

színház-
tudományi
szemle⁴⁸

theater
science
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01/02 2025

Cirkusz, oktatás, örökség

ECA nemzetközi tudományos konferencia

A 15. Budapest Nemzetközi Cirkuszfesztivál programja

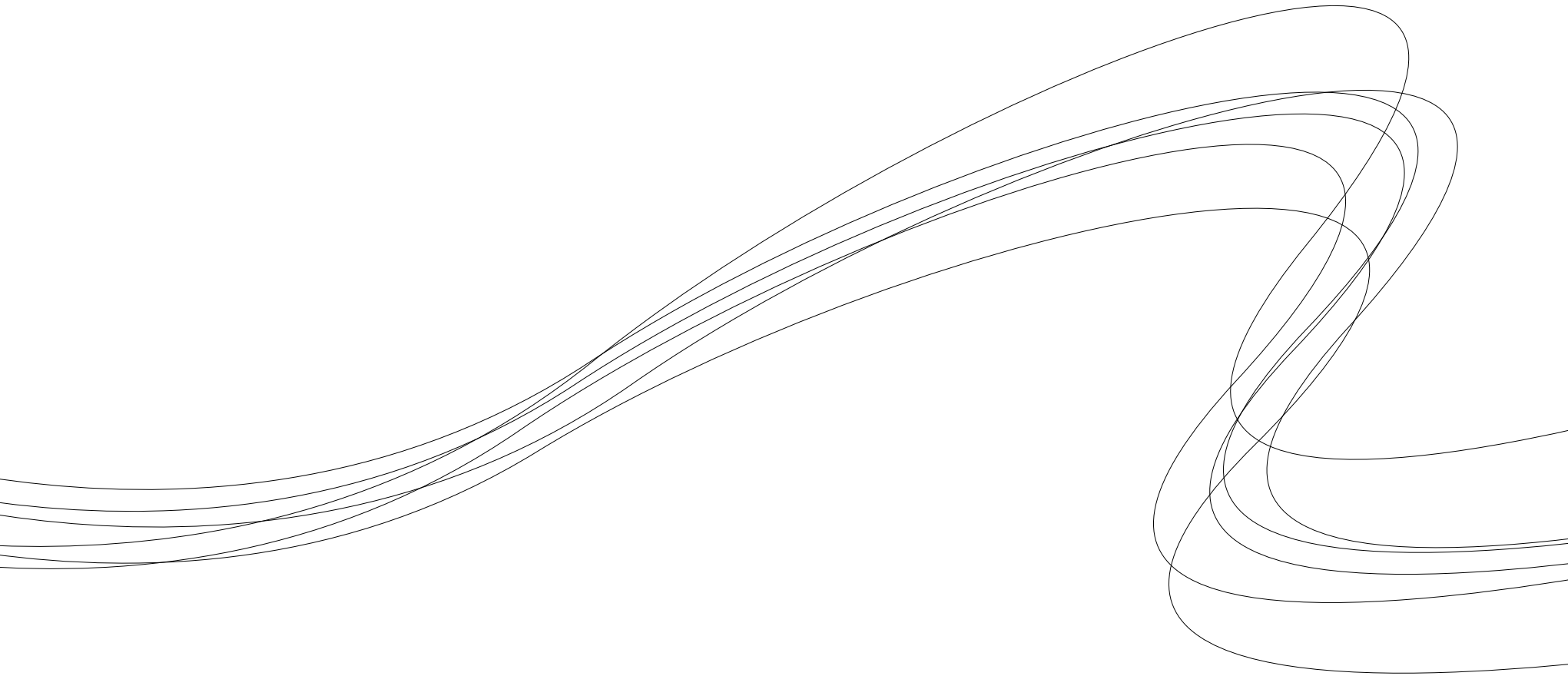
Circus, Education, Heritage

ECA International Academic Conference

Programme of the 15th Budapest Circus Festival

SEPARATE

Andrea Horthy



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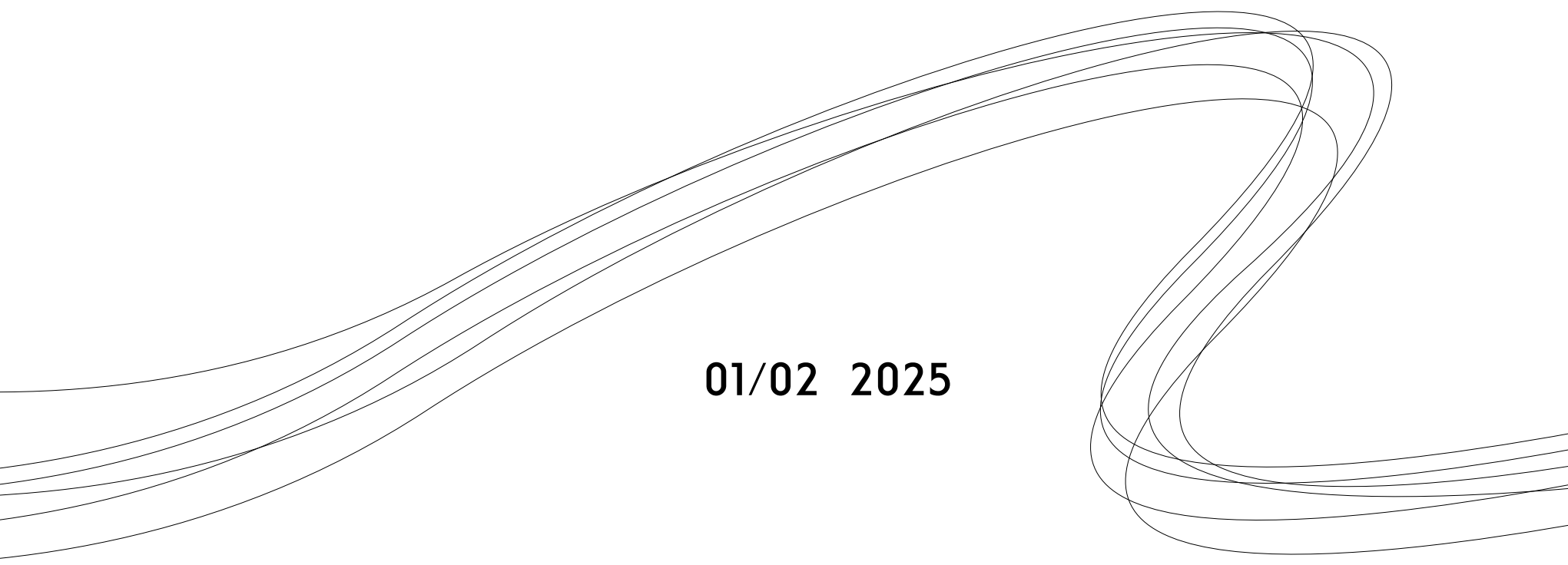
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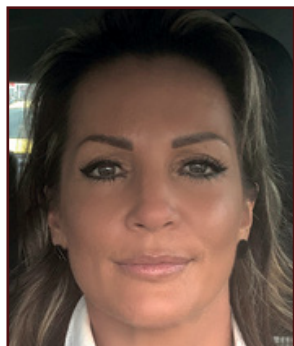
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ANDREA HORTHY

HEAD OF THE MENTORING PROGRAM,
PROJECT MANAGER,
ENTREPRENEUR

National Circus Arts Centre
(HUNGARY)

BIOGRAPHY

The Mentoring Program leader, who was born in Budapest, began her studies in psychology, but eventually spent her early professional years in a family business. Later, she participated in municipal development and local-government projects as a consultant. As a student of MIIBS - Madison International Institute & Business School, she earned BA and MA degrees in educational sciences. She subsequently held several significant private-sector projects and marketing management positions, while also managing her own enterprises.

In 2023, she was appointed head of the Mentoring Program of the National Circus Arts Center. Under her leadership, the constantly growing network now connects 263 clubs and more than ten thousand amateur circus artists within and beyond the borders, in close cooperation with BIAK - Baross Imre Circus and Performing Arts Academy, BCDC - Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College, and the Capital Circus of Budapest.

From 2025, she has been a student of the Circus Arts Teacher MA program at the Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College.

The author suggests drinking
Cotton Candy Martini
whilst reading her essay.

The author suggests listening to
Az már nem én lennék (Elisabeth Musical)
whilst reading her essay.

The circus is an international performing art: its centuries-old terminology reflects this. Different sources often refer to the genres and categorize them in many different ways. The aim of science is to create a consensual, well-defined circus vocabulary, a language of circus science - which already exists for other arts - to enable circus phenomena to be professionally defined, described clearly and accurately for all, and thus linked to other disciplines.

Circus Mentoring Program

Mentoring Amateur, Self-organizing Circus Communities in Hungary

The Circus Mentoring Program, started by the National Circus Arts Center, was launched in September 2023 and our main goal was to gather amateur, self-organizing circus communities in Hungary, organize them into a network and support their work. Since no one else in the world - in the field of circus arts - had started to create a mentor pro-

gram of this size and completely free of charge, developing it was quite a challenge. The evolution of the program was particularly interesting; the first reactions of the mentees we approached and how the future operation of the Mentoring program was outlined day by day.



As a project manager, compiling the database was not an easy task either. Although I have been a fan and practitioner of circus arts for years, compiling the circus genres also held surprises for me. The question was what kind of circus arts branches amateur communities could practice in addition to the basic aerial gymnastics, equestrian acrobatics and juggling? I listed this first and was surprised to find that the range within which I could search for amateur clubs was very wide. Imagine, there is even an axe throwing association in Hungary.

When my basic database was compiled along the circus genres (which counted more than 150 (!) clubs in two weeks and has been continuously expanding since then), I contacted the future mentees one by one to reconcile the data I had with them. Moreover, the number of members of the

far from complete 150 clubs, when projected to the entire population of Hungary, means that approximately every 600th person practices some branch of circus art, even if they are infants or pensioners. The number of amateur aerial gymnasts alone in Hungary is converging towards 6,000 people.



The first reactions were very interesting, because they were extremely suspicious of the offered partnership assistance. What do we have to give in return? How much does this mentoring cost? - was the most frequently asked question. After we clarified that this program was dreamed up by the Director General as a free and one-sided support, the next question came: what exactly does this mentoring program consist of? I quickly realized that I should also have a clear idea in my head of what this partnership would actually look like. I obviously received some guidance from the management about our options, but in practice I had to constantly improvise and figure out without additional financial resources how we could most effectively build and operate the partnership relationships with our existing resources.

Interestingly, instead of just a few minutes of data reconciliation, in most cases our mentees immediately started talking about specifics. Through these conversations, I could write a separate study on how the opportunities for amateur clubs have changed in recent years, the rise or decline in each sport and art form, how the pandemic period affected clubs, who was affected the most, who survived, and which genres were most sensitive to Covid closures.

As a specific example, I would mention that in Hungary, for some reason, juggling clubs reacted the worst to the closures and most of them did not re-form even after the Covid period ended. Or the trampoline sections operating within gymnastics clubs and enjoying great popularity in recent years almost without exception were on the verge of extinction. They clearly explained this with financial reasons, which are understandable, since gymnastics clubs struggling with financial difficulties cannot replace a professional trampoline.



It was clear that clubs have completely different needs, demands, and problems to solve, not only by genre, but also by region. That is why it quickly became clear that we would develop this mentoring program together with our mentees, tailored to their needs.

The few minutes of data reconciliations in most cases turned into conversations that could have been tens of minutes of psychotherapy, so I practically flowed into the lives of most of the mentored clubs like a fairy godmother. On the one hand, the openness and trust they showed in me was very honorable, which I obviously owed to the Circus Arts Center, and on the other hand, it placed a great responsibility on me.

After the first data reconciliations, we held a mentor meeting with the Director General in the form of watching a circus performance and discussion. The leaders of the mentored clubs arrived from all over the country, and after the performance, we had a pleasant and constructive discussion with those present.

After the first personal conversation, we started receiving specific requests and ideas. It was interesting that our mentees asked for things that were absolutely achievable, and we received many ideas from them for future cooperation. To mention specifics; there is an acrobat club that is expanding its activities with aerial gymnastics. They asked for our help with rigging and also asked for safety training regarding suspensions. We were happy to receive the request, as unfortunately, tragic accidents resulting from suspensions have also occurred recently, even in professional circuses, so we decided that in the future we will provide free training in this direction to our mentees at the Baross Imre Artist training Academy and the Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College.



Based on the idea of the Director General, we also prepared our mentor plaques, which we handed over to our mentees. In addition to the fact that they considered it a great honor and proudly communicated on their social media platforms the fact that they had indeed become official partners of the National Circus Arts Center and the Capital Circus of Budapest, in some sports this also gave them absolute legitimacy.



For example, the case of highliners is unique in Hungary. In our country, the most forests are highly protected, and the local foresters are their “terrifying” guardians. These athletes started out as slackliners in smaller communities and parks. Professionals often teach young people for free and know exactly how to attach their equipment to the trees so that they don’t get damaged. If they tie higher, they also tie

themselves to their ropes, so accidents are rare. The braver ones want to go even higher, so they go out of the parks into the forests, where they spend a long time installing and securely attaching their equipment. Then, when the experience, the training, the adrenaline could finally come, the local forester appears and distracts them from the scene like criminals.





Our partnership gave them real legitimacy. Officially, as the head of the Mentoring program of the National Circus Arts Center, I contacted the forestry departments, we started a dialogue regarding which forests and where our mentees would be allowed to train. At the same time, we provided the highliners with the opportunity to practice in the winter at our own Circus Camp.

Since we launched our mentoring program before Christmas, several leaders asked to reward their best competitors with circus tickets. In some cases, the unexpected gift brought tears to the children's eyes. They felt it was a special honor.

We were there for the gala celebration of the head of the artistic cycling department – Martin Schön – retiring from active competition and we were

able to recognize his career so far with a ticket to the Budapest International Circus Festival. They asked us to teach them unique choreography as mentors, which they will be able to use in future events beyond competing.

Or we could hand out circus tickets in a charity raffle at the new riding school and petting zoo of the equestrian acrobats of Dabas, and we also checked out their winter training opportunities. They asked us for a vaulting harness for their new horse as a mentoring aid and that I vault with them again after a 40-year hiatus... Well, that included the little rascals laughing at me and the Director General can't pay me for that, but I'm proud to say that I didn't bring shame to the Circus.

This also describes the relationship that I have unintentionally developed with the leaders and members of the mentored clubs as the head of the Mentoring program. If we want to provide real help to our mentees, we need to get to know them closely and sometimes participate in their everyday lives, their difficulties and successes. We become close to each other unintentionally, which makes it very difficult to think objectively. Although the zero point of the program was barely 4 months ago, I am slowly getting to know the members of the clubs one by one, not just the leaders. I meet them, I love them. I know their family background, their opportunities, their goals, their desires, the obstacles and opportunities they face. As we move forward from partner to partner, the Mentoring program becomes more difficult, since every club has faces, stories, experiences and it is very difficult to remain objective.

In parallel, our Mentoring program was also included in the Regional Cultural Program of the National Institute of Culture, which is under the Hungarian Ministry of Culture and Innovation. The state institution mainly focused on the catch-up and culture of the countryside, so we selected 20 mentored clubs from my own list, which we

prioritized, and now, with the help of the Hungarian state, we continued the work we had already started and jointly created 20 “pilot programs”.



In addition to all of this, we also provide all of our mentees with the opportunity for their leaders to participate in further training at the Baross Imre Artist training Academy or the Budapest Circus Arts and Contemporary Dance College, to learn from highly qualified teachers and former circus artists, and thus to educate the circus artists of the future even more effectively and professionally.

It was also necessary to dispel the misconception that only students with special abilities or descendants of old circus families are admitted to the artist training. Thanks to the Mentoring program, more and more people in Hungary now know that with some talent, but mostly with perseverance, courage and diligence, almost anyone can become an outstanding circus artist. We believe that values that our young people can experience through circus art, such as interdependence in a good sense, trust, cohesion, humility, respect and creative art, will represent an increasingly greater value again. We are working on this, and we also learn by teaching our mentees to do this. Because helping is a privilege.



Updated to January 2024, the barely two and a half year old Mentoring Program is constantly growing, developing and changing its methodology keeping in mind the needs of the mentees. The program is growing exponentially both in terms of number and opportunities. Currently, 262 amateur clubs in 19 counties with over 10,000 students belong to the network.



Andrea Horváth

„Az idei ECA-konferencia minden eddiginél sokszínűbb és összetettebb. Egy élénk, nemzetközi kutatói és szakmai közösséget hoz össze, és világosan jelzi, hogy az itt tárgyalt kérdések messze túlmutatnak egy szűk szakmai kör érdeklődésén: közös kultúránk jövőjének alapvető kérdéseiről van szó.”

Fekete Péter

“This year’s ECA conference is perhaps more diverse and complex than ever before. It brings together a vibrant international community of researchers and practitioners, demonstrating that the questions we address here are not the concern of a narrow professional circle alone. They reach far beyond that sphere and are fundamental to the future of our shared culture.”

Péter Fekete



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