

## festival

by Gloria Loree

When you're stressed out and want to calm down, do you ever think of juggling to relax yourself?

Mike Battie, of North Vancouver, says that's how he used to calm himself down when he was getting stressed out while working as a waiter.

"I would go into the back room, shut the door and juggle for a couple minutes. Then I would come out feeling refreshed."

Battie is a professional juggler who will be running a juggling workshop at this year's Vancouver International Comedy Festival on Granville Island.

Previous participants in Battie's workshops have included people recovering from heart attacks who are looking for a meditative activity.

"The juggling's repetitive motion with continuous activity is very meditative," says Battie.

He is quick to note, however, that until someone is up to 100 consecutive throws (and catches), it's not all that relaxing. "After you get up to 100 throws, which actually doesn't take very long, you begin to breathe properly and find a comfort zone."

Relaxation was not the reason Battie learned to juggle—it was survival.

He was in a professional theatre program at Malaspina College in Nanaimo, and part of the program apprenticeship was learning to juggle. People in the program had to promote their Shakespeare Festival by using their street-performing skills.

"We did a lot of guerrilla theatre: we would all jump out of a van and do a routine for ten minutes and then tell the people who gathered to come to the festival."

Battie came to Vancouver for Expo '86 as a street theatre performer and stayed on looking for work as an actor.

Like other fledgling actors, Battie got a job as a waiter while he tried to get his performing career off the ground. "The people at the Bel Air Cafe always allowed me to keep pur-

## The Ups and Downs of Juggling

suing my other work—they were just great to me."

Gradually, Battie started to make more money from his juggling gigs than from his acting jobs, and by 1994 he was juggling and teaching the skill full-time.

His resume includes performing in Whistler, at the PNE, for the Dragon Boat Festival and the Comedy Festival. He has put on workshops for the Vancouver School Board Adult Education Program, Vancouver CirKids, Ailanthus (Children's fine arts program in East Vancouver) and a handful of schools and colleges.

He enjoys working at places like the Comedy Festival because of the people who work there. "The organizers are quality people and you know you're going to be well taken care of when you get there."

The age range of Battie's students is from four and five year olds to adults, and at least ten of Battie's former students have gone on to get some professional juggling work.

Battie's daughter, Aja, is now four but she doesn't juggle. "She's a singer like her mother," says dad.

"Mother" in this case is singer Joani Jett, whose vocals are on albums by Bon Jovi, David Bowie and Cher. She sings with an a cappella quartet, the Euphorics, plays with the R&B Allstars and has her own band, The Homewreckers.

Battie says there doesn't seem to be a typical group of people who participate in his workshops.

"That's the beauty of it. One person is a housewife who has always wanted to learn to juggle, some are young kids with some skills who want to learn more, others have advanced skills and want to get into passing clubs and then some people come over and over to the Vancouver School Board workshops for the social aspect of it all."

Battie loves both the performance and teaching aspects of his career.

He finds the performance side constantly challenging because

crowds are always different in how they need to be pleased.

"The biggest ingredient is the crowd. You can do two shows back to back, ten minutes apart, and get two totally different responses."

Surprisingly, Battie says his biggest strength is not his juggling skills but his ability to adapt and play to different crowds. "I am a real chameleon—I can slip into a lot of different roles."

On the teaching side, Battie finds his work to be good for the soul. "You feel something spiritual when you pass something on, it's very uplifting."

And on the acting side of things, Battie seems to have come full circle. "I am now getting acting jobs because of my juggling," says Battie, who has juggled in TV commercials, movies like *Car Pool* and *Generation X* and in TV shows like the *X-Files* and *The Commish*.

Battie juggles his different career engagements without much difficulty.

*If you want to catch Mike Battie (pictured below) at the Comedy Festival, his workshop is July 29, 6-9 p.m. The Comedy Festival will be started off with a bang! on July 25 at 11 am when Reverend Chumleigh is shot out of a cannon (no joke) on Granville Island. The festival runs until August 4. Call 683-0883 for more information.*

