



# Rudolph Brilloff, the Olympic Games, and Salto Mortale in Circus Performances in the Grand Duchy of Posen

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**Abstract:** *Introduction:* In 1839 the Gazeta Wielkiego Xięstwa Poznańskiego (Gazette of the Grand Duchy of Posen) announced the holding of the Olympic Games in the city of Posen by Rudolph Brilloff's circus troupe. The aim of this study is to examine the role of Rudolph Brilloff in the history of nineteenth-century circus and to ascertain whether he consciously advocated for the organization of Olympic Games in circus format as part of the legacy of the Olympic tradition. Moreover, it aims to explore the distinctive characteristics of his circus performances within the realm of the Grand Duchy of Posen. *Materials and Methods:* The study used the historical methodology of the humanities of physical culture. Books, newspapers and other documents from archives and library collections in Poznan, Berlin and Potsdam were consulted. *Findings:* The research results show that although Rudolph Brilloff is considered the father of the German circus, little biographical information about him has survived. As a talented circus entrepreneur, who performed with his troupe under the name of the Olympic Games, he probably had little awareness or knowledge of the Olympic idea and therefore did not intend to promote it. However, Brilloff's circus staged unique performances in the form of pantomimes or feats rarely seen in Poland before due to their dangerous nature, e.g. the salto mortale, also known as the leap of death. *Summary:* Rudolph Brilloff can be regarded as the forgotten father of German circus and should not be directly associated with the question of the Olympic legacy. However, Brilloff's work had a real impact on nineteenth-century society and certainly contributed to other circuses expanding their repertoires with new elements based on various physical activities, ultimately leading to the development of modern circus art.

**Keywords:** Olympic, salto mortale, circus, Grand Duchy of Posen, Poland

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of autonomous German circus art can be traced back to the late 1820s and early 1830s. Although initially there was little departure from the artistic principles and traditions of the French circus (also known as the Parisian circus), over the years these were deliberately abandoned in order to demonstrate the specific identity and artistic standards of the German circus. This was not an easy process, as the German circus community was dominated by English, French, and Italian artists. It was not until the rise of the circus artist and educator Rudolph Brilloff, widely regarded as the progenitor of the German circus, that the process of developing successive generations of German artists began [1]. They would go on to dominate the circus arts in Europe for several decades [1]. In the beginning, Brilloff had a small circus troupe with which he performed mainly at German fairgrounds or town markets. However, Brilloff's professionalism earned him a considerable reputation, which allowed him to form a partnership with Brandt [2] and gradually expand his circus company, which by the end of his life employed forty artists.

On several occasions, Rudolph Brilloff and his troupe also visited the Polish territories controlled by Prussia after the final partition of Poland in 1795. In 1815, following the provisions of the Congress of Vienna, an autonomous province called the Grand Duchy of Posen was created from the Polish lands annexed by Prussia. As a result, the former Polish region of Greater Poland (also known as Wielkopolska), with its main city of Posen (present-day Poznan), became an important part of the Prussian state and thus an attractive area for various circus entrepreneurs to make money and gain popularity among the Poles, who made up almost half of Prussia's population [2]. Circus performers' displays of physical prowess aroused interest in the region, as until the late 1830s there had been virtually no physical activity in the region, as it was considered essentially useless [3]. For this reason, Brilloff's troupe often stayed in the Grand Duchy of Posen for several weeks or months, presenting a varied repertoire that was often announced in the local press as the 'Olympic Games' [4].

Over the centuries, Olympic themes appeared in literature, poetry, opera, or in various types of local or national sports games called *pseudo-Olympics* [5]. Considering that circus shows were mainly based on feats of vaulting, horsemanship, strength and physical prowess, and that they used the name *Olympic* – even if only in their programmes – it is possible to recognise the link between the circus and the pseudo-Olympics, or to classify circus performances as a distinct form of the legacy of the Olympic idea [6]. The question, however, is to what extent the circus directors – and in this particular case Rudolph Brilloff – consciously promoted the Olympic legacy through the circus.

The objective of this article is to elucidate the scholarly facets of Rudolph Brilloff's biography, with a particular focus on the influence his circus company exerted on the nineteenth-century circus milieu, especially within the area of the Grand Duchy of Posen. Moreover, this study endeavors to scrutinize whether Brilloff consciously advocated for the Olympic idea. The research posed the following inquiries: What role did Rudolph Brilloff play in the history of nineteenth-century circuses? What are the characteristic features of his troupe's circus performances in the Grand Duchy of Posen? Did he consciously advocate for Olympic Games in circus format as part of the legacy of the Olympic tradition? The research hypothesis posits that Brilloff occupies a significant position in the historical narrative of circuses. However, despite orchestrating circus performances referred to as Olympic Games, he operated without knowledge or comprehension of the Olympic legacy, thus precluding any deliberate promotional efforts in that regard. The attribution of the appellation 'Olympic Games' to his spectacles in the Polish press appears to have emanated from the editorial or publishing quarters of daily periodicals. Their rationale was to harness the evocative power of an epithet redolent of classical athletic competitions, thereby amplifying the allure of circus exhibitions, hitherto unparalleled in magnitude within the Grand Duchy of Posen.

The paper adheres to the standard structure characteristic of original articles in the field of physical culture sciences, encompassing an introduction, materials and methods, findings, and summary [7]. After the methodological section, the ensuing presentation encompassed the findings of the conducted analyses, categorized into four delineated sections. The initial segment endeavors to compile the entire extant biographical data pertaining to Rudolph Brilloff. Subsequently, the second segment delineates the operational sphere of Brilloff's circus ensemble during the undertakings touted as the 'Olympic Games' within the expanse of the Grand Duchy of Posen. Within this context, the research posits the inauguration of specific acts, notably the salto mortale executed by Ernst Renz in 1842. The tertiary segment of the inquiry endeavors to ascertain the inaugural execution of the aforementioned salto mortale, thereby potentially accrediting Brilloff's circus as a distinctive entity, particularly within the milieu of Greater Poland. Finally, all findings garnered from the conducted analyses were juxtaposed with the other scholarly arrangements of fellow researchers exploring circus themes, which, albeit in fragmentary fashion, encompass the chronicles of Brilloff's troupe. Through this comparative discourse, polemics were engaged, illuminating uncertainties surrounding the prevailing knowledge in the topic addressed in the article.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The current investigation adopts a socio-historical theoretical framework [8]. This study uses the historical research methodology of the humanities of physical culture as the most appropriate for studying the past in relation to human and social activities [9]. More specifically, non-reactive research methods such as content analysis and comparative and historical research have been used [10]. The employed methods facilitate the identification, acquisition, and interpretation of source material, enabling the establishment and elucidation of historical facts as well as the reconstruction of historical processes and formulation of conclusions [11]. Therefore, the study was grounded in heuristic principles within the realm of source criticism, and hermeneutics in the realm of source analysis, critique, explanation, and interpretation. The obtained results were subsequently synthesized into the presented historical narrative. As the period of study covers the first half of the nineteenth century (up to 1842), both source material dating back several hundred years and scholarly literature on the subject have been consulted. Due to the passage of time since the events described, many potentially important sources have been destroyed in the course of various historical upheavals, including wars. This was confirmed by the author's library research at the State Archives in Poznan, the Berlin State Library and the Brandenburg Main State Archives in Potsdam, which currently hold the largest number of surviving materials relating to the entire area that was once part of the Grand Duchy of Posen.

Following an official enquiry, the State Archives in Poznan informed the author that they had no material relating to the performances of circus troupes in the Grand Duchy of Poznan until the nineteenth century. The staff of the State Archives searched their entire holdings, focusing on statutes, posters and leaflets, excluding the contents of newspapers. Similar results were reported by the Brandenburg Main State Archive in Potsdam and the Berlin State Library, which instead offered access to several books published in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century that were relevant to the research topic. The Berlin State Library also suggested contacting the Berlin City Museum, which holds circus-related materials from private collections, but despite a wealth of material, only three posters announcing Brilloff's circus performances in Breslau (present-day Wrocław) in 1839 and 1840 have survived. For this reason, the search had to be limited to German-language literature and press published in the Grand Duchy of Posen. It was recognised that circus topics could only appear in daily newspapers, which usually contained sections with advertisements and various opinions

from correspondents or local residents. Therefore, of all the newspapers, only the Polish-language *Gazeta Wielkiego Xięstwa Poznańskiego* and the German-language *Zeitung des Großherzogthums Posen* were chosen as useful for the study. Ultimately, the study is a historical overview based on primary and secondary sources.

## FINDINGS

### *Rudolph Brilloff as a Pedagogue and Circus Director*

Born in 1788, Rudolph Brilloff was a master, a teacher of great authority, an outstanding artist, an indomitable individual and one of the first directors of travelling circus companies. Before becoming a strict and demanding circus director and 'licensed general artistic rider of His Majesty the King of Prussia', as he called himself, Brilloff began his career in his youth as a humble pupil of Pierre Mahyeu [12]. He probably founded his small circus company at the beginning of the nineteenth century, initially travelling and giving amateur performances mainly in the Rhineland [1]. Rudolph Brilloff was married to Johanna, five years his junior, with whom he had a daughter, Hannchen, and a son, Carl. His wife was an impetuous but obedient woman of medium height and stocky build, who stopped working on stage after breaking her leg in a fall from a horse. Johanna, however, continued to work for the company, selling tickets at the box office. The children, in turn, assisted their father in the circus arena, working as equals with the other performers [13].

Rudolph Brilloff's uniqueness should rather be seen in the context of his pedagogical skills, as he trained a large number of circus performers of the younger generation, including Karl Magnus, Wilhelm Qualitz, Wilhelm Carré, Karl Hinné, Gotthold Schumann [12], Louis Broelmann [14], Eduard Wollschläger [15] and the 13-year-old Ernst Renz [16], who was bought from Christoph de Bach's circus in 1829. As well as circus skills, Brilloff taught his students good manners, so that they would only speak at meals if someone asked them first [13].

Other details of Brilloff's life are directly linked to the story of one of his most talented pupils, Ernst Renz, who was probably the most commercially successful of all the circus entrepreneur's protégés, even surpassing his master. Renz joined Brilloff's troupe through an arrangement with Christoph de Bach. Brilloff attended performances by de Bach's company in order to scout artists for his own troupe. Ultimately, he wanted to hire as many artists as possible, but the vast majority were too expensive for him. Brilloff's presence backstage at de Bach's circus was greeted with some derisive comments, suggesting that he looked 'like a construction worker' and that he offered no prospect of professional development for circus performers, who should look no further than the Franconi circus troupe in Paris [13]. It should be noted that the performances of the French circus company, which followed the latest trends in the presentation of equestrian shows, vaulting or selected gymnastic exercises, were considered at the time to be the best in Europe for the development of circus skills. The Paris Cirque Olympique, built by the Franconi's in 1807, is considered a milestone in the development of the modern circus, not only in terms of its permanent building, but also in terms of the evolution of artistic circus performances known as the Olympics [6].

For Ernst Renz, who eventually became the thirteenth member of Brilloff's troupe, studying under the German master was a great opportunity. At the time of Renz's transfer in 1829, Brilloff had already formed a new troupe with Brandt, who performed as a clown in circus arenas, and planned to tour the whole of eastern Germany under the name 'Brilloff & Brandt'. What distinguished them from Christoph de Bach's circus was the commitment of all the artists to all the performances and pantomimes. The whole crew was expected to work day and night to prepare for many different shows, rather than resting on their laurels after a single party piece [13]. Each Brilloff & Brandt performance was preceded by a ceremonial parade of the entire company through the main streets of the town in which they were performing. At the head of the cavalcade rode Brilloff himself,

dressed in a special costume with a Roman helmet decorated with long feathers and holding a red and green banner. The rest of the artists, dressed in various outfits and playing trumpets and trombones, strolled behind him. The troupe would make frequent stops and the director would make an announcement encouraging the locals to come and see the shows. Ticket prices for Brilloff's shows were low, ranging from 2 to 8 silver groschen, which (along with the early time of the performances) was most likely a nod to the poorer members of the public [4]. Interestingly, it was also possible to buy season tickets from the circus director – in the case of performances in Posen, for '4 thalers for a prime seat and 2.5 thalers for a regular seat' [17]. Shortly after the start of the show, Brilloff, dressed in a tails coat and high riding boots, with a large pocket watch chain around his waist and a long riding crop in his hand, would announce each item on the programme. During each performance he would call a 10-minute interval, followed by the second part of the programme and the final pantomime [13]. In addition to making announcements, Brilloff personally introduced a large number of trained horses and also appeared as the Admiral in the pantomime 'Death of Captain Cook' [12].

In the following years, the circus troupe embarked on an artistic conquest of the eastern German lands, including the cities of Breslau, Danzig (present-day Gdańsk) and Stettin (present-day Szczecin) [13]. Thanks to the merger with Brandt's company, Brilloff's ensemble was able to expand its reach and increase its personnel (in 1836 their joint company consisted of thirteen men and three women, as well as twenty horses, of which about twelve were also used as draught animals for travelling) [18]. It is likely, however, that Brandt retired in 1834 and reached an amicable agreement with Brilloff, who was to repay him three thousand thalers in exchange for the possibility of redeeming his share in the company, which he did gradually over the following years. In fact, Brandt was considerably older than his partner, being 55 years old in 1829 [13]. Interestingly, Brilloff's company appears in some sources without a co-shareholder in its name, although a surviving poster indicates that Brandt appeared as an actor in Brilloff's troupe as late as November 1841 [16]. It is therefore very likely that he worked with Brilloff until his death, although perhaps as a guest rather than a partner.

Brilloff's troupe enjoyed a particularly prosperous period in the last years of his life when, after Christoph de Bach's death, two of the most versatile circus artists joined the company: Wilhelm Salamonsky and Wilhelm Carré. Brilloff himself continued the legacy of his predecessor, staging pantomimes on various topical themes or referring to the latest European events of the time [18]. The company also staged equestrian pantomimes in the style of Andrew Ducrow, with Ernst Renz as the rider [19].

Rudolph Brilloff died in December 1842 in Erfurt. The cause of his death was blood poisoning due to gangrene in a leg that had been broken when it was kicked by a horse frightened by a storm [16]. Brilloff refused medical treatment and by the time he was persuaded to accept it, it was too late. According to his will, the circus was to be taken over by Ernst Renz. However, Johanna Brilloff, probably embittered that her daughter Hannchen had not become Renz's wife, decided not to leave her husband's entire estate to Renz, but to donate only some props, two carts, and two horses to the young artist, selling the rest [12]. In any case, Ernst Renz used the inheritance he received to lay the foundations for his own circus company [20]. It took him only a few years to surpass the famous French Cirque Olympique [21].

### *The Olympic Games and the Brilloff Circus Repertoire in the Grand Duchy of Posen*

As well as touring the heartland of the Kingdom of Prussia, Rudolph Brilloff made several visits to the Grand Duchy of Posen – officially an autonomous entity under Prussian rule, but in reality a peripheral part of the Prussian state, separated from the rest of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. According to German-language literature, Brilloff's troupe performed around 1830 in the town of Krotoschin (present-day Krotoszyn), where they staged eight performances over twelve days, each attracting

between 80 and 200 spectators. Considering Krotoschin's population of two thousand at the time, this seems to have been a satisfactory attendance. Brilloff's next stop was Posen [13], to which the circus returned in 1839 and 1842. Interestingly, Brilloff's troupe included a Polish woman, Natascha Wolinska, whom Brandt had discovered at a fair in Neissen (present-day Nysa) and who was leaving Carré's circus, probably because of an affair. She joined Brilloff's company during their stay in Posen. She arrived in a light blue travelling dress, which accentuated her figure, and a woven cap decorated with feathers on her left ear, which aroused much interest among the male members of the company [13].

In 1839, Brilloff's troupe performed in Poznan for almost three months, arriving in the city on 26 July and performing his first 'equestrian show of a higher order' two days later [22] and his last show on 20 October [23]. The great circus entrepreneur arrived with riders and forty horses, and his shows were promoted in the press as 'Olympic Games' [22]. Unfortunately, no sources have been found to indicate that Brilloff was aware of the idea of Olympic heritage. The name of the shows may therefore have been a marketing ploy to attract potential audiences to the circus arena. Among the main attractions, the 'Grand Manoeuvre of the Hussars' was presented for the first time at the beginning of August, as well as a show of strength by Ernst Renz [24]. Subsequent performances were dominated by an 'extraordinarily grand equestrian show of the highest order', which, depending on the day, included additional elements such as a celebration of Frederick William I's birthday and a demonstration of fire horses [25]. Other highlights included 'a great carousel and a race to the ring' [26], or various pantomimes such as 'Count Polowski, or the Exile of Mazeppa and his Arrival in the Ukraine' with a skirmish amidst sparkling fireworks [27], or 'Fra Diavolo, or the Inn of Terracina' on horseback in sixteen scenes [28]. Brilloff's circus also presented a historical military scene 'Napoleon's Bivouac and Retreat' on foot and on horseback in the form of counter-marches and battles between Russian and French troops [29], as well as benefit performances in honour of its performers: A. and H. Wehle [30] and Ernst Renz [31]. All press releases, with the exception of one concerning Renz's benefit performance (signed by Renz himself), were personally signed by Brilloff, who even informed the public on which days the shows would not take place [28].

In the last weeks of his visit in 1839, Brilloff organised 'grand artistic races' of his horsemen on a meadow left of the Dębina Street, which had never been performed in Posen before. As he himself pointed out, it was a show of the highest quality, for which he spared no expense [32]. Although it was to be held only once, on 6 October, it was repeated three days later at the request of the public [33]. The races were preceded by the release of two large balloons. The competitions had a varied programme and included a flat race of six jockeys, a short flat race of jockeys, a large obstacle race, Roman races of four jockeys with eight horses, a race of three runners, a flat race of female jockeys and a grand race. The finale was the 'great postilion race'. Brilloff instructed spectators not to bring their dogs to the racecourse [34] and members of the public wishing to lodge complaints were asked to go to Rudolph Brilloff's flat and see the landlord, Mr Falkenstein [23].

Rudolph Brilloff's troupe made another month-long visit to Posen shortly before the director's death in 1842. By this time the troupe numbered forty riders and sixty well-bred horses, which, as Brilloff himself pointed out, was a significant increase after a three-year absence from the Grand Duchy of Posen [35]. Interestingly, a press release announcing the arrival of the circus company in Posen contained a caption indicating the city of Elbing (present-day Elbląg) as the place where the press release was issued [36], which may have meant that the troupe's performances were also held there at the time. A few more details have been found about Brilloff's reappearance in Greater Poland. The troupe arrived on 18 June [30], on 5 July they gave a 'great performance for the benefit of Miss Mostbauer', using 'novel props' [37], and on 12 July they staged a 'great, extraordinary performance for the benefit of Mr Ernst Renz'. A special part of this show

was the presentation of various scenes that had never been performed in Posen before, including 'the famous somersault known as the salto mortale', which, according to experts, was the most demanding circus act at the time [38].

It is difficult to find any special or direct links between Rudolph Brilloff's circus and Poland. His only motivation for visiting the Polish territories occupied by Prussia was probably the desire to earn money or to promote his own business [4]. It can be assumed that the main elements of his shows were presentations of equestrian skills in the most attractive form for the audience, although he changed his programme practically every day, focusing more on riding on some days and vaulting on others [16]. The essence of the last visit of Brilloff's troupe to Posen was probably the demonstration of the salto mortale, which had been announced in the press, and was probably intended to emphasise the artistic uniqueness of his circus and to show the extraordinary skills of the troupe members, who were capable of risking their own lives for the pleasure of the audience.

### *Salto mortale in the Polish press*

It is impossible to know exactly when the salto mortale was first performed in Europe, or indeed the world, as the history of acrobatics goes back centuries. It is known to have been performed in the Renaissance, when acrobats performed at royal courts and festivals, but information on the subject is limited and inaccurate. It is certain that in the year 1599, Archangelo Tuccaro, within the treatise titled *Trois dialogues de l'exercice de sauter et voltiger en l'air* (Three Dialogues on the Practice of Leaping and Vaulting in the Air), delineated the execution of a forward-facing salto mortale [39]. The Italian term *salto mortale*, literally meaning 'leap of death', rarely appeared in the Polish press, despite its gradual spread across the European continent. It was probably first used in January 1818 in the *Gazeta Wielkiego Księstwa Poznańskiego* (Gazette of the Grand Duchy of Posen) in the section 'Proverbs', in the explanation of the Polish proverb 'Praise God and do not offend the devil'. The saying is attributed to Władysław Jagiełło, the Grand Duke of Lithuania and *iure uxoris* King of Poland, who, while taking part in the ceremony of casting out the devil from the choir loft of the Wiślica Church on Maundy Thursday, waited for the symbolic performance of the fatal leap by an actor playing the role of Satan and ordered some candles to be lit, which was not fully understood by the commoners watching the ceremony [40].

Other references to the salto mortale appeared in the *Gazeta Wielkiego Księstwa Poznańskiego* as early as the 1830s, not only in the context of falls from heights, but also of suicide or desertion. One press report quoted the story of an Armenian man living in Kamieniec Podolski who caught his wife cheating on him, grabbed her lover with all his strength and threw him out of the window onto the street, causing him to perform an involuntary salto mortale [41]. Another described a drunken man who was ready to jump from the window of a church steeple in Boston and, seeing death before his eyes at the last moment, managed to successfully call for help [42]. In another report from England, a certain O'Connell, a Member of Parliament, on his way to London for a parliamentary session, was met in a railway carriage by his greatest political opponent, Colonel Perceval, who 'performed a salto mortale just to get off the train as quickly as possible' [43].

Situations in which the salto mortale was performed were also described in Polish newspapers published in the Russian and Austrian annexed territories. Among other things, there was the story of a girl who, probably out of fear or grief, jumped from a first-floor window and broke her back after performing an involuntary somersault [44]. The same happened to Mr de Wodenblock, the protagonist of the Dutch folk tale *Perpetual Motion*, published in the magazine *Rozmaitości* (Miscellany) [45]. The expression salto mortale in the context of hardship appears in the story of Mrs Cymerman, who had to cope with Mozart's demanding repertoire [46]. On the other hand, in the play 'My Son-in-Law', performed at the Variety Theatre, one of the characters was given the choice of executing a salto mortale or marrying a woman, but in the end he chose the latter [47].

However, several stories suggest that the salto mortale was deliberately performed as an extremely dangerous jump. For example, Jan Salamon had to perform it as a back somersault from a galloping horse in front of an examination board so that he could later work as a circus performer abroad, for example with the Franconi or Chiarini companies [48]. The somersault was also performed by equilibrists in Turkey [49]. Finally, a search of the Polish press indicates that the first public performances of the salto mortale in Poland, either on a theatre stage or in a circus arena, were those of Piotr Bono in Warsaw in October 1841 and the aforementioned Ernst Renz in Posen in July 1842. Little is known of the former. Bono's show in the capital of the Kingdom of Poland was part of a presentation of Bedouin and acrobatic arts, and the death-defying leaps forward and backward were performed at the end of the exhibited dances [50]. The backward leap was also part of a performance by Rudolph Brilloff's circus troupe, where Ernst Renz staged a quadrille with eight riders and, for the first time, a salto mortale over 24 soldiers holding their bayonets high above them. Renz did his utmost to ensure that all the spectators were completely satisfied [51]. From then on, the salto mortale became part of the repertoire of the Olympic circus, and after Brilloff's death – when Renz decided to carry on his legacy – it was performed in his company by, among others, Baptiste Loisset [52]. This is confirmed by an 1858 press release about the Circus Renz, which states that 'the circus company distinguishes itself by its precise performances of lovely carousels, death-defying somersaults, and gags by clowns from various nations' [53].

*Salto mortale* was therefore a term that rarely appeared in the Polish press. It was mainly used in the context of performing a dangerous leap, but it also symbolised courage, evasion, hardship and extreme challenges. From historical performances by professionals to contemporary extreme sports, the salto mortale is a spectacular and risky combination of strength, precision and skill that wins the respect and admiration of the spectators. Indeed, it reflects not only the technical aspects of acrobatics, but also the human desire to overcome limits and achieve the impossible, making it an icon of adrenaline and spectacle.

#### *Doubts and polemics with previous knowledge of the Brilloff troupe*

Although Rudolph Brilloff is considered the father of the German circus, combining old-fashioned street jugglery with modern elements in an original way, his biography has not been the subject of scholarly research. Despite the fact that more than 180 years have passed since his death, details of his life have only been mentioned in passing and remain in the shadow of other circus directors or artists. Most of the information on Rudolph Brilloff's life can be found in A.H. Kober's comprehensive German-language biography of Brilloff's student Ernst Renz [13]. Much of the material contained therein is also quoted by Danowicz [12] in his book on the history of the circus (in Polish). It should be added, however, that both publications can be classified as popular literature, although the latter also includes a bibliography of scholarly monographs. One of the earliest books to mention Rudolph Brilloff is Raeder's monograph from 1897 [16], which includes a chapter on Brilloff's collaboration with Renz as well as some original circus playbills. One of the most important sources is Kusnezow's book on the world history of the circus [1], which, although it does not discuss Brilloff separately, provides basic information on his activities in the chapter on the German circus. Interestingly, Rudolph Brilloff is not mentioned at all in the comprehensive *Circus: A World History* by Croft-Cooke and Cotes [54], nor in *Circus* by Ebenstaller [55], which in turn contains a print of Renz's original Olympic circus programme. There is no reference to Brilloff in a theatre encyclopaedia edited by Brauneck and Scheilin [56], although the entry 'Zirkus' is devoted to the development of global circus culture; nor in Saltarino's dictionary of artists [57], which contains hundreds of biographical notes on people associated with culture, including circus arts. Nor does Saltarino provide a biographical note on Brilloff in his other book, which describes in detail the biographies of selected circus artists [58]. Reviewing numerous other books on the subject and noting the absence of any mention of Rudolph Brilloff, one can conclude



that he seems to be a rather forgotten father of the German circus, whose existence can only be read between the lines in very few sources.

Rudolph Brilloff's uniqueness, more in terms of his pedagogical skills and teaching circus arts to young people than as a circus entrepreneur, was confirmed by Halperson, who called him 'the greatest circus teacher after Mahyeu' [59]. However, there are some doubts about Halperson's claims that, unlike his rival circus entrepreneurs of the time: Christoph de Bach of Austria (owner of Circus Gimnasticus) and Jacques Tourniaire of France (owner of Circus Olympique), Brilloff never built a permanent circus building. In fact, Danowicz [12] claims that Brilloff opened a circus in Berlin near the Brandenburg Gate in 1835, although he may have misstated his view and meant the arrival of Brilloff's troupe in Berlin for the first time that year, as described by Kusnezow [1]. It is certain, however, that Rudolph Brilloff generally performed with his troupe at fairs or in town squares [12]. In addition, Günther [18] stated that Brilloff used the term *circus* exclusively to refer to the building in which he performed, which was not confirmed by Raeder in his work, which includes a poster from 1841 announcing the circus performances [16]. Authors have also been unable to confirm Gobbers' information that Brilloff died in 1831 [60], as numerous press notes and books describe his active work up to and including 1842.

Włodarczyk and Rozmiarek demonstrated that Brilloff was not the first artist to perform under the 'Olympic' banner in the Prussian-controlled Polish territories [6]. In fact, the Olympic circus had arrived in Posen a month earlier with Joseph Liphard's troupe [61], which probably gave its first performance on 26 June [62] and its last on 7 July [63], presenting equestrian spectacles [64], as well as a benefit performance for Schumann [65]. The dates of Brilloff's performances given by Kurek [66] are also somewhat misleading. For Brilloff arrived in Posen on 26 July 1839 and performed his pieces two days later, not on 2 August as Kurek states. Furthermore, in 1842 Brilloff and his company were not in Posen from 14 June to 15 July, since according to the press he performed there from 18 June [35] to 20 July [67].

There is also a lack of information in the literature on the origins and development of the salto mortale. Although Gobbers [60] devotes an extensive section to the development of circus artistry, the history of the salto is not further defined. Similarly, Marquardt does not include such details in his book *Salto Mortale* [68], which reviews various circus stories related to vaulting performances (including the short story *Siegfried* by the Polish author Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz), but despite its title does not focus on the history or analysis of the salto in question. Thus, on the basis of source material in the form of press notes, the performances of Piotr Bono in Warsaw and Ernst Renz in Posen can be seen as crucial to the beginnings of the salto mortale in Poland.

Finally, it is likely that no sources have survived to establish whether Rudolph Brilloff had any awareness or knowledge of the Olympic idea. It can therefore be assumed that his aim was not to promote the Olympics, and that the references to the spectacles as 'Olympic Games' in the press may have been made by editors or publishers who simply wanted to draw as much attention as possible to the shows, which had never been staged on a similar scale in the Grand Duchy of Posen [6]. However, Brilloff must have been aware of the popularity of the French Cirque Olympique in Europe, and could have been aware of the emergence of other circus groups modelled on it. The travelling nature of circus troupes helped to spread both the repertoire of the Cirque Olympique and the name associated with it. This may be why Brilloff deliberately used the name Olympic Games, although this had nothing to do with the Olympic idea in the strict sense.

## SUMMARY

The beginnings of the professional development of the German circus can be traced back to the first half of the nineteenth century. Rudolph Brilloff, the owner of a

travelling circus troupe and an educator who was an authoritative figure for subsequent generations of German circus artists, can be seen as the initiator of this process. Brilloff mainly toured the main territory of the Kingdom of Prussia, but he also visited the Grand Duchy of Posen, where he repeatedly staged productions that were promoted as Olympic Games in the local press.

The scarce biographical information on Brilloff allows the conclusion to be drawn that he is the rather forgotten father of the German circus, although he worked hard and consistently developed his enterprise until the end of his life. He also continued the concept previously initiated by Christoph de Bach, which involved a departure from the so-called Roman school, and gave the German circus a unique character. The main attractions of Brilloff's performances were the displays of acrobatics, horsemanship, strength and physical prowess of the troupe's members, as well as numerous pantomimes on topical themes, which were usually the crowning element of the shows. The performances were more reminiscent of typical circus productions and did not directly reflect sporting competitions. Therefore, calling them Olympic Games should be seen more as a marketing ploy to attract the largest possible audience. Indeed, there is no discernible evidence indicating Rudolph Brilloff's conscious intention to advocate for Olympic ideals or incorporate references to them, thereby affirming the hypothesis posited antecedent to the study.

Rudolph Brilloff's staged shows were very popular with the public because of their relatively low ticket prices and wide repertoire. The salto mortale performed by Ernst Renz not only reflected the spectacular nature of circus acrobatics, but was also very much in line with the spirit of the nineteenth century, when many artists sought to break boundaries and achieve spectacular results. Such activities arose from a growing public interest in the extraordinary skills of acrobats and their ability to overcome the risks involved in demonstrating courage, determination, and artistic self-expression through physical performance. The activities of Brilloff's troupe thus shaped the German circus in its early stages and probably had a significant influence on the programmes of later circus companies, leading to the dominance of German circuses throughout Europe after Rudolph Brilloff's death.

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