



CoL Circles of Light

A History and Guide to the
Home of Poi CoL Series

e-Book by George McNeur
Published by Home of Poi Ltd

Contents

Introduction	3
Background/History	4
The CoL Sequence of Events	6
CoL Frequently Asked Question's	7
An Interview with Malcolm	11
Overview of Previous CoL video/DVD's	14

Introduction

CoL is phenomenon inextricably linked with Home of Poi. As an annual inspirational DVD its release is eagerly awaited each year by a community keen to learn and improve, share ideas, review their peers and to see what's new in the object manipulation world. But also as a competition it is eagerly awaited by the performers as a test of their ability – if they make it onto the DVD... or if they win a place....

As CoL has evolved over the years, there is always plenty of “opinionated discussion” on the Community forum about whether HoP/Malcolm/the judges got it wrong or right, the standard of the spinning, what was good or bad about the moves, the background, the music etc. Each year people say they'll submit an entry “next year”...

And despite it's long history, and the information available around the site in FAQ's, articles and the COL threads, we still receive questions as there is not a comprehensive “Guide to CoL”, so this wee e-book is an attempt to remedy this situation and bring a bit more awareness to performers and watchers of Circles of Light. I hope it is helpful to fill in some of the gaps and inspire you all to help bring another new level to coming years CoL compilations.

There's still quite a few gaps in this work though, so any and all corrections/additions are welcome (especially in regards to the early winners)! Please let me know!

George McNeur
HoP General Manager
george@homeofpoi.com
November 2007

Background/History of COL

The Circles of Light video compilation series has its origins back in 1999/2000. Malcolm wanted to help inspire the community and spread the love and knowledge of the arts, so he ran a competition on the fledgling Home of Poi website. The submitted entries were all collected and viewed on-line. However hosting on-line videos has huge implications for running costs, bandwidth/availability and video quality and Malcolm decided to address these issues by producing a compilation video that was originally produced in VHS format and more recently in DVD format. CoL 1 (“Circles of Light - Poi Spinning and Fire Twirling from around the World” as it was called) was produced in 2001, with additional CoL’s appearing each subsequent year.

On-line video competition winners: Sep 2000 Jo Derry UK winner. Highly recommended Sean Gibson.

The primary objective Malcolm had in mind is to share our love for these arts. It is hoped that by providing an annual audio & visual compilation, people will be inspired to progress into new areas of object manipulation and also to improve their technical and artistic level.

To attract suitable entries that would showcase the arts, Malcolm felt obliged to offer a prize. The level of the prize has changed over the years. In 2004 the first prize was US\$1000 worth of spinning equipment but there was a lot of negative feedback about the prize money so 2005 dropped the competition element for a straight compilation. The number of submissions dropped and so in 2006 Malcolm reinstated the competition with an increased first prize of US\$2000 cash and US\$1000 HoP credit as an added incentive. After “the drought” of 2005, 2006 saw a “flood” of over 100 entries and brought a new level to the CoL standard.

Each year Malcolm personally chooses a selection of the video submissions that he feels are representative of the whole pool of entries. Some of these will be “the best” in his view, others will showcase new trends or reinforce what he believes the Home of Poi Community is all about – the love of the object manipulation arts.

Each year there is usually debate on the forum about the quality of the videos, the quality of the techniques, the originality of the performances, who should have won, etc. There have been discussions about plagiarism, discussions about techniques such as smearing Vaseline on the lens to get that “diffracted” effect, and many others – which generally indicates at the very least, that the spinning is taken seriously, and the COL video/DVD is a good attempt to capture and represent the state of the arts each year. When the DVD is released, there is usually a flurry of people getting their copy.

A by-product of course is money – by selling a DVD we are also able to cover some of the costs of running the Community section of the HoP site. For those who hadn’t considered it before, the Community forum, articles, free lessons etc cost us money in the form of bandwidth as well as admin time etc. The small profits from the DVD sales don’t cover this, but it helps! 😊

At Home of Poi we are always pleased to see the CoL entries coming in from all over the world, and to see the standard increase with time. It shows us that the arts are becoming more sophisticated – growing up and maturing as it were and we have high hopes for the future CoL compilations. Whether, VHS video, DVD or some future holographic media complete with the smell of the burning fuel(!), you can be sure we will continue to do everything we can to showcase the arts and bring a representative selection thereof to the world each year.

The CoL sequence of events:

1. The competition is announced. These days it is taken as a standing annual feature.
2. In the last few months before the deadline there is a flurry of activity as everyone realizes they haven't got long to make and send their video, and in the last weeks of July we have a steady stream of couriers dropping off small packages.
3. In mid August we decide the last posted entries have had time to reach us, and we begin the process of copying all the entries onto a sequence of master discs. Malcolm then reviews all the entries in one sitting making notes and giving a rough score to each one to determine the ones which will go on the CoL DVD.
4. Malcolm then supervises the putting together of the DVD and the artwork. A sample DVD is produced and given a final review before sending off to the DVD mass printer.
5. At this point the list of acts featuring on the DVD is announced. A forum thread commences with congratulations, commiserations and speculations etc.
6. As soon as the DVD's are received they are put on sale and complimentary copies are sent to the judges and featured acts. Feedback starts almost immediately in the thread(s).
7. Judging: There is a secret panel of international judges known only to Malcolm. Judges are appointed under the promise of anonymity – they can't tell anyone they're a CoL judge. We send them a copy of the DVD and they send Malcolm their picks and comments. Malcolm reviews all the feedback and determines the winners.
8. The winners are announced - first by e-mail to the winners and then on the site. The thread feedback and speculation intensifies, and judging is alternately abused and congratulated! People promise to make a better entry "next year"...
9. repeat (start again at 1!)

CoL FAQ's

- Who are the judges?
 - ❖ Malcolm is the chief judge but he maintains a secret list of international judges who provide alternative views and feedback to help make the selection.
 - ❖ Malcolm has really only one rule he demands of his judges – they are not allowed to disclose to anyone that they are a CoL judge. It's not about “status”, it's about helping the community.
- One of the most commonly asked questions is “what are the judging criteria that determines first, second and third?”
 - ❖ There are many clues around the site for this and it's not an exact formula. Each judge has their own bias towards particular aspects of the performance. Some are more focused on the technical aspects of the spinning/object manipulation considering degree of difficulty etc, some are more interested in the visible emotion/feeling, and others the video editing, choreography, and visual appeal. Some are simply looking at the entertainment factor. Often the “technically superior” performances do not win outright but the majority of the judges agree one way or another on the final outcome.
- Things that improve your chances of making it onto the compilation and/or winning (in no particular order):
 - ❖ Good lighting so you can see what's going on. Consider day/dusk rather than full dark night – there is some beautiful lighting effects possible at dusk (but you do have to really on top of your sequence and filming timing as you don't get much opportunity to re-shoot until the next night!). If full dark night is your thing, consider additional sources of illumination (e.g. torches, fire-brands, mini spotlights etc) to help create mood and allow us to see what's happening.

- ❖ Good quality video – resolution able to show “ungrainy” on a TV screen. Shooting it on your cell-phone is not likely to go too well!
- ❖ A “different” ambience – background, costumes, “set dressing” in the way of coloured lights etc. Think “*stage*” versus “*back yard*” – not that it can’t be backyard, just that if you use your backyard we would expect it to look “pretty” – tidy at least!
- ❖ Music that compliments the action. With permission to use it!
- ❖ Well thought out camera angles that compliment the performance.
- ❖ Good cutting/editing.
- ❖ Visible emotion – enjoyment and/or feeling – energy and passion. A “mechanical” performance no matter how good technically will not rate as high as someone whose love of what they’re doing shows in the performance.
- ❖ Consider having a story or theme to the entry instead of “just” a nice spinning routine. Note this is NOT the only or “right” way to go, but if present, it WILL add another dimension to the act and generally rate higher than a similar show without this aspect.
- ❖ Variety – if it’s new or seldom seen, chances are it’ll make it to the DVD even if everything else is “rubbish”! ☺
- ❖ Fire – NO, spinning fire doesn’t earn “extra points”. Equally, spinning really fast doesn’t necessarily look better. In fact, often when you slow it down it looks much more graceful and entertaining – and can be more difficult/challenging.
- ❖ http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/film_tips.php
- Why no fire-breathing?
 - ❖ Members of the site should be well aware that Home of Poi does not endorse fire-breathing at all due to the personal safety risks involved for the performer.

There are numerous warnings about the dangers on the site. Of course we don't necessarily want to completely oppose people's free will to choose their actions, so even though we have always been against fire-breathing, we had not previously penalized entries. After the release of CoL2005 the member feedback was strongly in favour of banning fire-breathing from the performances. These days we enforce this rule and if a submitted entry features fire-breathing and is selected for the DVD, the fire-breathing section will be chopped without any concern for continuity of performance or music from the cut.

- Why can't I use my favourite music and where can I get royalty-free music for my video clip?
 - ❖ The international copyright rules mean no-one is legally able to distribute a recording of someone's work without their permission (or paying them a percentage of the income). Therefore in order to distribute the CoL video's we need permission from the performers, the video producers and also from the owners of the music. This is quite often a barrier to people submitting an entry.
 - ❖ The first CoL featured music "hand made" by Malcolm as a direct result of the above rule and is something he'd prefer to "hide in the attic"!
 - ❖ In 2007 we approached NZ music organizations to offer upcoming artists the chance to showcase their music internationally by making it available to HoP members for CoL entries. Only one artist did so!
 - ❖ For entries that arrive without music, or without permission for the music used, HoP utilizes the services of www.chrisworthproductions.com buying however many royalty free music tracks required. However we much prefer to receive entries that have

the music matched to the performance, so if you have nowhere else to go, try there!

- ❖ DeepSoulSheep advises of their friends site <http://www.invisibleagent.com/> as another possibility.
- How can I get on to a CoL DVD?
 - ❖ Plan a routine, film it, edit it, burn to disk or copy to master video tape, and send it to us at Home of Poi!
 - ❖ http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/video_compilation.php

An Interview with Malcolm

HoP Reporter: Malcolm, can you tell us what you think about the growth of CoL?

Malcolm: In the early days of CoL, the growth was enormous, but these days the popularity of video sharing sites like YouTube are having an impact. You can even see this on HoP with MCP's "Internet CoL" thread! But it's great that people have the ready access to be able to video themselves and get feedback about what they're doing from people all over the world. These days the growth is not in the quantity of entries, but in the quality of the performance aspects of the entries.

HoP Reporter: Is that why you think CoL is important?

Malcolm: Absolutely – if you want to improve at anything you do it's important to have people watch you and give honest feedback on the areas you can do better. The ability to have that feedback from people in the same industry, and from all over the world should be a great incentive for people to submit entries to CoL. But CoL is also important as a kind of "snapshot in time" record of the arts from year to year as the level of the tricks/moves and performances changes with time.

HoP Reporter: Is "CoL time" your favorite time of year? ☺

Malcolm: I don't know about favorite – but it's certainly the most stressful!! A good kind of stress, but I do feel a big responsibility to make sure all the details are correct, that each performance has music, the names are spelt right etc. etc. And there's a lot of video's going through my head and hands so the potential for mistakes is high. It's certainly rewarding to see the finished article though and to have heard some of the stories behind the clips that come in with the entries.

HoP Reporter: How do you choose the DVD submissions?

Malcolm: First of all we have to resist temptation as the submissions come in! But once we decide they have all arrived there's a couple of marathon video watching late nights where Cherry & I sit down and watch each entry. We usually watch them all about 5 times each and use a preliminary scoring system to make a shortlist. Cherry & I usually look for different aspects like technical and entertainment factor, but often it's the basics that let people down – can we see the performer? is it in focus? do the moves look natural or awkward? When all the basics are in place it's much easier to concentrate on the performance.

HoP Reporter: What are some of your favorite CoL stories?

Malcolm: My most favorite is Sage – she's an amazing lady and I was blown away when I saw her video entry (despite the quality of the raw video which we edited a fair bit). And then when her entry was judged the winner that year and we found out that she didn't even know the video had been entered and her friend that entered it had some fast explaining to do! That led to us making the "Sage" video and is a rather special memory. Another story I use quite often when reporters ask that certain question about some of the more unconventional acts - 2bags going downhill on the skateboard swinging 6 poi at once – you see some amazing things!

HoP Reporter: Do you have any plans for future CoL's?

Malcolm: We certainly want to increase the recognition for the CoL winners. I'm planning a "CoL Hall of Fame" and a wee extra surprise for the winners this year... But for the future of CoL, it really depends on what the Community wants/needs as to what direction it takes. Whether we go to the likes of an on-line version, or a holographic DVD version etc will depend on


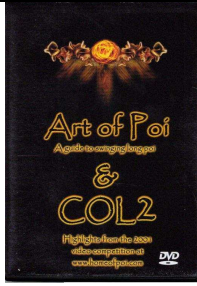
technology and the Community use of that technology, but we're not ruling out any of these possibilities.

HoP Reporter: Do you have any final words for the HoPpers reading this?

Malcolm: The best thing you can ever do to improve your spinning is to film yourself and watch it to get an “outsider’s” view. Then ask someone else to view it and give feedback. Once you’ve done this a few times and lifted your level sufficiently past “beginner” status, CoL provides a perfect vehicle to be seen by a multitude of people with similar interests from all over the world who will tell you what you need to do to improve again and again. I really hope and wish more people will look to each years CoL selection and use it to improve all aspects of their own spinning & performing and submit their own entry to help themselves and help others improve yet again. It is a great Community self-improvement program.

HoP Reporter: Thank-you Malcolm

Overview of previous COL video/DVD's

	<p>COL 1 - Circles of Light Sub-titled: Poi Spinning and Fire Twirling from around the World</p> <p>The inaugural Circles of Light compilation video produced in early 2001, featured 18 artists from USA, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany and South Africa. It was produced only on VHS video and had a limited life – largely due to the music (which was all “hand-made” by Malcolm)! The cover artwork was designed by Malcolm and featured a close-up of flames.</p> <p>http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/COL1.php</p>
<p>Competition winners were as follows: Jo Derry???</p>	
	<p>COL 2</p> <p>The video was released at the end of Nov 2001 Video and saw 25 acts from USA, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, France and South Africa. It introduced the HoP world to Sage who was the competition winner. The majority of the music is by DJ Rubio and still has a popular following today.</p> <p>COL2 now features as an inspirational section of our “Art of Poi” DVD. The original cover artwork was based on the first place entry in the 2001 T-shirt design by Robert Michael.</p> <p>http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/Tshirtdesigns.php http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/COL2.php</p>
<p>Competition winners were as follows: Sage (poi) and Xaeda (staff)</p>	



COL 3

The 2002 video compilation featured 28 acts and artists from USA, England, Israel, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. This was also only produced on VHS video and had a limited life. The cover artwork was based on the third place entry in the 2001 T-shirt design by Melissa Whitman.

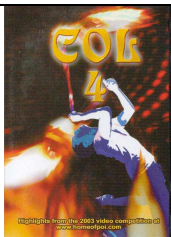
<http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/COL3.php>

The COL3 music is available for download from this website : ???

www.jamesrubio.net/music_home.php

Competition winners were as follows:

Shibaki (poi), and ?? (staff)



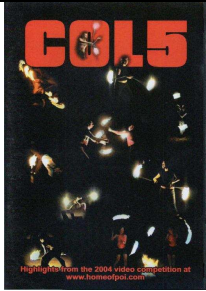
COL 4

The 2003 compilation video featured 35 acts and artists from USA, Canada, England, Japan, Finland, Austria, Scotland, Belgium, France, Australia and New Zealand. The list of names reads like a “Who’s Who” of HoPpers! The cover artwork was designed by Tomoko Saitou of Japan after a call for help Jun 03.

<http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/COL4.php>

Competition winners were as follows:

Boys in tha Hood, Canada, performers: Nick Woolsey & Rob Goodwin.



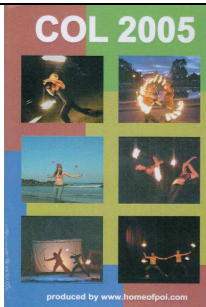
COL 5

The 2004 Video competition brought 65 submissions of which 26 were chosen for the Video/DVD. Countries represented: USA, Bangladesh, Finland, Australia, Japan, Germany, UK, Austria & Canada. The cover artwork was designed by Karen Tam (a friend of Malcolm's) from a series of still frames from the clips blended into a black background. With delays in editing, it was released Oct 2005.

<http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/COL5.php>

Competition winners were as follows:

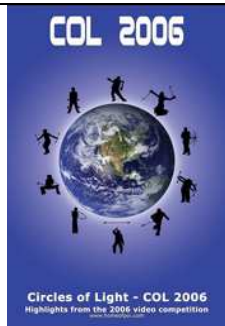
Brother and Son, Germany, performer: Andreas Hoemigschmid



COL 2005

This year we changed the title from the previous sequential numbering, to follow the year. There was no competition this year. Countries represented among the 24 acts on the DVD: Czech Republic, UK, USA, Australia, Canada, France, Taiwan, New Zealand, Slovakia, & Germany. The cover artwork was designed by Malcolm from a series of still frames from the clips but this time displayed on a multi-coloured background.

<http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/COL2005.php>



COL 2006

Moved back to a competition with USD3,000 first prize. Ban on fire-breathing after feedback from previous years. A record number of entries/submissions was received (over 100!) and it was a difficult job to select the final 31. They were chosen to represent the full range of entries received.

Countries represented on the DVD: Austria, Australia, Japan, Canada, UK, Philippines, New Zealand, Finland, USA, Czech Republic, & Germany. The cover artwork designed by Malcolm tried to portray the global nature of the contents – the world as a “circle of light” itself, surrounded by discrete silhouettes representing the performance content.


<http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/COL2006.php>

Competition winners were as follows:

1st: The Story of the Lake, Northern Ireland, performer: Clare Palmer (Firepoise)

2nd: Fire Groove, USA, performers: Kamala Mathis, Hannah Mooney, Lester Mooney, Jade Mangiafico-Greensberg

3rd: The Amazing Rubber Heart Duo, Finland, performers: Tommi Suomela, Antti Suniala

 <p>COL 2007</p> <p>Circles of Light - COL 2007 highlights from the 2007 video competition</p>	<p>COL 2007</p> <p>This year we decided to standardize on the cover art to maintain a consistent “look” to the series from now on. The global nature of the video’s is depicted in the world, while the silhouette images surrounding it give a taste of the action contained inside. A menu was also introduced as a standard feature.</p> <p>This year was “the year of the staff” with hoops and fans making a good showing as well.</p> <p>Countries represented on the DVD: Austria, Australia, Japan, Canada, UK, Philippines, USA, Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Israel, Germany, & “Somewhere”.</p> <p>http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/COL2007.php</p>
<p>Competition winners are as follows:</p> <p>1st: Zaobab in Africa, performer Dai Murata</p> <p>2nd: M.3.2, performer Sandy McClure</p> <p>3rd: Machina Candeo presents "Nox Incendio", performers: Ty Cy-Phy, Megan M. Sinclair, Rebecca "Fireplug" Nelson, Ray Sunglao, Raven Carreon, Magnetica, Jefferson Ballew, Helium, Carla</p>	

<p>What will it look like? What “shape” will it be?!?!?</p>	<p>COL 2008</p> <p>What acts and toys will we see on the next COL? Act now to ensure it will be another step forward in the object manipulation arts.</p> <p>Countries represented on the DVD: ???.</p> <p>http://www.homeofpoi.com/articles/video_compilation.php</p>
---	--