

# Introduction

## **'Train of Thoughts - Almost a Circus'**

Premiered in 1990 for the Victorian Arts Centre's country education program.

Ever since that day, the show has toured extensively to rural and city schools all over Australia thrilling thousands of students and teachers along the way. Over these successful years the show has also collected some of the best feedback anyone could hope for.

## **The Story**

Nelligan, a former vaudeville entertainer appears in an inner urban site under a railway overpass. His daily existence is enriched by memories of his past. Refusing to succumb to old age and loneliness, he gathers an audience, and creates a neighbourhood show. Nelligan's memories take over. A clothesline becomes a circus slackwire as he takes the audience back to the days when he was once a famous performer.

## **Speaks all languages!**

'Train of Thoughts - Almost a Circus' is most suitable for both Primary and Secondary, and because no word is uttered, has the unique ability to speak all languages!

**Peter Gray** is not the typical mime artist. He uses all sorts of visual ways, including characters, body language, circus skills and musical expression to tell a story. The set of 'Train of Thoughts' - Almost a Circus features a specially engineered self-supporting slackwire apparatus to enable Peter to present his amazing balancing skills while on a very wobbly wire!

## **A rare chance!**

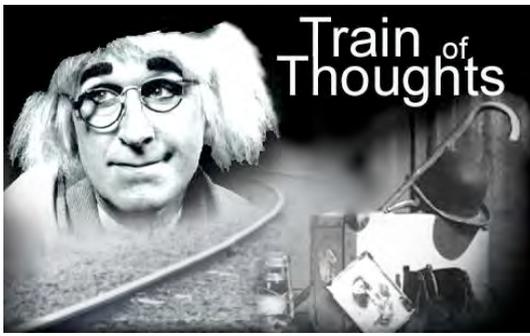
'Train of Thoughts - Almost a Circus' will transform your school venue into the world of theatre, using lights, sound and set. This is a rare chance for students and teachers to see balancing skills performed not on a tightwire, but a slackwire!

## **A memorable experience!**

'Train of Thoughts - Almost a Circus' not only tells a story filled with comedy, circus and character, but also highlights the value of older people in our community.

Beneath the wrinkles of wisdom is a person with a story, and a wealth of experience to share.

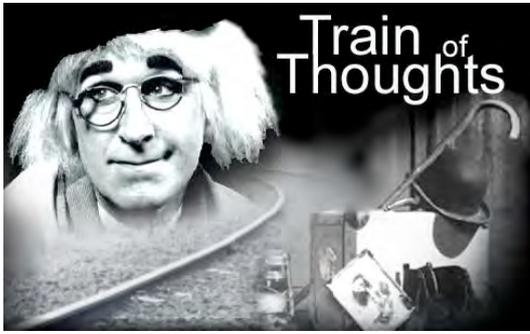




# Information

1. Cost: Only \$6 per student - A life's work for just the cost of a hamburger!  
Minimum fee is based on 150 students per performance.  
 $\$6 \times 150 = \$900 + \text{gst} = \$990$  minimum
2. Cancellation Fee: A cancellation fee of 50% of the minimum fee applies if your booking is cancelled less than 4 weeks prior to the show or 100% if less than 1 week prior to the show.
3. 'Train of Thoughts - Almost a Circus' is performed in a story format.
- 4.. Running time 55 min.
5. Choreographed to a musical soundtrack
6. Featuring two characters:  
Nelligan, (an old former entertainer)  
Quig (Nelligan in his performing days)
7. Characters do not speak, but use body language, circus skill and music to tell the story.
8. Performance is suitable from prep to yr12. If your school is a Primary School and requires more than one performance, it is best to mix prep to yr3 with an older age group such as yrs 4, 5, 6. There is audience participation in the show that better suits yr4 and above. Preps to yr3 love watching older students participate..
9. Slackwire apparatus design is a self-supporting, freestanding device. Sits on 4 rubber feet. Leaves no marks. It can be set up on any level surface. e.g. carpet, polished wood, cement.
10. A maximum number of 2 performances at the same venue are possible on one day.
11. If 2 shows are planned on one day, please allow a minimum of 60min inbetween.
12. Student question time can be offered after the performance if requested.
13. Teacher's notes are downloadable for group discussion on performance/background/ social issues related to the performance, and even activity diagrams teaching the basics of circus skills. To download go to: <http://www.wobblywire.com/downloads.htm>  
(click the downloads button - then look for Teacher's Notes in the school section on that page)





# Requirements

1. **Minimum performance space needed:**

7 metres width x 7 metres depth x 3.50metres height.

**NB.** If width is under the required minimum the special apparatus will not fit in.

These dimensions should give you an idea of the room needed to effectively present the show.

Additional to this, please allow enough room for the audience.

2. **Indoor Venue:**

\* Power Supply

\* A clear space to immediately start setting up

\* A clean space - swept and tidy

3. **Set up time - 3hrs**

This time allows for meeting teacher and checking venue, unloading and assembly of slackwire apparatus, lights, sound, props, and preparation of characters eg. make up and costume.

4. **Pack up time -1hr. 30min**

Please inform performer if venue is going to be used during pack up time.  
eg. after school care, sporting activity

5. **Car/Venue access:**

Station Wagon needs to be driven right up to door of venue. (a large amount of gear to unload)

6. **4 tables** (to put props and audio mixer on): either - desks (2 student length) or tressle tables.

7. **Primary Schools Only:**

Mixed Ages at each show (if 2 performances at same school)

8. **Seating arrangements:**

How the audience are seated can help make the show's atmosphere that much more effective.

Show is best performed on floor level for audiences less than 300.

In these situations two thirds of the audience are seated on the floor and one third are seated on chairs behind.

Because the show is entirely visual, people seated on chairs in the back areas not only will see better, but their elevation will help contain the show's energy!

Chairs to be put in place just prior to the performance (30 min) Stage assistant will show where the chairs are to go. Most schools provide student helpers for this task.

Audience will be seated slightly circular.

However if the school has a theatre setting eg. tiered seating etc it may be more effective to make use of these facilities and perform the show on the stage.





# Train of Thoughts featured characters

*My love of musical expression and makeup gave birth to imaginary characters, and as I performed I realised the key to holding the audience's interest was not only found in clever human feats, but in character communication.*



## Nelligan

Nelligan, a former vaudeville entertainer appears in an inner urban site under a railway overpass. His daily existence is enriched by memories of his past. The only treasure he has is an old cracked photograph from the days when he was once famous.

He's friendly to everyone who passes, and simply wants to share the skills of his past. There is a loneliness that comes forth in his effort to say "Excuse me, but once I used to be..."

Nelligan can be very gentle, but also cranky. If people show kindness he might play his spoons, or do the odd walking-stick trick, but if they are rude to him, he turns his back and hobbles away.

## Quig

Nelligan while balancing on the slackwire changes into a character called Quig.

Quig represents Nelligan when he was once a famous performer. It was back in the days when there was no television, computers, laptops, iPads, smart phones and other personal devices.

People in those days generally had to create their own entertainment. Use their own imagination.

Quig is an ageless character who lives in a world full of colour and imagination. He takes circus skills to a higher level performing amazing feats on the slackwire.



# Teacher Performance Checklist

Once the performance is underway, it is in the best interests of the performer and the audience that there are **NO unnecessary interruptions.**

**In order for your school to get the most out of the performance, please kindly ensure that the following are taken into consideration.**

- a. *All students attending the performance are seated before the performance commences, and that there is no reason for students to leave or arrive while the performance is in progress.*
- b. *Special need students and others who may require teacher assistance during the performance to be seated near a staff member on the side or back of audience.*
- c. *If students urgently need to leave during performance they should use exits out of sight of performance area (eg. upper side exits or back exits)*
- d. *In venue please No bells, sirens, PA system announcements during the performance, unless an emergency.*
- e. *All mobile phones and other electronic devices to be switched off.*
- f. *Still cameras may be used. (official school cameras only) Please see the performer or stage assistant in order to get the best results. There are great photos to be taken of students participating. Please take the opportunity to capture those moments in time.*
- g. *There are to be no video recordings of the performance.*
- h. *Teachers please do not bring work into the performance as this is very distracting for the performer. The performance atmosphere is greater when all those present are focused.*

## Arrival Procedure

- i. *Please enter the venue in order of younger classes to older. Sit front row first (youngest) following the curve of the witches hats.*
- j. *Approx two thirds of the audience are seated on floor with the other third on chairs. (if show is performed on the floor level)*
- k. *When all audience are seated and ready please inform stage assistant.*
- l. *Before start of show - allow students to chat quietly. (like normal theatre audience)*
- m. *There is no need to introduce the show as introduction is on soundtrack.  
If you wish to say something to the students beforehand please inform the stage assistant.*
- n. *Please make sure that students do not sit or lean on lighting stands.*
- o. *If you would like questions afterwards please inform performer or stage assistant .*
- p. *Pack up time is approx 90mins.*
- q. *Please inform performer if venue is going to be used during pack up time. eg. after school care*



## Train of Thoughts - almost a circus

### *The feedback says it all.....*

#### TEACHER RESPONSES:

*"It is difficult to engage the 'click and go' generation – Peter Gray is better than any Xbox, iPod or interactive computer game. The student's enjoyment was clear from their willingness to clap, laugh, sigh and be transported."* **Ogilvie High School - Tasmania**

*"A superb program. Professional down to every detail. Costuming, sound, lights, props were stunning. Beautifully presented. Best school show I've seen in 26 years of teaching!"* **Heathcote Primary - Victoria**

*"Excellent performance - skillful, captivating, entertaining. These days not many performers are able to hold the full attention of a young audience for 100% of the performance, but Peter Gray certainly did!"*  
**Blair Athol Primary - South Australia**

*"The students, both primary and secondary were transfixed throughout the show. A superbly crafted show illustrating the magnificent world of non - verbal communication. Obviously a very experienced, skilled artist who shares his talents with humour and warmth. Several teachers commented to me that it was the best show they had seen."* **St Marys District High School - Tasmania**

*"A truly outstanding performance. The children and staff were thoroughly engaged and entertained by this thoughtful, funny and skilful show. A wonderful story portrayed in mime. It inspired me to talk less and have children follow sounds and actions. Just superb. Captured the children's imagination. So beautifully crafted and poignant in delivery."* **Penbank Primary - Victoria**

*"Awesome. The students - discerning yet ordinarily passive audience members - were quickly hooked in and then held spellbound. The energetic discussions and reviews bubbled on back in our class. Fantastic. The best visiting performance I've shared with a class. Thanks for this rich viewing and performance experience, all the elements of mood, symbolism and plot tied together through engaging circus skills. I hope such performances remain alive."*  
**Castletown Primary - Western Australia**

*"Loved it!! Especially drums, whistle, and cymbals. Very funny. Covered all ages beautifully. Well done!!"*  
**Warrag Nth. Primary School - Victoria**

*"Audience in awe and enraptured. Eyes were riveted. One student commented "The first half made me laugh till I cried, and the second half I held my breath in suspense." Costuming, staging, music, lighting - the whole show was really a wonderful experience. Non verbal communication at its best."*  
**Karrinyup Primary - Western Australia**

*"The structure of the story woven with the acrobatics allowed for an indepth discussion on what memories we might pack in a suitcase. The child I work with has ADHD and has his work cut out to sit still for any length of time. My charge sat enthralled for the entire performance."* **Portland North Primary - Victoria**

*"There was a real 'WOW' factor. I lost count of the number of children and teachers who came to tell me how brilliant this show was. The best we have ever had etc etc. The writing and art work that followed was fabulous too."* **Cooloongup Primary - Western Australia**

*"Absolutely fantastic and hilarious - full of emotion - empathy for the performer. The best entertainment we've had at our school."* **Holy Spirit Primary Bray Park - Queensland**

*"One child said to me, "Today was the **best** day of my life!" I haven't seen a performance before that so totally delighted children and adults."* **St Albans East Primary - Victoria**

*"The storyline was easily followed and told beautifully without saying a word. The children were on the edge of their seats from start to finish. The expressions on the children's faces said it all."*  
**Boat Harbour Primary - Tasmania**

*"A wonderful mixture of pathos, humour, skill, drama, action and participation. Music was supportive of performance and different to genres children may be familiar with. So important for children to experience. Thanks so much for returning to our school to share your special talents."* **Mt Eliza North Primary - Victoria**

*"The best incursion we've seen for years. Moved us all from laughter to tears."*  
**Glencoe Primary - Western Australia**



## Train of Thoughts - almost a circus

### *The feedback says it all.....*

*"Close to the best show I've ever seen in 25 years of teaching. So professional and talented and focused. I have never seen a group of children so totally involved from beginning to end."*

**Kendenu Primary - Western Australia**

*"Peter, you have opened the students eyes to a whole new world. Absolutely fantastic! The students and staff were enthralled. The students didn't want it to end."*

**Upfield Primary - Victoria**

*"Outstanding, the best school performance we have ever had."*

**Salisbury S.E. Primary - South Australia**

*"The best program I have ever had the pleasure of taking children to."*

**Concongella Primary School - Victoria**

*"Fantastic! Best incursion I've seen in 27 years of teaching."*

**Quinns Rocks Primary - Western Australia**

*"Outstanding response from all ages. The most skilled performer in years. Enthraling, moving, high quality, fun and relevant."*

**Kirton Point Primary - South Australia**

*"Awesome" to quote a student. They were enthralled. This was the most positive student response to a performance we have had. Parents keep telling me how much children have talked about it at home."*

**Gooseberry Hill Primary - Western Australia**

*"It is the best performance I have ever seen in my 10 years of teaching. We were very lucky to be given such a special experience."*

**Irymple Primary - Victoria**

*"Children thoroughly enjoyed the performance. It was lovely to watch their faces change with the different emotions portrayed."*

**New Town Primary - Tasmania**

*"Brilliant! It affected us all for some time. So clever, so touching so sad and so funny!"*

**Heidelberg Primary - Victoria**

*"Peter your circus skills were exceptional, but what made the show was the range of emotions you portrayed and evoked in your audience"*

**Mt Barker Primary - Western Australia**

*"There were many, many moments when a silence, highly charged with tension filled that hall only to dissolve just as magically into laughter...Peter Gray's performance far exceeded my wildest hopes and expectations."*

**Melbourne Girls' College - Victoria**

*"Without doubt the best show ever. Couldn't believe the professionalism."*

**Grovelands Primary - Western Australia**

*"A delightful performance by a very skilled performer. The characters were engaging, funny and poignant – beautifully and subtly created. The performance appealed very much to our Year 8s and 9s and related to many aspects of their course work in drama."*

**Pembroke School - South Australia**

*"Three cheers for Peter Gray. Lovely to get a story as opposed to a conglomeration of circus acts. A sensitive, moving, powerful performance."*

**Kingston High School - Tasmania**

*"The students were enthralled! They were mesmerised! They laughed, almost cried, cheered and clapped. It was a magic response."*

**Sacred Heart School Booval - Queensland**

*"Excellent – every aspect! Children of different ages got different things – from simple visual delight to analysis of characters, plot, emotions, theatrics. It was simply wonderful."*

**Mullewa District High - Western Australia**

*"An excellent way of telling a story: brings the imagination into play; develops an awareness of skills used in telling a story. The students were captivated. Peter Gray was sooo good!"*

**Presentation College - Victoria**

*"A beautifully timed production with excellent combination of the circus skills and lovely pathos to the character driven story."*

**Methodist Ladies College - Western Australia**

*"Definitely a performance that will stay etched in my mind forever."*

**Sheffield School - Tasmania**



## Train of Thoughts - almost a circus

***The feedback says it all.....***

### STUDENT RESPONSES:

*"the actor/clown, Peter Gray has a very definite sense of communication and interpreted his act amazingly"*

*"Train of Thoughts was thoughtful yet hilarious, with a melancholic touch"*

*"to show what you mean and your emotions without words is mind blowing"*

*"I like how Peter was not a typical clown with big make up and a colourful wig, but an old man who looked back on his life as a clown and how he treasured those moments"*

*"his timing was brilliant and I loved the way he improvised"*

*"Train of Thoughts was a fabulous show that taught me a new side of performance that I hadn't seen before. I particularly liked the fact that he could include both clowning and acrobatics into one."*

*"I didn't feel at any stage in the show that I was at a performance. I felt that I was inside this man's head and that he was sharing his life with me."*

*"I think the main reason why I enjoyed Peter's performance so much was through the whole time not once did he lose his character."*

*"Train of Thoughts was a great experience for me as a drama student and helped me to get ideas for our clowning unit. It opened my eyes to the possibilities of clowning."*

### TESTIMONIALS:

*"an extraordinary performance, Peter Gray's character and timing never faltering"*

**Alan Attwood - Time Magazine Australia**

*"Peter Gray is seen at his best when performing his mime and clown routines"*

**Jim Cranfield - Michael Edgley International**

*"Peter Gray's work is subtle and innovative while sustaining a charm that engages a variety of audiences"*

**Betty Pounder - Victorian Ministry for the Arts**

*"Peter Gray emerges as a well practised mime, balancing artist and juggler. Children and grown ups alike are seduced by Gray's gentle, but demanding approach."* **Jill Morris - Melbourne Age**

*"Peter's characterizations enthralled the capacity audiences which he drew to every Piazza performance."* **David Hamilton - Piazza Producer - Brisbane World Expo**

*"Funny in a human way"* **Alan Roberts - Adelaide Advertiser**

*"Eloquence without words from an endearing man"* **Hope Hewitt - Canberra Times**





## Peter Gray Circus Workshop Planning Details

1. Schools may book workshops without having a performance.
2. If schools have a performance and workshops, all students attending workshops must have seen performance.
3. If schools have one performance, a maximum of 2 workshops that same day is possible.
4. If schools have two performances in one day, workshops are NOT possible.  
However workshops can be organised the day after the date of performance.
5. If no performances are planned for the day, a maximum of 5 w/shops are possible in one day.
6. Maximum number of 30 participants and comprising of same year levels or age groups.
7. A teacher needs to be present at workshop and prepared to assist the students as they learn.
8. Participants to wear sports attire or clothing that does not restrict movement.  
(Girls are to wear slacks)
9. If having the workshops on the same day as the performance, workshops need to be held in the same venue as the performance due to time restraints in setting up for workshops.
10. If not having the performance the venue still needs to be a cleared hall or similar to allow for equipment and space required for students to enjoy the physical nature of the activities.
11. During each w/shop there will be music at a reasonable volume.
12. Please allow a minimum of 60min and a maximum of 90min after the performance before the commencement of a workshop.
13. If more than one workshop is scheduled please allow a minimum of 10min between.
14. Workshop content for prep to yr12: Movement, Mime, Musical expression and Circus skills.  
Circus activities are designed to suit and challenge each age group.  
Drama students ~ W/shops in Circus, Character, Mime, and Movement can be designed to suit the needs of the school. More time might need to be allowed to cover the areas of interest.
15. Cost to schools HAVING the performance:  
Minimum fee per workshop \$75 plus GST - based on 25 students @ \$3 per head plus GST  
If attendance numbers go over 25 an extra \$3 per head plus GST is added.  
NB: Maximum number of students is 30.
16. Cost to schools NOT having the performance:  
Minimum fee per workshop \$100 plus GST - based on 25 students @ \$4 per head plus GST  
If attendance numbers go over 25 an extra \$4 per head plus GST is added.  
NB: Maximum number of students is 30.
17. Circus equipment is provided.



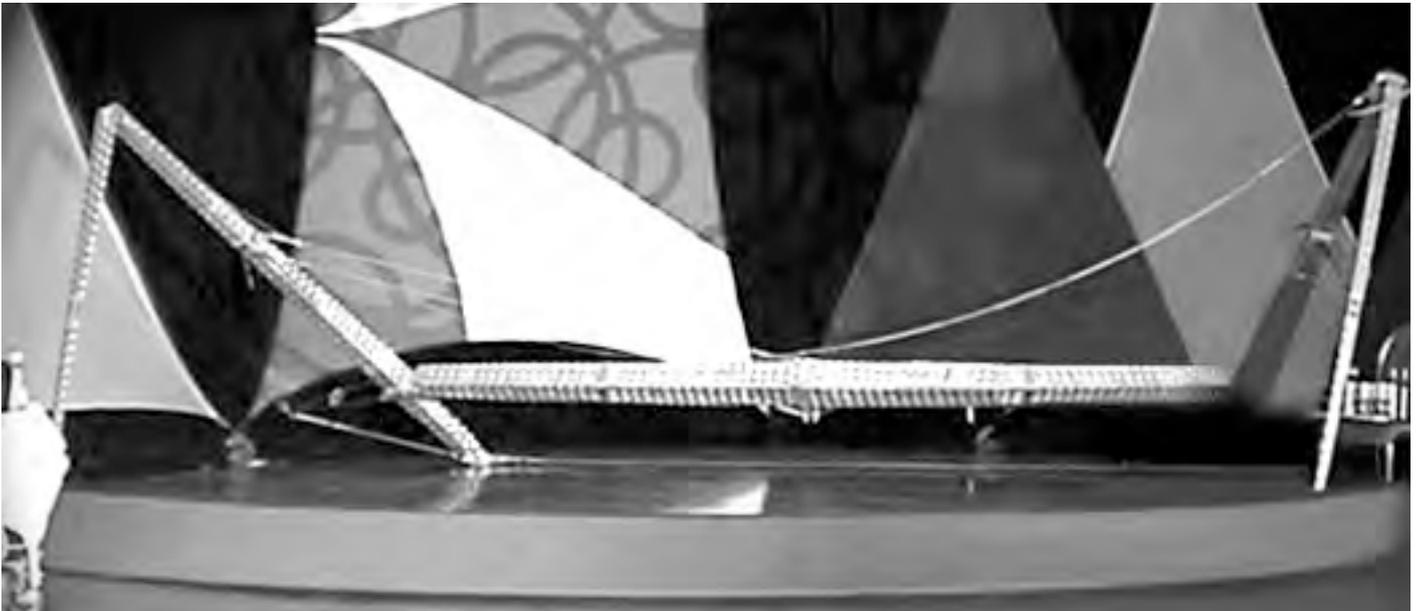
# Slackwire Introduction

Talk about a wire act, and most people think of a tightwire. They are generally not aware there is another wire act called the slackwire. Because one is tight and the other slack the two types of acts require completely different balance techniques. The tightwire is balanced from the hips up, and the slackwire from the hips down.

How it all came about with me was accidental. As a child, I imagined I was on a tightwire. That's what I'd seen in a circus, and that's what my imagination centred around. I didn't come from a circus family, so in my mind I knew no difference.

For me the reason it became a slackwire was that as a child I wasn't strong enough to tighten it! As I look back and think of what I have today, I'm glad that I tied a rope to a peppercorn tree and began to balance. When I fell and felt like giving up, I'm so glad I picked myself up and continued to wobble around on what was to eventually become a slackwire act!

Audiences across the world rarely see the balancing skills of a slackwire act. Why? My theory is that a slackwire requires more time, practice and patience to get just to the stage of standing on it. In the same amount of time taken on a tightwire the trainee would be already walking, and have commenced more difficult tasks. This is not to say that a tightwire is any less difficult, it's just that at the beginning stages of practicing the tightwire the trainee experiences a quicker sense of achievement, and because of this, is more likely to go on to develop a tightwire act. In the long term if one is to succeed in either, both types of wire acts demand just as much time and patience to reach a high level of performance.



View of Slackwire Apparatus

Designed and built by Josh Scott-Jourir -Year 2000



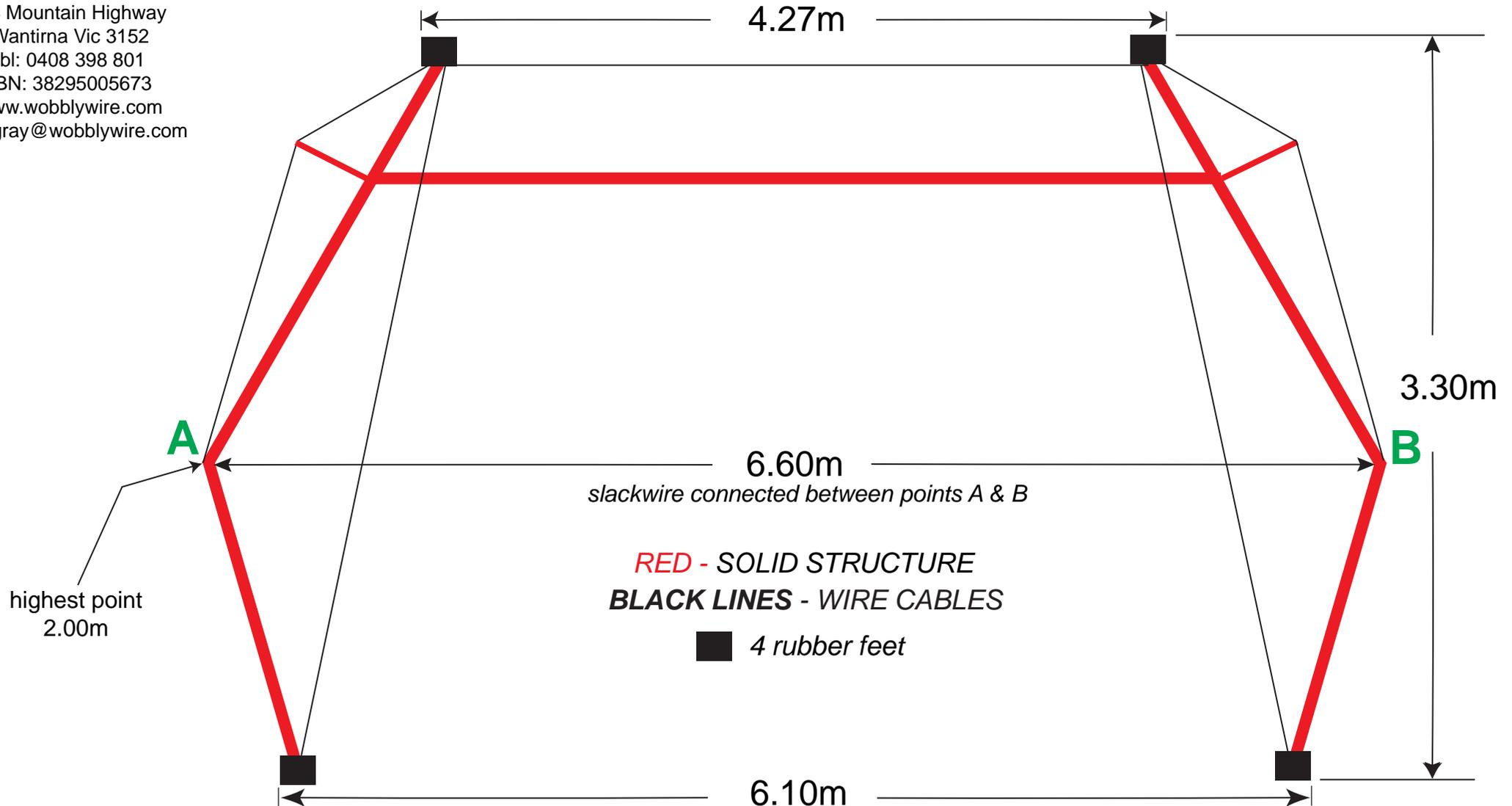


# SLACKWIRE APPARATUS PLAN VIEW

*simple drawing not to scale*

SELF - SUPPORTING STRUCTURE

Wobbly Wire Productions  
203 Mountain Highway  
Wantirna Vic 3152  
mbl: 0408 398 801  
ABN: 38295005673  
www.wobblywire.com  
petergray@wobblywire.com





# Highlights

- 1 Toured schools all over Australia extensively since 1990 with the solo production 'Train of thoughts - Almost a Circus'. This production is still touring today enthraling teachers and students all over the countryside every time it is performed.
- 2 Performed at the Sensational Adelaide International Police Tattoo as Angelo the Drum Major with The Itchy Feet Pep Band. The Tattoo featured Brass and Pipe Bands from Singapore, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Our act proved to be an outstanding success performing to five thousand people each night. The show was televised by Australia's Channel 7 for National and International viewing.
- 3 Performed in Casino Promotion's production of 'Aqueous' Circus of Wonders entertaining audiences from all over the world at the Reef Hotel Casino - Cairns Australia
- 4 Played the white faced clown in the stage musical 'Barnum' presented by Edgley International, The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, and the Adelaide Festival Centre Trust.
- 5 Performed at Brisbane's World Expo as the only solo artist engaged for the entire six months.
- 6 Created an 80-minute show focusing on our environment entitled 'The Greatest Earth On Show'. This involved training and directing 300 school children aged between 5 and 11 over a 6-week period in the areas of circus and theatre.
- 7 Appeared in a variety show with my performance 'The Wire Swing' at Her Majesty's Theatre, Melbourne Australia.
- 8 Performed comical routines with the Melbourne Philharmonic Orchestra presenting amongst many other things a spoon solo!
- 9 Performed as Drum Major 'Angelo', Choreographer, and Artistic Consultant with 'The Itchy Feet Pep Band' The Band originated from World Expo'88, and since then has travelled extensively including representing Australia in Hong Kong for the Chinese New Year Parade.
- 10 Toured Australia for the International Year of the Child presenting performances for schools and community groups.
- 11 Performed a solo show at the Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne Australia.





# Early Days

Overnight something bright appeared on the rusty corrugated iron fence. It was a sight that always made my heart beat with excitement, and it also made two weeks seem a very long time. New and fresh in the morning sun was a poster announcing the arrival of Wirth's Circus by train.

For the rest of the afternoon and the days to follow I could hardly wait. Not much schoolwork was done. In bed at night I'd hear the distant whistle of a train passing by our town and I'd wonder what it would be like to go on a journey travelling and performing in a real circus!

Finally the big day came. I sat impatiently at my desk waiting for the playtime bell to ring and when it did, I ran with other children down to the school fence to watch the parade of colourful wagons roll past. At lunch time I'd sneak up to the oval just in time to see the huge tent rise above the trees, and on the way home I'd stop to catch a glimpse of trapeze artists mending their nets and performers practising.

It took a little longer that day to get home, but mum and dad some how knew where I was. At dinner time I chatted all about what I had seen, and was about to see, and within moments it seemed we were driving down the hill towards hundreds of tiny lights glittering in the night sky. Soon the car doors slammed and we took our seats on the splintery boards covering ourselves with blankets. After staring at all the equipment littering the canvas roof, the lights finally went down and the band struck up introducing the most spectacular things beyond what I could ever imagine!

That night was a special experience I shall never forget, but the next morning I felt the opposite. On the way back to school once more, I noticed the oval was bare. All that was left were patches of sawdust and smouldering heaps of rubbish. I dawdled to school and looked across from assembly at the circus poster which was now tattered and flapping in the breeze. I stood blank faced thinking how lucky the people in the next town were. Just as I was starting to feel the day was going to be dull and drab, an idea flashed into my mind! Instead of waiting for the next show to hit town, why not invent my own. At that point I couldn't wait to get home.

## Backyard beginnings

Fascination of circus began for me at the age of nine, not under a big top, but under a Hills Hoist (Australian clothesline invention). As I played in the backyard, lemons became the juggling balls, and a rope between trees became the tightrope. In those early years I couldn't tighten the rope, so as a result I became accustomed to the precarious motion of a loose rope. Step by step I started to feel at home not on a tightwire, but a slackwire. Later this proved to be a bonus, because in the world of the Performing Arts a slackwire act is rarely seen.

## A unique mix of theatre and circus

Soon after, other skills developed, along with a keen interest in theatre. There was much to learn, yet none of the groundwork came from formalised training or specialised colleges, which partly explains my different style. During this time, ways were discovered to make ordinary things look interesting, and with my love of music and makeup, imaginary characters came to life. As my career developed I realised that the key to holding the audience's interest was not only found in clever human feats, but in character communication. Hence a unique mix of theatre and circus emerged

