



## **Integration of circus arts courses into the Hungarian higher education system**

My name is Kamilla Reidl, Head and Acting Rector of the Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College. I have been working at the College since its foundation and studied at its predecessor institutions myself, so I have decades of experience and insight into the integration of contemporary dance into higher education.

### **Context**

The Budapest Contemporary Dance College was established on 14 June 2004, its founder and rector until 14 June 2023 was Iván Angelus, and also until June 2023 it was funded by the New Performing Arts Foundation. The first courses started in a four-year college structure, with courses in Contemporary Dance Artist, Contemporary Dance Teacher and Contemporary Dance Choreographer. After the transition to the Bologna structure, the courses continued as Dance Artist BA and Dance Teacher MA both with Contemporary Dance specialisation. In response to the changes in the Hungarian educational and cultural policies, the College continued to operate as an international institution from 2014, making its courses available to foreign students.

In our country, Baross Imre Circus School has a long tradition of training circus artists at the institutional level.

The College's traditions, pedagogical methods and experience can help the process of bringing circus arts productions to an artistic level. It is the contemporary dance's fusionistic approach that allows circus arts courses to incorporate the pedagogical methods that make our College outstanding.

There is no doubt that one can think scientifically in the field of dance - the College has already been employing this approach - and now it can help the circus arts world to do so. Our strategic partner, the Capital Circus of Budapest, is already at the forefront of this. Among other things, they have established a library and a circus museum, and conduct research.

### **Transformation process**

In 2019, at the request of the National Centre for Circus Arts, we started to expand the training structure to ensure the long-term stability of the College. As a result of this process, since 1 August 2023 the institution has been operating under the name of Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College, funded by the Circus Arts Higher Education Non-Profit Limited Liability Company.

We went through a process of setting up and establishing courses and their specialisations, which was a bureaucratic process that took years. Of course, this has been backed up by a professional work involving a number of experts and producing a lot of valuable internal material.

In September 2023, the new higher education courses in circus arts were launched: the Circus Artist BA course with a specialisation in equestrian acrobatics and clowning, and the Dance and Rehearsal Coaching BA course with a specialisation in circus dance. In the expanded structure, the different





training areas will be developed in cooperation with each other, sharing pedagogical experience in the fields of contemporary dance and circus arts.

We have also faced many challenges during the accreditation process, and since then we have been going through a complete organisational development process. Our single course profile has grown into a more complex course structure.

### **Presentation of the training structure**

#### *The genres and teachers of the Circus Arts BA degree course*

In addition to the chosen genres, students also study other complementary genres and develop their skills, thus strengthening their main area of expertise. For this purpose, the different courses work closely together. In certain sessions, they participate in a matrix system with the dance artist students.

In September 2023 students could choose between the main disciplines of Equestrian Acrobatics and Clowning. From September 2024, students can also apply for our Aerial Dance and Aerial Acrobatics courses. From 2025, we will be offering individual training courses for all genres.

*-Equestrian Acrobat BA degree course:* The Equestrian Acrobat course aims to develop a way of life that follows the traditions of the circus arts and is based on the highly disciplined, humble, community-based, unconditional devotion to each other and to life, with knowledge and practice of Hungarian equestrian culture at its core. The training is time-consuming, so we encourage the presence of those students who will dedicate the next stage of their lives to living and experiencing this way of life.

*-Clown BA degree course:* During the course there is only one element that everyone is equally obliged to learn: the art of clowning. Although, in principle, a clown does not necessarily have to play music, dance, mime, do acrobatics or juggle, it is part of the tradition of this profession that a clown incorporates other art disciplines into his act. Our college offers a unique opportunity to develop individual skills within the institution. This provides interdisciplinary study opportunities for all our clown, circus arts and dance students wishing to develop skills related to other disciplines. These are available through compulsory and optional classes.

*-Aerial dance & Aerial Acrobatics course :* In addition to practical knowledge a BA degree from our College also develops an artistic analytical mindset. It enables circus artists with a bachelor of arts degree to be able to perform as individual aerial acrobats or as part of a group. They will be able to create a new, independent act but, in addition to the technical skills, they must also be aware of the artistic content and message-carrying potential of the skills acquired.

#### *Dance BA courses*

We train our students in two specialisations in dance





The mission of the BA in Contemporary Dance is to foster the development and artistic growth of young talents who wish to become a performer in the field of contemporary dance. Our aim is for students to acquire up-to-date and diverse knowledge of dance techniques and the essential practice in performing and the process of creation during their three years of college, and to graduate with a BA degree in Dance. The course also aims to provide those interested in becoming a professional dancer with orientation and preparation for the pathway to dance and a BA degree. This will be supported by preparatory programs and workshops for admission and the course itself. We hope that the pedagogical and educational activities of the course and the work of the teachers and former students using the tools of the arts bring core values to the cultural and social spheres of life.

*-Dance & Rehearsal Coaching(theatre dance specialisation):* The three-year, full-time course prepares students primarily for dancing in the circus world. Circus dancers are proficient in a wide range of dance styles, are able to capture and perform the stylistic and performance qualities of each genre, and dance not only on the ground but also in the air. They are also open to experimenting and developing themselves in different circus genres. They are able to contribute creatively to the realisation of the director/choreographer's concept. During the course, students will be mentally and practically prepared to conduct rehearsals, to coordinate the work of all participants in a rehearsal process. They will follow and convey an appropriate professional communication and behaviour. They will also learn the skills of self-marketing and communication with colleagues and the media which are necessary for a successful career. In addition to developing their dancing qualities, students will acquire the basics of aerial acrobatics, thus gaining a new profession that will give them a much better chance of entering the international cultural arena. They will also have the opportunity to see the work of the Dance Ensemble of the Capital Circus of Budapest and even follow the preparation process of one of their performances.

### *Teacher Training Courses*

Currently, our teacher training program is taking place in the field of dance. In the academic year 2024, we will start our Circus Arts Teacher MA course, headed by Péter Fekete.

Head of Teacher Training Department and Head of Dance Teacher MA course is Iván Angelus, Ph.D. The two-year teacher training course prepares students for pedagogical work in contemporary dance and other movement-based arts. The main areas of training are:

- Teaching integrated experiential dance practice and theory
- Teaching creativity development
- Teaching the development of social skills

The two-year course is designed for those who, with a background and routine in the performing arts, are willing to undertake 100% intensive individual and group work in order to find their own pedagogical path.

### **Academic progression support**





Our College has a high number of foreign students, with applicants coming from all over the world, from Mexico to Finland and China. Our common language of instruction is English.

All our students have a mentor to support them in their studies and to reduce drop-outs. We are developing our Teacher Support System based on the mentoring of our students, helping to maintain the mental health of our colleagues and supporting their continuous pedagogical and professional development.

The heads of year hold weekly meetings to discuss problems and tasks to be solved.

An academic year at the College consists of 5 periods with school breaks in between. We adapt our assessment system to these periods. At the beginning of each period, students submit a work plan and a plan for their creative work, and at the end of the period they write a summary of their progress. Each teacher sends a written evaluation to the student, and the mentor also helps with the summary of what to focus on for the next period.

The whole system of assessment of the student's performance and progress throughout the studies, as well as its individual elements, is designed solely to support the student. Therefore, the systems of assessment, feedback and support, orientation and assistance are intertwined. Such assessment is based on the use of personal, verbal communication and textual, graphic, photographic and video documents generated during the operation of the Mentoring System.

Our mentoring system: the role of the school is to provide the framework and background for this connection: the successful presence of the student - teacher - mentor triangle: it lists those who can be invited to do this, usually from among the school's former students and former or current teachers and staff. In some cases more experienced current students from senior years may also be asked to mentor. The mentor will provide support, encouragement based on their own personal experience and knowledge of the school's approach and help identify difficulties and find solutions. The mentor does not replace the teacher, does not solve the problems for the student, but "only" catalyses and helps the student's progress.

The mentor usually assists the student throughout the entire period of study. If necessary, the student, the mentor or the school will take the initiative to change the mentor or choose a new one. The mentor is usually a volunteer and provides unpaid support for the pedagogical and artistic work. In exceptional cases, the College may reimburse the mentor.

### **Our additional programs**

Our activities are not limited to training our students. We offer educational activities for teachers and those interested in our courses through a range of other events. We offer a full academic year of preparatory courses for students in our "LEAP" program and we also visit vocational training institutions. We run an online mentoring program for rural and international students and organize open days to give them a personal insight into our work. Our 30-hour accredited Circus Pedagogy course is aimed at teachers in public education.

### **Future plans**

While respecting tradition, we want to move forward and progress in an innovative way.





*In the field of infrastructure:* completing the construction of our own campus.

*In the field of education:* launching new courses, raising the profile of the supporting professions: training circus directors, technicians and theoreticians, and supporting scientific work.

*In the field of finance:* our scholarship system is exceptional, helping to pay the high tuition fees. We would expand our circle of patrons. At present, the support of the Soroptimist Foundation and the Capital Circus of Budapest is outstanding, but private individuals also contribute to support students' tuition fees.

*In the field of integration,* one of our priorities continues to be attracting foreign students. Seeking opportunities for cooperation with other universities and professional training centres.

