



The Cirk: a thrilling tale of passion, innovation, and artistry in  
South Africa



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The Cirk, founded by Orlando Vargas in 2018, is an entertainment and performance company in South Africa that specializes in thrilling audiences with a blend of aerial and ground acts, all meticulously choreographed to create enchanting shows. Currently, they have found a new home at Cresta Shopping Centre.

To support their productions efficiently, Gearhouse Splitbeam Pty. Ltd. provides a long-term rental service. This includes a core system consisting of Philips Vari-lite VLX wash lights, Philips Vari-lite VL2500 fixtures and Longman Phoenix Bars, which are permanently installed in the venue. Additionally, Gearhouse Splitbeam supplies extra fixtures as needed for each production, allowing for seamless transitions between shows and reducing turnaround times. This setup ensures that The Cirk consistently delivers outstanding performances to its audiences at Cresta Shopping Centre. Joshua Cutts of Visual Frontier has been the lighting designer for The Cirk's *Urban Circus*, *Castaways*, *Once Upon a Time* and their recent productions, *La Bella* and *Worlds Away*.



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The tale of The Cirk transcends mere entertainment; it's a narrative of unbridled passion. Hailing from Chile, Orlando Vargas' journey is nothing short of extraordinary. With four-year professional training at Circo del Mundo in Chile, he honed his skills in aerial work, basic acrobatics, and Chinese pole. Not content with just performing, he also undertook roles as an artist and rigger.





His quest for artistic expression took him across the globe until 2006 when he first moved to Cape Town, before settling down in Johannesburg. In this vibrant city, his dance company not only crafts and stages performances in their own venue but has been seen on stages spanning from the prestigious National Arts Festival in Grahamstown to corporate events like their recent performance at the RMB Starlight Classics in Johannesburg. Artistry and imagination aside, Orlando's artistic odyssey embodies boundless dedication and a relentless pursuit of excellence and getting things right.



"Above all else, I'm passionate about the arts," Orlando Vargas describes. "The field of cirque arts is unique because it blends creative expression with extreme technical precision. There is very little room for error as we push the boundaries of what dancers and athletes can do, and this kind of risk makes the end result very rewarding. There's always room to create something new that will leave a lasting impression on our audience, and there's a lot of freedom and inspiration to be found in the fact that the process of creating art can never actually be over. I love that my team and I share this passion for the performing arts, and I feel very privileged to be in a position where we can share it with a wider audience. It's also very important to me that I can facilitate a space of learning, skill exchange, and professional development. Giving artists a platform to grow and learn from each other is especially meaningful to me because I wouldn't have made it this far if I hadn't been afforded this same opportunity in my youth."



Comments Alistair Kilbee, Managing Director at Gearhouse Splitbeam, “I have a lot of respect for Orlando, I think he and I have a similar work ethic – although his energy is boundless – and I admire his enthusiasm and perseverance. Anyone who speaks to him can see how passionate he is, even during the tough Covid-19 times, Orlando never stopped working hard for the future of The Cirk. While theatres were closed, The Cirk continued to try and perform for 50 or 100 people depending on the restrictions. Splitbeam were doing anything we could to keep theatre alive and The Cirk was a great place of hope during this time.”

Lighting Designer, Joshua Cutts, also holds a special affection for Orlando and his team at The Cirk, appreciating the distinct void this artistry fills in the market. “It has been my pleasure to light all The Cirk shows,” said Joshua. “My main thought to lighting their productions is creating a simple and colourful design that can enhance the shape and form of the art. I like highlighting each space whether it’s ground or air to allow the audience to feel the texture of the piece from a visual point of view.” Joshua mainly uses a grandMA2 console, however at the National Arts Festival held in Grahamstown earlier this year, he used a grandMA3 to light their production titled Castaways.



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“The Cirk is a unique concept in South Africa, it is not only a place where young people can learn the art of acrobatics safely, but Orlando has created a platform for these talented individuals to present their passion to an audience,” Alistair Kilbee adds. “I love seeing people engaged in growing the entertainment industry, that’s why we always do our best to support the arts by offering professional equipment at reasonable prices.”



Orlando says the importance of the technical team he works with cannot be understated. “Each member of the team plays an integral role in bringing our artistic vision to life,” he comments. “Without the dedicated riggers, sound crew, and lighting specialists, none of what we do at The

Cirk would be possible. The individuals I work with on a daily basis put their hearts and souls into every job and I'm beyond grateful for their commitment to excellence. Without their specialised knowledge – and willingness to sometimes work through the night – all of this would still just be a dream."



What are the future plans for The Cirk? Orlando says it's difficult to pinpoint just one particular goal. "Short term, we want to continue putting on our in-house productions and performing at corporate events, so that we can introduce our unique art form to as many South Africans as possible," he says. "Being successful in this way also means we can continue to provide local artists with work and make a meaningful contribution to the country's performing arts industry. On a larger scale, our dream is for The Cirk to become a household name that everyone has heard of, hosting internationally renowned artists and performing across the continent. The more we can expand, the wider reach we can have on our community, our industry, and our country. It seems crazy to contemplate the possibility of one day being the largest cirque entertainment company in Africa, but not too long ago, just being where we are now was a pipe dream. At the end of the day, we want to provide passionate and hard-working people with opportunities to hone and display their craft and inspire folks on the other side of the stage."



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Aerial and cirque arts aren't as widespread as other forms of entertainment, especially not in South Africa and Orlando and his team are filling a gap in the South African market by offering shows and corporate performances. "The goal in this respect is to keep growing and establishing ourselves as the best of the best in this field so that we can support the industry while (hopefully!) igniting a fire in the people we perform for," he ends.