

UNDERBELLY'S
CIRCUS
HUB
THE MEADOWS

2015 EVENT REPORT



Photo credit: Tim Edgeler for Digital Triangle

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Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Introduction

Circus Hub was a venue created by Underbelly at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe 2015. Located on the Meadows, it presented a programme of contemporary circus in two temporary circus venues, as a “festival within a festival” at the Fringe.

It ran from 7-29 August 2015 with 13 contrasting pieces of contemporary circus, alongside a series of family circus workshops and an engagement programme for young people from Edinburgh.

This was a first for Edinburgh: one site providing the largest and most technically ambitious programme of circus that the Fringe has ever seen.



Photo credit: Fraser Cameron

Why Circus Hub?

As respected producers of contemporary circus year round, Underbelly are responding to the growing audience for this artform within the UK and at the Edinburgh festivals.

Underbelly also understand the technical and financial challenges that face producers and performers of contemporary circus and bringing such shows to the Edinburgh Fringe.

In creating Circus Hub, Underbelly wanted to establish a venue to respond to the growing audience and to answer these challenges facing contemporary circus: providing the technical facilities and personnel that contemporary circus requires and a financial arrangement different from the usual Fringe model.

Given the particular requirements of contemporary circus, Underbelly's idea was to create a thriving focus for the genre: a Hub. A Hub where we could deliver on the requirements for producers and artists, where creativity could flourish and into which audiences could immerse themselves and explore the multiplicity of what contemporary circus offers.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

The Programme

The inaugural Circus Hub programme illustrated the depth and diversity of contemporary circus. It tangibly demonstrated to audiences the different approaches of various cultures and countries to contemporary circus.

The programme included work made in seven different countries, with performers from ten different countries (the UK, Canada, Australia, France, Belgium, Italy, Czech Republic, Palestine, Germany and the USA), totalling over 100 different performers and supporting show crew.

In delivering this programme we engaged with key programming partners including UK based circus charity Crying Out Loud, international physical theatre promoters Aurora Nova, the French Institute, the National Centre For Circus Arts and Scotland's Full Circle and Impact Arts.

The programme included three world premieres, two European premieres, three UK premieres, and four Edinburgh Fringe premieres.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

The Programme, contd.

The shows in the 2015 programme were:

Barely Methodical Troupe: *Bromance* (UK)

Circa: *Close Up* (Australia)

Cirk La Putyka: *Dolls* (Czech Republic)

Cirque Alfonse: *Barbu* (Canada)

Cirque Le Roux: *The Elephant In The Room* (France)

Los Muchachos: *La Meute/The Wolfpack* (France)

Lost In Translation Circus: *The Hogwallops* (Italy/Australia/UK)

Ockham's Razor: *Arc and Every Action* (UK)

Palestinian Circus: *B-Orders* (Palestine)

Piff *The Magic Dragon* (UK)

T1J: *Les Inouis* (Belgium)

Trash Test Dummies (Australia)

Underbelly, Strut & Fret and Southbank Centre: *LIMBO* (UK/Australia)

A copy of the brochure with full details of the programme is included as an appendix to this document.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Audience Figures

Circus Hub created a democratic and accessible platform for audiences to enjoy contemporary circus, and in response to this audiences bought 47,832 tickets for the 13 shows that played at the venue.

Arts Industry & Future Touring

Over 200 tickets were issued to Fringe-accredited arts-industry professionals to see Circus Hub shows.

Following their appearances in the 2015 programme and as a result of being seen at Circus Hub by arts-industry professionals, at the time of writing this report, Circus Hub shows have been booked for a combined total of 176 weeks of touring in 14 different countries with numerous other offers in the pipeline.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Awards and Press Response

Circus Hub enjoyed an unprecedented response from the press at the festival, in Scottish and UK press and internationally, across print, broadcast and digital.

An appendix of press cuttings is included with this report.

Three Circus Hub productions were nominated in the best Circus category at the Total Theatre Awards – the major award for Circus at the Festival: *La Meute*, *Elephant In the Room* and *B-Orders*. This represented half of the overall nominations in the category.

B-Orders went on to win the award (shared with with *Smoke and Mirrors* at Assembly Festival).



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Social Media Response

Circus Hub enjoyed high levels of engagement on social media. Some examples of comments were:

Susanna McLean @Susanna_McLean Aug 29: Loving the Underbelly's Circus Hub at the Meadows! Such a cool venue.

Robust Robot @sevenhelz Aug 11: Now at the underbelly circus hub for FOUR SHOWS IN A ROW. It looks like a pretty sweet set-up @edfringe #edfringe

Richard Delaney @RichardDDelaney Aug 29: I bloody love @followthecow's Circus Hub!

Mel Jingle @mellywho Aug 24: I went to see Limbo at the Circus Hub, on the Meadows. I left in complete awe and needing to go for a walk to compute. @FollowTheCow



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Operational Overview

The Circus Hub was situated on the Meadows between Boy's Brigade Walk and Middle Meadow Walk.

The programme ran from 11.25am to 12 midnight daily from 7-29 August 2015 (shorter than the rest of the Festival Fringe which ran from 5-31 August).

The programme was presented in two Freedom temporary structures with respective capacities of 750 and 250. The tents were named after the renowned Great Lafayette, one of the most famous circus and music hall entertainers of the early 20th century, and his dog Beauty, both of whom died in Edinburgh in 1911.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Installation Period and Environmental Impact

Underbelly's original tender for Circus Hub was for a **29 day period** from 4 August to 1 September 2015 (comprising a three day installation period, a 23 day operational period, and a three day de-installation period). The 23 days operational period is in line with CEC's Parks Manifesto.

Following on from the tender, it became apparent that the installation period was too short to install and accommodate – both logistically and safely - the technical facilities required by the the shows and the venues themselves.

As a result, Underbelly requested a four day extension to the installation period, starting on 31 July, **extending the overall period to 33 days**. Underbelly paid an additional fee for these extra days. The de-installation period was completed by 1 September 2015, with some items of plant being collected on 2 September 2015.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Installation Period and Environmental Impact, contd.

During the installation period and during the erection of the Lafayette dome tent on 3 August, the tent cover was caught by a gust of wind, causing damage to the cover and requiring the tent to be completely de-constructed and the cover repaired before the tent could be re-built. This caused a significant delay to the opening of the Lafayette and shows did not open in the tent until 10 August.

Reinstatement

The grass at the site was re-instated by CEC staff following Underbelly's period of use and as part of the process and to reduce the damage to the grass, the area was sprayed with a retardant called primo maxx growth regulator. Anecdotal evidence was that the grass in the area was reinstated no later than in previous years.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Neighbourhood Engagement

Underbelly engaged with residential neighbours in the following ways:

- We briefed the South and Central Neighbourhood Partnership in June 2015.
- We wrote in July to all residential neighbours in the EH3 9, EH8 9, and EH9 1 postcode areas, giving details of the event and the programme and providing an email address and telephone number to report any issues or concerns to.
- We offered half-price tickets to residential neighbours in the EH3 9, EH8 9, and EH9 1 postcode areas.
- We provided a session at Circus Hub during the middle of the operational period for Ward Councillors and residential neighbours to give feedback at.

Neighbourhood Response

- One email from residents was received early in the operational period of Circus Hub, complaining about sound levels. The sound levels were adjusted and no further or other complaints or issues were received either by telephone or email from this resident or others.
- 370 tickets were sold under the half price offer to residents from the EH3 9, EH8 9, and EH9 1 postcode areas.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Neighbourhood Survey

Underbelly conducted a survey of residents and their attitudes to the new Circus Hub site. The residents were from the EH3 9, EH8 9 and EH9 1 postcode areas. 36 responses were received.

A summary of the responses from residents is as follows (and overleaf):

“On a scale of 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) how satisfied were you with the shows that you saw?”

94.12% of respondents replied with a score in the top two responses, 4/5 or 5/5.
70.59% answering in the top score.

“How well organized did you think Circus Hub was on a scale of 1 (not well) to 5 (very well)?”

90.91% of respondents answered either 4/5 or 5/5.
100% of responses in the top three categories.

“Do you think Circus Hub on the Meadows was worse or better as an experience than the previous Fringe tenant?”

67.65% answered either “better” or “much better”
0% answered “worse or much worse”
With the remainder answering “the same” or “no opinion”.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Neighbourhood Survey, contd.

A summary of the responses from residents continues:

“Did you think that the impact of Circus Hub on the Meadows was worse or better than the previous Fringe tenant?”

43.33% answered “better” or “much better”

0% answered “worse or much worse”

With 56.67% answering “the same” or “no opinion”.

“Would you like to see Circus Hub return to the Meadows in 2016?”

81.25 answered “yes”

0% answered “no”

With 18.75% answering “no opinion”



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Neighbourhood Survey, contd.

Further feedback from residents included:

“Noise travels easily but it ends early enough for it not to be a bother”

“First impressions all positive, hope it returns next year”

“Seemed to be built and removed very efficiently”

“Less noise, no one actually living in caravans, less bad behaviour and litter late into the night and also less noise heard inside our home which was a massive bonus as far as we are concerned”

“Very professionally run, much less rowdy than previous events and less litter”

“Great atmosphere and great location for the circus events”

“Excellent entertainment for the whole family”

“The bar should have been open to all, not just those with tickets used mostly by staff and performers and many bar staff unoccupied.”

“Great, positive, fun addition to the meadows in the fringe”



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Community Engagement

Underbelly believes passionately in breaking down the barriers between young people and the arts, and Circus Hub provided an opportunity for Underbelly to engage with young people from the local Edinburgh community in two key programmes.

(1) Work Placement Scheme

Working with local Edinburgh charity, Impact Arts, Underbelly designed a week-long programme for 16 young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Edinburgh to engage in work placements at Circus Hub, including in stage management, technical, box office, front of house, PR and marketing. The goals were to introduce young people to possible careers that they might otherwise have found difficult to access, and to encourage the benefits of full-time education and training and seeking qualifications. The project was paid for by Underbelly.

As Sarah Wallace, Opportunities Co ordinator, from Impact Arts said “For the young people who undertook a placement with Underbelly this year over the Fringe Festival was invaluable work experience in the Creative Arts which otherwise they would not have been able to access. The placement gave them wide and varied experience in what it would be like to work in various sectors from front of house, sound and lighting etc. For many of our young people this cemented their ambition to work in the creative arts in the future.”



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Community Engagement, contd.

Underbelly believes passionately in breaking down the barriers between young people and the arts, and Circus Hub provided a great opportunity for Underbelly to engage with young people from the local Edinburgh community in two key programmes.

(2) Circus Workshops

We worked with Edinburgh Circus training centre Full Circle to engage young people directly in contemporary circus arts, through a series of workshops.

The programme of workshops were aimed to give the local Edinburgh audience – and particularly young families - the chance to try out a range of different circus arts including acrobatics, hula hoop, juggling and aerial skills such as trapeze. Full Circle delivered the workshops and the cost was met by Underbelly, supplemented by a small ticket price from participants.

Feedback from Full Circle: *“We had a good run with happy families and happy workshop leaders... We would be very interested in being part of the Underbelly programme next year.”*



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson

Summary

Underbelly answered a clarion call from audiences and contemporary circus companies from around the world for a Circus Hub at the Edinburgh Festivals, and created a democratically accessible site and programme, which audiences responded to in their tens of thousands in the first year.

For our contemporary circus companies, Circus Hub provided the best technical set up for the artform at the Edinburgh festivals; and the press coverage, the awards and the amount of future touring and other work that the companies have received is a testament to the success that they enjoyed at Circus Hub.

Underbelly directly engaged with the neighbourhood and community in Edinburgh: both with local residents to communicate with them directly about Circus Hub and to minimise any negative impact or disturbance from Circus Hub; and with the wider Edinburgh community with the work placement scheme and the family circus workshops.

The response from press, social media and from residential neighbours to Circus Hub has been resoundingly positive and we believe that we have created an exciting and valuable new addition to the Edinburgh Fringe that with continued support from stakeholders, we can develop and grow for the benefit of Edinburgh and its festivals.



Photo credit: Sarah Hickson