



SWINGERS' CLUB

The circus might be for freaks and bearded ladies, but only ones that are ridiculously strong and flexible

THEY NEED TO BRING A STEP-ladder. Getting up to the bar I trample over two men as they hold the ladder steady. Not a good start considering that I'm to drop backwards off a trapeze at high speed and swing by my ankles. Once they've taken the ladder away I perch on the bar and look down at the concrete floor. I imagined that there would be a net, or at least a mat.

Brent van Rensburg, founder of the Zip Zap Circus, assures me – from the ground – that he's been a trapeze artist for 25 years and spent most of that time in hospital from falling badly on a net. He's got me tight (a rope goes from my harness to his hand) and he looks trustworthy. But what if the building catches on fire or his young daughter, who's trying to goad me into deadlier tricks, screams in distress at the crucial moment when my ankles fail? It's possible, but I'm still willing to take the chance.

Why? Soaring on a trapeze (without the spandex) lets you feel like a child – preferably an athletic, strong, fearless child. And I spent my formative years watching television, so I have a great deal to catch up on. Sitting up on the bar I feel part of a fit, exciting family. The trapeze artists – who've come out to watch – are more defined and in better control of their bodies than any other athletes I've seen. There's a gypsy caravan in the corner, kids trampolining up walls and, thankfully, not a clown in sight. You want a body of pure muscle and adrenaline for free? Start swinging.

FOR THE KIDS

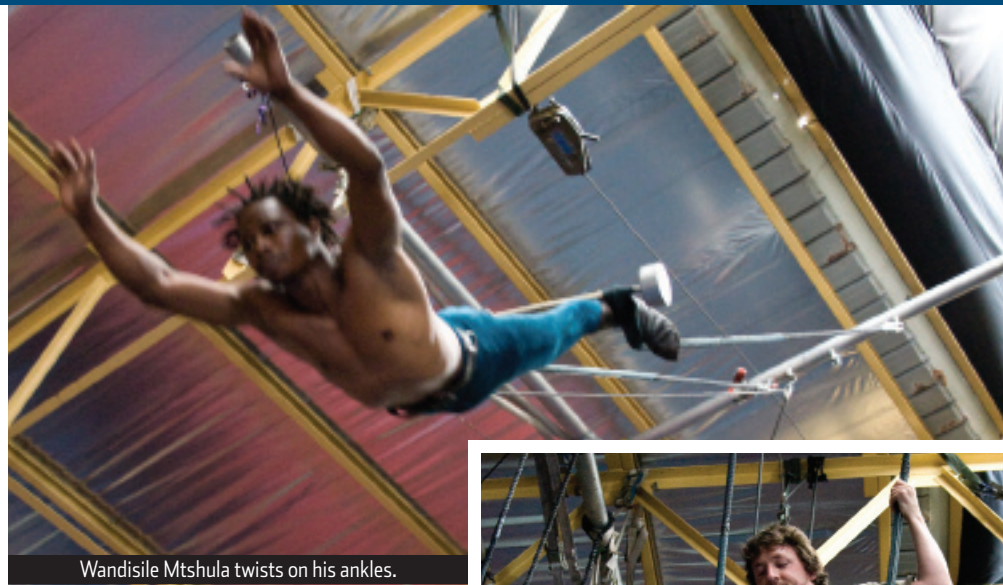
The problem with hanging upside down in front of little kids is the swearing. You can't fight the Gs, no matter how strong you are, so you need to do the tricky stuff – like standing up on the bar – at the point of the swing when the bar is the furthest out. That's when you've got further to fall and your body is parallel to the ground. Hence I yell profanity while standing or sitting, get a handle on myself, apologise to my underage spectators, then do it again.

But the cursing slows me down – on a trapeze, if you hesitate for a split-second you won't be in the correct place for the next step. The swing won't wait for you. To get the timing right I watch Wandisile Mtshula, one of Van Rensburg's first students. He was trained up a tree in a township before they even had a trapeze. Now he's spent the last five years touring the States. I imitate him by pumping my legs – like on a swing in a park, except now I'm aiming at warehouse rafters. "Most of the time in trapeze your arms aren't going to be as strong as your legs," Van Rensburg says. All very well, but what I need for this trick is strong ankles.

DOWNSIDE UP

I've rubbed my hands with resin (for grip) and touched my eyes, so Van Rensburg has to explain the trick while I'm crying. It's called the "sitting fall back to ankle catch". I have a trust problem with pushing backwards off a trapeze. Plus I've never used my ankles for anything but to compare and convince a girl that she wasn't fat.

Van Rensburg says my legs will know what to do. What he doesn't mention is when your ankles catch they still slip a few centimetres – this is how they lock – but it feels



Wandisile Mtshula twists on his ankles.

like you're headed for the floor. This shift panics me and I lunge up to grab back at the bar. I miss and, as the trapeze swings outwards, I flail back by my ankles.

Once upside down, I'm assured that getting back up has nothing to do with stomach

I'm missing all the skin on the back of my knees, but the workout is incredible

muscles but rather momentum. You need to flip and squirm like a fish on the floor of a boat and then you'll land back on the trapeze. I try to flip up and my fingertips skim the rope. I probably swear, but the kids are used to it by now. I try a few more times to no avail. You need to relax to complete this trick, but I can't get the tension out of



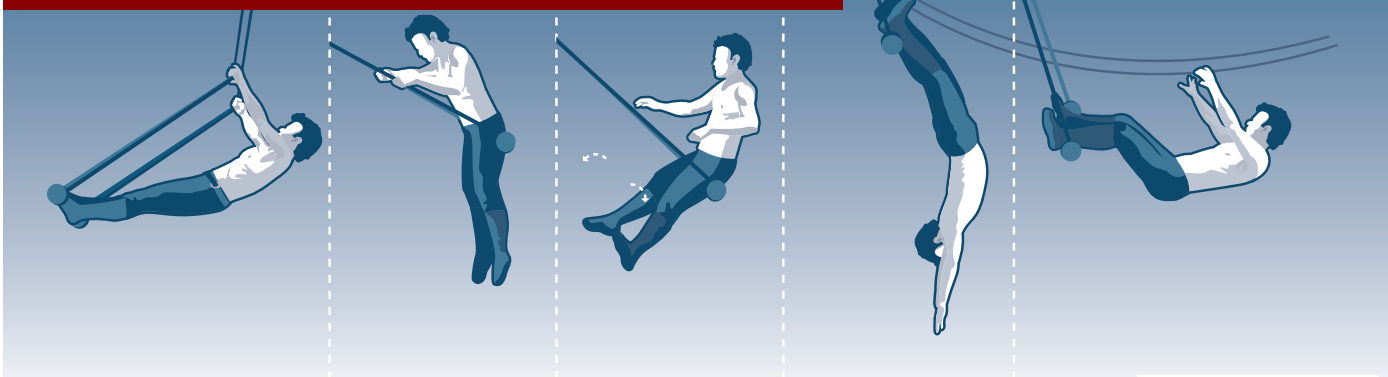
Get trapeze lessons by visiting www.zip-zap.co.za.

my trunk. On the plus side, dropping back to my ankles and swinging up to the rafters is now doable. I'm missing all the skin on the back of my knees, but the workout is incredible. I'm excited enough now to try whatever the daughter has planned – it's the least I could do to thank her for not distracting her father.

MH

How To: Do the "Sitting Fall Back To Ankle Catch"

Get a rush of blood to the head



1. Pump your legs as if you are on a park swing, to build momentum.

2. When the trapeze is furthest back, sit down on the bar.

3. Twist your legs out (like a duck stance) and push yourself backwards.

4. When the trapeze is at its peak look behind you. As it swings back flex your body forwards and back again.

5. Flex forwards for the last time when the trapeze swings back. You should land back on the bar.

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