

Chicago Teens from Actors Gym Chosen to Perform in The Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival THIS Sunday

Local Students Strap in for Circus Festival Performance

The American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO) has chosen two 17 year old students from The Actors Gymnasium to perform in the AYCO Young Artist Showcase at the first ever circus festival in the United States.



Alison Tye and Justin Durham applied to AYCO's Young Artist Showcase with their **aerial straps act** and were selected among **youth under 21 from all over the country**.

[Click here to see ChilL Live Shows' past photo filled coverage on this talented twosome and their home base, The Actors Gymnasium in Evanston.**](#)**

Since acceptance, they have spent hours in The Actors Gymnasium's space, practicing their routine for its **January 12 performance at the Atheneum Theater's main stage**. The performance is **part of the closing day festivities for the inaugural Chicago Contemporary Circus Festival, taking place January 6 -12**.

Durham and Tye first performed their aerial straps act in the highly acclaimed 2012 production of *Lost & Found: A Recycled Circus*. In the spring of 2013, **America's Got Talent** invited them to perform their aerial straps act for the producers while they were holding auditions in Chicago. They made it through many rounds of the rigorous audition process. The act

has only improved with age and attendees of The Young Artist Showcase are in for quite the treat. Tickets to the performance are currently on sale.

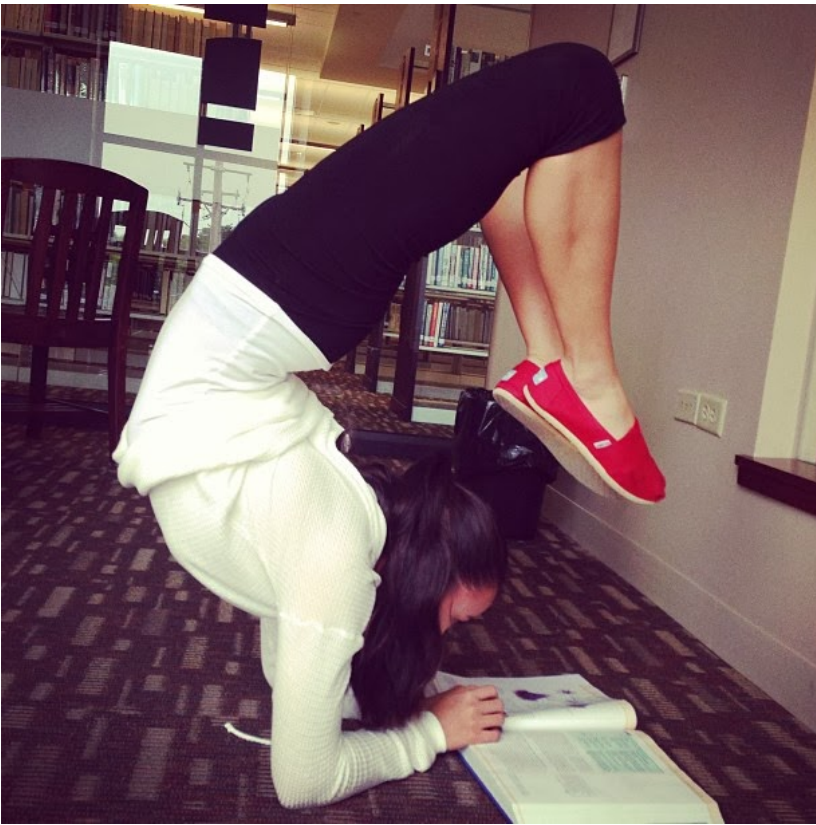
[Click here to purchase tickets for this family friendly, all ages treat!](#)

Both Tye and Durham are members of Teen Ensemble and long time students of The Actors Gymnasium.



The 2013-2014 Teen Ensemble. Top row, left - Alison Tye. Bottom row, center - Justin Durham.

Tye started out dancing, studying ballet and tap, while also starting skating. When she was eight, she found a flyer for North Shore Rhythmics and decided to give rhythmic gymnastics a try. Through it she learned the dance, flexibility, and strength that she ultimately used for her circus skills.



Tye started in The Actors Gymnasium Summer Circus and Performing Arts Camps with a friend. Once camp ended, she decided to quit gymnastics and join the circus. Starting circus arts classes also **helped her get over a fear of heights.** Audience members say that they would have never guessed she had a fear. Tye says, *"It doesn't affect me when I am performing because my love of performance is greater than my fear of heights."*

At Glenbrook South High School, she was recruited for the **girls' gymnastics team** and made it known that her top priority remained circus. For each class, rehearsal and Teen Ensemble practice, Tye drives 30 minutes from Glenview with her parents who wait outside until it's time to head home again. Her circus pursuits have also taken her to **studying flying trapeze in Chicago and the École Nationale de Cirque in Montreal.** Tye graduates this summer and will be attending Illinois State University's Physical Education Teacher Education Program.





Durham started doing cartwheels before he could stand. When his mother signed him up for his first circus class at age three, it was a natural fit. An ardent student of circus and movement, Durham has taken classes at The Actors Gymnasium since 1999, starting in the Summer Circus and Performing Arts Camps as soon as he was old enough in 2005. Later he became a member of the Teen Ensemble, a camp counselor, and a performer in several of The Actors Gymnasium's theatrical shows.



Like Tye, Durham struggles with balancing circus practice and rehearsal with being a normal high school student. Durham rehearses nearly every day, sometimes for up to 14 hours. This summer, he participated in The Actors Gymnasium's six-week, daily **Summer Circus Intensive Workshop**, where he was taught by renown circus professionals such as drama instructor **David**

Catlin of Lookingglass and **physical theatre instructor Dean Evans**. He also takes part in the **Dance Lab and Menz Dance programs at New Trier High School** as a dancer and choreographer and studies **German Wheel under world famous Wolfgang Bientzle**. Durham qualified to be a **member of the US Men's Team at the 10th Wheel Gymnastics World Championships in Chicago in July**.

Durham hopes that his hard work will pay off. He is applying to circus colleges such as **Ecole National De Cirque in Montreal**, the **Nation Institute of Circus Arts (NICA) in Australia** as well as U.S. colleges with dance programs such as **New York University, Marymount Manhattan College**, and the **University of Illinois**. **He dreams of performing with a world famous circus such as Cirque Du Soleil**.

Knowing Durham's dream, **The Actors Gymnasium** nominated him for the **2013 American Youth Circus Organization Youth Leader Award**. The winner receives a scholarship to the **American Youth Circus Festival**. Among the many excellent candidates submitted, Justin achieved placement on the shortlist for the award.



About The Actors Gymnasium

The Actors Gymnasium is dedicated to bringing a new physicality to the American Theatre. Encouraging ground-breaking theatrical exploration, The Actors Gymnasium teaches circus arts, physical theatre and multi-disciplinary performance to children and adults; produces original, daring works of circus-theatre; and serves as a talent resource, providing performance opportunities to our students and innovative professional event entertainment for a wider audience. At The Actors Gymnasium, people Learn To Fly - physically, emotionally, and creatively.