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Arts & Entertainment

The Actors Gymnasium Opens Third Studio Space In Evanston

Juggling, stage combat, clown class — the theater and circus arts nonprofit is offering an expanded range of classes for kids and adults.



Jonah Meadows, Patch Staff P

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A juggling class is one of several new classes offered by The Actors Gymnasium in its newest studio space at the Noyes Cultural Arts Center. (Lucy Carapetyan)

EVANSTON, IL — Classes resumed Monday at the Actors Gymnasium Circus School and Theatre Company after restrictions associated with the coronavirus delayed the start of the second semester. Though in-person class sizes have been capped, teaching space available for students — and the range of training options available for children and adults — have both expanded during the pandemic.

The Actors Gym has leased space at the city-owned Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes St., since 1995. This semester, it opened a third studio in the building.

Its largest space, "The Gym," is about 1,000 square feet and has 111 seats with a sprung floor and a vaulted ceiling rigged for aerial acrobatics. Its second space, "The Studio," also has some rigging for aerial work.

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The new studio space, dubbed the "Clown Room," will accommodate more recreational ground-based classes, as well as offer more space to a clown concentration offered as part of the nine-month professional training program. Both smaller spaces are about 800 square feet.

At about 1,000 square feet, The Gym is the largest of the Actors Gym's three spaces at Noyes Cultural Arts Center. (Courtesy The Actors Gymnasium)

John MacGaffey, marketing and operations manager for The Actors Gym, said the new space will allow the professional program's classes to be spread across three studios instead of two during the day. The Clown Room can then be used for weekly recreational classes on afternoons, evening and weekends, he said.

"Our bread and butter will continue to be at the intersection of physical theater and circus, but there's a whole range of stuff around that focus that folks who have no professional circus ambitions are interested in," MacGaffey said. "Our organization's

name is a little bit of a misnomer because most of our students are not professional actors or aspiring actors. It's kids who just really enjoy playing on the trapeze. It's adults who are just looking for a fun, off-the-beaten-path workout. We've got a circus fitness class that's been running for years that's just a standard, high-intensity interval training class that incorporates circus apparatuses into the workouts."

As the region returns to Phase 4 COVID-19 resurgence mitigation measures, MacGaffey said the Actors Gym is exploring how many in-person classes its 11 teachers can run in its delayed 16-week second semester of the 2020-21 academic year. The studio has also added online offerings, which may have resulted in even more class sessions than prior to the pandemic.

"I was talking to our clown instructor this week about whether he wanted to move his clown class — our weekly, recreational clown class — back to in-person, and he was like, 'Yes, but I've got this student over in Europe, who obviously can't attend an in-person clown class at the moment but wants to continue, I don't want to leave him behind,'" he said. "As a small community organization, it's really fun to be able to have the reach that we do through our online programming."

The Actors Gym also recently moved its office to a smaller space in the Noyes Cultural Arts Center, allowing the nonprofit to secure a new teaching space while keeping its costs flat, McGaffey explained.

"Even though, organizationally, we're excited to be able to maintain three classroom spaces, we are still in a pandemic," he said. "So, operationally, we're not actually increasing any of our overhead during this because we've been able to cut back on the office lease at the same time."

More information is available online about a range of [available classes](#) for adults and children — from dance, Pilates, mime, acting, juggling and stage combat.


"We're trying to spread circus in places that folks don't typically think of circus as

occupying," MacGaffey said. "Because we think the benefits of it extend far beyond people's traditional popular concept of sort of big-tent circus shows that so many people grew up seeing."

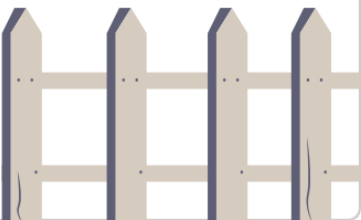
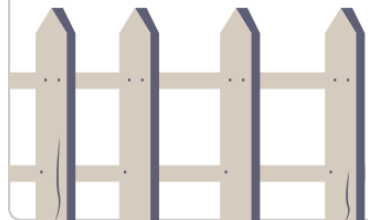
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