

## СЦЕНІЧНЕ МИСТЕЦТВО

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### ROLLER ACROBATICS AND THE CYR WHEEL AS ORIGINAL GENRES OF CONTEMPORARY PERFORMATIVE ART: A CIRCOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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The article “Roller Acrobatics” and the “Wheel of Sira” as original genres of contemporary performance art is explored in the context of contemporary circusology and art criticism of circus genres.

The topic of the research is devoted to contemporary circus genres today, namely in the genre of acrobatics – roller acrobatics; in the genre of equilibristics – the wheel of sira. These genres today on the circus arena and large circus shows programs of the World circus structures often have a bright presentation and representation, as they are original in their demonstration when transmitting an artistic image. The studies in the key of Circusology are analyzed and their features are indicated. Much attention in the study is paid to the specifics and representation of circus genres – roller acrobatics and the wheel of sira.

The technical part of these genres is analyzed in detail, the features of the props in roller acrobatics and the wheel of sira are specified. The features of performance in these contemporary circus genres are determined, namely the methodology for performing the trick part. The article pays attention to the historical context of the emergence of contemporary circus genres, namely in the genre of acrobatics – roller acrobatics; in the genre of equilibristics – the wheel of sira. It is important to note that often in the study of such genres there is no specific system of training the performer. And only in the Kyiv Municipal Academy of Circus and Performing Arts there is a systematic training for these circus genres – circus artists (acrobats, equilibrists). These genres are often present in circus Show programs of the world, as well as the famous Cirque du Soleil.

It is important to note that contemporary circus genres today with the original demonstration and representation of the artistic image constitute artistic value in the context of examples of Artistic Culture and Stage, Circus and Performative Arts.

*Keywords:* acrobatics, artistic culture, circus directing, circology, circus art, circus genres, equilibristic, original circus genres, performative art, roller acrobatics, sira wheel, stage art.

**Formulation of the problem.** To analyze the features and specifics of circus genres today: roller skating and the wheel of sira, to clarify their technical and artistic indicators in the context of conveying the artistic image and stage representation in performative show programs, performances and attractions.

**Research Analysis.** Not many scholars have been involved in research in this field. Most studies have focused on individual fragments of circus art without providing a detailed understanding of the circus process and its subject. They also present a superficial view of the factors and elements within the circus space and demonstrate a lack of a systematic approach to studying the specifics of circusology as a scientific discipline in contemporary art criticism.

However, it is important to highlight the most significant representatives in the study of circus art within the context of circusology. Among them are both theorists and practitioners: Inessa Lvivova, 2021 [4]; Marina Malykhina, 2016 [5]; Dmytro Orel, 2017, 2020 [7; 8]; Olena Pozharska, 2021 [8]; Yuliia Romanenkova, 2020–2021 [9; 10]; Kristian Stiemberh, 2017 [14]; Denys Sharykov, 2023 [17; 18]; Liudmyla Shevchenko, 2024 [19].

**The purpose of the article.** To identify important features and factors of circus genres today: roller skating and the wheel of sira in the context of conveying artistic image and stage representation in performative show programs, performances and attractions.

#### **Narration of the main material**

*Roller Acrobats* are a relatively young circus genre that combines elements of classical acrobatics, figure skating and roller sports. Its appearance is associated with the development of roller skates and their adaptation in circus arts.

First, let's analyze its genesis. The emergence of roller skates (XVIII–XIX centuries). This made it possible to use them not only for movement, but also for tricks.

Pair and group supports (one partner skates, the other balances on him). Jumps from obstacles and somersaults with landing on rollers. High-speed rotation (for example, “pinwheels” with a partner on the shoulders). Contemporary stage (1990s – present)

Today, roller skating is a spectacular genre that can be seen in the circuses of Cirque du Soleil and other famous shows. Modern technologies (glowing wheels, trampolines, extreme rollers) allow creating even more spectacular numbers. The basis for the emergence of the genre

Roller skating appeared precisely due to. The development of roller skates and their popularization. The influence of figure skating and sports acrobatics. The desire of circus artists for new forms of entertainment.

Today, this genre continues to develop, including elements of parkour, extreme skating and even aerial acrobatics. Ukrainian artists also contributed to the development of the circus genre of roller skating, for example. Valery Timokhin, who began his career in the Soviet Union in a group number of 4 people, under the direction of Sedova. Later, having worked in the state circus company of Ukraine for more than 20 years, he created a group act of roller acrobats “Sea Fun”, which presented its art in the arenas of Ukraine, China, Taiwan and other countries, where

the number of participants reached 6 people. Valeriy Timokhin taught and gave a start in life to more than 40 partners, who still delight the audience and develop this genre in all venues of the world. One of the participants of the act “Sea Fun” *Olga Pape*, who also made a wonderful act with *Alexander Ampodistov*, in the style of “Steampunk”, which amazed the audience with its professional performance in the arenas of the Kyiv Circus, other cities of Ukraine, the Philippines, Macau, Chile, Peru, Columbus. acting skills and tricks. There are also foreign leading roller-skating couples, such as: Duet “Nestorovs”, Britain, Duet “Leo and Ursula” Columbia and other leading artists from different parts of the world [18, p. 134–138].

Specifics of technical equipment and performing tricks of the circus genre of roller acrobatics. Circus roller acrobats combine elements of acrobatics, figure skating and roller sports, creating spectacular numbers. Their performances require high coordination, balance, strength and flexibility. Let’s consider the main methods and features of their work.

*Basic skating technique of roller acrobats.* Before performing tricks, acrobats master the following. Correct stance (legs bent, body tilted forward for stability). Acceleration and braking (T-stop, plow, braking with a turn). Rotation around its axis with a weight, to practice technique in a pair. Maneuvering (runs, cross-rolls, slides).

*Roller acrobats perform the following elements.* Jumps (screws, jumps with rotation). Balance elements (stands on one leg, “swallow”, riding on one leg “Eight”, rolling on two legs with a push-up “Flashlight”, skating in a large circle with a change of legs “Cut”). Pair and group tricks (supports, throws, pyramids).

Specific circus techniques: in the format of equilibristics – maintaining balance on unstable surfaces (for example, on reels or narrow platforms). In the format of roller juggling – a combination of skating with juggling objects. Elements of aerial acrobatics – if the number includes lifting on cables or a trapeze [1].

Features of the training and rehearsal work of roller acrobats are as follows. Training on various surfaces (wood, concrete, a special circus carpet, a raised pedestal with a metal frame and a plywood, painted covering). Synchronicity in group numbers – requires precise calculation of speed and trajectories. Artistry – a combination of technical skills with choreography and emotional delivery.

*Preparation and training.* General physical training – development of strength, flexibility, endurance. Special exercises – training of the vestibular apparatus, practicing falls. Improvisation – the ability to adapt to unpredictable situations in the arena [in Ukrainian].

*Equipment used. Roller skates* (usually quads – four-wheeled or inline – depending on the act). Ramps and springboards for jumping. Props. Plywood or plexiglass floors, a pedestal or a flat, hard surface that is a common platform for the entire show. Roller acrobats create dynamic and risky numbers that require many years of training and constant improvement of skills.

Description of quad roller skate equipment and surfaces for skating. Quad roller skates differ from inline roller skates (roller skates with wheels in a line) in the arrangement of the wheels: quads have two wheels in the front and two in the back, which provides stability and maneuverability. They are popular in rhythmic, artistic, roller derby and recreational skating.

*Boot.* The main components of quads. Soft boot – convenient for beginners and fitness skating (for example – Riedell Wave, Chaya Melrose). Hard boot – better fixes the foot, suitable for aggressive skating and roller derby (for example – Sure-Grip Rebel, Moxi Jack). Leather or suede – a classic option for artistic skating (Riedell 111, Edea Rondo). Frame. Metal (aluminum, steel) – durable, suitable for jumping and derby. Nylon or composite – lighter, but less durable, suitable for fitness. Adjustable – can be adjusted to fit the size of the foot (often in children’s models) [18, p.137].

Wheels. Diameter: 57–65 mm (fitness), 62–65 mm (derby), up to 70 mm (speed). Rigidity. 78 A–85 A – soft, for the street (good grip). 88 A–95 A – hard, for smooth surfaces (parquet, tiles). Profile. Wide – stability. Narrow – maneuverability (for slalom, dancing). Bearings. Class ABEC 3–5 – for beginners.

ABEC 7–9– for high-speed skating. Ceramic – expensive, but durable (heats up less). Brake (if available). Usually, a rubber pad on the front of the boot (rare on quads).

*Roller skating surface.* Ideal surface. Wooden or plastic flooring. Pedestal – the structure itself is made of metal or aluminum with plywood, paint and varnish coating, the height of which can vary from 10 cm to several meters. Special rollerdrome coating (polyurethane, epoxy resins). Parquet or laminate (in artistic skating halls).

Concrete platforms (flat, without bumps). The above special coatings are used for training, preparation for the main rehearsals. Problem surfaces. Rough asphalt – requires soft wheels (78 A–82 Tiles – vibration is possible, hard wheels are better. Wet surface – risk of slipping. Unsuitable surfaces. Joints, dust and water on work equipment – risk of falls [18, p.134–138].

Additional equipment. Protection: knee pads, elbow pads, wrist guards. Roller skate covers – to protect equipment and ensure their long service life. Tools: Allen keys for frame adjustment, bearing pullers. Quads are selected based on the riding style: Fitness or walking – soft boots, 78 A – 85 A wheels. Roller derby – low hard boots, maneuverable wheels. Artistic – leather boots, aluminum or titanium frame, hard wheels (88A+). Soft wheels are better for the street, hard wheels for the gym. Check the mounts and bearings regularly.

*Methodology for performing the trick part of the circus genre of roller skating.* Safety features on roller skates and technical skating. Roller skating is an active and traumatic genre in the circus, so compliance with safety rules is mandatory.

Knee and elbow pads – soften blows. Wrist protection – prevents fractures and dislocations. Correct rehearsal clothing – comfortable, does not restrict movement, without long laces or parts that can get caught in the wheels.

Checking the rollers before skating. The wheels should not wobble, the bearings – rotate without jamming. The frame is securely fastened; the belts and lacing are in good condition. Choosing a place for skating. Surface levels (the podium or floor is made correctly according to calculations). No obstacles (joints, water, sand) [11].

Correct fall. Do not fall on straight arms (risk of fracture). Tuck, landing on knees and elbows (protection will soften the blow). Avoid falling backwards (danger

of hitting the head and tailbone). Control of speed and distance from the edge of the podium. Start with a slow speed in the corner (Photo 4.).

*Technical roller skating.* Technical skating includes complex elements, pirouettes on two wheels, jumps and maneuvers.

Basic stance. Legs in the first position, knees slightly bent, stomach tucked in, pelvis should not go into a deflection. The body is slightly tilted forward for stability. The weight is distributed evenly or with an emphasis on a shallow squat, we keep the direction of the left shoulder in the circle of the axis. (depending on the element).

Basic movement techniques. T-push – one leg pushes off at an angle, the other rolls forward. Parallel movement – pushing off with the edges of the wheels (like in ice skates). Turns – stepping over (“scissors”) or transferring weight from leg to leg.

Braking. T-stop – one leg is perpendicular to the movement. Plow (V-stop) – legs are brought together in a triangle. Power stop (turn with braking).

Balance and coordination training. Skating on one leg. Snake, eights. Riding backwards. Safety is the basis of skating. You should start with basic movements, gradually mastering complex elements. Regular training and protective equipment minimize risks.

*Roller skating technique and training.* Technical execution and training in roller skating is a fascinating and useful type of circus genre that develops coordination, endurance and strengthens muscles. To learn how to skate correctly and safely, it is important to master the technique, choose the right rollers and follow safety precautions.

Preparation for skating. Selecting rollers. Types of rollers: Fitness rollers are universal, suitable for beginners. Freeskate rollers are for more aggressive skating, jumps and slides. Speed skate is for high-speed skating (long frame, large wheels). Slalom rollers are maneuverable, with a hard boot. Size: Should be slightly larger than regular shoes (by 0.5–1 size), but without much play.

Protective equipment. Knee pads, elbow pads – protect against injuries during falls. Wrist protection – prevents fractures when leaning on your hands.

Basic skating elements. Correct stance. Feet shoulder-width apart, slightly bent at the knees. The body is slightly tilted forward for balance. The arms are slightly bent at the elbows for stability.

Start of movement. “Duck step” (for beginners): Legs in a V-shape (five together, toes apart). Push off with the inner edge of the skate one by one. Classic push One leg is supporting, the other is pushed off to the side. After the push, the leg is turned under the body.

*Stage performance of circus artists, roller acrobats* – in the arena or on stage.

The problem and relevance of the genre roller acrobats. Features of performance and relevance of performances in different places of the circus or stages. The genre “roller acrobats” is a dynamic and spectacular direction, combining elements of acrobatics, figure skating, extreme sports and circus art. However, despite its spectacularity, this genre faces a number of problems:

Technical complexity – performing tricks on rollers requires not only acrobatic training, but also excellent proficiency in roller skating, which significantly narrows the range of performers. Risk of injury – falling at high speed or when performing complex tricks can lead to serious injuries. Limited areas – not all circus arenas and stages are suitable for roller acrobats due to the requirements for the surface (smoothness, absence of gaps, sufficient size). Competition with other genres – viewers often prefer classic circus acts (aerial gymnastics, juggling, illusionism), which reduces the demand for roller acrobats.

*Relevance of the genre.* Despite the difficulties, the genre remains relevant due to: Spectacle – the combination of speed, grace and risk attracts the audience. Innovation – contemporary productions using LEDs, projections and special effects make the acts more spectacular. Interdisciplinarity – the genre can be adapted to different formats: circus, ice shows, street performances, sports competitions.

*Features of performance.* Balance and coordination – the need to maintain balance on roller skates during tricks and spins. Speed and momentum – many tricks (somersaults, spins) require acceleration. Group interactions – in even or team acts, synchronicity and precision are important. Use of props – sometimes trampolines, ramps or podiums are added to enhance the spectacle. Relevance of performances in different places

Circus arena is a traditional place, but requires a perfectly smooth surface. Ice arenas can be adapted for roller skating, especially in the off-season. Outdoor venues – festivals, city holidays, but depend on the weather and the quality of the surface. Theater stages – possible staged numbers with choreography and a plot. The genre of “roller acrobats” remains a niche, but with the right presentation and adaptation to modern trends can become a bright part of circus and variety shows. The development of technology (for example, the use of backlit videos or interactive projections) can increase its popularity.

In the Ukrainian circus today, the outstanding representatives of the circus genre “roller acrobats” are the artists and circus dynasty *Ampodistovs*. Alexander Amodistov and Olga Pape, as well as their son Andrey. They toured the circuses of Ukraine, as well as in China, America, Europe. The professional school of the circus genre “roller acrobats” is represented today in Ukraine by representatives of this dynasty. Their son is a graduate of the Kyiv Circus Academy [1].

The circus genre “*Cir’s Wheel*” is a relatively new direction of equilibristics in circus arts, which emerged at the end of the XX-th century. Its appearance is associated with the Canadian artist Daniel Cir, who created the first wheel in 1996 and presented it to the public in 1998 in the show *Excentricus* from “Cirque Éloize”. One of the areas of research is the study of the physical principles underlying the performance of tricks with a gray wheel. For example, physicist and artist Julia Ruth in her presentation at the meeting of the American Physical Society in 2022 demonstrated how wheel movements illustrate the concept of the center of mass, conservation of momentum, balance and acceleration.

However, despite the growing popularity of this genre, there are currently no scientific studies devoted to the Cir’s wheel. The genre “Gray Wheel” is a type of circus art in which the performer makes rotational, acrobatic and dance movements inside a large metal hoop with one round frame (unlike the Rhine wheel, which has

two). This genre combines elements of gymnastics, acrobatics, modern dance and theatrical plasticity, distinguished by high dynamism, visual expressiveness and requirements for the physical training of the artist. The main feature is the integration of body movements with the rotational movement of the wheel, which creates the effect of “flight” and continuous flow.

What is clear, however, is that the “Cir Wheel” itself begins its history in the late 20th century. Its origins are linked to the Canadian artist Daniel Cir.

Daniel Cir is a graduate of the National Circus School in Montreal, Canada, and one of the co-founders of the renowned circus company Cirque Éloize. While working on his diploma act, he sought to find a unique way to move around the stage that would combine rotational movement, balance, and physical expression. His experiments resulted in the creation of a large metal hoop that could rotate with the performer inside. This hoop was named the “Cir Wheel” in honor of its creator, who created the first wheel in 1996 and presented it to the public in 1998 in Cirque Éloize’s show *Excentricus* (Photo 6).

The new prop immediately attracted the attention of both spectators and circus professionals thanks to its visual expressiveness, dynamism, and aesthetic movement. However, the real breakthrough came in 2003, when Daniel Cyr presented his act at the prestigious Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain in Paris and won the Silver Medal. This performance marked the official recognition of the new genre in the equilibristics section as the “Cir Wheel” as a fully-fledged circus genre.

From this time on, the popularity of the “Cir Wheel” began to grow rapidly. Leading Contemporary Circus Companies, particularly the Canadian Cirque du Soleil, began incorporating it into their programs. 7 Fingers and NoFit State Circus also began creating their own circus acts, expanding the technical and artistic boundaries of this genre. Simultaneously, training courses, workshops, and master classes dedicated to mastering the “Cir Wheel” technique began to appear. Some circus schools (particularly in Canada, France, Germany, and China) have officially incorporated this genre into their curricula.

Today, the “Cir Wheel” genre is not only a balancing act but also a means of artistic expression. Many performers combine wheel techniques with elements of contemporary dance, theatrical performance, and stage performance. Wheel acts often explore profound emotional or conceptual themes, bringing this circus genre closer to contemporary circus.

Let’s analyze the prop *structure and technical features of the “Cir Wheel”*. The Gray Wheel is a circus prop shaped like a large metal hoop, the diameter of which typically corresponds to the performer’s height plus 10–15 cm. The main purpose of this correspondence is to ensure optimal control over rotational movement and body balance within the structure. *Key structural elements*: Ring (hoop): A single metal frame in the form of a chain, usually made of aluminum alloy or steel. Aluminum provides lightweight construction, while steel provides additional strength. In most cases, the wheel is collapsible (consisting of 3–5 sections), significantly simplifying transportation. Outer cover: Part of the wheel is covered with a PVC tube or rubber coating, which provides better traction and simultaneously protects the stage surface from scratches. This coating increases safety for the

performer. Center of the wheel: The interior space has no crossbars, which fundamentally distinguishes the Gray Wheel from the Rhine wheel. This design allows the artist to move freely inside, changing the position of the body, the center of gravity and the plane of rotation.

The circus genre of “Cirus Wheel” is characterized by high levels of physical exertion, complex motor coordination, and active interaction with heavy metal props. Therefore, safety precautions are an integral part of the educational process, training, and stage performances. Neglecting basic rules can lead to serious injuries, both during stunts and during preparation [16].

*Preparation for Work.* Warm-up: Required before beginning classes. This should include joint activation, muscle warm-up, and vestibular preparation. Prop Inspection: Before each class, inspect the wheel for damage, cracks, surface wear, or loose connections. Workspace Inspection: The stage or auditorium must be level, clean, and free of foreign objects. The surface must be non-slip and free of defects. Safe organization of the space. Minimum working area dimensions: 4x4 m horizontally and at least 3m high. No obstructions: no furniture, columns, lighting fixtures, or decorations nearby. High-quality lighting: must provide full visibility of the wheel and the area around it.

*Artist's equipment and clothing.* Clothing: fitted, elastic, without laces, zippers or decorations that can catch on the wheel. Footwear: gymnastics shoes or barefoot – depending on the stage and technique. Protective equipment: knee pads, elbow pads, wrist bandages can be used at the initial stage of training. Hair must be collected, jewelry – removed. Safe performance technique Gradual exploration of tricks: from basic parts to complex compositions. It is prohibited to perform complex turns without preparation. Constant control of body position: the correct position of the center of gravity, working with the body and limbs in symmetry – the basis of stability. Prohibition of independent training without a teacher – especially at the initial stages. Behavior during a fall or loss of control. Learning the technique of a safe fall is mandatory – in particular, rolling over the back or shoulder. If balance is lost – immediately stop the turn and go to a stable position. Do not attempt to stay inside the wheel by force. If the rotation becomes uncontrollable, it is best to exit the circle.

*Conduct during a stage performance.* Preliminary stage inspection (humidity, surface, level changes). Full rehearsal of the routine on the same surface as the performance. Visualization of the trajectory and stopping points. Ensuring safety when working with the Seraya Wheel is the result of a comprehensive approach: physical training, discipline, technical control, and responsible handling of the props. Developing sustainable safety skills is one of the main goals of the teaching methodology for this genre. Basic general physical preparation for working with the Seraya Wheel and making the genre accessible to beginners [13].

**Conclusions.** Thus, it can be concluded that contemporary circus genres today, namely “Roller Acrobats” in acrobatics and “Sir’s Wheel” in equilibristics, are original and unusual circus genres of contemporary circus, unique performance shows. Furthermore, these two circus genres, due to their original props and the external appearance of the circus act, embody new artistic solutions in contemporary circus directing, creating a unique conceptual artistic image, which is a key factor in

circus. It is important to note that these circus genres, “Roller Acrobats” and “Sir’s Wheel” are currently represented in the educational process of the Kyiv Municipal Academy of Circus and Performing Arts. Graduates of the Academy successfully represent these two circus genres in leading circus companies worldwide.

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## АКРОБАТИКА НА РОЛИКАХ ТА КОЛЕСО СІРА ЯК ОРИГІНАЛЬНІ ЖАНРИ СУЧАСНОГО ПЕРФОРМАТИВНОГО МИСТЕЦТВА: ЦИРКОЛОГІЧНИЙ АНАЛІЗ

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Статтю, присвячену жанрам “Акробатика на роликах” та “Колесо Сіра” як оригінальним напрямом сучасного перформативного мистецтва, розглянуто в контексті контемпорарної циркології та арт-критики циркових жанрів.

Тему дослідження зосереджено на сучасних циркових жанрах, зокрема в межах жанру акробатики – акробатиці на роликах, а також жанру еквілібристики – колесі Сіра. Сьогодні ці жанри широко представлені на цирковому манежі та у масштабних шоу-програмах провідних світових циркових структур. Вони вирізняються яскравою сценічною формою та виразною репрезентацією художнього образу, що зумовлено їх оригінальною демонстраційною природою.

Проаналізовано наукові дослідження з позицій циркології та визначено їхні характерні особливості. Особливу увагу приділено специфіці та сценічній репрезентації циркових жанрів “Акробатика на роликах” і “Колесо Сіра”.

Детально розглянуто технічну складову зазначених жанрів, зокрема уточнено особливості реkvізиту в акробатиці на роликах і колесі Сіра. Визначено специфіку виконання та методик побудови трюкової частини в цих сучасних циркових жанрах. Також у статті висвітлено історичний контекст виникнення сучасних циркових жанрів, а саме: в акробатиці – акробатики на роликах, в еkvілібристиці – колеса Сіра.

Зазначено, що у вивченні подібних жанрів сьогодні немає уніфікованої системи підготовки виконавців. Водночас системна професійна підготовка за цими цирковими жанрами (акробати, еkvілібристи) здійснюється у Київській муніципальній академії естрадного та циркового мистецтва. Наведені жанри широко представлені у світових циркових шоу-програмах, зокрема в репертуарі відомого канадського Cirque du Soleil.

Важливо наголосити, що сучасні циркові жанри з оригінальною формою демонстрації та репрезентації художнього образу становлять значну художню цінність у контексті зразків художньої культури, сценічного та циркового мистецтва.

*Ключові слова:* акробатика, акробатика на роликах, еkvілібристика, колесо Сіра, перформативне мистецтво, сценічне мистецтво, циркова режисура, циркологія, циркове мистецтво, циркові жанри.

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