EPSOM & EWELL TIMES
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8th October 2026

ISSN 2753-2771

EPSOM & EWELL TIMES

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Leatherhead boy’s circus dream takes him onto European stage

3 October 2026

A 13-year-old Leatherhead boy who once strapped balloons to himself in an attempt to fly has been selected as the only UK performer at this month’s European Youth Circus in Germany.

Olivier Wehbe will perform his award-winning pirate-themed aerial silks act in Wiesbaden from 22 to 25 October. He is also the youngest artist selected for the festival.

The international audition process attracted 152 applications from 23 European countries, with 25 acts from 11 nations chosen to appear. The festival brings together circus artists aged 12 to 25, performing before an international audience and a professional jury.

For Olivier, who dreams of joining Cirque du Soleil, the invitation marks another step in a journey that began with gymnastics classes at Leatherhead & Dorking Gymnastics Club when he was five.

He later discovered aerial and circus arts at Acrosphere Circus Studio in Brockham, where he trains with Katherine and Igor Karpovich, both former Cirque du Soleil performers.

Under their guidance, he has developed skills in aerial silks, straps and hoop, combining demanding physical routines with characters ranging from a French mime to a sinister clown and a pirate.

Olivier is now homeschooled, allowing him to balance his education with intensive training and performance commitments.

His international achievements include gold on straps and bronze in aerial silks at the Madrid Aerial Art International Competition in 2025. His gold-winning routine featured a French mime character, while his bronze medal came with a creepy clown performance. He was seven years younger than the next youngest competitor in his straps category.

Earlier this year, he won gold, the Overall Best title and the Best Tricks award at the International Pole & Aerial Art Tournament with an aerial hoop act.

He also performed at Zirkusfest in Hückelhoven, Germany, in October 2025, where his silks routine earned him a place in the festival’s final gala. His pirate-themed act has won several UK competitions.

Alongside his regular training, Olivier has attended workshops with a current Cirque du Soleil artist performing in KURIOS, giving him an insight into the professional circus world he hopes to join.

His coaches said: “Olivier has worked incredibly hard to get to this point. His dedication, perseverance and commitment to his art have really paid off.”

They added: “We’ve watched him progress from local competitions, shows and in-house events to national and international stages, and we couldn’t be prouder of him.

“This is such an exciting next step in his journey. He has a bright future ahead of him, and we are all incredibly proud to see him representing the UK on such an important international stage.”

For Olivier, the appeal lies as much in storytelling as in the aerial skills themselves.

“I feel so excited and so proud to be representing the UK. Performing is all I want to do. I train really hard and I’m always thinking of ways to develop and create new ways to express myself and bring characters to life without saying a single word,” he said.

“I feel incredibly lucky to have such amazing coaches who have believed in me and supported me from the very beginning. Their hard work, creative guidance and encouragement have helped me develop not only as a performer, but also as an artist.”

His fascination with flight began long before his first circus lesson.

“When I was three, I strapped balloons to myself because I wanted to fly. I really believed I could, and I was always trying to find a way to make it happen. Now I actually can!

“I get to soar high above audiences and bring my characters to life, and it makes me so happy to be able to share that with people.

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ISSN 2753-2771

“My dream is to work for Cirque du Soleil.”

Lionel Blackman

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