

[seattletimes.com](https://www.seattletimes.com)

Seattle trapeze artists team up with live orchestra for what may be a first-of-its-kind performance

Nov. 16, 2021 at 6:00 am

4-5 minutes

Chamber music and circus arts seem like an unlikely pairing. But two local performance groups have come together in what may be the first collaboration of its kind to create “Dances in the Sky,” an aerial circus arts show with flying trapeze accompanied by live chamber orchestra.

“Dances in the Sky” is Emerald City Trapeze Arts’ first in-person professional performance since the pandemic began. The event is a collaboration with Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra, which will perform with ECTA on Nov. 19 and 20 at ECTA’s venue in South Seattle. The show will include aerial performances on silks, rings, chains, pole and cyr wheel. There will also be a flying trapeze act led by Jordan Tribble. Geoffrey Larson, SMCO music director, and Deon Fox, ECTA artistic director, matched each act with classical dance music to create a cohesive program rather than a typical cabaret-style presentation.

“The song of the bullfighter from ‘Carmen’ is literally about performing a death-defying feat and it will be spectacular to see

how the artists use it in the air,” said Larson. The Cyr wheel is paired with Dvořák’s mesmerizing “Slavonic Dance,” while waltzes by Johann Strauss II will match the pendulous rhythm of the trapeze. Working with an orchestra instead of recorded pop music gave ECTA performers an artistic challenge.

“We’re creating a story that is mixed with the song so that what we’re doing in the air is synchronized to the timing of what they are playing, which is difficult to do,” says Tribble.

Aerialist Jessica Perry will perform to Debussy’s “Danse sacree et danse profane.” It’s a signature piece for harp soloist Sophie Baird-Daniel, and nearly twice the length of a typical performance on silks, allowing Perry to expand her act with dramatic drops and additional performers.

Emerald City Trapeze Arts’ school has launched international careers (including Tribble’s), but still offers beginner classes. ECTA is the only local trapeze school built to double as a performance venue, with viewing areas on two levels wrapped around the performance space on three sides. ECTA’s annual Mardi Gras and Halloween shows culminate in big costume parties with the audience.

“Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra is an ensemble that exists to explore new opportunities for what an orchestra can do,” said Larson. Collaborations outside of classical music are central to their mission. They have performed baroque music in a Capitol Hill nightclub, incorporated electronics into a performance at St. James Cathedral and performed with Seattle rapper Wanz at Benaroya Hall.





Seattle Metropolitan Chamber Orchestra at a previous performance.

(Michael Goude)

Larson says he has admired ECTA for a long time and thought they would be a good fit for a collaboration. He called them just as they were considering how to return to live performance.

“We were really uncomfortable with the party element in a pandemic. At that point Geoffrey reached out to us and that was perfect. We could have a more intimate show where we didn’t feel like we were putting people at risk,” said Sarah Brownstein, trapeze artist and director of operations at ECTA. Proof of vaccination and masking are required to attend “Dances in the Sky.”

“It’s really the merging of two worlds. Traditionally and historically, circus was sort of ‘the common man’s entertainment.’ Symphony and classical music was more highbrow. Now in modern times we’re mingling all the genres,” said Perry.

This blend of carnival and concert is believed to be a first. No one

involved in “Dances in the Sky” has ever heard of live orchestra accompanying a flying trapeze act. Few venues can accommodate trapeze’s extensive rigging as well as a 42-player orchestra. Guests are encouraged to dress up for an elegant atmosphere, but with many standing-room tickets and a bar on each level (the show is for ages 21+), “Dances in the Sky” will not be formal. If all goes as expected, the circus audience’s usual raucous cheers will mix with exclamations of “bravo.”

Gemma Alexander is a Seattle-based freelance writer; gemmadeealexander.com. This report is supported, in part, by the Rubin Institute for Music Criticism, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and the Ann and Gordon Getty Foundation.