

LIFE STYLES

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Prepare Yourself For the Oriental World of Self-Defense

By Gary Buiso

Martial arts masters will open up the millennium by smashing slabs of concrete and ice over their head, fighting amongst themselves in world championship bouts, and bending steel pipes with their necks.

And it's all in the name of entertainment. But make no mistake: the bouts at the 33rd Annual Oriental World of Self-Defense 2000 are as real as you can get without having fatalities, according to event organizers.

Masters of martial arts will test their respective disciplines in full contact competition in Madison Square Garden on January 16th.

Challengers from the United States, Africa, Japan, Korea, and China will test their mettle in fierce ring battles. Cross-gender bouts, weapons bouts, and other contests that juxtapose say, Karate vs. Kung Fu, Kung Fu vs. Judo, Judo vs. Wrestling, and Kickboxing vs. Boxing, will all be featured.

Also featured will be a kick-boxing championship and practitioners of ninjitsu engaging in furious weapons fighting.

Over a billion people have seen this event over the years, created in 1967 by Great Grand Master Aaron Banks in New York City.

Since then, the first American touring martial arts show has traversed the globe, taking the disciplined world of martial arts to Europe, Asia and South America. It has played top-notch venues like Radio City Music Hall, Nassau Coliseum, Studio 54, The Ritz, and the Beacon Theatre.

Besides the battles on the mat, spectators will also witness how martial arts can be used in amazing ways.

Masters will demonstrate how internal power can be wielded into breaking seemingly unbreakable objects—with hand and foot.

Featured at the event will be the World Champion Martial Arts Daredevil and Bronx native Maurice Elmalem, whose astounding acts are well documented in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

Elmalem has studied martial arts for 30 years under renowned masters as Richard Chun, Joe Hays, Tiger King and Gidon Cadari. He has participated in over 500 championships throughout the world, where he has accumulated 4 gold medals and 450 trophies.

In 1999, he broke his own world record with an elbow strike that broke 90 sheets of glass; a knife strike by Elmalem shattered 50 sheets of glass.

Sure to 'wow' the crowd will be Grand Master Ricardo Mercado, scheduled to do some smashing. Mercado, an ex-Marine, recently broke 50 wooden boards—with his head. He's sure to match or exceed his past performances in the Big Apple.

Spectators will also be treated to a tribute to one of martial arts' most respected figures. Grand Master Bill Louie will perform the reincarnation of actor/martial arts great Bruce Lee in a one-act play. Event organizers promise, "you will not know the difference." Louie is no stranger acting—he has made many films in China as well as the United States.

When asked how he first got started in this live action version of 'fists of fury theater,' Banks said he "had a fight, and I really did not know what to do—so I wanted to learn some

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Ages 25 - 45
No Jeans or Sneakers



World Record Holder Elmalem stomps some burning slabs. Elmalem and other martial artists will fill the stage at the Oriental World of Self Defense 2000, January 16th at Madison Square Garden.

thing scientific. That's why I studied karate back in 1958."

"I never thought that I would eventually be considered a legend or for that matter, the person who turned the martial arts into a form of entertainment," he said.

Banks' showcases demonstrate a deep respect he has for each particular discipline. The shows entertain, but they also help educate the public on the commitment and dedication required in being a student of martial arts. The essence of the art is never obscured.

Of the level of competition in his events, Banks, also a Bronx native said, "It was always kept on a class level, and never made into some kind of mockery."

"The Oriental World of Self-Defense is...an event that encourages, motivates, and stimulates the people to do something for themselves—martial arts style," Banks said. "A person can watch others doing things for the rest of their lives. There is nothing more stimulating than being involved [yourself]."

The Oriental World of Self Defense 2000 will be held on January 16 at 2 p.m. in Madison Square Garden, in the theater, located at 7th Avenue and 32nd Street. Tickets, ranging in price from \$15, \$20, \$25, and \$50, are available through Ticketmaster. For further information, call (718) 896-0456.



Elmalem makes quick work of these glass sheets.