

Thomas Vaccaro

Artistic Director – Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts [PACA]

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PROFILE

Thomas Vaccaro is the founder and Artistic Director for the non-profit Organization, The Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts. Matriculated from the National Circus School of Montreal, Thomas is trained to coach 17 different circus disciplines to all age groups in a recreational, advanced, social, or production setting. His primary loves when it comes to circus are Cyr Wheel, Aerial Acrobatics, and the study/practice of movement in general. Since 2014 Thomas is the Artist in Residence of Market Hall Performing Arts Centre in Downtown Peterborough, and has used his residency to produce and direct original full length circus arts productions, host social programming for marginalized members of the community, and proudly coach many students. He is an avid believer that circus is an accessible art to all peoples, and takes joy from helping others find their flow within themselves. His recent work reflects on themes of family, having performed alongside his scientist husband with no circus background in 2019 for Ontario's Contemporary Circus Arts Festival, and with his adopted son Ethan in the Apple TV Documentary [Circus Boy](#). Since the pandemic, he has shifted focus to using his skills and knowledge as a Circus Arts Curator to bring visions of marginalized artists to life; particularly those living with physical disability or neuro-divergence.

Artistic Director: Projects Launched & Spearheaded

- Mentorship Programs: One-on-one high impact programming where a circus artist works with a marginalized member of the community to achieve their artistic goals.
- Social Programming: Partnerships with community organizations that take groups into a space to work on circus arts and develop resilience, confidence, and social skills.
- Archival Documentation: The practice of report/video documenting various projects to make available to an accessible archive of patrons and staff alike.
- Professional Development: Making funds available to staff on an annual basis to cover costs related to further their training.

CIRCUS COACH & TEACHER: Current & Past Curricula

- As of August 2023, is formally overseeing the launch of Ontario's very first accredited Circus High School program with The Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts, which will give grade 9 students an Integrated Arts Credit. At current, the only two institutions to offer this in Canada are based out of Quebec (The National Circus School of Montreal, and The Quebec City Circus School respectively.)
- Recreationally coaches Cyr Wheel on Mondays at Market Hall at 5pm, and Advanced Circus Production at 6:30pm on the same day. At current, the only permanent Cyr Wheel coach or class offered in Ontario.
- Coaches Social Circus, a free program in partnership with Peterborough Youth Services for Youth-at-risk on Tuesday's at The Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts, and youth circus for 9-12 year-olds
- Completed 6-year mentorship to 18-year-old Ethan Hinshelwood in 2022. Duo performances to-date include a fire and aerial showcase for Peterborough AIDS Resource Network Camp Fyrefly, A Fire/Aerial/Cyr Wheel act for Market Hall Performing Arts Centre's 20th Anniversary, an Acrobatic/Rope/Cyr Wheel Duo for Public Energy's Emergency #22 entitled [Parallels](#), and in 2022 a public performance in the city square with the duo made up as statues called "Statuesque." Ethan and Thomas were the subject of a documentary now on Apple TV entitled [Circus Boy](#); since its release Ethan has been accepted to The Quebec City Circus School as a prep student specializing in Cyr Wheel.
- Coached a group of youth in 2018 that went on a performing tour of the local area. Money collected from the shows went entirely to the college education of the participating youth.
- Lead Director for Creativity Circus Camp for youth ages 9-14 in Market Hall Performing Arts Centre since 2015. Students present an End-of-Week Showcase for their families and have made circus adaptations of classic movies.

- Circus Arts Consultant to Lakefield College School in their for their production *Chicago* in 2019 and *The Greatest Showman in 2018*.

CIRCUS ARTS CURATOR—

Circus Dreamland, 2021

- A year long Academic program put together by Thomas in cooperation with Public Health where Circus Curriculum was adapted into a movie production and Market Hall was adapted into an ever changing movie set where students worked to keep their circus skills in shape as they animated the scenes.

Happy Hall-o-Ween, 2021

- A 60k Concept to Creation project modifying the historic downtown Market Hall to the vision of an artist living with aspergers. Tours of the building and 35 minutes stage show were done 3 times a night.

Stressed Out, 2021

- A Report on Circus Arts and its usefulness for recovering mental health when executed with video journaling and video projection. Conducted with funding from the city of Peterborough, and world champion Cyr Wheeler Justin Dale.

Venus, 2021

- A video project shot with public health cooperation during the pandemic involving the youth of Peterborough Youth Services, PACA's Social Circus Program, and a student of our mentorship program. Involved the construction of a set that students were able to keep socially distanced but interact with.

I Follow Rivers, 2022

- A Waterfall set constructed in a circus scene-scape where students were able to showcase their skills onto video overlapping and working with one another.

Lab De Cirque, 2022

- A year long Academic program put together by Tohu, The National Circus School, Femmes Du Feu with funding by The Canada Council for the Arts. The program was designed to provide insights, thoughts, trainings, and exposures to modern circus artists to introduce methods of presentation, becoming sensitive to cultural issues, and ways of conducting workshops and putting their works into writing.

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR –

Paris in Ashes, 2012

- A 10 minute fire dance piece telling the story of a widowed soldier's wife in world war 2, whom as the city of Paris burns down around her, finds the soul of her husband in a living statue. Makeup provided by Facesby2, Dance Choreography by DeeJay Dassylva, Fire Dance Choreography by Victoria Wood. Performed as Part of Public Energy's Emergency #20 Alley Waltz.

Circus Dreamland, 2014-2015, 2021

- Thomas Directed and starred in this original dream-themed surreal production as part of his graduation requirement from The National Circus School of Montreal, earning the highest grade in his graduating class. featuring Hoop Dance by Tegan Moss and Tessa Nasca, Breakdance by Conrad Jane, Fire and Puppets by Victoria Wood, Aerial Choreography by Opal Elchuk, Special guest performer Mark Segal on Aerial Rope, With Patricia Thorne on Lighting design, Stage Management, AND acting as a lead role. The story follows Jack thru his dreams as he goes through an existential dream crisis of identity, with phenomenal projection by Lester Alfonso. The show sold out in its debut performance at Market Hall Performing Arts Centre. The show was later in 2021 adapted as a movie for Thomas' students to recreate, in collaboration with Public Health.

Circus Stellar, 2015-2016

- The space-themed sophomore production of the Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts, again directed by Thomas. Featured artists from recreational classes in their performing debut, as well as youth from social circus programs. Patricia Thorne, Lester Alfonso, again return with lighting and stage management, and the show also featured champion BattleRobot Designer, Jason Ribeiro, forging the remote-controlled lead starring role, The Sovereign Vagabond, as it journeys through space. Special guest headliner from the The National Circus School & Cirque Du Soleil, Justin Dale on Cyr Wheel made the finale of this show truly memorable.

Circus Fusion, 2016

- Directed by Thomas, A week in Market Hall that featured workshops in collaboration with other local community groups and organizations, with the goal of combining circus into other mediums. Groups included The Peterborough Poetry Collective, The Kawartha Artists Gallery Studio, The New Canadians Centre, and had special guest circus instructors provide lessons to the public. The week culminated in a showcase of performances for the public in Market Hall Performing Arts Centre.

Fanciful Fables and Tall Tales; A Series of Silly Circus Stories, 2017

- Co-directed with Opal Elchuk. A fairy-tale themed production, featuring a diverse age range of local performers, including the debut performances of 6 year-old Constance Thorne on Aerial Silk, 13 year-old Ethan Hinshelwood on Cyr Wheel, and recreational aerial students Lucy Lavoie, Abigail Stanton, Abby Vasey, & Lexi Mills. Adult students from recreational classes under Thomas' tutelage were able to choreograph their own routines for the very first time with minimal input.

Circus Idol, 2018

- Organized, Directed, and Produced by Thomas. Seven Youth aged 11-14 in a showcase of their first solo circus routines before a panel of judges in Market Hall Performing Arts Centre who gave public and private critiques of their performance. Students were prepared as though they were creating routines for the National Circus School of Montreal, and as such, workshop days were arranged with local special effects makeup designers Facesby2, as well as stage lighting workshops with Patricia Thorne in Market Hall Performing Arts Centre. Disciplines performed were Lyra, Aerial Silk, Cyr Wheel, Fire, and Acting. Winner was Riddick MacHart with his acting piece "Make 'em Laugh" from Singing in the Rain.

Circus Screamland, 2019

- Co-directed with Opal Elchuk, featured the youth and adult student bodies from The Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts in an original story of a girl who wanders into a haunted house. Incorporated Scripts and Acting in a PACA production for the first time written by Thomas, an original aerial puppet designed by Thomas, and the first ever incorporation of fire and cyr wheel together in a fire ballet.

Competitive –

Maitres Du Feu in Montréal: Placed 9th out of 45 National Fire Dance Performers, 2013

Public Performance (Non-Director)

Public Energy:

- Fire Dancer, Broken Down Circus, Emergency #19; 2011
- Aerial Acrobat, Creatures of Flight, Erring on the Mount, 2013
- Model and Bubble Dancer, Wearable Art Fashion Show, 2015
- Fire Creature, Elements, 2017-2018
- Aerial Rope & Cyr Wheel, Parallels, Emergency #22, 2018, 2020 Remount
- Fire & Trapeze, Beautiful Tango, Aer Time, 2017
- Fire & Laughing, Aerial Canoe, 2019
- Statue/Fire/Cyr Wheel, Alive Circus, 2021
- Aerialist and Performer, Erring at King George, No Elevator to Success, 2022

EXAMPLES OF CONTRACTED PERFORMANCE – (Contracted thru The PyroFlys, Uncommon Entertainment, or The Peterborough Academy of Circus Arts)

- Aerial Performance, Justin Bieber, 2016
- Featured Fire Performer, Front Gate of Canada's Wonderland, 2015-2016
- Stunt Performer, Universal Studios of Orlando Florida, 2013
- Fire Performance, Royal Botanical Gardens, 2014
- Fire Performance, Rogers Cup by National Bank, 2015
- Cyr Wheel, Big TO Circus, 2018
- Pyrotterra Glow, Microsoft Presents Gwen Stefani, 2017
- Aerial Acrobatics, Taste of Downtown/Peterborough Pulse, 2016-2018
- Cyr Wheel, Hula Hoop, Aerial Acrobatics, Rustic Mama's, Huntsville, 2021

GRANTS & AWARDS

- Concept to Creation, Canada Council for the Arts, \$60,000
- Ontario Trillium Foundation, Resilient Communities Fund, \$46,020.
- Arts Education Projects, \$10,325, \$8,900, \$11,000 and \$13,500 for Social Programming; Ontario Arts Council
- City of Peterborough Community Project and Investment Grants, total sum \$74,600.
- Peterborough Economic Development, \$5,000, Business Grant for the PyroFlys, 2015
- Theatre Trent - \$1550 from 2015-2016 for Circus Dreamland and Circus Stellar.
- "Where's Our Lunch?" People's choice Award, Runner up, November 7th, 2016
- Appreciation Award, Peterborough Multisport Club 2016-2017
- "House of the Year," Canada's Wonderland, Front Gate 2016