



VIRTUOSOS
OF JUGGLING

Karl-Heinz Ziethen
Alessandro Serena



KARA

Paul, for example, held his sister above his head with one hand and, with the other, juggled three large iron balls. While he spun a tureen on a pole with his left hand, he juggled three plates with his right with a ladder leaning against his shoulders on whose rungs Agnes climbed. The spectators appreciated these strange combinations and above all started to see characters in scenes with clothes not so dissimilar from theirs and with an almost mundane behavior. This increased their amazement for the contrast that was borne between the habitual and the extraordinary.

THE GENTLEMAN JUGGLERS

Spadoni was among the first to realize the importance of the elegant form that was always clearly revealed in contrast to that of the brute force. Kara completed such an evolved course and made famous the genus of the "gentleman juggler." Kara's real name was Michael Steiner and he was born on January 31, 1867, in Nuremberg. Like many predecessors, he did not come from an acting family—but had decided to leave home to follow his vocation. In the first years of his career, he performed in small circuses, thinking, above all, always of his training. He quickly carried out exercises of rare technical depth, such as juggling four balls in one hand, a movement not often equaled.

From the start, his style was very traditional but, one day, when he was contracted at the Circus Diaz in Lisbon, he was able to watch an artist who, behind stage, juggled with a walking stick, hat and cigar. In this way, he got the idea of transforming himself into a gentleman juggler and to take on a second stage name—this time, The Italian of Corradini. He began to get well known in the circus world and an agent, Franz Pospischil, called and suggested he go to the variety theatres and adopt a shorter and easier name to remember.

His growing success convinced the American manager, J. Hopkins, to hire him for a three-year tour in the United States. During his second year in the American contract, Kara had the occasion to watch a performance of a Japanese juggler, Satsuma, who performed the famous Awata Games. Kara was fascinated by the exercises in which the balls seemed to be "alive" and slid up and down the sticks that the Oriental artist held between his teeth. He attempted this and, discovering a certain talent, decided to divide his act in three parts: in the first he performed as a gentleman; in the second he wore the classic tasseled tights and executed the complicated Awata Games; in the third he presented foot-juggling tricks similar to the Burmese trio, Moung Toon.

He performed this act in 1894 at the Alhambra in London, and thereafter all the great variety theatres of Europe competed to have him on their bill. In 1908, he decided that his act could be based exclusively on the part that got the most success, that of the juggling gentleman, and for this reason, this portion of his performance was perfected even more. The scenery that he had adopted was composed of the inside of a caffè with a billiard room annexed. In an evening suit, with white velvet gloves, a top hat, walking stick and monocular, Kara, with magnetic appeal, made his entrance on stage and carried out his various exercises with an air of indifference that gave his performance a light, ironic touch.

The act was a flowing of movements without interruption and without losing an instant. Technically, his exercises were impeccable. For example, he held a billiard cue balanced on his forehead, made it slide down his back and caught it with his heel before it could touch the floor. He hadn't only established the genus of the gentleman, but had also used new props with inventive exercises. On top of a pole, about three feet long, he held a wooden panel with diagonal sleepers that functioned as corridors for the balls, which were thrown up there, and which rolled in this way from one place to another.

Kara also had big problems at the start of World War I, problems similar to those that had happened to Cinquevalli and nearly caused him to abandon



ADANOS



JETON

his livelihood. In August of 1914, during a performance in Paris, Kara was placed under arrest—as he was considered a revolutionary due to his German nationality. He was detained in various French prison camps until August of 1918, when he was finally released and given his freedom. Four years without training and practice may have ended the career of many a juggler. What was worse, all his props were lost. One of the most prepared jugglers, Adolf Salerno (another Italian stage name), came to help by lending Kara his props.

Kara began to train once again and, in late-1920, at the respectable age of 50, he obtained a contract for a five-year tour in the United States. It is probable that on that occasion he may have seen or heard of Enrico Rastelli, who had great success in performing at the Palace in New York in 1923. In 1929, at the age of nearly 60, Kara said good-bye to his career—performing for the last time at the Scala in Berlin. He died 10 years later in a town close to München, where he had settled down.

During this time, the genus of the gentleman juggler enjoyed great success and there were many who carried on the tradition. Other notable “elegant” jugglers were Bellini, Farini, Hera, and Carl Lentini. Also to be remembered, without doubt, is the above-mentioned Salerno, born Adolf Behrend, and Willy Rossio, who had created an act called Direkt vom Bahnhof (Straight from the Station), in which he entered the stage with a workman who passed him suitcases and other elegant travel accessories with which he started to juggle. Another noteworthy Italian name was Antonio Vivalli, made famous by the legendary P.T. Barnum, who engaged himself in memorable duels with jugglers claiming to be as able as he.

Selma Braatz, born 1885 in Berlin, was the first female juggler to demonstrate feats that were ordinarily performed by men. Another top gentleman juggler was Felix Adanos, who lived in Vienna. During the 40 years of his artistic career, Adanos also worked in variety theatres and circuses.

Today, the last surviving exponents of the variety art form are only found in Germany, by the juggler Jeton. He spent a year at the school Ecole de Cirque de Bruxells and found in Germany an exceptional teacher in the person of Arthur Caral, who was himself a strongman and salon juggler.