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Cirkus Cirkör: Limits

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House

Jun 7—10 at 7:30pm

Running time: approx. two hours & 25 mins, including intermission

Conceived and directed by Tilde Björfors
Music by Samuel “LoopTok” Andersson

Set design by **Fanny Senocq, Stefan “Drake” Karlström,
Joel Jedström, and Tilde Björfors**

Costume design by **Jonna Bergelin**

Video scenography and projections by
**Johannes Ferm Winkler, Tom Waldton, and
Per Rydnert / Visual Relief**

Lighting design by **Fredrik Ekström**

Choreography by **Olle Strandberg**

Make up design by **Madelene Söderblom**

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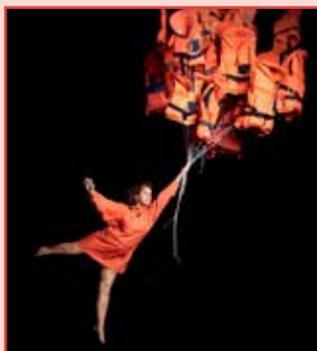
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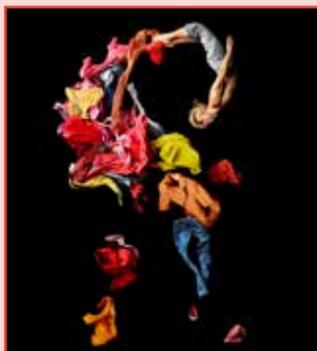
Peter Åberg



Saara Ahola



Samuel "LoopTok" Andersson



Anton Graaf



Einar Kling-Odenchrants



Manda Rydman

ENSEMBLE

Saara Ahola acrobatics, aerial acrobatic, vocals

Anton Graaf acrobatics, teeterboard

Einar Kling-Odencrants acrobatics, teeterboard

Manda Rydman handstand, contortion

Peter Åberg acrobatics, juggling, vocals

Samuel "LoopTok" Andersson musician

ADDITIONAL PRODUCTION CREDITS

Text **Tilde Björfors, the ensemble, Nadia Ben Belgacem, Arash Dehviri, Kajsa Bohlin,**

Tatiana-Mosio Bongonga, Qutaiba Aldahwa, Javid Heidari

Vocal coach, pre-recorded vocals, co-composer* **Maja Långbacka**

Sound technician **Fredrik "Börje" Danielsson**

Voiceover **Qutaiba Aldahwa, Javid Heidari**

Costume production **Hilda Junker, Jonna Bergelin, Emilia Esping**

Assistant director **Maria Wallin**, with support of **Alexander Weibel Weibel**

Constructions **Joel Jedström**

Assistant set and costume design **Emilia Esping**

Filmed material **Malin Nicander, BLAM Ateliers, Visual Relief**

Researcher **Pinja Lehtonen**

Artistic coach **Alexander Weibel Weibel**

Sound/video **Joakim Björklund**

Stage/truss **Kasper Holm**

Lights **Fredrik Ekström**

Tour manager **Irene Ramilli**

Technical manager **Stefan "Drake" Karlström**

Production managers **Amy Fee, Sara de Vylder**

*on the songs "Borders," "Salamdina och Fallande rummet"

Limits was partly developed in residence at The Watermill Center, USA as well as in residence at Västmanland's Teater. *Limits* is a coproduction with Archaos, Pôle National des Arts du Cirque Méditerranée. With support from: Swedish Arts Council, Stockholm's County Council, the City of Stockholm's Culture Administration, Botkyrka Municipality.





MUSIC

All songs composed and performed by
Samuel "LoopTok" Andersson

Pre-recorded vocals and co-composer (*Borders*, *Salamdina*
och *Fallande rummet*) **Maja Långbacka**

Våga

Borders

Salamdina

Uttrot

Archaos

Pärt

Oceans

Balloon

Våga

Vakna

Våga

Pärt

Jonki

Limits

Who are

Oceans

Borders



Dear Audience!

Anything is possible! Boundaries are meant to be crossed. Limits are meant to be exceeded! We human beings can do so much more than we believe, if we dare to challenge our limitations! That was the feeling I had when I giddily walked out from my first-ever contemporary circus show, the French group Archaos' guest performance in Stockholm when I was in my 20s.

In France, a few years later, I understood that this was not an isolated event but part of an established art form—Cirque Nouveau. Here, the boundaries of the possible were being pushed. Here, there were practice facilities and even a contemporary circus college. Imagine if this had existed in Sweden when I was growing up? What would my life have been like then?

Maybe the fact that I was a fairly frightened person was what made the boundary-pushing inspiration of contemporary circus so important

to me. If this could make me want to be more daring, there were likely others who felt the same. My friends and I began dreaming of bringing contemporary circus to Sweden.

The journey from being a few naive, young people with a dream to what Cirkör is today (in the media often referred to as a “circus empire”) has been at once a tumble dryer and a roller coaster. Loads of hard work, risk-taking, sore muscles, and growing pains mixed with magical moments. If there's one thing we've seen proof of time and again, it's that human beings have so much more capacity than we think. At Cirkör, we have created our own and other peoples' jobs within a field that no politician nor recruiter could have imagined. We have seen dreams become reality, the fearful become fearless, the lost find themselves focused, chaos be transformed into order and control issues morph into trust.

For several years now, in collaboration with brain researchers and circus artists, I've been trying

to understand how boundary-crossing works. Absolutely crucial to those of us who defy a limit, create something new or go where no one else has ventured is whether we are focused on the risk or on possibility.

During the fall of 2015, when the wave of about 150,000 refugees arrived in Sweden, I was one of many people in Sweden who tried to welcome displaced people in a spirit of common humanity. I was involved in establishing a transitional housing facility and also opened my own home. Hundreds of people. Hundreds of boundary-crossers. Every encounter a new story, a personal tragedy. I became aware of limitations within myself and society. Several times, I felt that I could not take in anymore. There was no room. But every time I started to shut my door, one of the most vulnerable souls showed me there was still hope. It felt as if my heart was stretching and growing a little. Suddenly there was room for more! Contrary to what we often claim, our boundaries are supple. Both our hearts and our brains have an innate capacity for growth.

There's a big difference between a circus performer who takes risks of their own free will, and an individual fleeing for their life. Someone fleeing has no choice. Yet the way they handle risk is the same. A person fleeing knows what it's like to be afraid, while at once being brave. They know that when you venture out into the unknown, it is only the belief that it is possible that keeps you going. That faith in oneself and others is a necessity; there is no other choice. Planning, preparation, and organization are all good, but to be able to handle all the unforeseen things that arise, it is even more important to be

present in the moment.

It is shocking to watch Europe close border after border, when our circus has dedicated the last 20 years to pushing boundaries. The word "circus" is often used disparagingly, but I think the opposite is true—the world should practice more circus!

Play with the idea of Sweden as a body... or why not the US as a body. Imagine that the task facing this Nation-body is to learn a new, advanced circus stunt. It is my conviction that if we exercise our Nation-body, we will become better at dealing with the risks instead of, as is now the case, focusing so hard on them that we become inhuman. No one is forcing us, but we can choose to accept this challenge! And yes, for a while chaos will likely ensue, and our current order will be jolted a bit. There is always a moment of disorder when something new is created and our brain neurons have to connect new paths. But if we all stretch a little, perhaps we can transform these risks into possibilities for all of us. If we look in history's rearview mirror, good things have generally come out of change. And usually, it is those who succeeded in maintaining a humane and compassionate perspective that we remember with respect! Imagine what the world might have been like if no one had ever taken a risk. To deal with the challenges we now face, it's about time we get our Nation-body into intensive training.

Welcome to Cirkus Cirkör and our performance, *Limits*.

—Tilde Björfors

It's as if we human beings have two fundamental instincts. One seeks out challenges and defies limits. The other is conformist and protectionist. Ever since the advent of modern man in Africa around 200,000 years ago, we have incessantly sought a better life by searching for new ground. Some 80,000 years ago, when climate changes made it possible for us to travel from Ethiopia to the Arabian Peninsula by land, that's what we did. Ten thousand years later, groups of wanderers had populated India, Southeast Asia, and China—moving all the way down to Australia.

Fourteen thousand years ago the first settlements of what we today call Sweden also took place. Pitted against this limitless urge to explore the unknown is our fear of the stranger, as well as another deep-seated drive: preserving the group. Us and them. An instinct that, when derailed, quickly can turn extremely violent.

We thought we had learned something from World War II and the Nazi's ravaging of humanitarian values: to stand up for the idea that all human beings are equal in dignity and in their natural right to flee if their lives are threatened. Now, we once again live in a time when fascist rationale is tightening its grip. Many of us are deeply disturbed by the echoes of the 1930s, which we believed could never be heard today.

At Cirkus Cirkör we have decided to dedicate the next few years to the theme of boundaries and boundary-crossing. Deeply inspired by the transboundary essence of the circus, our desire is to convey the importance of focusing

on possibilities rather than on risks when we as individuals, or as a society, are confronted with new challenges. We believe we dare to do more than we dare. We believe that difference is good. And we believe that defying limits is a necessity. Without pushing boundaries, nothing new arises. We want to change the world through circus.

Our work is rooted in two areas: art and education. Our artists, educators, and office acrobats work both with stage and educational activities. In the cycle between the different areas of knowledge, new ideas and activities are created and sent into the world, onto stages, exercise floors, and other areas. In the wake of the flagships that are our performances, other projects are born, such as events and educational programs. So, on lakes and oceans, little boats filled with circus inspiration continue on their way.

Flaky? Not at all. But we do live in a fairly foggy world. One shining beacon is Lasse Berg's book on the origins of humankind and the reasons for the success of our particular species: *Gryning över Kalahari* ("Dawn over the Kalahari"). It states—and I'm paraphrasing—that nothing is more vital to survival than strengthening the bonds of solidarity and love. Modern man became modern by developing a language, conversing and having fun, by being kind to his fellow man and resolving conflicts by a thousand different means. It is to this end that evolution supplied us with our brain: to help us get along and avoid battles.

—Anders Frennberg, CEO, Cirkus Cirkör





TILDE BJÖRFORS (concept, direction, set design)

Tilde Björfors is director of *Limits* and Cirkus Cirkör's founder and creative director. She was formerly professor of circus at the School of Dance and Circus (DOCH) in Stockholm, where she also presented the research project, "Circus as a transgressor in art and society." circusresearch.com

PERFORMERS

ANTON GRAAF

Anton Graaf is a teeterboard artist who has been awarded several gold and silver medals at international festivals. He studied winter circus in Åre, Sweden, attended the Contemporary Circus Program at Cirkus Cirkör's Upper Secondary School, and in 2014 graduated from the School of Dance and Circus in Stockholm.

EINAR KLING-ODENCRANTS

Einar Kling-Odenchrants is an acrobat and teeterboard artist who works with Anton Graaf. He studied at Cirkus Cirkör's Upper Secondary School and graduated from the School of Dance and Circus in Stockholm in 2014. With Graaf, he has been awarded several gold and silver medals at international festivals such as the Monte Carlo Circus Festival, Cirque de Demain in Paris, Daidogei Streetfestival in Japan, and Moscow International Circus Festival.

MANDA RYDMAN

Manda Rydman is an artist who specializes in Asian rings, handstand, and contortion. Rydman studied circus in Kiev and Rotterdam and has, among other things, toured with *Wear It Like a Crown** (BAM Winter/Spring, 2012).

PETER ÅBERG

Peter Åberg, a juggler and hand-to-hand acrobat, has previously appeared in *Borders** and *Udermän**. Åberg studied at Cirkör's Cirkuspiloterna as well as at the School of Dance and Circus in Stockholm. In recent years he has toured with his partner in hand-to-hand acrobatics, Saara Ahola.

SAARA AHOLA

Saara Ahola is an aerial and hand-to-hand acrobat nurtured at Sorin Sirkus in Tampere, Finland. She has been a circus practitioner for more than 20 years. Ahola last appeared in *Borders**.

SAMUEL "LOOPTOK" ANDERSSON

Samuel Looptok" Andersson is a composer and multi-instrumentalist who mixes acoustic and electronic instruments with live loops. Andersson composed and performed the music for *Knitting Peace** and *Borders**.

* Performances by Cirkus Cirkör

FANNY SENOCQ (set design)

Fanny Senocq is a scenographer and artistic project leader. She has been working with Circus Cirkör since 2009. She made the set design for Circus Cirkör's performances *Knitted Piece* and *Knitting Peace* and curated the knitted exhibition that travels with the performances. Senocq has a master's degree in cultural studies from Stockholm University and four years of art school studies at Gerlesborgsskolan. She has previously combined work as an artist/painter with work as a chef on a boat, train conductor, film coordinator, illustrator, phone operator at a hospital, pizza maker, and more.

STEFAN DRAKE KARLSTRÖM (set design)

Stefan Drake Karlström is Cirkus Cirkör's technical producer.

JOEL JEDSTRÖM (set design)

Joel Jedström is a technical coordinator and construction designer at Cirkus Cirkör.

JONNA BERGELIN (costume design)

Jonna Bergelin is a freelance costume designer and illustrator who has worked with, among others, Orion Theatre (Stockholm's largest avant-garde stage), and the Royal Dramatic Theatre (Sweden's National Theatre). She has a bachelor's degree in fine art from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts de Rennes and a master's degree in textile art from Konstfack (Sweden's largest university college of arts, crafts, and design, founded in 1844). She previously ran the gallery

Minibar artists' space, illustrated children's books, and worked with the children's clothes brand "Tiger ate my kid."

PER RYDNERT, JOHANNES FERM WINKLER, and **TOM WALDTON/VISUAL RELIEF** (video scenography and projections)

Visual Relief is based in Stockholm and was initiated by two video artists, Per Rydnert and Johannes Ferm Winkler. Rydnert had previously worked as an animator and editor in the television industry and Winkler had worked as a VJ-artist and lighting designer in the Swedish film industry. In 2015 video magician Tom Waldton joined the duo. Since its founding in 2012 the team has worked with everything from the Eurovision Song Contest, the Nobel banquet, and the event *Together in Hope* featuring Pope Francis during his visit to Sweden.

FREDRIK EKSTRÖM has created the lighting design for Cirkus Cirkör's performance *Limits* and toured the world with Cirkus Cirkör since 2012 as stage manager/lighting technician for *Knitting Peace* and *Limits*.

OLLE STRANDBERG (choreography)

Olle Strandberg is a director and artistic project manager at Cirkus Cirkör. He has been working as a circus artist and dancer since 2002. He has three years of circus studies (Circus Pilots, 2002–05). Strandberg directed *Undermen* and *Underart*, two Cirkus Cirkör productions that have toured the world. He is currently working on his final part in the trilogy, *Under*.



Manda Rydman, Saara Ahola, Samuel "LoopTok" Andersson. Photo: Mats Bäcker

Contemporary circus first emerged as an artistic genre in the 1970s. The main difference between traditional circus and contemporary circus is that a traditional circus show takes place in a tent and includes acts with humans and animals. Contemporary circus has moved the circus onto the theater stage, and it is influenced by other art forms such as theater, dance, visual arts, music, and street arts. Contemporary circus performances are by nature dramatic and often have a narrative thread. There are contemporary circus companies that include animals in their shows, but this is far less common than in traditional circus.

In traditional circus it is the family that trains and passes on acts to the next generation of artists. With the emergence of contemporary circus, educational programs opened up to artists that were not born into circus families. Although contemporary circus artists were inspired by the alternative community that the traditional circus had created, they wanted to take an active part in and influence their society.

A contemporary circus stage can be anything from a classroom, a theater, a rock venue—and a circus tent. For the audience the narrative and often animal-free performances of contemporary circus is quite different from what they have imagined. Physical limits are tested—just as in traditional circus—but it creates transboundary art pieces using other art forms and expressions.

- Cirkör is a play on the French words “cirque” and “coeur,” circus and heart.
- Cirkus Cirkör started as a non-profit organization in 1995. The first show, *Skapelsen*, premiered at the Stockholm Water Festival.
- In 1997 Cirkör started the first contemporary circus education in Scandinavia: Cirkuspiloterna. In 2005 the artistic education was merged into the university system and today it is run by the University of Dance and Circus.
- In 1998 Cirkör founded a private corporation that is owned by the non-profit organization. Cirkör secondary school, continuing education, and pedagogical programs for school and leisure time is run by the non-profit organization. The corporation runs the shows and Cirkör Event. Cirkör Event produces contemporary circus acts and performances on assignment.
- Since 2000 Cirkörs head office and base is located in the municipality of Botkyrka, south of Stockholm.
- In 2005 Cirkus Cirkör was given the status of a regional artistic institution with fixed grants from the Swedish Arts Council, the City of Stockholm, Stockholm County Council, and Botkyrka Municipality.
- The performances are seen by more than 100,000 people annually; about a third of that is outside of Sweden.
- It delivers between 50–100 customized events each year, and around 30,000 people train in circus arts there. There are roughly 40 students in the upper secondary school program.