

Advice For Street Performer's – Straight from the Horse's Mouth

The changing economic conditions and the more experimental nature of the theater scene we are seeing a surge in performances on the street. Mimes, jugglers, mentalists, magicians, living statues or any type of actor all looking to find their place, create their art then ask you for money. A lot of these performers are first timers and when put up against the veterans their inexperience is quite obvious. It's obvious but it is hard to say why.

Glenn Singer knows why. He has been practicing the art of Buskering, an old English term for street performer, for over 16 years. He performs as El Gleno Grande, a quasi-equestrian act that will be at the Lawrence Busker Festival this August 20th through 22nd. His habit of hanging out on street corners has taken this gentle West Virginian around the world appearing at festivals for Buskers in Japan, New Zealand, Italy, Australia, Israel and England. He is considered a venerable veteran in the worldwide Busker community. Although he does not like to compete with other performers he has won many awards for his globetrotter horse act.

Horsing around is about the best way to describe El Gleno Grande's show. Unlike most street performers he does not do anything with fire, does not juggle, does not fold himself into a box, does not perform magic and refuses to stick anything down his throat that does not belong there. He does use a horse but even that is not really a horse, it's a clever puppet that gives the illusion of a man riding a horse. Along with his faux friend and his own skill in acting and reacting to the audience around him, he attracts and entertains thousands. How he does this is what the newcomers to the craft need to know.

"Most street performers consider themselves Pirates," asserts Glen, "They are there to steal your time and kidnap your attention. They act as if they are outside of the mainstream and do not belong there." El Gleno has a different take. He says "he becomes the host of the space he performs". He becomes a part of whatever is already going on. He says, "As host it is my responsibility to take care of the space and the audience. I also assert an authority that a host has too." It is not unusual for him to start a show by introducing himself and asking a passerby if he can get them anything. Surprising things can happen with this approach.

"There was one time in Halifax where I was waiting to do a show while another show nearby was finishing. I drew a small crowd just by setting up but could not start". El Gleno noticed a nearby ice cream seller and asked the small crowd "who would like some ice cream?" He retells the instance; "I had only \$7 in my pocket but offered to buy everyone some Ice Cream". One boy took him up on the offer and he paid for his ice cream, he asked again and more people raised their hands. "I then asked if anyone would like to buy ice cream for these people and the first little boy's father came forward". It soon became a chain reaction of kindness and by the end

everyone had ice cream that someone else paid for. "It's those moments that you act as host and magic happens, it's gift from God".

Glen's approach pays off. He often has the largest crowds, and thus the largest tips, at every festival he appears at. By being the gracious host he is rewarded in gratitude and gratuities. "People enjoy the simple and authentic moment that makes them laugh and recognize how much they need it," He says.

El Gleno Grande will be horsing around and performing his magic for the grateful crowds at the Lawrence Busker Festival this August 20th through the 22nd. Over 25 other street acts will join him in spaces and places around the historic downtown Lawrence area. You can find out more about the festival and a full schedule of performances at www.lawrencebuskerfest.com.