

Other Half Productions

Report on Risk Assessment –

the *Better Halves* Street Show

Introduction

This report accompanies the attached risk assessment which was compiled to advise the performers of the *Better Halves* street show on the measures considered reasonable to control the risk associated with performing this show to audiences around the world.

Terminology

In this report the terms are defined as follows:

‘show’ refers to the *Better Halves* street show;

‘performer’ refers to Jo Galbraith or Martin Goode, actors in the show;

‘company’ refers to Other Half Productions, an unincorporated association of the performers as co-directors and creator of the show

‘acrobalance’ is a circus skill in which groups of two or more people balance on each other forming different shapes e.g. human pyramids, standing on shoulders;

‘base(s)’ the person(s) who stay in contact with the ground supporting the weight of others;

‘flyer(s)’ the person(s) who balance on the base(s)

‘club juggling’ is the throwing and catching of specialised plastic skittle-shaped objects;

‘club passing’ is the throwing and catching of these objects between two or more people;

‘fire juggling’ is the throwing and catching of specialised clubs with wicks at one end which are dipped in flammable liquid and then lit;

‘volunteer(s)’ are the person(s) selected during the show to undertake tasks on stage with the performers;

the ‘booker’ is a person or organisation who arranges for the show to be performed;

the term ‘hazard’ is used to describe an activity with potential to cause harm;

‘risk’ is the likelihood that harm from that activity will actually occur;

a ‘risk rating’ is calculated to measure the extent of the risk and to advise upon the ‘control measures’ to be implemented to eliminate or reduce the likelihood of an incident.

Reasons for the Report

Risk assessment complies with the law under health and safety regulations for self-employed performers. However, the main reason for using the risk assessment technique is to determine the nature of the risk in order to put in place suitable control measures to eliminate or reduce the risk of harm faced by the audience and the performers. This approach provides a pseudo-scientific study of the risk and the related record provides justification of the procedures to be employed.

A risk assessment provides some benefits to the company and performers. It identifies them as safe performers, which can help to attract employment. It can also reduce insurance premiums and help to defend claims if there is an accident. Sometimes a booker may require a risk assessment before allowing the show to go ahead.

Legal Framework

There is very little legislation on street theatre involving circus skills. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places an obligation upon employers to employ whatever means are considered 'reasonably practicable' to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of employees. Employees are required to take reasonable care of themselves, other staff and members of the public, and comply with the procedures laid down by the employer. The company needs to ensure that the show is safe for the audience and volunteers, and that we the performers are competent to perform it. The performers need to check that the environment provided by the booker is safe. The company needs to co-operate with the booker on common safety issues such as first aid and evacuation.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1992 introduced the legal requirement to appoint competent persons to assist the employer to meet the legal obligations and to undertake risk assessments. The booker has to appoint a competent person; as self-employed people we appoint ourselves.

Activity Analysis

In the past eight years the performers have done this show on four continents for many types of event, including festivals, parties, rock concerts; in theatres, workplaces, shopping centres, hotels, restaurants; night clubs etc., as well as on the street. The show runs for approximately 30 to 40 minutes and can be divided into various parts:

The *Kids Running Out* involves us choosing as volunteers about five children. We give each a different number in sequence, explaining that we will pass juggling clubs around them, and that when we call their number they should run out from the juggling pattern. We give them other guidance as necessary;

The *Story of Love* is a comic acrobalance routine by the performers parodying a romantic encounter.

The *Three-Person Candlestick* is an acrobalance manoeuvre performed with a male volunteer acting as a base. After giving instruction, Jake supports the volunteer while Jo climbs on his back. The volunteer stands upright and

places his hands on Jake's shoulders. Jake takes hold of Jo's shoulders and Jo holds on to the volunteer's shoulders. Jo then goes upside down above the bases' heads.

The *Finale* involves Jo standing on Jake's shoulders and juggling three fire torches which have been thrown up to her, one at a time, by the briefed volunteer.

Extent of the risk

Although no serious incident has occurred during any booking, there is potential for harm. There have been half a dozen incidents in the past eight years. During the *Finale* Jo has failed to catch a fire torch on four occasions, twice when the volunteer has thrown wildly and twice when she has failed to catch her own throw whilst juggling. The club on each occasion fell to the ground and was recovered without causing any harm. During the *Kids Running Out* a juggling club has twice struck a child. On both occasions the child was not hurt and the show carried on.

Potentially, however, a more serious incident could occur. During 'the *Kids Running Out* a child could be struck on the head by a juggling club, causing pain, minor injury or emotional distress. In the *Story of Love*, the *Three-Person Candlestick* and the *Finale* any of the balances could collapse and any of the participants could be injured: the flier by falling from a height, the bases from having someone fall on them. In the *Finale* the fire torches could burn the volunteer, Jo, Jake, a member of the audience, or set fire to property.

The exact cause of an injury is difficult to establish, as we have not had anyone injured during a show. This risk assessment considers the general risks associated with the show, which may cause injury, as being:

- fatigue, medical conditions and stress in the volunteers and performers;
- the performers, volunteers or audience being under the influence of drugs, e.g. prescriptive, non-prescriptive and alcohol;
- communication;
- weather conditions.

Control Measures in Place

Prior to the show we warm up physically and mentally. We do not drink alcohol or take drugs before a show. We also check the space for hazards e.g. broken glass, water, rubbish.

During the show we strive to control the stage area and the audience. At the start we create the space in which we will perform. We place our props and we mark out where the audience should stand by placing a red safety ribbon. We invite the audience to stand behind the ribbon. All the time we are assessing the audience for those we will ask to be our volunteers and for those who might be a liability, for example by doing something physically dangerous or verbally abusive. Once we have the audience in the correct place and the stage set we start the *Kids Running Out*. We tell the children what to do and when. When we pass the clubs round them we anticipate their movements

and modify our juggling appropriately. We can make this part of the show harder or easier depending on the abilities of the children. During the first part of the show we observe the audience to determine a capable male volunteer for the *Three-Person Candlestick*: someone who appears strong, fit and youngish. The people who are most at risk are the performers, then the volunteers, then the audience. To our knowledge no injury resulting from the show has ever happened.

Risk Rating

A calculation of the risk, based upon the definitions below, suggests that the risk is low.

Consequence:

- 1 Property damage
- 2 Incident leading to slight shock
- 3 Injury treatable on site
- 4 Injury requiring hospitalisation
- 5 Death

Likelihood:

- 1 Very unlikely to ever happen
- 2 Remote possibility
- 3 Possible
- 4 Likely
- 5 Regular occurrence

Risk Rating

4 (injury requiring hospitalisation) x 2 (remote possibility) = 8

Recommended Control Measures

As the risk is low it seems unnecessary to bring in additional safety measures. However, the measures in place need to be maintained, monitored and passed on to both performers. They should check they follow the following procedures.

A review of the control measures should happen yearly, or immediately after any sort of accident associated with a show. If we hear of accidents occurring during similar shows we can review the situation. We can also check in the Equity magazine for reports of bad accidents. We are experienced street performers, but, unfortunately, as there are no available qualifications in this subject our experience cannot be quantified.

Conclusion

As the nature of the risk is considered low and the control measures proposed are already in place the performers need to review them only in a year's time unless there

is an incident, when the control measures should be reconsidered. We perform using fire at the end of the show even though it could be considered risky. We found that if we did the show without fire we generated a lot less income than if we did it with fire. Street shows involving circus skills involve risk by their very nature, but this element of risk can be justified by the enjoyment gained by the audience. The use of volunteers is an integral part of the show: without them the audience would identify far less with the drama and its entertainment value would be much reduced.

Scope	Outdoor entertainment / street theatre
Subject	Performance of the <i>Better Halves</i> street show
Policy/Procedure Reference	Health and Safety Policy (and Miscellaneous Procedure)
Date of Assessment	25/11/01
Assessor and Position	Martin Goode – co-director of the company & performer in show
Hazards Performing a 30-40 minute street show in various locations involving 5 child volunteers which we juggle round and one male adult volunteer who performs a 3 person balance with us and then throws Jo the fire juggling clubs whilst Jo is standing on Jakes shoulders. Jo then juggles with them.	Hazard Effects Injuries to the performers caused by others or selves Injuries to any of the volunteers Injury to any of the audience Accidents caused by people having taken drugs, e.g. alcohol Accidents caused by weather conditions Communication
Risk Rating: Consequence (4) x Likelihood (2) = (8)	Description (low risk)
Who may be harmed? The performers The volunteers The audience	Who is most at risk? The audience standing at the end of the fire clubs' trajectory The performers The male volunteer The child volunteers The audience

<p>Controls</p> <p>Warm-up for the performers both physical and mental The performers are experienced and insured. The performers visually check the area before the show begins and remove hazardous materials e.g. broken glass. With the volunteers the performers demonstrate and ask they have understood where possible. Kids could run out at the wrong moment and get hit on head/body with a juggling club – the performers use plastic juggling clubs so it would not hurt very much if they strike someone. They are experienced jugglers so can compensate if a child runs out early or late. A verbal check that male volunteer has not drunk/taken drugs before. The male volunteer could hurt his back from Jo jumping on it- we verbalise and demonstrate what will happen, we ask if he is ready, Jake supports the volunteer and takes as much of Jo’s weight as possible. Jo chooses a youngish strong man as the volunteer. Use fuel that is not very flammable and burns as cool as possible e.g. paraffin. Prior to fire juggling - tell everyone to stay behind roped area. Ask the audience that is standing at the end of the fire torches trajectory to move. Ask organisers/stewards to stand by with fire extinguishers and fire blanket. A drunk pushing the performers over - be vigilant and have someone on standby to help in that situation e.g. the organisers/stewards/other performers. Adverse weather condition - wet floors can cause accidents and windy weather affects juggling. Don’t perform if it is too wet or windy and cut the show short if the conditions change. Stress and fatigue - never be booked for more than 3 shows in one day and preferably keep it to 2.</p> <p>Sources of information</p> <p>Various street performers, magazines, organisations</p>	<p>Implementation</p> <p>Refuse to perform if the weather is bad. If the show is a paid show make sure this is in the contract.</p>
<p>Monitoring and Measuring</p> <p>Ask other street performers if they have had accidents. Read the Equity magazine to see if there are accidents reported.</p>	<p>Reasons for review</p> <p>If there is an accident; Periodically to update</p> <p>Expected Review Date: 25/10/06</p>