

Circus School

**China – NY PREMIERE**

Documentary, Guo Jing/Ke Dingding, 2006, 103 min

Mandarin with English subtitles

Recommended ages 12 to adult

SYMPH – Sat, Mar 7, 3:00pm

Awe inspiring, shocking and poetic, *Circus School* takes us behind the scenes of the Shanghai Circus School, where child acrobats are undergoing grueling training in preparation for the prestigious national acrobatic finals. For American audiences who watched spellbound at the precision choreography of the Beijing Olympic opening ceremonies and the near flawless grace of the young Chinese floor team, this film will be an eye-opening look at the trials and sacrifices these athletes must undergo to attain such a level of poise and perfection. Under tremendous pressure to succeed, the coaches appear to prefer threats and humiliation to encouragement, and as the filmmaker's camera takes a silent, fly-on-the-wall approach we see young performers subjected to verbal tirades and physical training so intense that it borders on torture (one coach yells so hard, he is driven to a heart attack). But then, beyond the injuries and adversity we get the triumphs: acrobatic routines of rare beauty, cheering crowds, lithe little Xu Lu flying through the air like a rocket, and 13 year old Cai Yong displaying such strength, flexibility and control that his movements appear utterly impossible. This is an amazing film; you sit in disbelief, mouth agape at the beauty and tragedy of what you are witnessing.

***Comment: Film contains adult language. Some scenes of forced stretching are difficult to watch.***