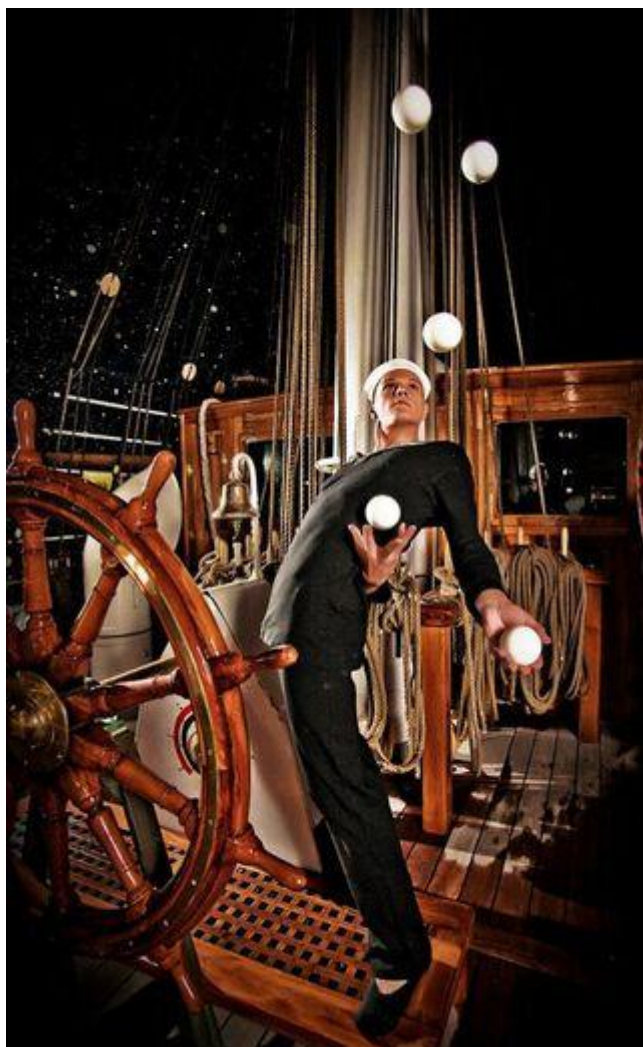


Alexander Koblikoff

Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk



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This life story was extracted in 2020, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the eJuggle section of the website of the International Jugglers' Association.

1. Introduction



The following is the introduction to an interview with Alexander Koblikoff published on the eJuggle section of the website of the International Jugglers' Association:

Alex Koblikoff is the solo juggler for Grand Tour, the Big Apple Circus' 38th season production in New York. His four minute routine is an exquisite dance of dazzling patterns immaculately combined. For his final trick, he multiplex throws ten balls, though he has done fourteen in practice. His graceful splits and five balls on the side are superb and his vivacious personality is contagious. This is his first time performing in the United States.

Alex won the Gold Medal at the Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain in Paris in 2008, and the Silver Clown at the International Circus Festival of Monte Carlo. He has appeared in Circus Roncalli, Circus Conelli, and Salto Natale in Europe, and appears in the Guinness Book of World Records.

The amazing thing about Alex that serious jugglers can learn from, is that if you want any success as a performer, you've got to learn to focus. Focus on perfecting your act and not get up in front of people and drop all the time.

In the course of the interview it was revealed that Alex spent four years of intense work in the National Circus Academy in Ukraine developing a single four minute act. That means not fooling around with diabolo and combat or a secondary act, but rather focusing on one thing and one thing only. Four minutes of beauty and perfection. And with that, he has won award after award and can take his act anywhere in the world, including New York. So next time you wonder why you can't get a gig, remember Alex. Unless you're hobby juggler, in which case forget everything I just said.

2. EJuggle Interview



The Kiev Academy of Circus and Variety Arts.

eJuggle: You graduated from the Kiev Circus School?

Alex: Yes. My teacher, Yuriy Pozdnyakov, stopped performing about twenty years ago when he was forty, and became a full time trainer. He developed his own unique system. But based on key skills learned in the circus school. He is a student of Sergei Ignatov and the Ignatov school.

e: Have you met Ignatov?

A: No, I'm not sure what he's doing now. A year or two ago he was giving a workshop at a convention in a juggling work space in Berlin.

e: Where'd you learn English?

A: I learned in school and learned from travelling and meeting traveling students in Kiev.

e: Is this your first time in the USA?

A: Performing, yes, but the first time I visited the US was in North Carolina at the IJA festival, 2007 in Winston-Salem. One weekend. My teacher was giving workshops there and I came as his assistant. He would explain stuff and I would demonstrate because he was getting old. Viktor Kee also gave workshops there. Viktor arranged that my teacher was a guest.

e: You had a good time?

A: Yes. This was my first time leaving my country, and it was great to see so many jugglers in one place. Later I went to a EJC convention and it was very different. 2011 in Munich. I've also been to conventions since then in France and Norway. The European style is very different from the American style.

e: You are highly influenced by Alexander Kiss but are also influenced by Michael Moschen and Jay Gilligan.

A: Yes. Michael Moschen initially, and Jay Gilligan later. My teacher is a big fan of Moschen. When I started the circus school I didn't know any contact juggling.

e: You do the contact with Russian Balls, sometime called Sand Balls? Because it is usually done with solid balls.

A: Yes they are very good for contact once you get used to it, and easy to do stalls. You don't need to find the balance point.

The balls I use are from a company in

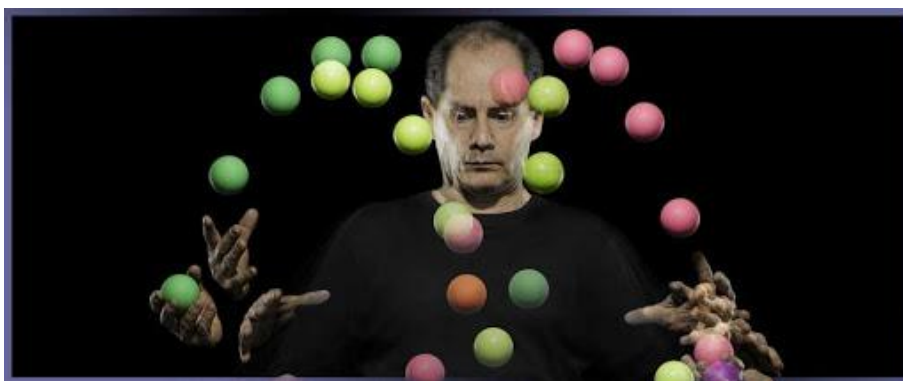
Europe called Plug and Play. It has a plug and you can add the amount of filling you choose. I use bird seed.

This type of ball is called Russian Ball in Europe.

e: So you know all about Michael Moschen?

A: Yes, my teacher was very impressed by his video. Before him it was all very traditional, everything going back to Kiss. Kiss already said you don't have to juggle 13 balls. You have to find something original. Anything. Juggle with a chair. But the Soviet system is too much everybody doing the same. Like, 'He did thirteen rings, I have to do 14.' That attitude. But after the Moschen video, my teacher was in shock because it's only one ball and you can do a whole routine for 13 minutes and it's so interesting and crazy.

He started to think about using different objects, such as the large metal triangle. Petrosky used five of them. And contact with rings. So my teacher started to look for different objects to juggle and he showed me the Moschen video and told me to think about that. Then when I was doing the leg splits he said this was not typical and he encouraged me to work on that. And contortion.



The American juggler Michael Moschen.

e: Do the Moscow and Kiev circus schools encourage you to learn other non-juggling skills and to develop a separate act?

A: Maybe in Moscow but not in Kiev. In Kiev you choose your discipline and focus on that. I was a juggler and had classes in handstands and acrobatics, which was important, but if I showed up at handstand class and said I have to work on my

juggling tricks they would let me go. Your main discipline had priority. The aerialists and acrobats also had juggling class but they could skip class if they needed to work on their main act.

e: How long is your act here in Big Apple?

A: It's quite short. It used to be shorter but I added the looking at the 11th ball and kicking it away. Before that it was about four minutes. Three minutes, 58 seconds. But now almost five minutes.

e: How much control do you have over your act? Can you change it or say to the director, 'hey, I want more time?'

A: No, this act took me four years to develop. And its precisely choreographed with the music.

e: So the Big Apple Circus band had to learn your exact music.

A: Yes, we sent them the music six month before we even arrived. Then heavily rehearsed because the instruments were different.

e: Where'd the sailor come from?

A: It's traditional Russian.

e: Like Battleship Potemkin?

A: Yes. But we didn't want to make a sailor character at first. So I started with this music and we had our tests in the school. Every two month you have to show your progress. For the first two years you show your progress in technique, but after that you show your progress in terms of a routine. A performance oriented routine. With music and costume. So we had the music and the wave idea fit and then the sailor hat fit, and another juggler was working with bowler hat and my coach saw the sailor hat on a clown and told me to give it a try. Catching the ball on the hat worked so we went with that. Then from the hat to the whole sailor costume.

e: When did you move to Kiev?

A: When I was fifteen. I grew up in Donetsk, near the Russian border.

e: What other props do you like?

A: The first year I learned the three classic props, balls, clubs and rings. Then my coach said to choose one. It's nice if you can juggle all the props but we have only four years. If you want to make something on a high level you'll have to choose one and focus.

I also love rings so I had to choose between balls and rings. I don't really like clubs. Then I started to focus on the multiplex tricks and learned eight, then eventually ten.



e: Your final trick is a ten ball stack multiplex. Whose idea was that?

A: My coach. His partner was Michael Rudenca. He learned the ten ball multiplex but I never saw it because it was before everything was filmed. But he didn't perform it. I met him after I learned it and it gave him great joy to see it executed properly since he invented it. My coach said that the audience doesn't care that it's multiplex. As far as they're concerned its ten balls, they can barely understand that.

e: Once you're juggling more than four they don't know what's flying

A: Exactly.

e: How do you like New York? Is it considered the top gig?

A: Yes, and I love the city.

e: And do you get to tour?

A: Yes, we went to the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum Of Natural History. We also went to some funky theater in the Village which was great.

e: Do the Chinese artists get to tour around?

A: Yes, but less on their own. They don't speak any English.

e: How are the audiences?

A: They are great but like anywhere else sometimes more and sometimes less. Every show is different. They are certainly better than some cold audiences you get in some European cities like Zurich. They're a bunch of snobs there. They don't get enthusiastic. New York is a great audience.

e: Is it because in Switzerland they expect more or because no matter what they get they just can't get emotional about it?

A: Yes. Both.

e: How do you like the subway?

A: It's different from Kiev and Moscow, but more similar to Europe. I like that it never closes day or night. This is crazy, I never saw anything like it. There's no schedule. The trains just come. You don't have to worry about missing the last train. It's also very cheap. No matter where you go it's the same price. In London and Munich the further you go the more expensive.

e: Is Big Apple different from other circuses?

A: It's similar to traditional circuses in Europe. The tent and format.

e: What's going on in Russia about animals in the circus? In American and Western Europe they are phasing out lions, bears, and elephants.

A: Russian circuses are still full of animal acts. The Ukraine state circus is full of animals. Bears and lions for sure. Not as many elephants. In Germany they still have traditional circuses, elephants from Monte Carlo.

(at this point in the interview the Russian aerialist Sergey Akimov, age 30, drops by and continues the discussion about animals in Russia and the Russian circus)

Sergey Akimov: The Russian animal acts are too established to be phased out. There is too much invested in it, and they are way too popular. It's big business and too many people are dependent on it. It may fade out eventually, but not for a while.

e: They are not creating as many new animal acts?

S: That's correct. The ones that already exist are doing well, but not many new ones are being created.

e: They were part of the great Soviet tradition?

S: They were essential to it. Most people don't realize that the great Soviet golden age of ballet, Olympic athletes, chess masters, etc., it all followed the circus performers. You see, you couldn't expect people to give up everything to become a ballet dancer or athlete if you knew that at age 25 you'd suddenly be obsolete and out of work. So the Soviets promised that if you dedicated your life to one of these disciplines they'd take care of you later in life. You might work as a trainer or something, but you wouldn't suddenly be stuck. And it started with the circus performers. The minister of the Interior for Khrushchev was married to a circus performer. They decided to make Russian circus a show piece for the entire world.

e: Like the space program or the ballet.

S: Yes. But to do that they had to guarantee to take care of the performers when they got older. It proved extremely successful and ballet and other disciplines followed.

e: That's astonishing. Thank you gentlemen, it's been a pleasure.

S&A: Thank you!



3. Videos

As one of the world's leading jugglers, Alexander Koblikoff demonstrates extraordinary skill. Here are some remarkable videos of him in practice and in performance.



Click here for this video of Koblikoff in practice:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BgPQgTcMKo&t=1m48s>



Click here for the video from the Stephen Colbert TV show:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5RPNZ0YIGNk>



Click here for a video of Koblikoff performing in his trademark sailor's outfit in a Paris night club: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-rBklK5Aw>
