

# **The Aerial Hoop Manual**

## **Volume 1**

A step-by-step reference guide for teachers  
and students of any aerial lyra program

**Rebekah Leach**  
**with Julianna Hane**

Photography by Matthew Leach  
and RED Creatives

## DISCLAIMER

This manual is not intended for a layperson to pick up and start learning on their own. All use (and misuse) of this manual is done so AT YOUR OWN RISK.

Check with your healthcare professional before inverting and going into positions that cause pressure to certain places on the body. For example, those with heart conditions and/or inner ear issues should not invert as it is a dangerous situation which can cause stroke, heart attack, dizzy spells, or further injury, including death. As with any exercise program, there is always a risk of injury. Also, working at any given height adds an increased risk of injury, including paralysis or death.

## BE SAFE

The top 10 things you can do to make sure that you are practicing safely:

1. Start by taking live lessons from a professional aerialist. Use this book for reference only.
2. Always check your rigging.
3. Always practice over a mat.
4. Never practice alone. Always have a spotter.
5. Always perform a solid warm-up prior to mounting an aerial apparatus.
6. Practice safe progression. (If you do not have the required strength, do not attempt the move.)
7. Don't make guesses. If you are not sure if something is going to "work," don't try it!
8. Focus on injury prevention exercises early in your training.
9. Pay attention to proper positioning of your shoulders at all times.
10. Listen to your body. Take care of it and it will take care of you.

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This book may be purchased with bulk discounts. For information, send an e-mail to: [info@aerialdancing.com](mailto:info@aerialdancing.com).  
Corresponding video content is coming available on [AerialDancing.com](http://AerialDancing.com).

When practicing aerial hoop, always perform warm up exercises before attempting any individual exercises. Also, when practicing aerial hoop, always do so in the presence of a trained professional, with load-tested aerial equipment hanging from load-tested rigging, which has been set-up and inspected frequently by rigging professionals, along with crash pads underneath the hoop. It is recommended that you check with your doctor or healthcare provider before commencing any exercise program, especially one as rigorous as aerial hoop.

Whilst every care has been taken in the preparation of this material, there is a real chance of injury in execution of the movements described in this book. The Publisher and all persons involved in the making of this manual will not accept responsibility for injury to any degree, including death, to any person as a result of participation in the activities described in this manual. Purchase or use of this document constitutes agreement to this effect. Furthermore, rigging of aerial equipment is not discussed in this manual. Consult a professional rigger when it comes to using any hanging equipment.

Published by Rebekah Leach

United States of America

First Edition

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# From the Authors

Dear Reader,

How I wish you could have been present for all the conversations Julianna and I had during the making of this book. We talked about so many ideas, but putting them all into this book would either overwhelm you or bore you to death. But I can assure you of our conclusions: There are a million and one ways to apply the knowledge that we present in this manual.

Sometimes our conversations centered around the differences between how the progressions make sense for a linear organization in a manual versus the progressions for teaching in the classroom. These are two very different ways of organizing material, and it is impossible to cover the latter in a book, since the way you teach this material will vary so widely depending on the background of the students. On that note, I would not be surprised if our next collaboration involved a book on aerial teaching philosophies. We have already incorporated many successful initiatives into our teaching styles, and Julianna has seen tremendous improvement in her retention rate.

Sometimes our conversations were about what the ideal aerial career looks like to each of us. Aerialists tend to make a living through either teaching or performing, but for many it is a mixture of both. Through the purchase of this book you have helped me come one step closer to my ultimate dream career. All of my profits after tax – of all of the manuals that I have written – are currently going into a fund that will build and open an aerial dance studio when the time is right. I had a small aerial dance studio once. It could not survive financially, and I long to have a studio that can. It was a gift to take the journey that I did because these manuals have been a part of it, but how I wish to just be an aerial teacher and choreographer once more!

Now here is how this book can be a gift to yourself: To really glean the magic of this book, you must put it into practice. Put the words on the page into your body. Make it come alive for yourself. You will be blessed.

Of course have fun, but always play it safe so that you can continue dancing long into your old age. The only two injuries I have had in my last three decades of dancing have been on hoop. One injury happened years ago when I was being pressured under a director to perform to a level that my body was not at. My shoulder blade did a weird pop into my back rib cage, and years of physical therapy simply keep the pain at bay. The second injury was more recent: After the birth of my daughter, I was rushing back onto hoop, and didn't listen to my body like I should have. I was in the candlestick position and decided to let go against my inner voice telling me not to. My knee popped, and while it is healed, now and then I notice its weakness.

Getting injured has helped me be a better teacher because it has encouraged me to take a longer look at the risk factors of various moves. I have learned my lesson in the importance of listening. If I had done that, it would have prevented both of my injuries. The best safety lesson we can teach is listening to our bodies. Go slow. Some lessons will feel painfully slow to both the student and/or the teacher. Both of you just need a dose of patience, and have it with yourself as well as those who are a part of your journey. Some days you just need to rest, and stop when your body says stop.

Despite or perhaps because of the risks, the lyra is a powerful apparatus. It shows off flexibility and strength in ways unlike any other apparatus. It can also show off pure gracefulness. Pick a move, start spinning and you have yourself your first piece!

I have my own reasons for why I enjoy working with the lyra, but I also want you to hear from Julianna. While she started out loving fabric and scared to death of hoop, now the lyra is her "aerial home." She has a great passion for it, which her students get to enjoy learning from. Her comments and reflections about how to

teach aerial hoop has been a great help to me throughout this process. I turn you over to her now, to hear more about her story:

*"I was a dedicated fabric person for several years, having taught all levels and performed in a variety of venues. After all, everyone loves fabric, right? It's impressive, fluid, graceful, and soft. I had little interest in hoop because it gave me bruises and felt unstable. How could I possibly like an apparatus that doesn't mold to my body? It just didn't make sense to me.*

*Aerial dance pulls at my heartstrings because it combines grace with daring. I've always wanted to be a more daring person. I tend to be quite shy. So while I avoided the most frightening apparatus for a while, a mentor came along (Tandy Beal) and suggested I try hoop because it seemed like a good fit for my body.*

*I trained briefly with a Russian coach (Elena Panoova) who made me to do some pretty scary moves. There was no questioning her authority – I just had to do what she told me. And that was the most amazing gift. I wasn't allowed to think or overthink – just do and do again. Let go, reach, catch. It was a simple existence that forced me out of my head and into the moment.*

*Learning to work the spin was another beast. I wanted/needed to gain more control over the spin. So another teacher (Aimee Hancock) told me to let go of my agenda and let the spin lead me. Wait... I'm supposed to be in control, right?*

*But then I realized it's not really about me...it's about connecting with something greater than myself. The practice of listening to the hoop has been one of the most mind-blowing experiences for me. Practicing yoga and contact improvisation on solid ground has also helped.*

*For me, aerial hoop isn't really about learning new skills...it's about learning to live life a little better. I have bonded with the hoop because it has helped me become a more truthful version of myself. And for*

*that I am truly grateful. I hope that aerial hoop will give you as much as it has given me."*

Enjoy exploring the art of aerial hoop through this manual. I hope this book helps you better do what you love.

Happy Flying,  
Rebekah and Julianna



# Grip Holds

## Prerequisite(s):

Ready to build calluses

**About this move:** The grip test will put your hands to the test, so take care of those hands. Our favorite hand treatments include ice after a long workout (a cold beverage works well), and holding wet black tea bags. The tea tans the skin and makes it thicker like leather. Hold the tea bags for five minutes per hand, and repeat as often as you like. On the flip side, you can use lotion to soften calluses - just not while you are in class!

## GET A GRIP ON GRIP

Gripping a metal hoop can cause discomfort at first. The skin at the top of the palm will fold under creating pressure and building calluses. (For that reason, it is best to remove all rings.) The good news is that our bodies are adaptable, and you can get used to the grip. It is also completely normal to get a “flash pump” in the forearms from gripping the hoop over periods of time (the term “flash pump” is borrowed from rock climbing – the arms build up lactic acid suddenly and become unusable). Drop the hands and shake the arms out to relieve some of the pressure.

To help reduce forearm soreness: Hold your arms straight out in front of you. Make fists, roll them under towards you, then out and extend hands forward, opening up towards the ceiling, and extend your fingers. Repeat slowly for several minutes. Add this exercise into your warm up routine to help build stamina. Also, drink plenty of water (and make sure you are getting all your needed nutrients) to keep all your muscles in peak working condition.



### Overhand Grip

Hold onto the hoop with the knuckles facing you and fingertips facing away. Always wrap the thumbs under the bar. Your hands may be at varying distances apart depending on what move you are preparing for. The wider you hold your hands on a hoop, the more stress can be placed on the wrist from gripping the curve. Other factors also come into play such as having a smaller hoop, where the curvature is greater.

On the hoop, it is the default grip for moves that are in the hoop/on the top bar (i.e. moves above the horizon line where the concavity is downwards). In below the hoop moves, you are more likely to see an underhand grip being used amongst dancers.

*Training Tip:* Pull ups are a great way to build your grip strength and vice versa. They go hand in hand.

### Underhand Grip

Hold onto the hoop with fingertips facing you and the knuckles facing away. Wrap thumbs under the bar.

You may find this grip to be your personal preference for moves under the bar due to less wrist strain. It also allows you to use your biceps, which makes this method easier. Just make sure to work both grip methods so that you will be ready for all movements.

### Opposite Facing Grip

Standing profile to the hoop, hold onto the hoop so that your hands face different directions.

Once you have hand grips conquered, you can play with letting go with one hand. Practice a little bit of weight transfer at a time. Gradually work up to holding all your weight on one hand.

*(From hanging on two hands)* When you let go with one hand, one of two things might happen: your hoop spins or you spin. Because of the swivel, it's typically the hoop.

# Tuck Mount

## Prerequisite(s):

Double Knee  
Hang

**About this move:** The tuck mount is the perfect symmetrical mount, meaning your body can remain in mirror symmetry for the duration of the movement. For that reason, it is a perfect addition to conditioning routines. You can use beats swings under the hoop as a way to get into this mount, but add those in after you have the foundation of this movement.



## From a Knee Hang Prep to Gripping the Horizon

Begin with a prep for a knee hang by placing the backs of your knees on the lower bar. Underhand grip can be used so that you do not have to switch your grip in the coming steps. Using shifts of momentum, get your hands higher on the hoop. These shifts in momentum can be either little rocks to inch your hands up the hoop or a big sweeping motion of the body in knee hang beats (covered in chapter two). If you use knee beats, the momentum from the swing will allow you to grab the horizon of the hoop in one motion. At this point, you need to have your grip around the outside of the hoop in order to safely pull your body towards the hoop. *Spotters:* Have the hands under the back to help as needed. One hand protects the upper back/head, while the other supports the hips.



## Seesaw Motion to Sitting in the Hoop

Once your hands are close to or above the horizon line of the hoop, you have two options for the seesaw motion: (Photo 6) straighten both legs or (Photos 7 & 8) straighten one leg. It can be helpful to learn/teach the straight leg method first so that you learn how the body weight shifts here. The seesaw motion is so named because you begin with the pelvis low and the feet high before throwing the legs down to lift the pelvis up. Push your legs down into the bar as you slide to a sitting position. This seesaw action should bring you directly up to sitting without too much bicep action.

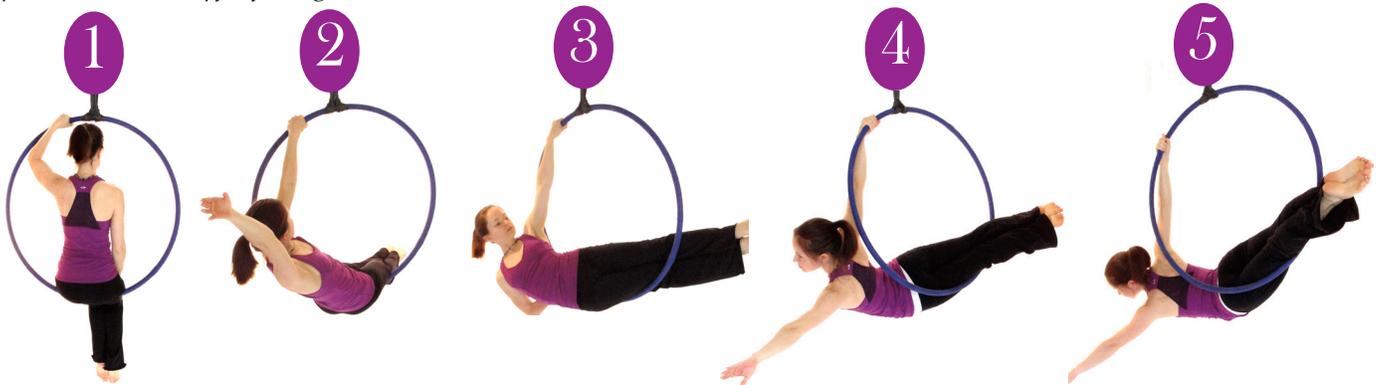
# Mermaid Family (& Angel Roll)

**Prerequisite(s):**  
Laybacks (a.k.a. the lean family)

**About this move:** In the mermaid family, the legs are tightly held together as if forming a mermaid's fish-like tail. In the outside mermaid, the body rolls away from the hoop so that the front of the body is exposed to the outside. In the inside mermaid, the body lays parallel to the hoop, with the front of the body on the "inside," next to the hoop. The crossed-legged mermaid is a variation of outside mermaid.

## Outside Mermaid

Outside mermaids can feel quite exposed when first trying them because the body rolls away from the hoop with only minimal support at the thigh and gripping hand. The hoop also tends to move a great deal during the thigh rolling process, so rolling towards a spotter's arms is helpful for beginners.



### Outside Mermaid

Begin in a sitting position with one hand at 1 or 11 o'clock. Layback with the legs together. For assistance as you roll, reach behind your body with the free hand to grip the hoop. Then roll onto one thigh so the legs are stacked. Reach the back arm out away from the hoop and arch the upper back. For a deeper mermaid position, begin with the hand slightly further away from the anchor point. This allows the torso to drop further and create a bigger arched position. To exit drop the pelvis as you reach back to return to the sitting position.

### AN EXIT



## Inside Mermaid



### AN EXIT



### Inside Mermaid

Begin in a sitting position with the side hand in overhand grip and the top hand in an underhand grip. Lean sideways, passing the hands until the arms are straight. The weight will transfer from your sitz bones to your bottom thigh. Release the bottom hand and reach away from the hoop. To exit, bring your torso toward the hoop and pike at the hip joints. Drop the pelvis to return to the sitting position.

## Crossed Legged Mermaid (from Man in the Moon Profile Sit)



### Crossed Legged Mermaid

Begin in man in the moon with legs crossed. Notice which leg is on top, and grip with the same hand high on the hoop. Grip behind your lower back with the other hand. Straighten both legs, and keep them as close together as possible. Rotate the body away from the hoop, squeezing the legs together. Release the bottom hand (from behind your back) and reach out into space.



**EXIT TO SITTING:** Grip the top of the hoop with both hands and bend the knees. Turn back into a sitting position.

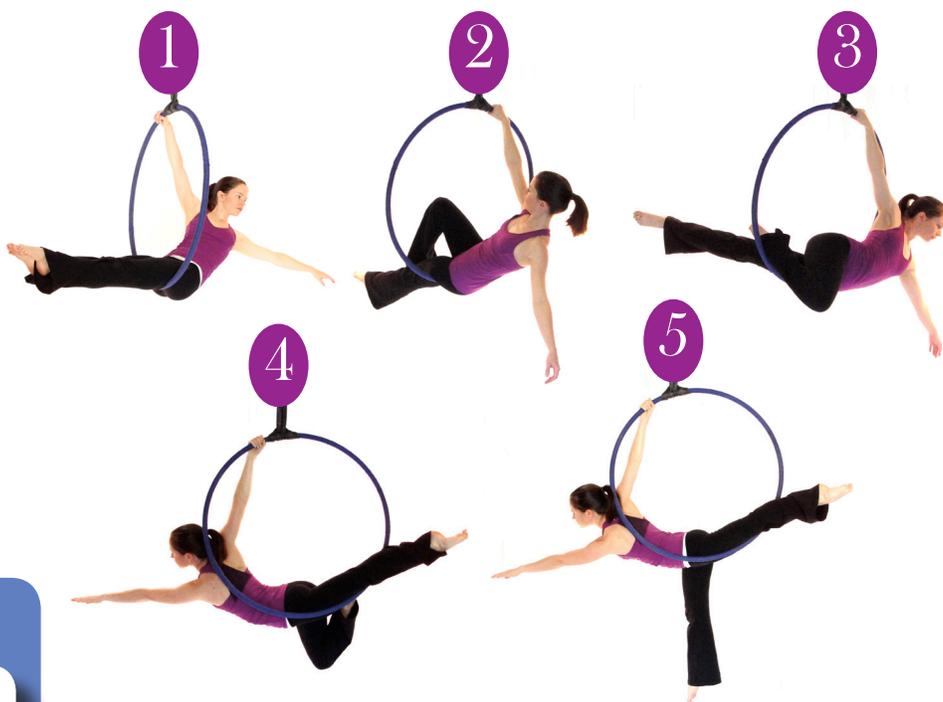


**EXIT TO SLEEPER:** Grip the top of the hoop, then bend the knees and drop the pelvis down to enter sleeper.

## Angel Roll from Mermaid

### Angel Roll (Mermaid Extension)

Begin in a sitting position with one hand at the top of the hoop (just like going into regular outside mermaid). As you lean for an outside mermaid, bend the top leg bringing it through the hoop and down in front of your body. It will take some practice to find just the right spot to roll to on your thigh. Rotate as far as you safely can, and then extend the free leg if you would like.



### ALTERNATE VIEW



### EXIT TO SITTING

In the roll back to the sitting position, the secret is in the drop of the hips. This prevents a roll to the back—which is perfect for a transition into dragonfly, but not so great for the retrograde of the angel roll.



# Gazelle (Profile Laybacks)

**Prerequisite(s):**  
L-sit

**About this move:** Gazelles are traditional moves performed on trapeze. If you are used to performing gazelle on a trapeze, then transitioning to hoop will feel strange at first due to the curvature of the apparatus. New aerial students may want to learn gazelle on a trapeze before trying it on hoop since the ropes of a trapeze allow for more movement and adjustments in the aerialist's body.

## Gazelle

Begin in an L-sit. Bend the bottom leg toward your chest. Lean back and shift your hands so that your body ends up on one side of the hoop and your bent leg on the other side. Lift and shift your pelvis over so that your sacrum ends up centered on the bottom bar. Some aerialists prefer to lean back, bend the knee, and shift the pelvis all at the same time. Hug the bent knee into your chest. Press your straight leg into the other side of the hoop for stability. Continue holding onto the knee with the same side arm (right arm if the right leg is bent) as you release the other arm and lower the torso below the bar. Press the inner thigh of the front leg firmly into the bar. If you feel secure in this position and your sacrum remains centered on the bar, release both hands. *Spotters:* Hold under the back and shoulder when the student releases the arms.

## PLAY TIME!

Explore the many variations within this move -one bent leg with one straight leg, and vice versa, or bend both legs; try grabbing feet, twisting torso, etc. For a gazelle split, grab the heel and straighten the front leg. Be sure that your back leg has not lost constant pressure with the hoop.



## AN EXIT

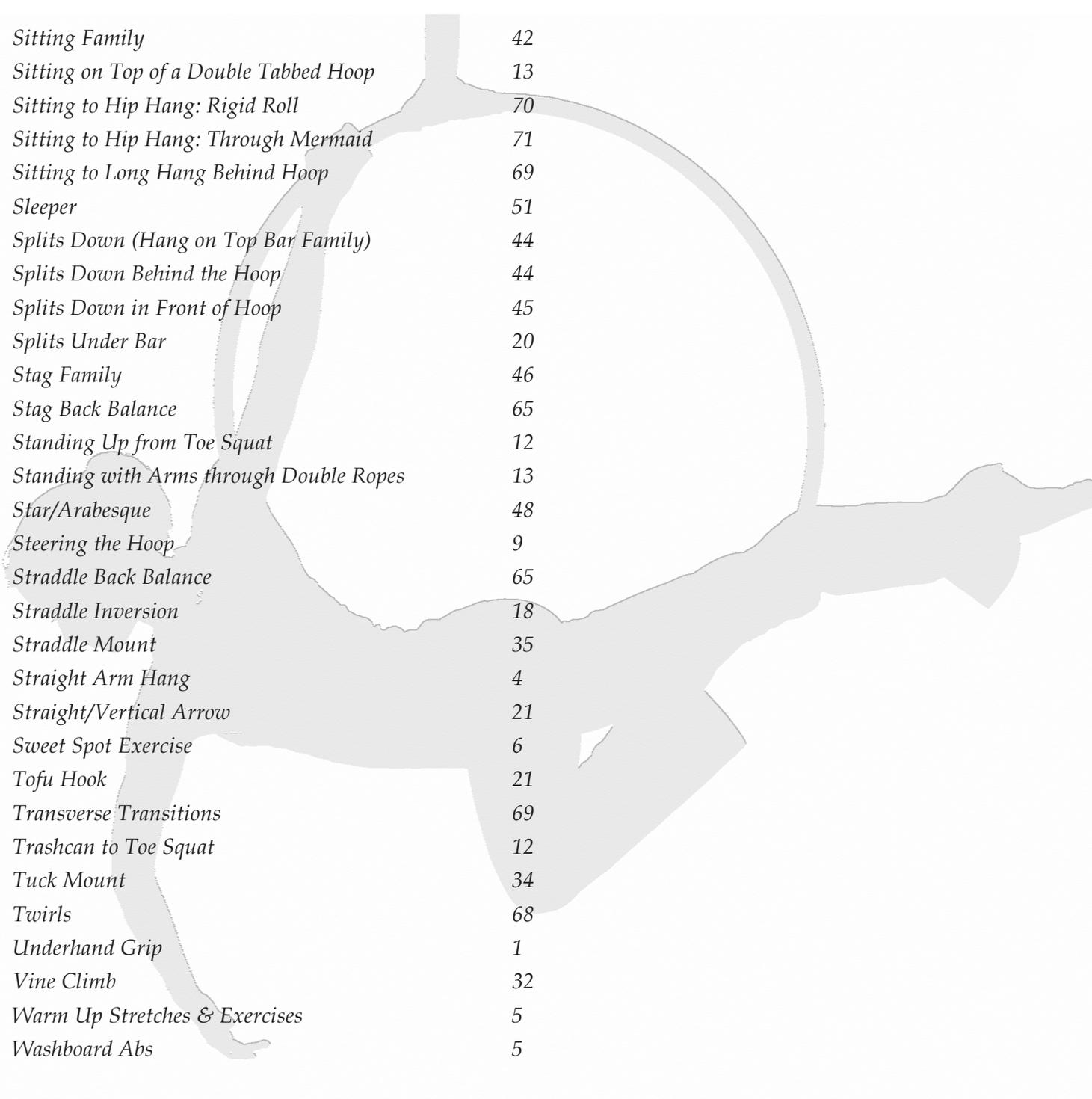
There are many transitions from this position (see chapter six), but for now simply retrograde the position by climbing back up the hoop hand over hand.

*Spotters:* Hold under the shoulders during the movement.



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## About the Author

Rebekah Jean Leach has been dancing for over three decades now. Anywhere she is, is her stage, starting with the fireplace hearth when she was 3 years old. In college, she took her first official course in dance. On the wall, was a picture of dancers dancing in ropes. She felt the urge—the calling, if you will, to higher ground. At age 22, she attended a workshop by Fred Deb held at the Aerial Dance Festival in Boulder, CO. Before the festival, she attended a performance of Fred Deb's with the Colorado Symphony Orchestra. That performance changed the course of her life.

In 2008, Rebekah and Matthew Leach opened an aerial dance studio in Ojai, CA. Rebekah combined her background in education with teaching her love of aerial dance. However, when the recession hit, and Matthew was laid off from his job, hard times hit. Plan B went into action. Relying on her technical background, Rebekah joined the Navy, where she is currently a commissioned officer teaching nuclear physics at the Nuclear Power Training Command in Charleston, SC. When her active duty commitment is complete, her dream is to once again open an aerial dance studio. All of Rebekah's profits from the sales of these manuals are going towards that end. Thank you for helping dreams come true.

*Rebekah currently lives with her loving husband, Matthew and adorable daughter, Naomi, in Charleston, SC.*



## About the Contributing Author

Julianna Gaillard Hane, a native of South Carolina, traded life on a cotton farm to be a dancer and aerialist. Julianna's first experience in aerial dance happened at Winthrop University (where she received a B.A. in Dance) when she performed in two rope & harness works by Mary Beth Young. She then continued her study of aerial work at New England Center for Circus Arts with Elsie Smith, Serenity Smith Forchion, and Aimee Hancock. She has also studied with Bay Area artists Joanna Hai-good and Elena Panova.

Julianna holds a M.F.A. in Modern Dance from the University of Utah. During her graduate study Julianna founded Revolve Aerial Dance, a school and performing company specializing in aerial fabric, trapeze, and aerial hoop. Through the company she co-produced aerial concerts, performed in corporate events, and set an aerial dance work on the Snow College Dance Company in Ephraim, Utah. She wrote her master's thesis on aerial dance choreography under the guidance of Donna White, Eric Handman, Abby Fiat and Tandy Beal. She also wrote an aerial dance curriculum for her studio and a teacher training course to mentor new aerial teachers. This manual has been an extension of that work.

*Julianna moved Revolve Aerial Dance to Charleston in 2010 to collaborate with local dancers, musicians, writers, and other artists in her home state.*



# Acknowledgments

More people helped with this manual than all of my previous manuals combined. This was one of reasons that I feel that this manual has turned out to be the best manual I have worked on thus far. This manual, more than any others, reflects not just my own work as an artist, but that of the entire aerial lyra community. (Another thing that helped make this manual awesome was access to better programs to help design it! I created the other manuals in a program not meant for books, and they were formatting nightmares. Now I have to go back and revise all my old manuals. Ah, the list of things to do...)

The aerialists directly quoted in this manual are: T Lawrence-Simon ([hoopartist.com](http://hoopartist.com)), Rachel Stewart, Liz Cooper, Jerusha "Juice" Horlick, and Clayton Woodson. I appreciate their work as aerial teachers, and am delighted to have their contributions in this manual.

Some others who were not quoted directly, but whose stories helped inspire me and get me out of writer's block include Julie Wood, Jessica John, and Jordan Anderson. Much thanks goes out to Julie Marchand for coming over and helping with a photoshoot one day. Jordan Anderson and Clayton Woodson were among the aerialists who would get together with Julianna and myself to brainstorm teaching ideas. It was super helpful!

Thank you to many others in the lyra community, especially those on Facebook who kept helping me figure out what the most common names for poses are. You have all helped in one way or another contribute to this book's creation!

The editing process for this manual was particularly needed. I have lost my touch for the details after becoming a frazzled mom. I am thankful so many people were willing to help edit for both grammar and content. At first, I thought we had too many people looking at the book at once, but all of them found different kinds of errors. Clayton Woodson, Jordan Anderson, Catherine Saldana, and Julianna Hane all helped with the editing process. Thank you!

This was my first attempt at co-authoring with someone by my side as I went through this process, and it has been absolutely wonderful! I am so happy that Julianna Hane joined me for this adventure. Her words are completely intertwined with mine to say everything better than either of us could have said it alone. I cannot wait to do more collaborations with her and with other artists.

And of course, last but not least, my amazing, talented, supportive, loving, dedicated husband, Matthew Leach. He keeps me blessed as well as balanced.

## Aerial Dance Manuals by Rebekah Leach

Beginning Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual

Intermediate Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual Part 1

Intermediate Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual Part 2

Aerial Yoga Manual Volume 1

Aerial Yoga Manual Volume 2

Aerial Hoop Manual Volume 1

Aerial Hoop Manual Volume 2 (coming soon)

Advanced Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual (coming soon)

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Corresponding video content to all manuals is being developed and coming available on *AerialDancing.com*.

