

International Juggling Festival

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Yangon, 9-15 February 2015
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Director's Report

By Jude Smith
21 May 2015



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Overview

The first International Juggling Festival in Myanmar took place in Yangon from 9-15 February 2015 with 47 international participants and crew. Jugglers from the Netherlands, UK, France, Belgium, Spain, Estonia, Israel, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and USA traveled to Yangon at their own expense to take part in the festival.

During the week, workshops and shows were staged in more than 20 locations around the city. The programme is outlined below.

The festival was organized by the Serious Fun Committee in partnership with Smile Education and Development Foundation, which provided organisational support and volunteers. The festival also received support from businesses, the Yangon City Development Committee (city hall), the British Embassy and British Council and a number of community organizations. The festival budget was raised through sponsorship, an appeal, fundraising workshops and shows.

The festival had serious objectives behind all the fun. These goals were to bridge gaps, teach new skills to disadvantaged children and to bring people together in the spirit of fun. It also aimed to provide training and promote regional and international linkages for local performers, and to celebrate Myanmar's remarkable juggling heritage.



Pre-Festival Activities

Juggling Workshops

A workshop programme focused on children living in marginalized communities began in December. Weekly juggling and circus skills workshops were run by Jules Howarth, assisted by Lin Thet Naung.

The workshops were aimed at developing skills and building confidence while giving children a chance to have fun and experience success. Around 150 children and teenagers were trained in the lead up to the festival.

The organisations involved in regular workshops were:

- Thanlyin Boys Training Center, Department of Social Welfare
- Taw Mae Phar hostel, Taung Thu Gone Karen Baptist Church, Insein
- Eden Center for Disabled Children
- Ratana Metta Organisation
- Scholarships for Street Kids, Myanmar
- Save the Children demobilized child soldiers programme.

Additional workshops were held with:

- Youth at Helping Hands
- Myanmar Disabled Sports Federation athletes
- Shwe Min Thar Foundation sports team
- Dala orphanage (show & workshop)



Adults also took part in juggling and team building workshops run by Jules as introductions to the festival, fundraising activities, or as part of sponsorship deals. These workshops took place at:

- Great Day Out, British Ambassador's residence
- Smile Education & Development Foundation
- British Council Library
- 50th St Bar
- Union Bar & Grill
- Blind Tiger Bar
- Shangri La Hotel
- Shangri La Residences



Public Workshops

Serious Fun volunteers held workshops in Mahabandoola Park every Saturday afternoon from October. The public showed a lot of interest and many, both adults and children, learned basic juggling skills. Some returned regularly to continue juggling. Unfortunately this workshop became the target of thieves and regular workshops were discontinued in late January.



Juggling for Disabled Children

A training of trainers project for people working with disabled children was initially planned for January, in order to include the children in festival activities. This was postponed due to lack of funds, and instead Jules began training staff at Eden Centre for Disabled Children and then joined them in weekly juggling workshops with one class of children. The Eden Centre group later joined in festival activities. The original plan, to bring adaptive circus specialist Thomas Hinz to Yangon for a week to train staff from three disabled organizations, took place after the festival.



Inner Light Project

Ratana Metta, Scholarships for Street Kids and the demobilized child soldiers were part of a collaboration between Serious Fun and the Yangon Photo Festival organized by the Institut Francais de Birmanie (IFB), which coincided with the juggling festival. The project had three phases:
 Phase 1 — 5 consecutive days of workshops in photography and juggling in December.
 Phase 2 — Weekly visits in January to participants in their communities to continue building skills.
 Phase 3 — Sangeeta Isvaran from the Wind Dancer Trust worked with participants over 10 days to create a performance combining dance, circus skills and photography with their life stories.
 Many of the juggling students involved in Phase 1 and 2 did not take part in Phase 3, as their organizations put other children in their place. This resulted in minimal juggling/circus activities in the final show but nevertheless it was a very moving performance at IFB on February 13, which also included festival participants Red Nose Foundation, Mike Twist and Maike Aerden.



Pre Festival shows

Shows were arranged as fundraisers or in return for the donation of goods or services to the festival.

Major shows were:

- February 6: 50th Street Bar “A Night at the Circus”
- February 7 & 8: Shows for Dream Boat Productions at Junction shopping centres in exchange for sound & lighting equipment for the Big Show
- February 8: Juggling brunch at the café, Sule Shangri La Hotel
- February 8: Juggling at Parami Pizza



Sponsorship and Fundraising

In October, Yangon Coordinator Virginia Henderson and myself began the search for funding and sponsorship to cover festival costs. Sources of funding from embassies and NGOs were investigated but were not available for this project either due to timing or scope. Commercial sponsorship was initially difficult to obtain although support in kind was more forthcoming.

Sponsoring events is a relatively new phenomenon in Yangon and those companies which do sponsor events face heavy demand. While companies do have corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, these are targeted at specific issues, i.e. the environment, or at specific causes such as supporting an orphanage or monastery school. In the end, cash sponsorship was achieved due to personal contacts rather than a straightforward approach to marketing departments.



Sule Shangri La Hotel and Shangri La Residences were first to come on board with in kind sponsorship, providing a festival office, press conference and social circus presentation venues, and accommodation for 12 participants.



With no cash in hand the week before the festival, Myo Win, Executive Director of festival partner Smile Education & Development Foundation, arranged a meeting with Naing Group and together we made a presentation to senior management. Sponsorship was secured, promoting its brands Romanson, G Shock and Cherry Oo. During the festival itself the Htoo Foundation became a major sponsor and in March, the festival received a substantial donation from the proceeds of a silent auction aboard the visiting cruise ship ms Amsterdam, in support of the festival and community programme.



Supporting Businesses

In kind support from businesses provided substantial savings to the festival budget. In some cases goods were traded for performances and workshops by festival participants. Major costs were saved with Dream Boat Productions providing sound and lighting equipment for the Big Show, Sim cards and top ups, from Ooredoo, City Mart providing lunchboxes for 180 adults and children for the Day of Fun, Off the Beaten Track providing dinner before the Big Show, and Governor's Residence who put on the closing function in exchange for performances the night before.

Businesses who contributed goods, services or discounts were: 50th Street Bar, 100 Plus, Blind Tiger, City Mart, Coca-Cola, Dream Boat, Fonterra, Governor's Residence, Gullivers Travels, Mandalay Beer, Myanmore, Off the Beaten Track café, Ooredoo, Pomelo, Parami Pizza/Union Bar/Gekko, Sein Lan So Pyay Garden, Yoma Fleet.



Non-commercial Assistance

Several NGOs and embassies offered valuable in kind support.

Action Aid provided accommodation for the visiting youth circus teams from Indonesia and Cambodia at their Global Platform training facility.

The British Council assisted with advice, networking and with the opening day activities. Day 1 workshops and the opening night function took place in the garden of the home of the head of the British Council, Kevin McKenzie, who also contributed dinner for opening night guests and arranged for a performance from Shan knife dancers. The Civil Society Initiative of the British Council library paid for the transport to bring the Thanlyin Boys Training School juggling team to various events.



Fundraising

Funds were also raised with shows and workshops, and with an appeal to friends and colleagues to support the community programme which had substantial costs including transport and family support for working children.

Festival merchandise (T-shirts, badges and wallets) were also on sale at public events .



Media Coverage

The festival press conference was held at the Sule Shangri La Hotel on February 4 and attended by about 50 reporters, photographers and camera crews. Smile staffers Poe Poe and Mon Kyi worked with Serious Fun media coordinator Jeanne Hallacy to ensure a wide range of local and international media were invited. The media advisory and all press releases were produced in English and Myanmar language.

Formal speakers were Myo Win from Smile, Kyaw Oo from Thanlyin Boys Training School and myself. Two Thanlyin boys joined in a juggling demonstration with Jules Howarth and Haggis McLeod. Early festival arrivals added to the atmosphere by doing tricks and interviews before and after the formal press conference.

The press conference focus was on the upcoming festival highlights and the community juggling project. Video highlights of workshops and a slideshow were screened and provided to reporters for use in their coverage.

During the festival, key events such as the Big Show Spectacular and the Day of Fun generated extensive media interest, and many interviews were conducted with festival organisers and participants. The Big Show Spectacular was filmed by MNTV and later broadcast in full.

While mainstream media coverage began in earnest with the press conference, social media was also an important part of the media strategy. The Serious Fun in Yangon facebook page featured posts initially in English and then more frequently in Myanmar language too. Posts began in the months prior to the event with regular updates about the community workshops and festival preparations.



Film and Photography

Serious Fun is fortunate to have volunteers highly skilled in media. Cameraman Lin Thet Naung, using the Smile video camera, filmed the community workshops while also translating for Jules. During the festival, Yannick Jooris helped Lin and an additional camera was hired for key events. Footage was used on the website and facebook, and edited into a series of webisodes about the children's juggling project. See www.seriousfunglobal.net/videos.

Photographs and video were later provided to sponsors, and to performers who received a multi-camera shoot of their act and professional performance photographs taken by Tim Webster during the Big Show and Fire Show, as a thank you for performing for free.



Juggling Props

Juggling equipment was donated by European juggling companies and gathered by Play Juggling in Italy ready for shipping to Yangon. Arranging import of the donated goods to Yangon proved difficult and was eventually resolved after some months, with the assistance of the British Embassy. Consequently the donated juggling props did not arrive in time for the community workshops. Jules arranged for balls to be made in Yangon and was able to borrow diabolos, rings, clubs and other props from Adam Fraser at the International School of Yangon. The juggling props were received on the eve of the festival and were later distributed to the community juggling groups in order for participants to continue juggling activities. Some props were retained by Serious Fun in order to continue workshops and for later distribution.

The juggling companies who donated goods were:

- Play Juggling, Italy
- Gora, Hungary
- Ballaballa, Germany
- Beard, UK
- Just Juggling, Germany
- Henry's, Germany
- Oddballs, UK



Festival Programme

Day 1 Monday 9 February

- 6.30am Dawn Juggle at Mahabandoola Park
- 7.30am Mohingya and coffee at Pansodan Scene
- 9.30am Registration, workshops/juggling at the lakeside residence of British Council head, Kevin MacKenzie.
- 9.30am Youth leadership workshop at Global Platform for jugglers from Indonesia, Cambodia and Myanmar led by Sangeeta Isvaran.
- 12noon Lunch for everyone contributed by Parami Pizza.
- 1pm Workshops/juggling continue
- 6pm Opening ceremony with speeches from Myo Win, Kevin MacKenzie and myself. Dinner and a Shan knife dance provided by the British Council, beer from Mandalay beer.
- 8pm Fire jam.



Day 2 Tuesday 10 February

9.30am Workshops, rehearsals and planning, YMCA hall downtown. Show for the YMCA preschool in return for a discounted hall hire rate.

5pm Social circus presentation at Sule Shangri La Hotel, hosted by Myo Win from Smile Education and Development Foundation. Presentations were made by Dan Roberts - Asia Pacific Social Circus Association, Andrea Russel - Spark Circus, Sangeeta Isvaran - Wind Dancer Trust.



Day 3 Wednesday 11 February

A day of various activities with a rendezvous for all participants at Kandawgyi Park for the Big Show Spectacular.

- 9am Set up begins for Big Show, Kandawgyi Park
- 9.30am Group to Eden Centre for Disabled Children for workshop/shows
- 9.30am Youth circus teams fundraiser at the International School Yangon.
- 10am Jugglers invited to Sein Lan So Pyay Garden, Inya Lake



- 3pm Technical checks for Big Show.
- 5pm Dinner provided by Off the Beaten Track cafe
- 6pm Pre-show entertainment from MiMi (bubbles), Elmar (stilt-walking) and Balloonity Bangkok (balloon modelling).
- 6.45pm Global Harmonies choir on stage
- 7.15pm Show begins, filmed by MNTV for delayed broadcast. Opening speech by Myo Win & Virginia Henderson





Big Show Performers (in order of appearance)

Thura Thein & Jo Ker, Omega Mime, Myanmar
 Lee Hayes, the Netherlands
 Edu Martinez, Spain
 Kama, Estonia
 MiMi, Japan
 Haggis McLeod, UK
 Phare Ponleu Selpak, Cambodia
 Nat Brown, Australia, with Tink McQuillin, USA
 Ta Ta Cho, Myanmar
 Mike Twist, New Zealand
 Captain Finhead, Australia
 Biz, Myanmar
 Tea for Two, Other Half Productions, UK
 Melissa Marie, Nomadic Flame, USA
 Ben Zuddhist, France
 Venus Goddess of the Diabolo, Netherlands
 Red Nose Foundation, Jakarta



The show was well attended with an audience of more than 1000. The stage was in poor structural condition but the floor was strengthened with temporary repairs by the Dream Boat team, who set up all sound and lighting equipment. An area at the back of the stage remained dangerous and was taped off. Sponsor Naing Group set up a big screen enabling the community workshop video and slideshow to be shown before the show and ensuring the audience had a good view of the acts. The juggling team from Thanlyin Boys' Training School were surprise guests.



Crew

Show Director: Jules Howarth
 Stage managers: Jake Nevin and Alberto Arco Miras
 Sound: Richard Gillett
 Technical Manager: Phil Foster
 Cameras: Lin Thet Naung, Yannick Jooris

Day 4 Thursday 12 February

More shows and workshops for groups dispatched in various directions across the city, with a rendezvous in the evening.

- 9.30am Group to Karen hostel Insein for workshops and shows
- 11am Group to People's Park for Dream Boat show
- 1pm Group to Thanlyin Boys Training School for workshop, show
- 7.30pm Union Bar "Circus Caberet" show



Day 5 Friday 13 February

Groups once again spread out across the city before meeting at Institut Francais de Birmanie for the Inner Light performance in the evening.

- 10am Youth circus teams present a juggling workshop for Global Platform staff
- 10.30am Group departs for Insein Monastery with Sule Shangri La staff for show/workshops
- 3pm Youth circus teams at Institut Francais for Inner Light set up & rehearsal
- 5pm Mike Twist & Maïke Aerden to Institut Francais for Inner Light show
- 6.30pm Inner Light performance. Speech by Virginia Henderson on behalf of the Juggling Festival.



Day 6 Saturday 14 February

9.30am Bollywood dance workshop with Sangeeta Isvaran
10am Shows including children’s juggling show, face painting, juggling workshops, walkabout — MiMi (bubbles), Elmar (stilts), Kama, (cycling balance and juggling).
2pm Juggling Olympics
3pm De-rig Kandawgyi Park

It was an early start for Serious Fun volunteers, setting up from 7am for the Day of Fun at Kandawgyi Park, rigging banners, tables and stages. The aim was to bring the public, the children’s juggling teams and festival participants together for shows, workshops and games. The juggling kids from Eden Centre for Disabled Children, the Karen hostel and Thanlyin Boys’ Training School joined in the fun. The team from Scholships for Street Kids was expected but did not come.

The location originally requested and approved by the city authorities for the Day of Fun event was Mahabandoola Park but permission was withdrawn just weeks before the festival as “security could not be guaranteed”. Kandawgyi Park was a beautiful setting but the admission fee to the park (300 Kyat, approximately 30 cents) may have kept public numbers down. Park management allowed free entry for festival participants including volunteers and children’s juggling teams, as well as providing a stage, sound equipment and a dressing room. City Mart provided 180 specially-packed lunch boxes and sponsor Naing Group once again installed the big screen.

The children’s juggling teams met for the first time and Jules merged them into a combined show. The kids also had a chance to play parachute games, try out Ben Zuddhist’s slack rope, as well as relax and enjoy the other shows. Smile volunteers helped out, particularly with selling merchandise and translating. Pearl was a star, translating the shows on the main stage all day and then the juggling Olympics. Pen Myanmar also joined the Day of Fun, running a stage throughout the day.



Day 6 Saturday 14 February continues ...

4pm Set up for Fire show, Mahabandoola Park
 6.15pm Introduction by Myo Win & Jude Smith, followed by Red Nose Foundation on stage
 6.30pm Fire show begins
 7.15pm The Wheel band
 7.30 2 one-man acts at Governors Residence
 7.30pm Party at Helping Hands

The Unplugged Stage runs at Mahabandoola Park on Saturday evenings during the dry season after the park closes at 6pm. The stage faces out of the park and the audience is outside. The city authorities agreed to Serious Fun staging the fire show there with The Wheel band to follow. The Parks Department provided sound and lighting equipment. The fire show was widely promoted on the media, flyers and the festival poster. An estimated 4000 people came to watch.

Fire Show Performers (in order of appearance)

Red Nose Foundation, Indonesia,
 Mike Twist, New Zealand
 Andrea Russel, Spark Circus, Canada
 Leon & Maya, Myanmar residents
 Julien Ariza, Myanmar residents
 Ensemble—Roo Galbraith, Maike Aerden, Haggis McLeod, Jo Galbraith, Alberto Arco Miras
 Maarja from Kama, Estonia
 Edu Martinez, Spain
 Captain Finhead, Australia
 Nomadic Flame, USA
 Finale



Day 7 Sunday 15 February

10am Jugglers at the British club
 1pm Show & workshop at the Shangri La Residences
 6pm Closing Function, Governors Residence

Summary

The festival was very successful with major objectives achieved, financial targets reached, and sponsorship and partnership commitments met. Festival participants made a huge contribution, entertaining thousands of people as well as passing on their skills to children in the community juggling project. The children involved in the Serious Fun juggling teams had a unique experience and a lot of fun, whilst developing new skills. Daw Aye Aye Thinn from Scholarships for Streetkids summed it up with the following statement:



"Juggling was a great new experience for our kids. They got more confidence in their ability. Their social behaviour and even their facial expressions changed. By the end of the festival they happily talked with each other. Another benefit was with the parents who came to the Inner Light show. They were very proud of their children. It was so unexpected for them. They never expected that their children would be able to do that. They have repeatedly thanked SASK for being part of making that happen."

Two main factors were responsible for the success of the community juggling project. Firstly, we were advised early on to work in partnership with organizations already involved in each community and this advice certainly helped everything to run smoothly. Secondly, having workshop specialist Jules Howarth in Yangon for three months running the workshops, teamed with Lin Thet Naung translating and arranging logistics, provided a high level of expertise and an extremely solid base.

One festival objective, to connect local performers with the international network, was not fully met. Thura Thein and Jo Ker of Omega Mime helped a lot and did a superb job as MCs for the Big Show. Their juggling colleague Ta Ta Cho joined in workshops before the festival and performed during the big show, but attempts to include more local performers were not successful. They were difficult to find and those we did contact had work commitments which prevented them from joining the festival.

Another objective, to conduct a Training of Trainers course for people working with the disabled, was postponed due to lack of funds, but successfully took place from 18-22 May 2015.

The partnership between Serious Fun and Smile worked well and the assistance of key Smile staff was very welcome. Mon Kyi and Poe Poe were essential members of the media team and both Thin Zar's made a big contribution to the festival. Executive Director Myo Win's networking was very much appreciated.

In conclusion, we had a lot of help from a lot of people and that help enabled us to achieve so much. Serious Fun indeed.

Serious Fun Committee

Organisers

Jude Smith, festival director
 Jules Howarth, juggling specialist, show director
 Virginia Henderson, Yangon coordinator

Key volunteers

Alice Vernat-Davies, photographer, media, production
 Alberto Arco Miras, production & workshops
 Elmar Langer, public workshops
 Jane Davies, child protection focal point
 Jeanne Hallacy, media coordinator
 Lin Thet Naung, cameraman & translator
 Phil Foster, graphics & technical manager
 The Nyein Thu, translator
 Tim Webster, photographer, production
 Usasinee Rewthong, production
 Yannick Jooris, filming director

