



Former student takes his performing skills to a new level with circus arts show

When student Barney White left Havering Sixth Form College five years ago, little did he know that he would soon be performing for his former tutors in a circus arts show put on by a theatre company he himself created!

Barney, now 23, who studied A Level Performing Arts, Dance and Theatre Studies at College from 2002 to 2004, runs Acrojou with his partner Jeni Barnard – and they have just performed their new contemporary visual arts show, *Wake*, at Jacksons Lane Theatre, Highgate, North London.

The show, billed as a poetic journey through a filmic landscape, towards stillness in a shifting world... was an unusual, innovative and exciting display of circus and creative arts.

Former Gaynes School pupil Barney said: "The courses I took at College gave me a great range of techniques and methods of performance which have certainly had an effect on my development as an artist post-college. This was also largely thanks to how supportive and encouraging my tutors - Viccki Beck, Lisa Smith (now Rogers) and Jonathan Venner were.

"Dance was completely new to me and really took me out of my comfort zone physically and creatively which was challenging at first, but I gradually got into my groove with it. And being the only boy in the class does have its perks...!"

Barney left College with his 3 A Levels and took a three-year degree in Circus Arts at The Circus Space in London. "As I was interested in using quite an eclectic range of forms in performance, I thought that learning a completely new skill base would be a great opportunity. I went to the audition and got a place," he said.

"I met my partner Jeni there and we decided to specialise together in German Wheel, which is acrobatics performed on a large steel wheel like a hamster wheel. When we graduated from the degree course, we formed our company Acrojou, and were commissioned to perform at the Trafalgar Square Festival.

"After another commission to make a walkabout act, *The Wheel House*, we built up a selection of street performances which went down really well because taking something like German Wheel onto the street is quite a unique spectacle, as nobody has really seen one before!"

Now living in Faversham, Kent, Barney believes he inherited his passion for performing from his parents. His mum was a dancer and his dad an actor – "I was exposed to this world quite extensively from a pretty young age," he says.

The show *Wake* was made possible by a grant from Arts Council England. Barney says: "We were awarded our first grant at the beginning of 2009 to research and develop a

new, venue-based show. We have spent most of this year working on the project along with a director and video artist.

"The show is a synthesis of contemporary circus, physical theatre and visual art in a poetic journey through a sculptural and filmic landscape and the performances were very well received."

College tutors Lisa and Viccki took a group of current Performing Arts students to see the show and were highly impressed. Viccki said: "They are producing some beautiful work and have shown real potential. We are hoping to get Barney to come back to College at some point and work with our current students."

Meanwhile, Barney's days are filled with circus arts training and following up offers of further support for the project as well as all the administration involved in running your own company. Sometimes it can be overwhelming.

Barney said: "You have to have a lot of discipline and an ability to step back and see the bigger picture when times get a little tough, as they do, but with perseverance and optimism you start seeing results. It really is all worth it in the end."

He hopes in the future that Acrojou will become a regularly funded company producing innovative, cross-art forms and indoor work. "It's a few years off yet though...!" Barney says.

For current College students, Barney gives this advice: "Think carefully about what you want to do and take the initiative. We received so much support for the project Wake just because we asked people for their help. Working hard today will absolutely pay off tomorrow, so get the ground work done for long-term goals sooner rather than later.

"Also, stay positive! Whatever career you want to follow, but especially in the arts, it can be hard and slow to get set up. Identify your goals and believe that you are good enough to achieve them."