



The Giang Brothers

Breaking records, one harrowing step at a time



PHOTO BY BAO ZOAN

Guinness World Record breakers come in many shapes and sizes, and the Giang brothers arrive in what appears to be peak physical condition. To walk up 96 steps with one balancing vertically upon the other brother's head, you have to be. However, it's a risky act that has them balancing between career success and possible paralysis.

In the Circus

Born and bred in Ho Chi Minh City, the Giang brothers Co, 34, and Nghiep, 28, followed in their father and grandfather's footsteps by becoming circus performers, but they are the first in their family to have taken their act all over the world. From the US to Ukraine and from France to Taiwan, they've been performing as part of various circus troupes since 2001.

Their act is centred around a gravity-defying stunt whereby Nghiep gets on top of his brother's head and balances vertically, giving a spectacular mirror image type effect. Unsurprisingly, both brothers trained in gymnastics from an early age — which has given their acrobatic performances a solid framework.

The proudest moment of their career came nine months ago at Saint Mary's Cathedral in Girona, Spain, when they performed their balancing act while walking up a whopping 92 steps, breaking the Guinness World Record for 'most stairs climbed while balancing a person on the head'.

They regularly perform for long stunts in Europe, which was how their record-breaking attempt came about. While working in Spain, staff at the circus encouraged the brothers to go for the record.

"The old record was 25 steps in one minute, and that is very easy. So they asked us to do 90 steps in one minute," says Nghiep.

The brothers have been performing the balancing act as part of their routine for a decade, but they were still apprehensive about breaking this particular record. They'd only practised a couple of times prior to their main attempt, and on each time they'd failed to reach their goal of under a minute.

"The first time it took us 1.1 minutes and the second time we did it in one minute," says Nghiep.

The pressure was on.

On the Day

When the day came there were understandable nerves. 92 steps is a long way to fall, and they were unused to the chilly outdoor weather conditions.

"It was very cold. At 12pm we were waiting for the sun so it would be a bit warmer and there was a big crowd watching. We were nervous. We didn't think we could do it. We said this is a good time to make a big happening for Vietnam, so we wanted to do it. In the end, we did it in 52 seconds," says Nghiep.

"It was unbelievable," adds Co. "We didn't think anyone could do it, but we are human."

The brothers say their life hasn't really changed since they became record breakers, but it has certainly made them more well-known in their home country. One unusual request has since come their way, and a wax model has been made of the balancing duo in a new wax museum that celebrates the artistic achievements of Vietnamese, past and present. Co says it feels good to be recognised.

"We're proud," he says. "It's one of the things that young Vietnamese people can look at to follow their dreams. It can be a symbol of young people in Vietnam and what they can achieve. Try to do your best and don't stop practising."

Sacrifices

For Nghiep, the smaller of the two, his role is more physically demanding, especially on his neck, and a nasty fall recently is threatening to put an end to his career.

"Five days ago I went to hospital to check my neck, and I found out that it is not straight. It suffers a lot of pressure so now it's deformed," he says.

"The doctor advised me to stop my career. But it's just advice, I can choose to keep doing it. The next time I fall off, my neck could break."

This element of danger gives their act a risky dimension. "I worry," says Co, when discussing his brother's neck problems. They are a double act and rely on each other.

Never Say Never

But records are there to be broken, and the brothers have their eyes set on Bulgaria in March of 2018, where they hope to beat their own record.

"Now we want to do it faster. I hope 45 seconds for 90 steps," says Nghiep.

"If someone wants to break it. We will always be the first. We are protective over it. We're scared somebody can do it better than us, so we keep practising every day. To be proud of ourselves and proud of our country." — **Thomas Barrett**

Check out a video of the Giang brothers breaking the record on their website giangbrothers.com 