

My Paralympic Opening Ceremony journey is over and I feel like I have been mourning the end of something truly amazing.

It all started back in February when I auditioned for an aerial position in the ceremony and a month later I found out I was going to be paid to do the most incredible job I could imagine. However the first audition got me through to the circus boot camp, then another audition took place 8 weeks later. The second audition would get me through to the actual Paralympic Opening Ceremony so I had a long way to go.



Boot camp with the pro cast team and Circus Space teachers.

Before I got involved I didn't really know what I was letting myself in for but I soon found out. From late April I was starting a circus boot camp at the national circus school – Circus Space in the heart of London. Luckily my previous aerial years had helped me a little bit but it was definitely a shock to the system. The full time training began and we were taking classes in aerial skill, body conditioning, flexibility and movement. It was a lovely way to bond with the other 45 successful aerialists who all had various disabilities and backgrounds, of which most had never done circus skills. I had a lovely training buddy where we both bounced off each other and encouraged one another to get the most out of ourselves. 5 weeks in we had to show case our skills to the big bosses of the Paralympic Opening Ceremony organisers and artistic directors. Of course we blew them out the water and surpassed all their expectations of what we could achieve in such a short amount of time. It was a proud feeling and we were getting near to the end of the 8 weeks boot camp before we moved onto 3 Mill Studios for actual rehearsals. By the end of the 8 weeks we did a show and tell for family and friends and we had an agonising week wait before we found out if we were definitely through and what role we would have within the ceremony, whether it would be aerial harness or sway poles.



During our week off I did another circus show for the Greenwich and Docklands Festival called Prometheus Awakes. It was a lovely one night only show where we reached full capacity of 5000 people. It was a great experience and I was one of the human net people. After one of our rehearsals some of us who were taking part in Prometheus Awakes were also in the Paralympic Ceremony all found out that we were through to the final stages of Opening Ceremony, we were all



so relieved and excited that we still had a job carrying on the following week. I found out I was going to be doing aerial which is what I wanted and I couldn't contain my excitement.

Prometheus Awakes



Harness training

The following week we then moved to 3 Mill Studios which was incredible. We found out more about our roles but each week things were changing quite considerably. I was going to be in both aerial pieces of the ceremony, one in a harness and one on a trapeze. All the aerial team were going to be in the harness routine, and then there was going to be 4 guys on a rope, 4 girls on a trapeze then everyone else in nets. However the trapeze got put into the show as an added extra, then it was cut because of technical issues so therefore I would be doing nets, but then the trapeze got put back in. All these decisions were on one day, so it was quite unnerving not knowing if you're coming or going. In the end it worked out ok and rehearsals came along nicely. The aerial team were also put into a dance on the ground for the empowerment section of the ceremony. This wasn't our most favourite rehearsals to go to as they tended to be on a Friday night 6.30-9.30pm by which point we were all knackered because we had done aerial rehearsals from 10-5 which was very demanding on our bodies. However we seemed to pick it up quickly and my group of 4 were chosen to lead in the band for this song.



Dance rehearsals

I was also pleasantly surprised when the Olympics were on travelling to the studios which is pretty much opposite to the stadium was uninterrupted and made my commute much easier. It was exciting being in the rehearsal space for all the ceremonies and we caught a glimpse of what the

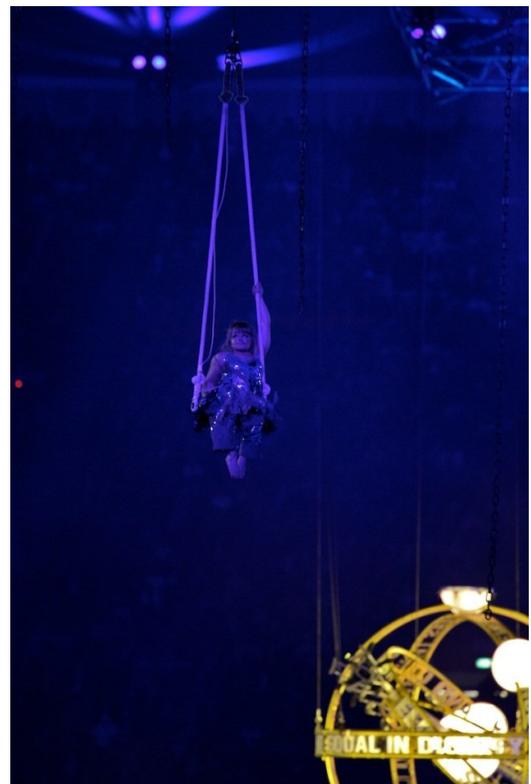


Olympic Closing Ceremony was going to be like as I happened to be parked up next to the Spice Girls for the week leading up to the Closing. We also saw lots of celebrities walking around like Jessie J, Tinie Tempah and Brian May. Although I had the privileged experience of bumping into David Beckham and having my photo taken with him with a friend. He was a really nice guy, and didn't mind having his picture taken with us even though he was with his children.



In the last 10 days leading up to the Paralympic Opening Ceremony we then moved our rehearsals into the Olympic Stadium. The first time you walk onto the field of play is something you really can't describe. It made me feel so proud that I had come such a long way and had achieved something that I didn't think was possible. We had very long hours of rehearsals and a lot of waiting around, our typical day could be anything from rehearsals 10am-10pm or 3pm to midnight. It was very exciting to be around such a buzzing environment and when we could we would watch the other parts of the show. It was amazing backstage in our holding area where we would do our hair, make up, costumes and get our harnesses checked. We had a great team working for us who were all very patient.

On the night of the ceremony I was so excited that somehow I didn't get nervous which was very surprising as there were a few changes in our routines and I knew I had a 6min time frame between one routine to the next. Our first aerial piece was in harnesses under an umbrella structure where we did somersaults and dives. It was exciting opening the show and before I went on stage I was lucky enough to share the same entrance where I met Stephen Hawking and the dance group Flawless. Obviously Stephen Hawking trumps Flawless but still nice to meet everyone. It was equally as special as I got to be backstage with Sophie Partridge who also has OI, and she was one of the pro cast dancers. Our next aerial routine was after the athletes had paraded in so it gave us a chance to slowly get out of costume and change into different harnesses as these were just for safety in case we fall rather than suspending us. This was my favourite section as it really showed off our aerial talents and everything we had learnt in the last 4 months. Unfortunately channel 4 didn't highlight it but footage has been posted online and the 80,000 people in the stadium got to see just how special it was. After this routine which was very slow and elegant we then had to race to get to the next entrance where we had 6min to get our costume and harnesses off, put a new costume on and change the make up for our ground based dance routine. We all managed it and we did the dance which went well and it was all so exciting.



It something I will never forget and without support from my family but also from access to work who paid for someone to drive me to work every day and the fantastic physio team, I really couldn't have done it. The night went so quick and I was so privileged to meet and work with some incredible people.

