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It's exciting. I love the feeling of flying around in midair.

Yan Xiaoyu

Acrobatic actress

Yan Xiaoyu is preparing for “ERA Shanghai 2” by practicing hoop rotation, which requires her to spin at a high speed on an iron ring with a diameter of 1.88 meters. — Sun Chao



Dear girl, that's the real lord of the ring



A student from Shanghai Circus School does stretching exercises. — Ma Xuefeng

Tan Weiyun

Yan Xiaoyu hides in a backstage corner and stares toward the center of the ring, her face indistinct in the shadows but her eyes glistening in the bright stage lights.

When the leading performer begins spinning in a head-high hoop swiftly and rapidly in the ring center, the act peaks to a crescendo, then the performer basks in the applause of the crowd.

And Yan, a stand-in for the regular acrobat, 17, must wait behind the scenes every night in full make-up and costume. She has no idea when she will be called on to fill in for somebody else.

“I wish I could do my hoop rotations on stage one day,” Yan says with an enthusiastic smile.

“However, I’m sure I’d be really scared on that day.”

Yan, a native of Liaoning Province, has dedicated her entire childhood to acrobatics, but the

journey from a grass-root tumbler to a big star may require not just hard effort and talent, but also patience and luck.

Yan is participating in the second edition of “ERA Shanghai,” a glittering gold name on the city’s performance stage.

It has been performed nearly every night at Shanghai Circus World, over 5,000 times in front of more than 5 million guests in the last 15 years.

The new edition, “ERA Shanghai 2,” which was created, designed and choreographed last year, integrates fashion elements, technology, stage art and Shanghai-style acrobatics.

When the “new normal” returns after the pandemic, people will return to the ringside. More young acrobats are needed by the circus ensemble.

A senior at Shanghai Circus School, Yan stood out for her abilities and dedication. She was chosen to be an intern for the troupe and joined the new performance as a

sub for the lead acrobat last August during her final year of study at the school.

She’s working on Cyr Wheel, which requires her to spin at a high speed in a hefty iron ring with a diameter of 1.88 meters. In order to spin, she must also work with the principal actor.

The duo spins in the ring together and performs additional daring stunts.

“I can perform dangerous stunts like jumps, spins and somersaults, but I have no idea how to act like an actor.

“It’s difficult for me,” Yan admits.

Acting is more important in today’s acrobatic performances than accomplishing feats of physical strength, balance and agility.

“ERA Shanghai 2” depicts a young couple’s love story, which frequently embarrasses Yan, who is required to act affectionately and make eye contact with her partner.

Her daily routine in the ensemble