

INTERVIEW ■ NAPAMON ROONGWITOO

Fluid dynamics in action

Meet the driven young Canadian who lives for her work — dancing in the air

Dubbed the “Queen of Circus” by one enthralled magazine writer, Erika Lemay has the physique of an acrobat, a love of the arts and a passion for expressing what she calls “physical poetry”. The Canadian performer’s extraordinarily flexible body and choreography skills have won her coveted invitations to work with Dita von Teese, the burlesque diva, at Cirque du Soleil, and appear at such glittering events as the 66th Venice International Film Festival.

Later this week Lemay will be wowing audiences here when she makes her Thailand debut at the Central Summer Fest. The weekend performances of “Le Style Movement by Erika Lemay” will be open to the public free of charge. They kick off at 6.30pm on Saturday and Sunday on a stage set up in the Morakot outdoor car park at Central Chidlom.

When did you first discover your passion for dance?

When I was four years old, my parents got me into classical dance, but it was kind of easy for me. It wasn’t passion at all, at the time — it was more of a game. Then, I started gymnastics and, when I was 11, I got into circus arts — which was more like the aerial dance and acrobatics that I do today. This was passion at first sight for me. The first week I started, I knew it was something I wanted to do. It gives so much freedom. Like any sport, it gets more difficult as it goes on, but it’s never too difficult if you like it.

Where do you find your inspiration?

From every kind of art, that’s for sure. I don’t like to stop myself at one particular style of dance. My inspirations come from the beauty of life. It can come from literature as much as some great choreographers or classical dance. A lot of things I see in the world inspire me.

In what way has your work changed your life?

My art is my whole life, so it’s hard to think about my life without what I do

today. Because, since I was little, I have been training every day. It’s like a discipline. I didn’t go to normal school like other children. My life has always been based on my art. I have benefited a lot from it and the biggest benefit would be to get to see the whole world. I grew up everywhere, which was a great opportunity. Another thing I am grateful for is, like any athlete, when you have to have such discipline every day, it sculpts your whole personality. All the disciplines I learn from my art, I can apply to my whole life.

Could you describe for us an ordinary day in your life?

An ordinary day doesn’t exist in my life: every day is different! When I’m in my creation period, which means when I’m not travelling, I would get up at 6am, do an hour of yoga, work, do two more hours of training for body preparation and cardiovascular work-out. And in the afternoon I do a few hours of specific training such as hand-stands. In the same way that a coach would set a schedule for an athlete for a whole year before going to Olympics, I do this for myself.

You have such a rigorous schedule. Do you ever take a break or go on holidays?

I hate holidays! When you love your job so much, you don’t want to stop. First of all, I can’t stop for more than three days, otherwise I wouldn’t be able to do what I do. For me, holidays mean anxiety because I’m scared I won’t be able to do my work afterwards, so I end up training during holidays, which means it’s not a holiday any more. But my work is so much fun that I don’t feel like I’m working.

How do you take care of your health?

I have to be healthy and in the best of shape. If I get heavier, I have to carry extra weight and that makes my job harder. Having such a hectic schedule and being on planes all the time, I have to be healthy, so I try to eat well. I eat a lot of protein — being so tall and skinny



“When you love your job so much, you don’t want to stop”

I need something for my muscles. I eat a lot of fish and vegetables and everything has to be very natural — no sugar or processed food. I’m very strict with my diet, like with anything else in life. When you start to go on this route, if you start eating bad, you feel really bad. I also sleep as much as possible but, as we all know, sometimes there’s no time left. But I have to prioritise sleep because I’m so physically active. I get grumpy if I don’t get enough sleep and that would make me not a very good team worker.

What are your other interests?
I’m into literature, languages, psychology — I studied psychology at university,

actually. I like everything that has to do with the body, the way the body functions, because it goes with my job. Sports are also my passion, but I have to be very careful because my body is my tool for work. I have to be very careful with what I do. I like extreme sports, but I can’t do them because if I were to injure myself, I couldn’t just stop for two weeks and pick up where I left off. I can’t afford to stop.

Can you describe how you feel while you’re performing?

The moment I’m on stage is the moment of freedom, I’m always thinking and working, but when I’m on stage, everything kind of goes away. I’m so concentrated on what I do and I get so much energy from the audience. It’s a very special moment!

What is your biggest achievement?

My body looks like it’s been designed for one kind of dance, but I wanted to do something more muscular and difficult. I was a skinny little girl, so what I’m most proud of is that, through hard work and hours of training, I was able to do what people thought I could never do. This sort of became my trademark: you don’t see many skinny girls doing strong movements. Second of all, I’ve always wanted to go my own way and not follow the trend, so I am very proud that my audience accepts that. That’s a success for me. Some people don’t do what they like because it’s not trendy. I kept going and somehow I reached my goal. I am faithful to my artistic idea.

What makes your work different?

There is a mix of hand-balancing, contortion, special apparatus, aerial acrobatics and special visual surprises. That’s what makes it unique. Some may see what I do as highly skilled acrobatics, but I like to see it as an art. I know it’s very risky and difficult, and I need to train hard every day, but I don’t want the audience to feel that part. I want to show them the artistic part. Each piece of my work took more than 10 years of preparation. It’s not like some dance that you can just prepare in two weeks. The acrobatic world, it calls for so many years of practice.

Is there anything you’d like to say to your audience?

Sometimes people think that they’d disturb me if they were to express their feelings while I was performing. But that’s not true. An artist works for the audience to respond: this is like gold for me. So please show me whatever you feel. It gives me energy — all the applause and the wows. I love to communicate with my fans because what I do is for the audience, not for myself.

What are your hopes for the future?

Hopefully, the next decade will be dedicated to my one-woman show: *Animus Femina*. My job usually involves me being part of some other show, but for the past few years I’ve been working on a production in which I will be on stage for 75 minutes non-stop. It’s quite a physical challenge, but also very rewarding at the same time, to be in contact with the audience for so long. It’s a lot of fun. It’s what I call physical poetry, and I hope to be touring the world with this performance. It’s the best moments of my show redesigned, with a storyline. The show is ready, but we need the right partners.

SOCIAL SCENE



ROYAL VISIT: HRH Princess Mathilde of Belgium greeted an 11-year-old girl and learned how to make a clay flower at Baan Kredtrakarn, a government-run shelter that provides protection for girls and women who are victims of abuse, exploitation and trafficking. The princess is the special representative for Unicef and UNAIDS.



WARM WELCOME: Highly respected as a Grand Buddhist Master, Ambassador of World Peace, and the founder of the Guan Yin Citta Dharma Door, Master Jun Hong Lu, seated, was recently invited to Thailand by religious groups in Southeast Asia and thousands of Buddhist followers of Guan Yin Citta to promote Chinese Chan Buddhism. He was warmly welcomed by Pol Gen Sawasdi Amornvivat, standing centre, and hundreds of the master’s disciples during his stay at the Eastin Grand Hotel Sathorn, Bangkok.



GET-TOGETHER PARTY: Dr Amnuay Viravan, former deputy prime minister and minister of finance, and Khunying Samornsri Viravan were recent guests of honour at a get-together of former high-ranking executives of the Comptroller General’s Department, Ministry of Finance, at Next2 Cafe of Shangri-La Hotel, Bangkok. Seated from left: Kamol Juntima, Dr Chalermchai Vasinrond, Dr Amnuay, Khunying Samornsri and Dr Panas Simasathien. Back row from left: Piyaphan Nimmanahaeminda, Kovit Postyananda, Puntip Surathin, Pachong Tantixalerm, Meethi Phamaranon, Dr Maruay Phadoongsidhi, Anan Tantixalerm, Manimal Vudthitornetraks and Prateep Buphaint.



PARTY TIME: Gen Sampao Choosri, President of the National Defence College Class 366, recently organised a get-together of members and their spouses at Vimarathip Room, Montien Riverside Hotel. From left: Pol Gen Ampol Inthaiwong, Asawin Kongsiri, Vannivat Srikraviv, Gen Sampao, Khunying Tipayawan Tantakit, Khunying Orawan Thanajaro, Gen Boongsang Niumpradit and Sumate Tanthuwant.



ANNIE’S MAILBOX

■ KATHY MITCHELL & MARCY SUGAR

School friends unsure of how to deal with buddy’s disorders

Dear Annie: I am a teenager in high school with two close friends, “Emma” and “Vienna”. Emma was recently

and am no longer with Emma and Vienna. Emma insists that I will ditch them for new friends, making them both

private medical care. Please try to be patient with her, but understand that not all friendships survive high school.

Power of belief

Dear Annie: The letter from “Sad