

Vaudeville joins technology for 21st century

■ Lazer Vaudeville brings its updated magic and juggling act to Eugene on Sunday

By Jen West
Oregon Daily Emerald

Traditional theater and circus meet high-tech lasers in Lazer Vaudeville's variety show featur-

ing juggling, acrobatics and magic. The Hult Center for the Performing Arts presents Lazer Vaudeville at 2:30 p.m. Sunday. Tickets are \$15 for the general public and \$14 for youth under age 14.

The show comes complete with comedy, rope spinning, audience participation, hoop jug-

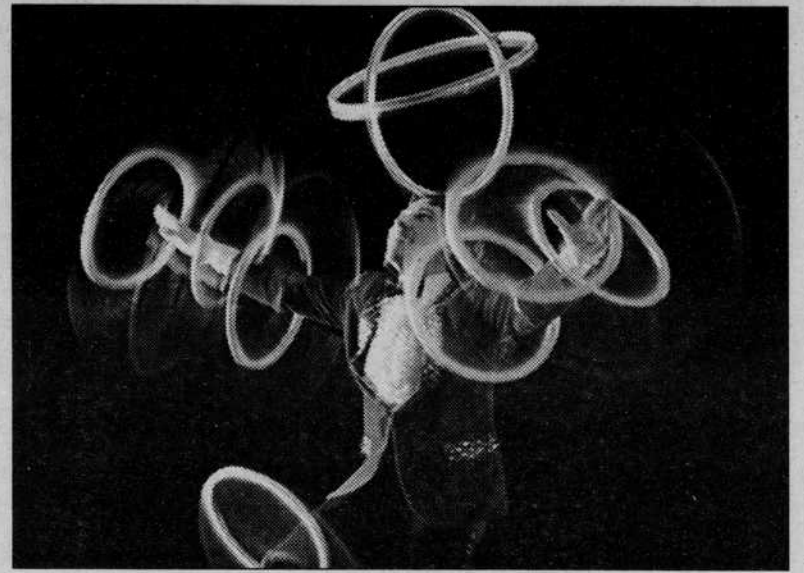
gling, a laser light show, a neon cowboy and a seven-foot-tall, fluorescent, fire-breathing dragon named Alfonzo as master of ceremonies.

Carter Brown founded Lazer Vaudeville in 1987 and was later joined by Cindy Marvell and Bee Jay Joyer.

The show combines the physical aspects of theater with the visual arts of lasers and black lights. The trio of performers will juggle balls, clubs, plungers, machetes and running chain saws, and later on in the show they will saw the dragon in half with lasers.

"I got started (juggling) as a hobby when I was a kid in New York City," Marvell said.

She said she learned some juggling tricks from her father and performed her "wacky hobby" for her eighth-grade talent show. While still in high school, she began formal training at the Antic Arts Academy at SUNY Purchase.



Courtesy Photo

Carter Brown, a Ringling Bros. Circus veteran who founded the futuristic Lazer Vaudeville in 1987, juggles with hoops made from antique bicycle rims.

Juggling was a "small, elusive field," she said, and there were few women who performed it.

"Girls in general shied away from throwing and catching," Marvell said, and usually people took it for granted that boys knew how to throw a ball. But unlike other physical activities, she said

juggling is not a "co-ed sport," but an activity that men and women can do together.

Brown, a veteran of the Ringling Bros. Circus, does a type of juggling with bicycle rims that is almost a lost art form. He is the only person in the world who performs a seven-minute bicycle-rim juggling act "as far as we know," Joyer said. Brown uses three different sizes of rims, and some of his hoops are more than 100 years old, according to Joyer.

"It's difficult to perform," he said.

Joyer's roots in the juggling arts stem from his childhood. When Joyer was two years old, he went to the circus, and he said he "fell in love with the clowns." He said as a kid, he dreamed of being an astronaut or fire fighter, but he always came back to the clowns.

He started juggling in high school and continued at the San Francisco School of Circus Arts, where he trained and taught for five years. Then in July he joined Lazer Vaudeville.

Vaudeville was widely popular in the United States from the beginning of the 20th century through the early 1930s, but it is now in decline, Joyer said. Many famous entertainers such as the Marx Brothers, Charlie Chaplin and Houdini started out in vaudeville. Lazer Vaudeville has taken the traditional vaudeville and added modern technology to it.

"If vaudeville were still going strong, this is probably what it would look like," Joyer said.

In addition to their performing schedule, Lazer Vaudeville also visited elementary schools in the Eugene-Springfield area Tuesday, demonstrating their skills and informing the kids of the history and technical aspects of their show.

Marlene Thornton, substitute teacher and clerical worker at River Road Elementary School, said she thought the kids at the school really enjoyed the demonstration.

The performers encouraged audience interaction, she said, and often had students come up on stage to assist them.

"I thought it was interesting that they told (the students) about how it all worked," Thornton said. She said she wouldn't be surprised if the kids went home and tried out some of the lighting techniques with flashlights and their bathroom mirror.

"The show is visually appealing and a lot of fun," Joyer said.

E-mail reporter Jen West at jenwest@dailyemerald.com.

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