



Cirque Mechanics

Birdhouse Factory

Saturday, Oct. 9, 7:30 p.m.

Macky Auditorium

Enter the most unlikely setting for a circus: a factory. One where the workers are acrobats and the machines are circus props.

Welcome to **Birdhouse Factory** by **Cirque Mechanics**.

A place where spectators will watch a contortionist perform on a turntable powered by unicyclists, they will be captivated by the trapeze artist flying high thanks to the spins of an acrobat inside a giant gear-like wheel, and they will be stunned when the trampoline wall artists defy the laws of physics by virtually flying and walking on air. All the while, they will be giggling at the antics of the comedic characters, impressed by the acro-dancing and enchanted by the story of laughter, love, flight and birdhouses.

Birdhouse Factory was inspired in part by the masterful industry murals of Mexican-born artist Diego Rivera, the outrageous illustrations of cartoonist Rube Goldberg and the slap-stick style humor of Charlie Chaplin's film *Modern Times*. While its inspirations make *Birdhouse Factory* artful, nostalgic and funny, the true essence of the show comes from the circus.

This is a simple story of daily life in a “widgets” factory circa 1935, where workers are brought together by the most unlikely of events, a bird accidentally injured by the main steam boiler. The accident—and caring for the bird—brings the workers closer and inspires them to break away from the efficiency and monotony of the assembly-line mentality so they can display their true inner talents and abilities. In the process, they use their bodies and machines to build birdhouses in a less efficient, albeit joyful and soulful way.

Birdhouse Factory delivers a timeless message of hope, camaraderie and the power of the collaborative human spirit when presented with adversity. Although conceptualized prior to the pandemic, and inspired by the Great Depression, *Birdhouse Factory* addresses the challenges faced by industry and workers during unprecedented times. The story is one of imaginative recovery, where humans create magic when working together toward common goals.

CIRQUE MECHANICS IS
REPRESENTED BY

ALLIANCE
ARTIST MANAGEMENT

PLEASE NOTE

- Masks are required in public indoor spaces on the CU Boulder campus, regardless of vaccination status.
- Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of the house manager.
- Photography and video recordings of any type are strictly prohibited during the performance.
- Smoking is not permitted anywhere. CU Boulder is a smoke-free campus.

Personnel

CHRIS LASHUA (founder, creative director, producer, machine designer) hails from Boston, Massachusetts, where he spent most of his youth riding on a BMX bike. He was discovered by Cirque du Soleil and there created and performed a BMX bike act that was entirely his own. He was then commissioned to build a German Wheel act for the company, an act he performed for several years in Cirque du Soleil's production of *Quidam*, cementing his reputation as a visionary of circus gadgetry. His engineering chops and creative energy led him to 'run away' with his own circus company, Cirque Mechanics. Lashua believes that innovative mechanical apparatus and the relationship between performer and machine set his company apart and are at the heart of what makes Cirque Mechanics unique. Lashua has delivered on this unique approach in the company's theatrical productions. His innovative machines interact with acrobats, dancers, jugglers and contortionists on a 1920s factory floor in *Birdhouse Factory*, a gold rush era town in *Boom Town*, alongside renowned symphonies in the *Orchestra Project*, in a bicycle shop in *Pedal Punk*, and inside a circus ring in *42ft — A Menagerie of Mechanical Marvels*. Lashua continues to build on the might of his engineering mind, his passion for the circus, and all things mechanical by designing performance apparatus in real world settings that amaze and awe. He's currently developing material for a new production titled *Zephyr* that will premiere fall of 2022. When Lashua is not developing material for a theatrical show, he is building other wacky performance devices for events, most recently the Paddleship, a portable stage that not only floats, but also can be navigated by pedal powered paddle wheels. Lashua is a producing partner of the Vegas International Variety Arts Festival (VIVAFest), a founding board member of the American Circus Alliance (ACA) and founding member of the Producers Alliance of Southern Nevada (PALS). He's also been featured as a guest lecturer at the annual Association for Theater in Higher Education Conference.

Creative design team

ALOYSIA GAVRE (co-director, choreographer, costume designer) co-founded both Cirque School and Troupe Vertigo in Los Angeles in 2009 after 22 years of touring internationally with the Pickle Family Circus, Cirque du Soleil, and symphonies

around the globe including the Sydney Opera House and the Kennedy Center. Her passion and knowledge for the circus arts has led her to a career as a director, choreographer and educator including *Cirque Cracker* (Phoenix Symphony), *Cirque Broadway* (Baltimore Symphony), *Cirque Cinema* (Indianapolis Symphony) as well as her own creations including *Tableaux*. She has both coached and choreographed for film and television including *Water for Elephants*, *Pitch Perfect 2*, Bravo, NBC and BuzzFeed. She has been recognized in Dance Teacher Magazine, Dance Informa and has held speaking engagements with TED-X, Center Theater Group, Directors Lab, Chicago Circus Festival, AYCO and VIVAFest Las Vegas. Gavre has been a longtime artistic collaborator with Cirque Mechanics, having had creative involvement in more than five shows since 2004 after meeting Chris Lashua while performing in Cirque du Soleil.

SEAN RILEY (set designer, artistic rigger) has a 20-year career combining suspension, kinetic movement and design with performance. Through scenic design, rigging design and mechanical design—often in concert with each other—he creates unique performance environments. Concentrating his design for performance on site-specific and non-traditional work, Riley has created installations in collaboration with a wide spectrum of accomplished artists and collaborators. Known for his bold and often surprising use of space and for large-scale movement, Riley's installations commonly reflect his lifelong obsession with gravity and Newtonian physics. His works have been installed from backyards to Broadway and continue to tour internationally. He is a founding member of Cirque Mechanics and Gravity Design, his company through which he has developed an arsenal of specialized tools, pushing the bounds of performance as well as industrial safety. Riley was the host of the National Geographic Television series *World's Toughest Fixes* and the four part docuseries *Speed* currently on Curiosity Stream. visiblegravity.com, gravitydesign.org, cirquemechanics.com

STEVEN RAGATZ (writer) is an original *Birdhouse Factory*, *Boom Town* and *Orchestra Project* cast member collaborator, plus lead writer for *Pedal Punk* and *42ft — A Menagerie of Mechanical Marvels*. Ragatz has been entertaining audiences with his juggling, physical comedy, stilt walking

and general antics for the past three decades. As a 10-year veteran of Cirque du Soleil, Ragatz has toured throughout North, South and Central America as well as Asia and Europe performing multiple juggling acts as well as an eclectic array of characters. Ragatz was on the staff of Bloomington's Stage Flight Circus Arts, where he taught juggling and unicycle skills workshops. He has also toured his one-man show *Under the Umbrella, Life is a Circus*, an evening with a juggling virtuoso and stories from world-wide circus adventures. Ragatz holds a BA in variety theater and an MS in computer science from Indiana University. He studied mime, stage movement and circus arts with Fred Garbo, Tony Montanaro, George Pinney and Michael Moschen. He and his wife Lisa have two children, Melissa and Andrew, and currently live in Maine, where they have perfected the art of making the perfect margarita.

CODY WESTHEIMER AND JULIA MARIE NEWMANN (composers) are versatile music makers and creatives who operate a family-owned music scoring facility in Santa Barbara. They've brought heart and soul to hundreds of projects over the past two decades. Julia Marie Newmann garnered four ASCAP awards during her nine-year stint on the hit Fox show *Bones* and has also worked on *Medium* and *The Finder* alongside Emmy-winning composer Sean Callery. In 2016 Newmann and Cody Westheimer teamed up with Callery on the CBS series *Doubt*. Westheimer has been a force in independent cinema, documentary film/tv and nature films. He has scored nearly 50 feature films and over a hundred hours of television. But he is perhaps most known for his iconic theme for the Tour de France, airing each July on NBC. Their 4,000 track catalog, the *New West Collection*, has been in high demand for both temp scoring and as an alternative to typical production music libraries.

KALIN HENNING (costumer) has spent their life so far bouncing around between theatre, acrobatics, and complete and utter confusion. They developed a love for historic costuming early on and served as the head costume designer for four different Shakespeare productions before the age of 21. Since then, Henning has spent their time when not working as a performer making costumes as a freelance designer. They cannot decide if the favorite costume they've ever made was an Andolite or a historically appropriate hand-sewn 1901 ballgown.

AIDA LASHUA (co-producer, collaborator) has been Chris' co-producer and creative partner in life and work for nearly 30 years. Their partnership includes a decade of touring and work experience with Cirque du Soleil (CDS), as well as 15 years running their own company, Cirque Mechanics. Lashua worked for CDS sponsor AT&T, implementing their multi-million-dollar sponsorship agreement on tour, which included product placement, sales staff training and supervision of special sales promotions. She also worked as a box office supervisor and house manager for CDS, where she trained and managed a staff of 60, implemented customer service policies and helped develop and revise training manuals and VIP package tests. Thanks to her experience with CDS, Lashua has an appreciation for the business and a passion for the circus arts. She currently manages the day-to-day operations of Cirque Mechanics and family with poise; she is a creative force and a stabilizing influence. Lashua's education and background in direct marketing allow her to use a targeted message approach in the development of the company's website and social media presence. As a mother of three boys, Lashua is an avid supporter of the educational component and community outreach programs offered by Cirque Mechanics. She has written the education outreach support materials and study guides, as well as developed the structure of the educational workshops. Lashua, who is a native of Puerto Rico, feels most at home near the ocean. She recently began freelance writing for CityLife Publications and hopes to one day publish that elusive next great American novel.

JOE D'EMILIO (lighting director) is a New York City-based lighting designer with over a decade of experience in theatre, dance, concerts and circus. He joined the Cirque Mechanics family in 2013 on the original tour of *Birdhouse Factory* and continued on to tour with *Pedal Punk* and *42ft*. Additionally, D'Emilio has designed for Circus Juventas in St. Paul, Bindlestiff Family Cirkus in New York and Circus Sarasota. When not on tour, he designs new shows and immersive experiences in New York, as well as concerts and special events. He is a proud member of United Scenic Artists Local 829. joedemilio.com

LEONARDO HIDALGO (lighting director) is a New York-based lighting designer, production manager and educator with a focus on theatre, opera and



dance. Currently, he is the production manager and lighting designer for Battery Dance Company with whom he has internationally toured workshops built to create community, tolerance and acceptance. Additionally, he works with several New York area schools teaching lighting and theatre technology as well as safety in their programs. Past works include Madcap Motel (associate LD), an immersive space in the Arts District of Los Angeles; McKittrick Hotel (guest designer) home to *Sleep No More*, The Manderley bar, and The Club Car. He is excited to be joining the Cirque Mechanics team this year as lighting director.

RACHEL A. LANTOW (production stage manager, on tour) is experiencing her second show with the Cirque Mechanics team. She joined with the tour of *42ft*, including the off-Broadway residency at the New Victory Theatre. Selected stage management credits include three years with Circus Juventas for *STEAM*, *TWISTED*, *GALAXIUM*, *A Hygge Holiday* and the Spring Shows of 2018, 2019 and 2021; Loyce Houlton's *Nutcracker Fantasy* (Minnesota Dance Theatre); *SOLO* (McKnight Foundation); *In the Margins* (THREADS Dance Project); *Heaven*, *French Twist* (Flying Foot Forum); *Hatchet Lady* (Walking Shadow Theatre Company); *Momentum: New Dance Works 2017 & 2019* (The Cowles Center, The Southern, Walker Arts Center, The O' Shaughnessy); *Flying Foot Forum* (Flint Hills Children's Festival at the Ordway, The Guthrie, the Cowles Center); *The (curious case) of the Watson Intelligence* (Park Square Theatre); *CLIMB Theatre*, *Medora Musical 2016* (StageWest); *Four Saints in Three Acts* (VocalEssence and Black Label Movement at the Cowles Center); *Taiko Groove* (Mu Performing Arts Center). She's a proud Minnesotan and earned her BFA in theatre technology/design from Minnesota State University, Mankato. "For my audience of one and for Kaela."

JANEEN JOHNSON (production manager, remote) is an independent arts administrator, stagecraft specialist and activist with 20+ years of experience in arts management, event operations and theatre arts production. She supports projects, artists and organizations through planning, fund development, executive producing, touring and partnerships. She is a maven for dance, theatre and special events; a production tour de force on any team. Johnson facilitates creative visions to be realized and is often sought out for her expertise in theatre production and event management. For the past 11 years, she has worked with Cirque Mechanics as the principal touring production stage manager,

directing the administration and logistics of its four theatrical touring productions: *Birdhouse Factory*, *Boom Town*, *Pedal Punk* and *42ft — A Menagerie of Mechanical Marvels*. With the company, she has toured North America, Europe and Asia, installing creative works that cross platforms, genres, cultures and language barriers. Currently, Johnson aims to leverage arts and culture as a viable service industry with a sustainable impact to arts communities locally and beyond. Her hope is to continue service in collaboration with Cirque Mechanics and local agencies that work to develop a model of art creation for sustainability, community building and public sharing.

Cast

WES HATFIELD (captain, coach, acrobat) was born in California. His parents raised him in Germany where he got his start in gymnastics. At age 10, he joined T&T (Trampoline and Tumbling) when he and his family moved to Colorado. In the world of trampoline competition, his resume includes several state and national championship titles. At 19, he quit competition and became a circus performer, traveling around the world, wowing audiences with his technical prowess and zany comedic antics. Hatfield has been an integral cast member in all of Cirque Mechanics touring productions, *Birdhouse Factory*, *Boom Town*, *Pedal Punk* and *42ft — A Menagerie of Mechanical Marvels*, performing trampoline, Chinese pole, Cyr wheel and general acrobatics along with group choreography. Over the years, Hatfield has become part of the Cirque Mechanics production team, acting as team leader for the cast and head artistic rigger for the setup of the show. Hatfield now lives in Las Vegas where he continues his work with Cirque Mechanics. He is a fan of avocados, needing only a spoon to enjoy them. His favorite breakfast entree is steak and eggs with hash browns ... not potato chunks ... hash browns ... don't forget the ketchup.

BROOKE NEILSON (acrobat) has been a gymnast most of her life. She majored in dance performance at Valencia College in Orlando, where she was also born and raised. After college, she performed at Universal Studios Orlando in the Superstar Parade, Terminator 2:3D experience, The 8th Voyage of Sinbad stunt show, the Macy's Holiday Parade and Mardi Gras Parade. Neilson got her first break into the circus world at SeaWorld San Diego's summer show *Cirque De La Mer*. There she performed Chinese pole and trampwall with aquatic dismounts. She continued to develop her circus



skills on the Carnival Dream cruise ship, performing hand-to-hand, Chinese pole, tumbling and dancing acts. Neilson spends most summers bouncing on a trampwall at the San Diego Zoo. This is her second show with Cirque Mechanics, her first being *42ft*. She is obsessed with traveling and horses, and she spends all her money on both—travel adventures and her horse, Echo.

MICHAEL RUBINO (trampoline wall acrobat) was born and raised in gymnastics. His parents owned a gymnastics gym in North Carolina called the Cat's Pajamas. After the age of 10, he and most of his family packed their bags and headed to California. He bounced around gymnastics gyms until the age of 18 when he got his first performing gig at Legoland California. Rubino has been performing for over seven years, working at Disneyland California, Six Flags, *Cirque De La Mer* at SeaWorld San Diego and the San Diego Zoo. He has performed overseas in Canada, Belgium and France, with different acts like Chinese poles, trampwall, diving and tumbling. When Rubino is not working, he likes to spend his time surfing, hiking, creating and playing video games and following his beautiful, amazing wife-to-be, Brooke, around the world.

DANIEL ALBERTO BABILONIA TORRES (trampoline wall acrobat) was born and raised in Bayamón, Puerto Rico. He is a dancer and acrobat. He began training in hip-hop dance at the age of 10. He performed in MTV's *America's Best Dance Crew* with 787 crew. At age 18 he auditioned for Cirque du Soleil and moved to Las Vegas. He has performed in three Cirque du Soleil shows (*MJ One*, *Mindfreak Live*, *Run*). In 2021 he completed his bachelor's degree in liberal arts from St. Mary's College of California. He first saw tramp wall when he was in *MJ One* and started training under Wellington Lima. Eight years later, he is combining his love for dance and acrobatics to spread wonder and laughs wherever God takes him.

CORNELL FREENEY (German Wheel acrobat) joined a youth circus in Chicago at the age of 13 in search of excitement. He first took an interest in tumbling and mini-trampoline. In 2005, Freeney started to train on the German Wheel. Preparing for the World Championships in Wheel Gymnastics, he practiced every day before and after school. After two years of training, he was awarded a silver medal and became the first American to ever compete in the international competition. Winning four gold medals, Freeney has also shown success in national competitions. Upon graduating

from high school in 2008, he transitioned from competition to performing professionally. His career started with the German Wheel on ice, performing for the Royal Caribbean cruise line. Understanding the importance of education, he enrolled in Illinois State University later that year. Along with earning a degree in elementary education, he grew his circus skills through Illinois State's Gamma Phi Circus program. After graduating, Freeney started coaching youth circus artists in Chicago and performing on and at various stages, TV shows and arenas. In July of 2020, Freeney moved to Las Vegas where he founded the Unity Circus Project, a youth circus that focuses on building kids' self-confidence using circus arts as a tool.

THOM WALL (boss juggler) is an American juggler who specializes in juggling disciplines from the past. After completing a five-year tour juggling for Cirque du Soleil's *Totem* (2014-2019), Wall now resides in Philadelphia, where he researches circus history, consults for nonprofits, and coaches juggling and performance at Circadium: School of Contemporary Circus. When not at home, he's performing his solo show *On the Topic of Juggling* on cruise ships and stages around the world. Wall holds a MS in nonprofit arts administration from Drexel University (2015) and was awarded La Medalla Crotalus Scholaris by the Mesoamerican University in Puebla, Mexico, for his work revitalizing forgotten juggling disciplines. Wall is the founder of Modern Vaudeville Press (2018), an independent publishing company that produces academic titles about the circus arts. In 2021, the International Jugglers' Association honored him with the Excellence in Education Award. Wall is delighted to be back on tour, sharing what he loves with circus fans across the country.

LINDSEY COVARRUBIAS (aerialist) is a San Francisco Bay Area native who began performing as a child and continued to pursue her love of the stage in college at the University of California, San Diego. Shortly after graduation, she found a home in the circus arts in L.A., where she taught and trained at Cirque School Los Angeles. Maintaining a strong emphasis on corde lisse, Covarrubias has performed as an aerialist with various companies across the country including Troupe Vertigo and Cirque Mechanics, with whom she joined for two touring shows (*Orchestra Project* and *Pedal Punk*). Additionally, as a freelance performer, Covarrubias has worked commercially for companies such as Dick's Sporting Goods and Neutrogena and has performed at many private events for similar

corporations. She currently resides in Paris, where she likes to hang from her hair, eat lots of weird cheeses and practice her accordion.

GARRETT ALLEN (acrobat, aerialist) is originally from San Diego, California, where he began his circus journey at 10 years old at a small local studio in his hometown. Almost instantaneously, he fell in love with the art and went full steam ahead. Learning handstands, aerial acts, contortion, dance and other forms of performance art, he began showcasing his skills around California and neighboring states from a very young age. After turning 18, he began performing in various festivals, theatres, touring shows, night clubs, theme parks and cruise ships around the world (India, Cuba, China, the Caribbean, the Mediterranean, Latvia, and just about every nook and cranny of the U.S.). Now 26, he is so grateful and excited to start traveling and performing again in a post-pandemic world. He specializes in aerial rope, stacking chairs and duo trapeze in addition to whatever else a client may request. When Allen is not on stage, you can find him tending to his garden of organic fruits, vegetables and exotic tropical plants at home in San Diego.

JULIAN CALLARI (trampoline wall acrobat) began his circus career at age 19. Callari first discovered the trampwall after moving from his hometown of Maui to California. Callari attended Ecole de Cirque Quebec, with trampwall as his primary discipline, performing in shows with Catwall, productions Haut-Val and Flip Fabrique. Within just four years Callari was cast for *Kurios* by Cirque du Soleil performing Acronet. He's excited to be bringing a total of nine years of circus experience to the Cirque Mechanics cast.

CHASE CULP (clown/comedic character) grew up in Houston, Texas, and started performing in theatre at a young age. He began his circus career as a teenager, spending summers touring New England with Circus Smirkus. He then joined Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey straight out of high school, touring the U.S. for the next two years. Since then, his career has taken him to 11 different countries around the world to perform in arenas, theatres, circus tents and more. Some of these adventures included a festival in India, a theme park in Abu Dhabi, a circus in Switzerland and the award-winning *Slava's Snowshow*. Culp was with the Venardos Circus when live performances had to pause, but he used the break to return to teaching the next generation of

performers at Circus Smirkus. He also took some time to pet his dogs, fix up his tiny house, and become a Certified Laughter Yoga Leader. He's happy to be back on stage performing for live audiences again.

ELENA SANDERS (contortion, hula hoops) is a multi-disciplinary circus artist who currently has three solo acts: contortion, hula hoops and aerial straps. Her career highlights include *America's Got Talent*, *The Steve Harvey Show*, *Tengo Talento Mucho Talento* and winning a mechanical bull riding contest at a cast party. Sanders is very excited to join the legendary *Birdhouse Factory* show for her Cirque Mechanics debut!

A note of thanks from the producers

We want to thank our family—our three wonderful sons, Zion, Quinn and Iago—for their unconditional love and support, their enthusiasm, their imagination and for adopting the spirit of a true circus family by discussing act ideas, narrative and plot points at the dinner table and by helping in the shop with painting, building and cleanup! Our parents, for taking us to the circus as children and allowing us to dream.

Our cast and crew for their tireless efforts and their collaborative energy. The team at Alliance Artists Management for believing in our company and for their extensive support during the pandemic. Bo Bogatin and Kurt Nelson for keeping us honest and legal. Andy Espo for his friendship, clear head and objectivity. Bryan Schuette and the boys at United Machine, for fabricating and creating and trusting us with their equipment. Don Seiersen at Vishnu Creative for his great graphic support. Our family at Cirque du Soleil and our fellow American circus companies for their commitment to this art form and for continuing to set the bar higher.

The creation process was long and arduous, but extremely rewarding. We had so much fun designing and exploring, training and rehearsing. Our goal is that you are entertained, and our hope that you are moved. Finally thank you to our audiences for venturing once more to the theatre, for your loyalty and your faith in our company, for the laughs, the applause and the appreciation for the circus arts.