks.

5. What has been your most memorable or unique performance experience so far?

LE: My most memorable experience performing so far was performing for the first time in front of a very large crowd, probably over 2000 people. I was surprised how much the crowd watching me didn't matter and just melted away into the background. The flames sort of blind you from the crowd and you feel like it's just you and your prop. And every now and then when you nail a tough or visually appealing trick you hear the crowd cheer and clap and whistle.



Hurry, Hurry, Step Right Up
Angie Reiber

I meet you at the ticket booth and you hand me a long strand of tickets. “Do we have enough time?” I ask. Your reply is casual. “We’ve got all the time in the world.” Spun sugar and off-kilter screams hang in the air as we walk shoulder-to-shoulder through the gates.

At the tilt-a-whirl, you turn to me, eyebrows raised in a question, then pull me to the front of the line. I hang on tight as we tilt and whirl, faster and faster, swirling and smashing into each other. I turn to look at you and you’re looking back at me. We both smile. Maybe we will have time.

You stop to show off your strength by swinging a hammer, and I act like I’m not impressed. But as we stroll away down the midway, I try to show you I was. I am.

We buy cotton candy and you end up with a stripe of melted blue crystals across your cheek, like a little kid. I point it out and laugh. You just shrug and push a piece of sticky fluff onto the tip of my nose.

On the bumper cars we trade playful jabs. We knock into each other with delight before teaming up to take down the bully of the bumpway. As we exit our cars, you put your arm around me.

“I think we’re ready for the Ferris wheel,” I say, meeting your eyes. “Are you sure?” you ask. I take your hand, lead you, climb aboard. We begin our ascent, float past the peak, and come

back down. Up again, and circle down. As we rise a third time, the wheel slows at the summit and—just for a moment—we can see all the lights twinkling below us.

Too soon, we drift back toward the ground. You're still smiling, and I try to memorize its curve.

You steer us toward the scrambler, and I get a sinking feeling in my gut. As the arms toss us this way and that, something shifts out of place. The force has thrown us against opposite sides. When we walk away from the ride, you pace ahead of me.

You hesitate in front of the haunted house, so I stride right through the darkened doorway, desperate to prove I'm not afraid. A monster jumps out with a growl and I want to grab you, want you to pull me close, but instead I keep my hands at my sides and let out a scream. Behind me, you laugh. Are you mocking me or covering your own fear? I can't tell.

In the hall of mirrors, I hear you call for me. I reach out to you, but it's only your reflection. I call back to you, but your reply is distant now, and all I see are one hundred different me's.

Outside again I wait for you, willing you to emerge, to take my hand and lead me to the tunnel of love—I think it's just around the corner. But you don't come out. Twice I swear I see you in the crowd, but it isn't really you.

I make my way back to the front gate and hand our unused tickets to a couple in line. "Have fun," I say, not sure if I really mean it. I look back once more, hoping to see you waving me back inside, but deep down I know. That was all the time we had.





Summer Affair

I have to get off
this rollercoaster, or else
I'll be sick like you.

Single Rider

The tunnel of love
feels so empty and lonely
when I ride with you.

Strange Reflections

The funhouse mirror
caught me and my fears growing
as the fog crept in.

Suzy Pasqualetto



Notting Hill

Sonia Burns

Kettled in by crowds, bladders strong and bellies full of Red Stripe.
Vodka jellies for a pound and jerk BBQs on every corner.
Hysteria and lethargy in tandem; this carnival weekend is made for dancing.
East Row our annual meeting point, drawn in by the devastating dub of Aba Shanti-I
a heavy pulse through the decaying grandeur of Notting Hill,
residents gone or holding down a three-day bender –
spilling from flat windows, camped out on rooftops - charging tourists
to use their precious toilets.

What a fitting finale, this season-ender; overblown, dangerous and beautiful.

One last hurrah before the sweeping up, the drawing in...
the change in tone is subtle, but it's there. We know what's coming,
so we put our fingers in our ears, move and shout and pull together

as light declines and morning air grows crisp
and mushrooms push their way up from the earth
and autumn smoke clouds from allotment fires
and swallows gather restlessly on wires.





Don't let them put you in the dark

Scenery

Iza Blanka

I forgive him for the little lies. The little fibs that slip away and the broken promises that go unkept. He always tells the same lies, and sometimes I believe him because the story paints itself like a vivid oil portrait; first, the figures are painted, then the background, then the corners, edges, contours, and finally, it becomes as if it were a real scene on the canvas of life, but only the immensity of human imagination has made believable what could never be real. It tells me what I most desire, so I reach for it with all my heart, stretching out my soul's arms to preserve all its lips say and hold it within me for eternity. I love him with all my heart, but when my reality is keen-eyed, it sometimes smells like the scratch of jagged-edged infidelities in the dawning light or the wistful night. The cold realisation slips into bed beside me or touches me as I walk.

Today we take it into our heads to walk around the riverbank. We get caught in the cool January breeze, and he starts coughing. I take off my thin pink cotton scarf and wrap it around his neck with careful movements. He gives me a weak half-smile and walks on. My chest gets hot, even though my whole body is shivering from the winter's minus temperatures.

Sometimes we stop. We look at the broken-legged seagulls on the slippery waterfront stones, the sloppy sidewalk ahead, and the footprints of giddy pedestrians. He rubs his hand as we spy on one of the old buildings covered in melted snow. His fingertips are almost purple, so I tug off my black fabric gloves and slip them on his frosty palms. He

thanks me quietly. His silent words creep into my consciousness like angelically soft notes, wrapping my trembling body in a gentle embrace.

Barely perceptible, the milky-white sky opens, and it drizzles, but we are unperturbed. We sit on a stinging bench and stare silently at the glistening toes of our wet boots as they tread the snowy ground before us. Somewhere in the distance, expensive hand-painted plates clink, light pages of newspapers crinkle in the city breeze, the iron bells of a dilapidated church jingle, and a delicious golden-skinned duck in a warm oven is being prepared. I feel him move beside me, and I put my head down. He sways back and forth with folded arms while tiny particles of dripping snow fall on his knitted flame-red angora sweater. I slip my thin arms out of my expensive loden-lined coat and place them on his back. He looks me in the eye. My tongue curls and confesses at seeing his delicately delineated perfect face. It humbly confesses the truth it has admitted so many times before and hopes. It hopes that, for once, its love's answer will not be a lie. But once again, he replies, I love you too. I-love-you. He utters this gracious lie delicately. The first syllable is trust, the second is passion, and the third is loyalty. He feels none of these, yet he testifies to them. He savours the shape of the voice. First bitter, then sour, then finally swallowed. After all, it's only one word. But for me, it's so much more: I put myself in his hands.

Maybe that's not how it all happened. I've been sick for a while now; my lungs are weak from the January freeze. Every time I close my eyes, I try to remember our last story. Embellish it, add to it, rearrange it, change it. Maybe one day I'll grind it to perfection, and that word won't ring so false. Or the memory will turn yellow, like old letterhead, and no

longer matter. Or maybe “I love you” will become just another fluffy word to be whispered in the harsh winter, bored, picked up by the wind, carried far away, across the world, to where it means nothing. Far from the eager, greedy arms of my soul.



Flick and Jube

At the Carnival

Simon MacKie



HOW VA FEELIN' HOT! HOT! HOT!
HOW VA FEELIN' HOT! HOT! HOT!

The carnival's got good vibes but one has to get away from the music from time to time. Good thing our pad is nearby



But it's a shame we can't escape from the eternal beat



I'll set up my own sound system and have the alternative music



Now this here's a song I'm gonna play for you by Pete Shelley from 'The Buzzcocks'



It's a personal favourite of mine and I think you're gonna like it too



...and it's called Love me, Love my Dog



Freedom is a dusty road leading to a highway Californian skyways will lead us where we wanna stay...



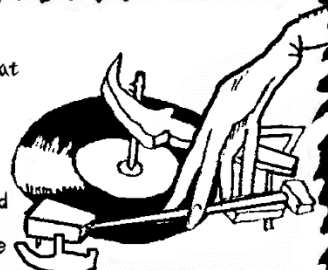
...Love me, Love my dog we've lived the road too long to break up... Love me, Love my dog and travel through this land...



Can you turn that down now? I think we've all had enough of Peter Shelley

I don't think you can ever have enough of Peter Shelley

Flick has turned the music off at Jube's request but has left his microphone switched on which is still transmitting sound through the speakers outside



Care for some weed, Jube?

I thought you were never going to ask!



HOW VA FEELIN' HOT! HOT! HOT!
HOW VA FEELIN' HOT! HOT! HOT!

I HATE FRANKIE T-SHIRTS



AAAAHHH!! The green, green grass of home!!

You know I don't think Pete Shelly was right -Freedom isn't a dusty road heading to a highway.



It can be in your own place... Where you can smoke what you like...

Pop what you like...



Short what you like...



...and nobody knows where you live!

That's what you think m'boy!

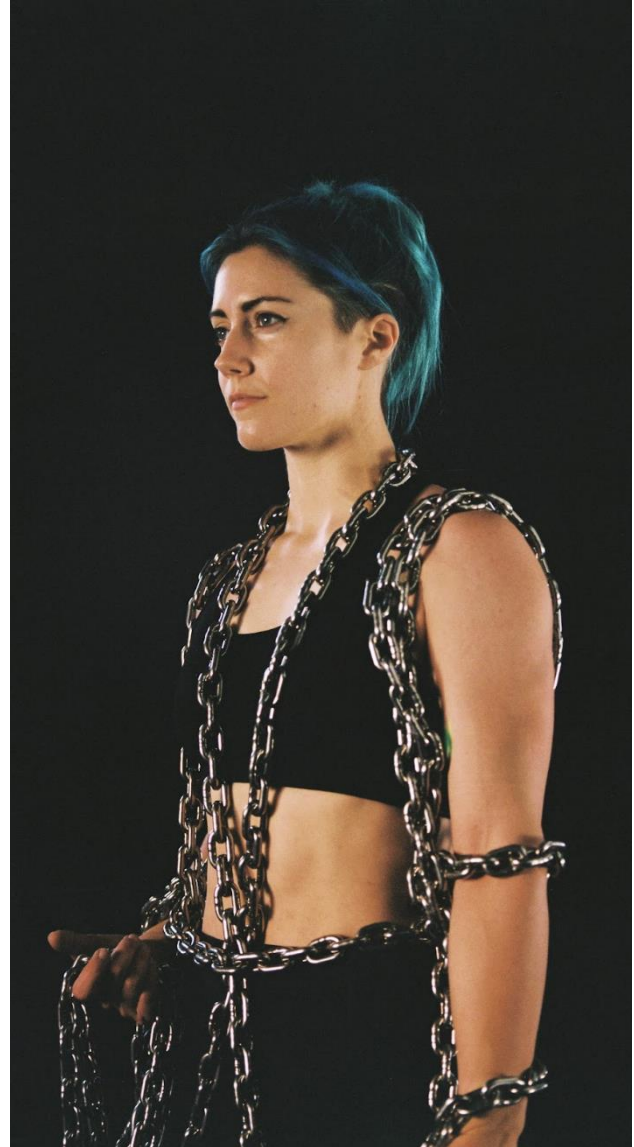


Interview with Jenny Tufts

by Melissa Ashley Hernandez

Deciding that a job in her academic field of study (politics) sounded exceptionally un-fun, Jenny proceeded post-college to live in 7 different countries across three continents taking jobs as an assistant editor, a live-in nanny, an English teacher, a university administrator, and a full-time dog walker. These occupations allowed her time to pursue a patchwork education in circus across various institutions including Circus Warehouse (NYC), Circus Oz (Melbourne), and Centro Acrobatico Fedriani (Madrid), alongside participation in innumerable private lessons, workshops, and festivals.

While she's tried her hand at just about everything, aerial hoop is Jenny's primary discipline followed closely by her invented apparatus 'the infineight,' made in collaboration with metalworker Tim Omspach. She has also performed aerial harness/vertical dance, spanish web, aerial chains, hula hoops, aerial spiral, and worked at great heights on crane gigs with Fidget Feet Aerial Dance Theatre. She might even do verticals if you pay her a lot of money, and she is a born 3-high middle.



Jenny is a US citizen and aspiring permanent resident of Ireland. When not on tour, you can find her snuggling her two giant dogs on the coast of county Sligo. She is proud to also be supported by the Arts Council of Ireland, and her beloved team over on Patreon. You can find her all over the internet under the name @circlecirque.

When we think of circus, we think of the experience of watching performers and acrobats “fly through the air with the greatest of ease.” Whether it be trapeze artists, aerialists, or fire performers, we always find ourselves asking the same question: *how do they do that?*

Well, Jenny Tufts is here to give us some insight on exactly that! She is well-versed in many kinds of aerial performance art and has graciously given us the opportunity to ask her about it. In this interview, Jenny talks about what it’s like to work as a full-time aerialist, her aspirations for her future, and what to do if you want to chase the “*wheeee*” like she does!



Jenny Tufts on Aerial Performance

TMP: We'll start it off with a basic question, what got you into aerial performance? How did your journey start?

JT: I got hooked on aerial arts through the recreational scene in NYC just after graduating college – I was working a bunch of odd jobs (academic administrator, barista, nanny, dog walker...) and trying to decide what to do with my life, since a job in my field of study (politics) turned out to be way less appealing than *The West Wing* made it sound. I've never done intensive gymnastics or dance training, but I've always loved adrenaline and challenging my body, so when I discovered aerial hoop it was love at first sight!

TMP: Is there a type of aerial performance that you like the best? One that you specialize in?

JT: I specialize in spinning bar apparatuses. In contrast to 'floppy apparatuses' (like aerial straps, or verticals like fabric or rope), most steel-based aerial apparatuses no matter what their shape will have similar properties, and once you've mastered one it's fairly simple to translate that knowledge to other landscapes. My foundation in aerial hoop gave me the tools to explore other bar apparatuses, like spiral, with confidence and comfort. And while I wouldn't say I'm stage-ready in many other disciplines, I do train or have trained in dozens of other circus arts. I LOVE being a student and am a huge believer in having

a diverse movement practice, both for practical injury prevention and to inspire new ways of approaching your home discipline!

TMP: What does your training process look like? What does your training look like when you're contracted versus when you're in your off-season?

JT: The unfortunate thing about circus is that, unlike every other professional sport, we don't typically have an off-season. France has a brilliant artist unemployment scheme where performing artists are paid a livable wage during the months they're not working so long as they've clocked enough hours in a performing job, which allows them to appropriately recover from the demands of a long contract, upskill, and/or create their own independent projects! Most artists around the world don't have this luxury. ...Like most freelancers, my calendar is a hectic patchwork of gigs. I prioritize performing, but also teach a few aerial intensives and festivals per year. I'm extremely fortunate to be supported by the Irish Arts Council, and through their grant programs have for the last several years been able to schedule paid time to work on my own creative and technical training, usually with the guidance of outside mentors. I can't overstate how much this has transformed my work, especially coming from the US where circus arts funding not tied to a product is virtually unimaginable.

When I'm on contract, keeping my body healthy is the top priority: time in the

studio is mostly spent conditioning and doing my physio exercises until I'm confident I can handle the show load without risking an overuse injury. When I'm at home and have the luxury of full training days, I'll often go to the notes app on my phone where I write down quick choreo ideas and follow one or two of those rabbit holes for a while. These ideas come to me while watching my own work, watching others, when I'm randomly in the shower, and sometimes even in my dreams! At least half the time I try something and realize my understanding of physics or anatomy was flawed and the idea is impossible – but occasionally it works, and more often it leads to a totally different surprise.

TMP: What are some of the physical and emotional challenges you face while learning new aerial skills? How do you work through or around them?

JT: I went through quite a rough couple of years where I'd feel fear in the face of a new skill, and then get so overwhelmed with anger at myself *for feeling that fear* that I'd give up in shame. I thought all I needed to do was *toughen up, commit, just do it*, all those gym clichés – I thought that my peers who were doing the things that scared me were just braver than me, that my fear was an inherent personality flaw. But I see now that what those peers had wasn't necessarily more bravery, they just had more familiarity with the apparatus. Nothing can substitute for time, and don't discount what a dramatic difference time can make. I like to imagine fear is my little buddy just doing his job,

keeping me alive – he deserves to be listened to, and then we can negotiate whether that particular warning is valid or not.

TMP: What kind of preparation goes into each performance?

JT: All aerialists should have as much rigging knowledge as they can acquire, and check their own rigging before every session. Whether you're in a class or on stage, there are never too many eyes on the equipment and no question is a stupid question (if your rigger makes you feel stupid for asking a question, fire their ass and find someone who actually cares about your safety). I make sure I've run the act in the costume (nothing makes an act sloppy or dangerous like fabric that's slipperier or grippier than you'd anticipated!), that I have my preferred liquid chalk on hand, and that my body is warm and ready. My favorite grounding exercise comes from my mentor Rachel Strickland, who recommends asking yourself: 'Where are my feet?' It gets me right out of my head and into my immediate physical surroundings.

TMP: What is it like being in the air? How does it make you feel?

JT: Once in a workshop the leader asked us each what our core motivation for our work was, and I said, 'I'm just out here chasing the *wheeee!*' And I think that's pretty apt. Nowhere else can I be more present, in a playful conversation between my body and the apparatus. I like these heavy solid steel apparatuses because they feel more like a dance partner than a prop



– sometimes they support you, sometimes they reject you, and when you work as a team with that incredible force of spin it's pure magic. Aerial also gave me my first environment where I felt consistently *powerful*. Raised as a woman, and a chronically shy one at that, it's not a feeling I experienced much prior to entering the aerial world and very much enjoy.

TMP: Chronically shy? That raises more questions! I know you've been doing this for a while, but do you still get performance anxiety? How do you combat that?

JT: Absolutely! I suspect the day I feel zero performance anxiety should be the day I quit, since the butterflies signal to me that I still care deeply about it. Good preparation is key to quieting nerves, but also the acceptance that in live performance, things go wrong all the time. Most of the time the audience doesn't even notice. The more imperfect performances I give, the more I can relax into the knowledge that it's not a big deal and happens to everyone.

TMP: Can you discuss the teamwork aerial performances? How do you work with other performers and technicians to create a smooth experience?

JT: One of the most intimate ways aerial artists (who are majority soloists) work together is through counterweight systems, where one artist lifts another via a pulley system. Getting the timing and height of the lifts perfect can make or break an act, and I love counterweighting

aerialists I know because I can usually predict their needs better than any rigger. My girlfriend Aisling Ní Cheallaigh (also a world-class aerial hoop artist, go follow her!) and I always lift for each other when we can, and I feel much more relaxed knowing that the person on the other end of the rope knows my discipline and body language inside and out.

TMP: Any tips for beginners wanting to get into aerial performance?

JT: Learn broadly – take as many classes in as many disciplines with as many teachers as you can! Not every teacher/studio is the right fit for every student, so shop around until you find a culture that feels like home – and even then, travel to festivals or outside workshops whenever you're able. Also, *go see some circus*. Attend a Fringe festival, see anything that comes to town big or small. As Stephen King says of writing: 'you learn more reading a bad book than a good one,' and in the same vein, I never feel like I've wasted time watching a show.

TMP: Thank you so much for this interview, it's been incredibly fun to hear you talk about your passion so deeply! Is there anything I haven't asked that you would like to mention?

JT: If you'd like more in-depth writings on professional aerial life, exclusive access to full shows/act videos, and first dibs on booking intensives, sign up to my [Patreon](#)! It's a brilliant way for fans of my work to show monthly support, and for me to connect to a more intimate audience than the megaphone of instagram.

I suppose my last tip for anyone wanting to pursue aerial professionally is just this: show up, in person, over time, and be kind. That's it. Call it nepotism, but people really only hire people they know – so get in the room. Show up to festivals, take lessons

from people you admire, ask thoughtful questions on CircusTalk panel zooms... there are endless ways to engage. And know that these interactions will build up over time. People enjoy helping people they like. Good luck!





AERIAL LIGHTNING ROUND



Question: Favorite genre of music to perform to?

JT: I don't really understand genres anymore, but usually something instrumental with a driving beat.

Q: What was your favorite costume?

JT: In Disneyland Paris' Le Roi Lion I got to be a hyena in a full velvet catsuit – I felt like a kid in footie pajamas and it was so cozy!

Q: Biggest inspirations in the industry?

JT: Aisling Ní Cheallaigh, Dreame Frohe, and Jennifer Cohen have always been some of my favorite technicians to watch – Emilia Dawiec is another up-and-coming hoop artist who I really enjoy watching these days. I also get a lot of inspiration from movement artists outside my field, like Yvonne Smink (pole) and Aime Patching (handbalance), and always look to Rachel Strickland for wisdom in all things related to creative life.

Q: Most challenging/uncommon place you've performed?

JT: Probably atop a crane in Gweedore, in the remote northwest of Ireland – the views were SO stunning I kept forgetting to wave at the kids below!

Q: What has been your most memorable or unique performance experience so far?

JT: In 2022 I got to premiere a show I made with my partner Aisling and two of our close friends. It's the closest I've been to having creative control over a full-length piece of work, and while that responsibility was often harrowing, it was also incredibly rewarding! I screwed wheels onto our home couch so we could use it as a set piece, got to see the apparatus I invented make its stage debut under the capable hands of our friend Jen DeBrún, and shared the process with some of my favorite people. I'm looking forward to more of this in the future! (PS: the full show *NASC* is available to watch on my Patreon.)





