

Risk Assessment for Surreal McCoy & Big Rory & Co

I have been performing since 1973 both on stilts and at ground level in the Streets, so we have considerable knowledge of the sort of dangerous situation that can occur. We are extremely careful in our performance not to take risks, largely because, as they say 'this is going to hurt me more than it is you'!

By far the most common problem for all Street Theatre performances is when a member of the audience becomes over enthusiastic or aggressive, sometimes, for instance putting their arms round the legs of a stilt walker. Even though we are experienced performers we can be taken by surprise if the person approaches from behind (though if we sense a dangerous situation we will use shop windows etc as mirrors to check behind us). Obviously this is a dangerous situation, where the performer, the perpetrator him, or herself, or even an innocent member of the audience may be injured.

Should a performer feel that there is a danger of violence he or she will request for a steward to accompany them. Should performance become dangerous in any way (through audience misuse of alcohol, drugs, aggression or simply sheer enthusiasm) the performers will abort the performance immediately.

Stilt characters other main risk areas are being blown over, tripping or slipping, or a stilt breaking. Obviously if a stiltwalker falls he may damage him (her) self, or any audience members. Therefore if the wind is too high or the surface is too slippy, steep or rough the performer may request that - either the performance is carried out in a safer venue or that it is aborted if there is no alternative.

NB it is worth noting that in 26 very active years of performances (mostly in Scotland), we have only called off twice on account of high wind, once on account of ice and about 5 times on account of heavy rain and flooding.

The Pram (in which an adult toddler rides) is six feet high, three foot six wide and five feet long. It is a strong, light weight construction with tricycle wheels at the four corners. It is pushed around by the 'parent' on stilts. Possible dangers associated with the pram are bumping into audience members, or in the extreme the pram falling over if the surface is too uneven or sloping. The pusher of the pram will watch carefully where he / she is pushing it to stay out of dangerous situations, and apply the brakes when the pram is 'parked'!

The dogs are adults walking on legs and arms with sprung arm extensions which consist of 'welded pogo stick crutches' enclosed in a fibre glass case, all covered in thick fur fabric. There is a relatively small risk of the performer knocking over a member of the audience or hitting them with a crutch, but this is unlikely as the dog has a very clear field of vision. Unfortunately, as above, the greatest risk is of violent behaviour towards the performer. It is therefore essential that each dog has one steward allocated to him or her at all times.

The Seagulls are adult performers walking upright in large padded foam seagull suits. Their heads are made of fibre glass with long yellow beaks extending about 9" from the nose outwards. The risk factors for the Seagulls lie within the beaks. the danger being that a performer might knock someone whilst turning, or poke someone with the end of the beak. Given that the beaks rest on the performers own noses and that any knock severely hurts the performers themselves much rehearsal has gone into the movement of the Seagull heads. With any turning of the head, the beak is lowered slowly and the head is turned and then lifted. This gives the performer a much better field of vision so that the performer can see where his / her 'beak is going.

We believe in safety at work. All our stilt walkers wear protective elbow and knee pads and are taught how to fall. Our Dogs and Seagulls have protective fiberglass head covers.

Mike Rowan, Director