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STAGE

60 Second CV

In 2003 Kiwi, Bryan Donaldson founded the London based company High Performance Productions with colleague Joe Hull. A former aerialist, Bryan and his partner, Juliette Hardy-Donaldson, performed as Duo Vertigo for 12 years and are famed for their acrobatic casting cradle act.

Isn't there show business in your family?

Yes, my maternal grandparents came from a variety/theatre background. My grandfather was in a concert party and entertained the troops during the Second World War. I grew up in an environment of being taken to see shows and seeing the magic of how everything worked backstage. I got bitten by the bug very early on and suppose it was in my blood.

How did you get into circus?

When I was eight, I saw the Tony Curtis film Houdini and decided I wanted to be a magician. I joined the local magic circle and started entertaining with my grandfather's concert party. There were comedy sketches, opera singers, dancers and I used to present a magic act. One day a circus came to town and needed a magician for a couple of weeks to present a 'Lady to Lion illusion'. Then they offered me a small caravan and asked me to join the tour. I thought "hell yeah". I loved it and learnt all my circus skills on tour.

When did you start doing aerial work?

I met Juliette in 1994 during the Blackpool Tower Circus' Christmas season. I was performing on the Wheel of Death when, tragically, during performance, my partner, Neville Campbell Jr. was killed. Juliette needed someone to help in her aerial act and I volunteered. We then joined the very first tour of Cirque Surreal.

Why start High Performance?

Acrobats have a limited shelf-life. I've seen so many friends who can't perform any more but haven't planned for the future. I'd started picking up bits of rigging work and realised there was an opportunity to set up a business and provide rigging and the production side of things in circus, the corporate industry and even classical theatre. Having been an aerialist myself really helped to put the people I was working with at ease.

Have you rigged anything unusual?

We did a publicity stunt and press launch for Sister Act the Musical and had nun's abseiling off the front of the Palladium Theatre in London as Whoopi Goldberg and the VIP's were coming in. And recently, one of the most fun things we've done was rigging a hire-wire walk, 150m long and 50m high, across Wembley Stadium.

Liz Arratoon