

VASTLY  
IMMATERIAL

MARTIN EWEN



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**VASTLY  
IMMATERIAL**

...including...

Performers  
Perspectives  
Interviews  
Festivals

plus

Two Previously Unpublished Pantomime Scripts:

Wall People  
and  
Table Manners

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# INTRODUCTION

So let's call this the post cancer period.  
Martin Ewen, talented Clown Malcontent  
International Clown Soloist  
Contracts Cancer  
Misdiagnosed, Returns to NZ to die  
Doesn't  
Gains hope.

Book 2. Purpose. Pay for rental car for 10 days.

Proceed.



# FORWARD

In 2003, I met Martin Ewen. At the train station. And took him home with me. “Another one of your boyfriends?” asked my husband when I mentioned a certain New Zealand-born world-traveling pantomime stiltwalker would stay with us for the weekend.

Er, yes?

I learned of Martin in 2002, via an online community called Performers.Net, which has gone quiet of late. He is, as I am, a circus arts performer. Circus arts, particularly clowning, is a male-dominated profession, like engineering, only with more makeup and less math. Most of my work friends are men, so ‘another one of your boyfriends’ wasn’t inaccurate.

When Martin posted he’d been hired by a local venue and was looking for accommodations, I offered to host. Having read much of his descriptive, adjective-heavy, sometimes violently acerbic writings, I felt I had a good idea of Martin.

I learned quickly otherwise. He’s desperately complicated.

This, his second book of memoir and musing, is nothing like a narrative, and everything like a series of postcards from various venues and internet cafes around the world. Throughout the book, which describes places, people and events who existed in a particular moment and under a particular set of circumstances which precludes the reader ever experiencing them firsthand, runs a thread about the importance of How We Treat Each Other. Some of the writing is disjointed, some is lyrical, some is unserious and

some is absurd, all of which are perfectly in keeping with Martin's personality.

It's a Clown's-eye view of the nitty-gritty circus-skills busker-festival-veteran's life and could only be told by Martin Ewen, insofar as were these same events related by any of the featured players from these stories, they'd come out very differently. What you're getting is a hyper-specific "One Performer's Experience" with a stiltwalking panto clown filter on it. In each capture, there is not only a depiction of Martin's subject, but also an inherent image of Martin himself.

One amiable October afternoon, I fetched Martin from the train station, convertible open. Martin slid his stilts into the back seat and plopped a propeller beanie on his head as we set off for an early evening community music festival in which he would perform and I would try to not be too obvious about watching him.

We drove in and out of cool and warm pockets, cool created by trees along the avenue, warm from sunshine and cars on the expressway.

"You've no vanity mirror," he complained.

"You shouldn't be so vain," I replied.

"I want to know if I'm spinning."

"Not at present, no. And... now you are, since we've picked up speed."

"That sounds like a metaphor for..... something."

We never did decide for what.

Of all the clowns I know, Martin is the most articulate and literary. Of all the writers I know, Martin is the most dedicated to spontaneous public outbursts of dancing. Of all the travelers I know, Martin has the most multi-faceted perspective. In a world filled with uniqueness, his uniqueness is singular.

It's been more than 10 years since I've fetched Martin from the train station. Reading his essays has been like receiving a whole stack of international postcards all at once, each one resonant with humanity. I trust that you will find *Vastly Immaterial*, as I did, to be Curiously Engaging, Monumentally Whimsical, and Slyly Heartwarming.

--Cybele Pomeroy, Baltimore, June 2018

*Editor's Note:*

*I've left alone Martin's language, (a great deal cleaner than I'm accustomed to from him, in fact), and therefore certain Kiwi-isms (since I'm perhaps two steps to the side of being a 'punter' myself, I'm not sure whether that term's offensive to a New Zealander or not) and leave you, dear reader, to sort for yourself what idioms such as 'spitting the dummy' are meant to mean. I could tell you, but where's the fun in that?*



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# POPE

I met the Pope once.

We arrived at his gig, an outdoor Mass in a large grassed amphitheater in Auckland, NZ at about the same time. He had his Pope-mobile, I was wearing stilts and leading a phalanx of curious children presumably attracted by my oddness and sense of purpose. I'd gone formal, black pants and tails.

His crowd filled half a large grass bowl. His Pope-mobile, a vehicle representing an almost Satanic lack of faith in Divine Providence was slithering along one side, making its way backstage while I crested the brow of the hill the stage was facing, children strung out beside and behind.

These were olden times, '86 thereabouts. The social contract was benign. There may have been snipers trained on me but they didn't make themselves apparent.

My temporary underage disciples and I instinctively formed a tactical arrowhead formation.

There were 15 of us with a couple of hundred yards to cover and the Pope's gang, their backs turned as they craned at a distant stage for a glimpse of an elderly Polish demigod, numbered in the thousands. The under 14's around me breathed long and deep and stole glances at the sky. It was a good day to die.

We halted some distance from the back of the crowd as his Popeness popped and locked his way onstage. (The correlation between geriatric movement and rudimentary breakdancing at extreme slow speeds is INDISPUTABLE.)

I don't know how good his eyesight was but I'm guessing an 11-foot man dressed in black surrounded by children standing alone and apart in the outfield about 150 yards away dead center might not have escaped his attention.

Which was my purpose that day. I lived nearby and was young and well trained in the art of subjugating public places for comic effect and thought it would be fun to try and catch the Pope's eye just as an exercise in social elasticity. There's a distinguished history of Clowns fucking with Popes and I wanted in.

I like to think we peered at each other in a contrived yet nevertheless profound search for meaning before he began warming up his crowd in Latin.

I moved closer, right up to the back of the crowd. My child disciples grew bored and dispersed. It would have appeared, on my stilts, that I was standing on the crowd's shoulders. They began handing me cameras to take Pope-pics for them. I had become one with the congregation and communed with them in one vast universal love...for Pope-pics.

So now the tall dark clown at the back was engaged in a barrage of flash photography. I shot the Pope many times.

After about five minutes of Pope-arratzi freelancing, I figured both the Pope and I had seen enough of each other. I stopped, turned my back and strode back the way I had come. Across a large empty space, up a hill and away.

# FUNKY

Now a story, a recollection, the joy I feel when I come across a clown.

Funky the Bear was a guy in a bear suit. A cartoonish bear suit, the fancy-dress variety rather than the authentic grizzly.

Funky was an artist, in that he created his own reality and projected it. Funky didn't fit in, the world just had to adapt. Funky was funny and Funky was a Clown.

The first time I came across him, he got arrested.

It was hilarious and I was lucky enough to see it unfold from beginning to end. I was ambling into the city, (Perth, Australia), passing through a large pedestrian plaza where the Art gallery and Museum reside, where there was a fenced off area where one of Perth's many variations of Arts festivals was eventing. (This one was the 'ARTRAGE' festival.)

As I walked into the area, I came up behind two mounted policemen staring intently at an apparently drunk and antisocial bear who, over the next few minutes, staggered and fell, took wild swings at those who stopped to assist and who at one point began to take waste wood from a construction project and throw it into a public fountain.

Whether it was contrived or not it certainly appeared that this bear was simply out of control.

While we watched, another, younger, policeman arrived and watched with us. The bear was running amok about 100 meters

away. The two mounted cops ordered the unmounted fresh faced cadet to "Go and deal with that."

The bear had just swung another length of 2x4 into the fountain, over-rotated and fallen on his face then got up again when the Cop, about 20 feet away and approaching, yelled, "Hey, stop!"

Funky turned and then did a classic cartoon double-take, his arms thrown out wide, jumped into the air, spun 180 and landed running away, heading for the art event enclosure. It took only seconds for the policeman to catch up with him: he grabbed Funky by the shoulder but the bear kept running anyway. Funky ran the short distance up to the fence, missed the entrance point by a wide margin and ran straight into the chain link fence, froze a moment fully spread-eagled then slid dramatically down the fence to lie in a heap. The cop was now standing over him and a crowd was forming. Funky had done his best to make it look like the policeman was overreacting with violence at an innocent Bear

Trying to wrestle back the initiative, the young improvising policeman thought it best to put an end to this anthropomorphic charade by yanking the bear's costume head off. A good idea except the suit's entry point was through the crotch and the head was not of the removable type.

The cop strained at yanking the bear's head off and the bear milked it by throwing his arms out and exaggerating each attempt made at de-bearing him.

The now-surrounded young cop had moved on to brandishing his handcuffs only to find they didn't fit round the bear's wrists when the encompassing crowd gave voice to their disapproval, adding to his woes. I presume the mounted cops were spectating stoically from a distance while howling with laughter within.

"You can't arrest him ! He's a conceptional artist!" someone barracked.

"You have the right to remain fluffy!" another yelled.

The typically Australian disdain for authority was given full play, no-one took it that seriously, the fact that the cop carried a sidearm meant nothing. He was embarrassed and stressed and try-

ing to arrest a bear therefore the crowd became Bear champions and conceptual art sponsors instinctively.

Funky the bear put the policeman out of his misery by standing, head held low in shame, offering his hand for the cop to take and lead him away. He shuffled meekly away, being towed by a policeman, the crowd good-naturedly booing.

I later heard he was taken to the nearby station and mug-shots were taken with his costume still on before simply being let off with a warning. He was actually that year the official mascot of the festival so prosecuting him would have simply been more trouble than it was worth.

I saw him an hour or two later inside the enclosure and was impressed by the amount of expression he could muster from within that suit. He would dance until he attracted children then run away from them and lead them in a simple game of 'catch the funny bear' until he worked out who might be a parent and then he would rush up to them and drop to his knees and clasp his paws together in supplication, begging that the parents take their kids back.

He was funny, he was bitter and antisocial and trapped in a bear suit and that was his character.

Some months later I heard of his hijinks when paid to do roving atmospheric work at the grounds of the main Perth University.

He had thrown a rock at some reticulation pipe and burst it and spent part of his gig being chased around by the gardening staff.

He'd run indoors to hide and walked into a full lecture hall mid-lecture from a door at the front of the class. The lecturer looked at him and the amassed students looked down to him from their tiered seating. A moment frozen in strangeness as he entered. Funky then walked slowly and slyly towards the blackboard, picked up a piece of chalk in his paw. Turned and wrote slowly and deliberately F...U...C...K on the board, then sprinted from the room.

We became friends when, at a later time, I met the man who filled the costume.

Funky was funny and Funky was a Clown.

# LUCKY DIAMOND RICH

Lucky Rich is a street performer. He uses the juggling-on-a-twelve-foot-unicycle template which is one of the more popular shows to adopt as it gives the performer what has now been commonly accepted among our community as the TMO advantage. [Tall Metal Object]

The higher you are, the deeper your crowd can be and still see you, and the further away you can attract people to your show as you perform and thus the more money per show you can potentially make. Many performers do this template; there are as many variations to it as performers, however the basics tend to stay the same. It is the kind of show that allows a performer to concentrate on the relationship between them and the audience and as such each rendition is a vehicle for the personality of the performer.

Because of its basic structure, this show gets adopted by performers often and it's not unusual to have, at a street performance festival, one or two or three going at once. A little sad, in my opinion.

I gain perverse pleasure out of knowing from many years observation that eventually these templated practitioners will succumb to the consequence that people who jump from 12 foot objects for a living invariably confront. Their knee joints turn to chalk. After a decade or more of making easy money they are suddenly that much older and their means of employ comes to an end because that drop from the 12 footer at the end of the show is sim-

ply not worth the ongoing pain. Some make it and go onto new things, bigger better things, in, for example, Tom Comet's case, to name but one. Others simply fade away.

But Lucky has survived and still pumps them out and I sincerely hope he proves the exception because what he does is timeless and what he is, is one man's spiritual and/or philosophical journey broadcast moment to moment both onstage or off.

Lucky is additionally the most tattooed man on the planet.

I have known Lucky over 20 years. We stood somewhere between friend and associate for many of the earlier years. We were both arrogant in our different ways, he because he had worked in traditional circus from his youth before he took up street theatre and was as well competitive and combative by nature and I because I considered myself an artist and had a tendency to forgo potential income by performing using dynamics that were not optimal for income and also, and I still carry this:

I have a superior intellectual stance that may well be brittle but is too well verbally defended to bother confronting.

Now we are both older I would say as we both recognise being friends means an acceptance of separate journeys taken together.

Also early on he was to me a bit scary. He fought for himself. He had grown up in some working class suburb in Australia, been marinated in carnies from youth and simply knew he was surrounded by bullshit and bullshitters and acted accordingly.

It takes time, I've recognised, to discover that being sensitive to the detection of bullshit often blinds one to their own production of it.

Youthful humility, bah, who needs it.

The tattoos started off with the usual couple. I think there were two, one on the leg, small, maybe another somewhere else. Hardly pivotal or definitive.

Then followed a period where he lit all his afterburners and went 'rock star'. He earned tasty wads of dosh wherever he worked as a byproduct of polishing the same module for more than a decade. He worked Covent Garden one week, Sydney the next. His appetite grew to match his formidable income, which was

married to his formidable work ethic. If Lucky saw potential for a show, then it was on.

Once, after a couple of weeks full-on Covent Garden work to build up a war-chest the then heavily-tattooed Lucky paid Savile Row a visit. Chromed teeth and tats, he strolled into the strange august venerable atmosphere of one of the world's most pompous outfitters. Imagine the look on the face of the tailor who approached him to state, "Sir, I think you may have come to the wrong outlet."

Lucky's reply, made even more grating by his Australian accent, "Nah, you sell suits? Show us the best you have."

I think he had a wad of around 20,000 pounds. He got measured up bespoke-like and then chose 7 of the most lurid colors they had, yellow and pink and scarlet and puce. Put whatever was needed down and then came back a week later to pick them up.

I have this concept that floated by while I was compiling this piece in my head, I grasp at metaphors instinctively. Lucky, for the first decade of street performance was surfing his own wave with his eyes on the beach, keeping his balance instinctively and reflexively adjusting to conditions underfoot, that confidence of youth thing where your trust in yourself is absolute. It's all so easy.

At some point he looked down and in that moment lost his board, hit the water and spent time being churned. When he surfaced, he'd happily relinquished all thoughts of the beach and now focuses on bobbing round in the moment trying to be kind and patient and generous to himself and others.

He has no formal education; however he's pursued a rambunctious extended semester dedicated to finding his own peace of mind. He's definitely graduated and is certainly more comfortable with himself than anyone who judges him.

I once remarked to him back when I used flippant bollocks more than I do now, "I don't know if it's art, Lucky, but it makes an interesting frame."

...and it does, it frames many things, Lucky's startling appearance.

To others, mostly, because to Lucky, it's just ink.

# DUNG BEETLE

I first met my friend the Dung-Beetle in Edmonton Canada, at the annual Edmonton International Street Performance Festival.

I could go on at length about Shelley, its director, and the ear to the ground casting that sees ten days of set piece and roving and amalgams of each, pepper a huge downtown outdoor plaza artfully, and I could also go on about its creator Dick Finkle and the culture he created wherein lonely performance eccentrics were showered with respect and coddled in a language they understood and luxury they were not used to, (although everyone pretended it was normal), wherein they were flown, put up at the Sheraton and scheduled in front of active curious Canadians, to ply their studied performance affectations for donations.

Because I'm all about the Dung-Beetle, those other things can wait.

Sometimes, very rare, you find someone whose applied whimsy is a form of magic.

The Dung-Beetle was a character who existed for 10 days, he dressed as a bug. He had antenna and looked like a featherweight bumblebee. For ten days he pushed his ball, a 5-foot ball covered in layers of Post-it notes. The notes read, 'rent due' 'my husband doesn't love me, 'my milk went off,' 'I'm socially awkward'.

He would have Post-it note pads stuck to the front of his costume, and for ten days introduce himself:

"Hi, I'm a Dung Beetle, I collect [sotto] shit."

"Here's a pen, here's a Post-it, write down the shit in your life and I'll add it to my ball."

So it went for ten days, the ball got bigger and bigger, cumulative 'shit'.

That was the Dung-Beetle's role.

It was an all-weather role, if it rained and most of the other performers deferred, the Dung-Beetle would be one of the few pushing his ball and stopping people wearing raincoats to explain himself.

It rained a little more, mud pools formed, the Dung-Beetle was in his element.

"I'm a Dung-Beetle!" he would exclaim before belly-flopping muddily, through puddles triumphantly.

He had found a unique place in the performance eco-system: resilient, reflective, whimsical and deep, he existed to collect shit and celebrate that.

Truly a mastermind.

We talked, the next year he took my idea of pedestrian crossing theatre as we had first practiced it in NZ and had created, 'Moses, the crossing guard'.

But that's another story.

## FESTIVAL: HALIFAX 1999

Halifax was well-oiled mayhem. The administration sets it all up, pops the performers in at one end and then plays pinball with 15 balls in play and the flippers thwacking like crazy. The wheelbarrows are taken to the bank, just about everybody gets drunk, feels good and disperses globally.

It was my first time there but I got the impression that for public and performer alike it was considered a cast iron gig. Crowds were big, hats were big, weather held up until the last day rained out and gave everyone extra time to pack.

The festival seems to have been going long enough for it to develop into a slick, well-run, foregone conclusion. But that said, all credit goes to the administration: Kim, Angela, Brian and Robyn for making all the big decisions and Bob, Lori, Dave and Howard for making all the small ones that seemed so big at the time. (Gasp--as he retracts his tongue from the collective sphincter.)

The ever-present volunteers fell into two camps, doe-eyed debutants and drama-proof veterans; all helped lubricate our experience (rumour has it that one even used her own fluids, the names will be furnished in my next article; 'Halifax--Who bonked who.')

The acts themselves were varied: magic, mime, movement, juggling, unicycles, singing, slack rope, unicycles, balance on tightrope, juggling, chairs and sundries, percussion, unicycles, face-painting, instrumentalists, juggling and Clown. This is the major advantage to performers in festivals: there are so many contacts to be made, styles and philosophies to digest, collaborations

formed, information shared, new friends made. For me, this was the point of the exercise and I think all the performers gained in some way perspectively.

My only (ONLY!) gripe, and it's personal as well as administratively political, is with the management of the historic properties site whose behaviour towards performers was not so much anal retentive as anal redundant. Armed with security guards with Caligula complexes and one particularly evil retailer, who in a past life was quite possibly one of those incredibly deep sea fish with a lamp stuck on his head that didn't work and hopefully in the next life will return as an anorexic's bowel, all made life difficult and in one case impossible for any of the site-specific acts put there. This singular venue needs to be taken out of the loop.

Tom Comet, who had been frighteningly ill the week before, never missed a show and powered through the people's choice prize.

Unbilled arrivals Les Nereides, Heloise Deporas and Genevieve Lechasseur, were stunningly blue and 'out there.'

Dow and Pearson deserve the 'high art of professional stupidity' award for their show.

I found Bubble Boy to be the most simply beautiful act but then I'm just an old mime softy.

Hardest working act I would give to magician Steven Elve (rumour has it he cheerfully palmed his own afterbirth.) If there was a gap in the showers, he was out there, if there was a spare stage, he was on it. Over 10 days, he must have performed 80-100 shows. I imagine him on the tilting deck of the Titanic: "I still think there's time for one more." All credit to him.

That's all I've got.

# FESTIVAL: DENVER

Denver is the mile high city, the air is thin and dry, the people are that usual mixed-up bunch of races that make America so optimistic and inclusive.

Free busses blat up and down an otherwise pedestrian inner city mall, pity that- but it's half a mile long and I concede its usefulness- although without them, the mall itself could be a showcase for all that is good about the absence of traffic.

Add to this, over three days, 32 international street theatre acts and you have the Denver International Buskers Festival.

This was my first American festival, my first immersion into the ranks of those who have carved out successful careers in hard-arsed venues like New York City and Key West, Florida, notoriously competitive pitches, often ruled by the competitively combative, the egomaniacal single-minded verging on the psychotic.

Festivals like this are as much political events as anything else with the administration having to organize such diverse talents and temperaments so the obviously unmanageable never make it this far, however talented. Some people here tone themselves down for the occasion. Not everyone.

I'll give you an example.

An aggressive and parasitic method of crowd gathering is to put yourself at the edge of a crowd already watching a show and bellow your intention to yourself perform and your superiority to the act the audience is watching. A variation of this is to wait until the other act is just finishing and wrapping up with asking for do-

nations before you begin your vocal assault, thus disrupting the end flow of the other act and stealing the audience's attention just when they should be donating at the end of the show.

There's an artist I've seen in action in his home town and he's just an ego bulldozer, yelling 'look at me-look at me' before the end of others' shows and basically living in a combative world of his own. I'm a mime (so volume is not an issue with me) and I have met this guy on a few occasions and as we are not in direct conflict, we simply pass each other by with nods and brief exchanges.

I'm merely using him to illustrate the worst aspect of American street performance where solidarity and consensus loses to the loudest and most selfish voice. I'm pretty sure there's a large American sociological metaphor in there somewhere, but I digress.

The festival was run comendably with around 9 stages provided, each with amplification and mics with technicians. Performers were put into different groupings daily and given stages on which to rotate their acts, which is as close to the unregulated street dynamic as is possible.

We had meetings every morning over breakfast at the hotel we were all kept in, and an impressive hotel it was, too. Single rooms with lounges, the 5-star treatment. The hotel was one of the sponsors of the event. I believe we were all secretly flattered.

It was a three day festival and the turnout was good, each stage was capable of big crowds and they seemed to pay well, the weather was hot and sunscreen was liberally applied by all.

I've been deliberately sparse with the descriptions of the acts but each was its own unique interpretation of one street format or another.

The differences between jugglers can be staggering; personality, projection etc.

I believe we all fall between two opposing philosophies. To paraphrase-The exploiters and the ingratiators.

At one extreme is the performer who utilizes hook lines, well-known dynamics and standard patter to mechanically construct a

show that is boilerplate and treats the audience as infinite fodder used indiscriminately and efficiently in the pursuit of income.

The other extreme is performers whose thrust is more relationship-based: their major objective is rapport- their shows being vehicles for the achievement of a collective warmth. I admit that this second group are the shows I find consistently interesting.

Having been in the business many years, I have seen most of the variations of the 'look at me, look at me' shows and can't help presuming the insecure overcompensation that fuels them.

And yet I have seen shows soaked in skill where the performer projects a humility and respect for his or her audience that leaves them touched and grateful rather than manipulated and meekly herded up to donate money afterwards.

The exploiters and the ingratiators.

The look at me's and the look at us's.

The overdressed and the naked.

Hilby the Skinny German Juggle Boy, The Scared Weird Little Guys, Misaji Terasawa... I know there are others in this cast just as giving, but these shows consistently give more than they ever receive and it's that sort of generosity of spirit that makes me proud to be a member of this street performing fraternity.

Thanks must also go to the administration who did a great job and also to the many unpaid volunteers who gave of their time to aid the performers, watch over their gear, fix broken stilts, operate the PA systems and all the other small but appreciated tasks that needed doing.

And thanks to the audiences for wanting to have fun.

And thanks to the sponsors for seeing the worth of it all.

# ANTHONY LIVINGSPACE

Anthony LivingSpace turned his back on society 25 years ago and has been in its face ever since. His neck aches. Nobody seems to care.

Out of this frustrating void Tony pulls laughter.

He's adopted the junctions of two bars and a church on banked cobbles in the old part of Granada on the hill in the south of Spain.

His show is built on pain so Tony has to build up sorrow, misfortune and woe in usable quantities to even consider going through the agony of comedy.

Tony's genius is that he provides industrial quantities of sorrow misfortune and woe and many other, equally sterling qualities by the use of a simple tool that is his lifestyle.

He's an anarchist, a comic anarchist whose laughter is drawn from those who recognise in his show and thus in his mind, and briefly theirs, that all this seriousness and convention and dignity and rigidity, is laughable.

He has a free apartment, his own pitch and nuns who lock up the church (with them inside for the night) in the middle of his show to play with.

He puts a cloth over his head and in Spanish pleads to be let back into the nunnery,

"It was only one movie,"

"The people were only pretending,"

and

"It wasn't real love."

He skips up to the church with soccer ball underarm and shouts repeatedly for Mary at the door, he waits loudly, asks if Jesus can come out to play soccer, then starts kicking his ball against the steps.

He's walked into the church clothed and out of the church naked within seconds, to thunderous applause.

He's been experimenting for years. One of the last great street theatre purists, he can and does do shows inside, on stages, in theatres, but just for variety. He is the only performer I know of his quality who's devoted to the street form rather than using it as a springboard.

Originally Australian and a dishwasher, Anthony confronted his own boredom in public places as a young man, and in this self-induced state he has carved a small career consisting of his trousers, amp, mike, suit and a multitude of small, ever-changing props.

In small part, Pepe and Lee Ross have been influences, although in my mind Tony goes further. He takes Pepe's physical impro further and Lee Ross's improvisational commentary further still having codified it in a small sampling unit connected to an amp.

For those unaware, Pepe was the king of Covant Garden improvisational mischief for a while, legendary in the risks he took, physically and socially and comedically before tragically succumbing to his alcoholism, while Lee Ross was a graduate of Juilliard NY theatre arts who spent time internationally on the street before taking three principle roles at once for Cirque du Soleil, touring Asia before retiring to be a conceptionalist of sorts in LA.

However no-one else to my knowledge has spent time consistently getting obese men to take off their shirts in public and vamp.

Or eats a flower so wistfully.

Or has created so many inspired original comic 'bits' in the increasingly templated and regulated world of street theatre.

His show is contrived madness dedicated to simply and briefly making people happy.

Figuratively, if you were to imagine the outskirts of society and from there walk a day and a half, then have on hand a very powerful set of binoculars, you may, in the distance, make out what looks to be a putrid swamp.

Tony lives just on the other side of that but returns to do shows for the folk.

He has a rare full instinctive sense of comedy coupled with that second sense of where the crowd can be taken, and innate timing, all counterbalanced by a romantic disdain for success or safety.

Many years ago we shared a hotel room, a cheap room in a converted Victorian house in downtown Christchurch, NZ.

Anthony confessed that he was actually painfully lonely but held a belief that somewhere out there was a woman who was perfect for him and that gave him strength.

It was pitch black and I let the moment hang before stiletto-ing his soft underbelly with my scorn.

“Do you have any idea of the amount of compromise that goes into a relationship?” I asked.

“This fairy tale you use to ward off weeping yourself to sleep, this article of faith of yours, you realize your unrealistic hope dooms you to a realistic hopelessness?”

There was a weighted silence and then the wounded retort.

“You know Martin, when I'm your age, I'm going to be a lot more successful than you.”

I laughed. Yet twenty years passes and while Tony is still living month to month, I concede that as a street performer he does now hold an advantage. He remains fearless and at heart still a practicing optimist .

Already an accomplished technical mime he bounced up to me once after years apart and excited confided.

“Hey Martin, I've been studying a lot of this Clown stuff, doing classes in Europe.”

“Really,” I returned guardedly.

“Yep, did all these exercises, getting in touch with my inner child, that sort of thing.”

“What came of that?” I asked.

“Well, what happened was I found my inner child...and raped him.. and got sentenced to 15 years in my inner prison,” he delivered with a deadpan expression but an evil grin in his eyes.

Anthony's beyond successful. He's an uncompromising public comedian and while it could hurt his feelings to be told this, he is indeed a Clown of exceptional quality.

## RUMPLE OVERVIEW

Rumple, or Rumpelstiltskin as he is referred to out of earshot of copyright enforcers, is an international clown. He's worked solo performing streets and street theatre festivals and arts festivals and all number of events, Glastonbury, among others and recently enjoyed employ with Cirque du Soleil and is now, not surprisingly, a free artist once more.

Oh how we laughed, we being Clowns and street performers with more than a couple of decades experience both in this precarious form of business we've chosen and of Rumple himself, to hear that Cirque had grabbed his talent.

We laughed for the simple fact that Rumple cannot be tamed, never has been, never will be and for Cirque to have the audacity (which is one of their qualities) to presume they could direct Rumple in the exacting way his two year contract implied automatically was to presume that some unlucky Cirque arts administrator, (if lucky, just one and if unlucky, a handful), would suffer an aneurysm.

I am not a religious man; however if ever there was an argument for some spiritual hand that directs from within, giving birth to dreams and impulses that drive an individual brave enough to trust in them, that argument would be personified in Rumple.

He is in his own motley way a sacred Fool.

He speaks on and off stage in a falsetto. It used to be a cruel game among some to ply him with alcohol, the rumor being if you

got him drunk enough he'd drop an octave. I have it on good authority that this is so. He was an innocent and innocents gets taken advantage of. I saw him once at Glastonbury coming in to pick up his check, supported by a person under each arm, unconscious with exhaustion, to sign for a check and have others change his flight to some east European festival and get him on the plane because those were the things he needed doing. Rumpel would sit on somebody's floor and exclaim in his high little voice as his eyes roved in wonder.

"Blimey! You've got a nice house/caravan/big tent. I slept in a ditch last night," and it of course would be true because to my knowledge Rumpel has never lied; his character shuns that level of sophistication.

However, Rumpel could go where others could not (in, I believe, so many ways). Before the Berlin Wall fell, Eastern Europe was steadfastly closed for visitors yet Rumpel, in the jester's suit and false nose he wore far, far more often than not, would simply walk through checkpoints under armed guard explaining that he'd heard of this castle or that and wanted to go there because he liked castles and burly men would step aside and let him past to walk on towards wherever and I like to think they did it because on some level they recognised he was holy in that pure sense of childish purpose that radiates from him. (Believe me when I tell you I could think of many more cynical reasons and motivations but I choose not to.)

Originally Australian, Rumpel first arrived in Europe into London on a Qantas jet. It was a laughably short visit. He had worn his costume and false nose the entire 20+ hour trip. The curtain between performance and backstage was to Rumpel a sliding scale with a Clown at each end.

Disembarking, he tottered through to Customs. British customs officers being, quite fittingly, the most dour people on the planet, the spectacle of some falsetto-ed Aussie with bells hanging from his jester's hat and long false nose served not to entertain them but further amplify their disgust with the human condition life had subjected them to.

Rumple, no doubt, would have been smiling and probably said something as uncomplicated as

“Hello, there.”

The passport changed hands, an ordinary passport considering, most likely, an ordinary photo.

They didn't care. They asked the important questions.

“Do you have any money?”

Rumple's eyes would have sparkled I suspect as he bent down and rustled in his carry-on before standing with a water polo-sized bag made from strong cloth tied in a bundle all circular and bulging before exclaiming delightedly, “HAVE I GOT MONEY!”

Then plonking down his package which inspection revealed contained multiples of hundreds of dollars in Australian coins. Useless, unexchangeable coins that had no value whatsoever in Europe. Banks at the time, and probably still, only change notes.

The customs officers would have looked at him blankly (while laughing uproariously inside their heads which is what I imagine the most spectacularly dour people do) before sending him to some small bare room with his luggage and within hours he was on his 20+ hour return trip to Australia.

Rumple contains no daunt, he cannot be daunted, because like many things he simply refuses to conceive of daunt's existence.

Close to 50 hours later Rumple, still with his coins and again a rich man returns to Sydney.

Within two weeks of circulating and telling his story he has paper money and a new airticket and had been persuaded to forgo his costume for the trip. Rumple's not stupid, he learns from experience like anyone else. It's simply that his larger picture is unique. So within short order he had gained entry into Europe and was headed in his fantastically impulsive meanderingly steadfast way towards castles he'd once seen pictures of, behind the iron curtain.

His dauntlessness is legendary among those relative few who know of him. He has, at multiple day festivals with multiple stages, performed shows that have lasted up to 48 hours. He has improvised non-stop for more than a day. He would pick up a juggling ball and state,

“I am now going to throw this ball up into the air and catch it 317 times!”

and count each one along with the audience until he dropped one then start again. That's an easy 30 minutes right there but Rumpel on many occasions would be given or grab or make a stage at a festival and go until he dropped.

His props were a unicycle, juggling stuff and various very obscure found objects or things he'd made.

He would do his show and people would pay him afterwards and in that way he was like us. (In that he was like anybody.)

But he had almost complete disregard for the form he was using, it was more like a vehicle he jumped on and off of in pursuit of his character. There's a now stock piece, I first saw Peter Post use it, where you fail to balance an inflated ball on your finger and after repeated attempts, enraged, you throw or hit it away over the heads of your audience. The joke comes when invariably at some point shortly afterwards it gets thrown back into the circle and further humor is milked by taking out a knife and stabbing the ball and then throwing it again from the circle. Very very often the tattered ball is again returned, thrown back into the circle and the character's comic humiliation is complete.

I saw Rumpel use this on a cobbled courtyard in Villach, Austria: he tried and tried to spin the ball on his finger then threw it away in mock anger and got a laugh and moved onto his next 'trick' for a good couple of minutes by which time his audience had quite forgotten about the ball but he hadn't; when he stopped and in his falsetto shouted, “Where's my ball?”

the audience looked behind itself to see, but the ball had vanished; some kid had probably run off with it.

Rumpel asked again,

“Where's my ball?”

The audience didn't know so Rumpel discarded them, he just walked through them and away, leaving his props scattered on what used to be his stage, surrounded with what used to be his audience as he wandered 'round the very old Town, through court-

yards and walled pathways, asking anyone he met, mostly Austrians,

“Where's my ball?”

He gave up after a couple of hours but he never found his ball and others cleared his props from the stage where he had abandoned them and stashed them back in the greenroom. We were all at the same hotel, it was no trouble.

Rumple put his hand to writing for a year or thereabouts. On Performers.Net, he would write long stream of consciousness screes. Genius begs comparison and Rumple is beyond that so no one will ever be able to judge whether Rumple's writing is profound. It will take some sort of singularity to finally make sense of him.

I do suspect he himself is profound, although that could be seen as an article of faith on my part, and as I've said, I'm not a religious man.

# RUMPLE INTERVIEW

Here's a transcript of a taped conversation I had while driving Rumpel/ Jolly Goodfellow, when I simply ask him "What's it all about?"

**Martin: So Rumpel? What's it all about?**

Rumpel: Yeah..there's too much out there for anyone to know.

**Martin: So your answer to what's it all about is a question mark.**

Rumpel: Yeah I think that sort of sums it up [laughs] I mean...pretty simply...but what's behind the question mark? [laughs]

I mean..yeah..there's so many words that you can come up with that you can try to define it, to sculpture meaning out of it all, but uh yeah the human mind's a fascinating thing you know, there's just so much out there, my mind's wide open, I don't claim to know the meaning of it all, I don't think there's any human alive that can fully encapsulate everything with words, there's so many different levels, you know, there's so many different ways to look at things, or even the same things, so many realities and cultures...space-beings, yeah, planets [laughs]

I mean [laughs] it's just so cosmic, you know, it's just... goes on forever and people claim that they know it, you know, but people on this planet, you know they go to universities and read books, you know but a lot of our things, initially, come from the imagination of the human mind, human perception, human imagery, so we can comprehend you know, in a human context so we can relate to it... but there's more than meets the eye.

But I think it is quite fascinating that humans out of all species can modify the environment to such an extent to be able to control it but ah, yeah there's just a lot going on and when you break it down, the science of everything, there's just a, it's mind boggling, overwhelming.

Yeah you could read all you like but ah, it's always going to be a mystery. I mean I think that's the beauty of it you know? Keeps us guessing. I mean how can one living entity claim to know everything, when you look at the scale of the universe, the stars and everything. Scientifically, how could scientists understand everything, but ah, yeah I'm just keeping an open mind, I'm just a fool you know [laughs] yeah... yeah, you just got to do what you can, enjoy life, make the most of it, you know it's an array of, a palette, of life, you've gotta make the most of what there is to offer.

I mean, it's quite interesting too, you know, I think, you know... like Buddhist monks, you know, can have a completely different outlook, but also being an artist is magical too, you you can marry the best of both worlds, like, you know, I think it's quite beautiful to play music, to juggle, a bit of all, everything. Yeah, I've gotta meditate more, I mean oneness, the ultraverse, the altraverse, the universe, yeah it's all so cosmic and I'm just a goose in inverted commas, I'm on my 'L' plates, yeah, how do you figure it out? ...through art, through entertainment, through philosophy, meditation, dreams, sometimes you just gotta look at the big picture but you get lost in all the details. [Laughs]

Or you break it down to a science. Fuck! How detailed is it? Because dillions of mere atoms spinning around in a, you know, like, some strange glue of atoms that binds it all together, all this stuff in the universe, like fuck, what the hell is going on? Does anyone really know what's going on? Yeah it's all happening....crikey! ...yeah, you know, I just think, universe, culture and spirituality, everything has its pros and cons, but I think love transcends all politics, you know there's so many barriers...with politics, the people, you know, forget... religions... have a different path, but they all have a similar goal, about Love, but it's completely different. Yeah, love is the greatest power of

all, I mean it's just... like, if there is God, God must have a pretty strong point. [Laughs]

It's just a big sex bomb, [laughs], love is the bomb. The plan, everything, masculine, feminine, even the French language, I mean, or German they have ah, like you can have a female chair and a male table, [laughs] That's pretty funny. [garble & laugh] I'm an androgynous hermaphrodite, I'm a lesbian transvestite, no, I'm an asexual; jesters don't have sex.

**Martin: They reproduce through the laughter of others.**

Rumple: Yeah, [laughs, chokes], yeah there's a species that... [changes subject] but what I do is just try and ah, set things off, spread multiple giggleasms, so things just ah, you know, get creative, laughter of ah... [Changes subject]

God this is awesome! Check this out, [picks up camera], this is so incredibly beautiful.

[Changes subject back]

I mean ah, maybe I mean God is... Where everything is God, I guess, I mean whatever you call God, you know we're all a part of... we're all in this together. It's good to be a part of it all... our life force, the energies, it's about energy too, so much energy out there and in a way, I think everyone effects each other with all the energy that goes on in the world... across the planet, you know, the vibrations, of even... of, you know, Gods or ...archetypes... yeah, I mean, there's many different levels, ah, cos I guess to a certain extent, you know, I mean there's so many beliefs that, just, just you could go on and talk about it forever, it's just...

**Martin: So it would appear.**

Rumple: Huh?

**Martin: I said, so it would appear.**

Rumple: Yeah I mean like, I mean people think, some people think that animals don't even have a soul. But ah, I think animals, [pats chest] oh shit, sorry, I'm just, my heart just jumped then, caught an irregular beat, Yeah [unintelligible] spirit.

**Martin: Don't die in my car, Rumple**

Rumple: No, I know, my dad had a heart attack, yeah and he was only 2 years and a few weeks older than me.

Yeah, I mean sometimes I'm amazed, but other times, you know, when you just think about things, your mind can, you know, it's much more of a, I don't have to talk forever, you have a sense of feeling ...like your feelings, emotional intelligence. I must meditate a bit more though, be a good thing to do, the inner journey, the outer journey, sometimes I get lost in the kingdom of grammatical sense.

I find it interesting too, words, you know, to sculpt someone's expression... or meaning, and I think that's why a lot of people, too, in the world, have conflicts, because of, um, you know, communication and expression. There's a lot of beautiful people out there who can't express themselves, they get ...lost in translation. But ah, yeah ...emotions are a really incredible thing you know, to be a human being, to be alive, it's just so fascinating, people come and go and... you think in the past and the present and future. If only time travel was possible you could hang out in the past and present and future at the same time.

What's the meaning of life? Yeah, ah, pretty out there. I mean you think of a brain and it's just... I mean, if you stretched out all the ah, all the connections in the brain, probably extend to the moon, they say... I don't know, I'm just a goose, inverted commas... I don't know what's going on, it's beyond me, my words, what are they, [laughs], I've gotta, I've gotta go and learn English properly. I still don't even speak English properly. It is pretty interesting when you think of English the language too, because all the blend, you know because there's a bit of French there ....and Scottish....

I mean, I don't know, you could just go on forever, yeah.

Who am I? Who are you? What are we? We think we know it all, us people... it's very people based isn't it? People, it's all about people, we are it, yeah. I put my faith in people. Nothing else. The universe is only planet earth, the universe, there's no other life forms, we're the only life form...naah.....There are... I believe there are many other life forms.

**Martin: I think you are one.**

Rumple: Yeah....Do you think there's a higher intelligence than us?

**Martin: Well, I know I'm not the brightest person in the world.**

Rumple: Do you think that you're not bright? You read a lot of books.

**Martin: I'm above average, but that's meaningless.**

Rumple: But you read a lot of books, you must know it all, Martin.

**Martin: They're not mutually inclusive statements. I read a lot of books; there's a lot of books I haven't read.**

Rumple: Yeah, I mean you can just get lost in the world of information.

Yes, it's interesting isn't it, I mean when you speak about the concept of God, no matter what religion, you know, I mean some people are close-minded, they don't like to talk about new age topics or anything outside of the philosophy of Christianity or the Bible or whatever but everything has a bit of truth in it, beautiful art, philosophical art, ideas, but ah, yeah...

I can't believe in any one particular thing, of religion, I think it's total integration of everything put together, all the elements, you can't divide anything fully or separate, it has to be a complete oneness, even though it's hard... like, something like... it's not good to have any enemies at all, anyone in the world but ah, it's not easy sometimes in this world, I mean, you know it'd be so wonderful if everyone could love each other and there was no begrudgement, but I guess... it's kind of bizarre when you think, I mean you think of a John Lennon song 'Imagine' but in a way it probably would be a bit boring if every country was the same country and there was no France, no Italy, no Spain, because you know it gives a bit of character, but, I don't know if it'd be ideal or I mean- it would be very beautiful if everyone could live together in peace and harmony and you know, just share the love and laughter and... but it's hard to imagine what the world would be like if it were all the same because then there wouldn't be different languages would there?

I don't know, Yeah, there's...every subject, you know is... [Laughs]

**Martin: Come on! Only 47 hours to go!**

Rumple: Oh no! Geez, help! I need help! I need to see a psychologist to tell me who I am, I need professional help, I'm only a fool, don't listen to me. I don't know what's going on. You know, go in, go to church or if you haven't time have a personality test with scientology, they'll tell you what the real deal of, what the universe is... I mean sitting in an office under a fluorescent light, all day, on a busy urban street, I mean, they must know what's going on, I mean... I could believe in nature too... I mean, it's good, and love, I mean I think love is the true meaning of life.

Oh fuck, look at this, Jesus Christ [grabs camera and shoots out window]

fuck, my camera, couldn't get it. Jesus, fuck a duck. That was, that was, if only I could have shown you what I just missed, then you would understand. [laughs]

Ah, crikey! I'm back to square one. I think Martin knows what it all is, what it's all about. I think Martin Ewen is God, I mean, I'm sorry to disappoint everyone. [laughs] [laughs a lot] Yeah.

# FESTIVAL: EDMONTON 2000

Edmonton International Street Theatre Festival is the mother of all Godzilla work-hard, play-hard, feel-good festivals in North America for the simple reason that the whole endeavor is shrouded in a deep respect for the performers and their work.

It's a ten-day festival, now in its 16th year, held mainly in Winston Churchill Square, which, when at its busiest, has 6 circle shows and three or four roving acts all working at once. There are also outreach programs where performers visit the elderly and hospitals, and the obligatory revenue-boosting shopping center appearances.

An army of volunteers are ever-present on the pitches, providing hospitality back in the lounge, cooking, pouring drinks, picking up litter, driving etc. We all stay at the Sheraton and party pretty hard and it's one festival that has the luxury of selecting from some of the best street performers there are, some of whom participate for far less than their usual commercial rate simply because of the society that forms over the 10 days.

Additionally to the outdoor performances, the entire cast of performers are split into two groups who are each given the opportunity to produce a collaborative stage show for one night each on the last weekend of the festival. These are called "Late Night Madness" and some of the work cobbled together over two days' rehearsal is a brilliant testament to the caliber of talent collected.

Worth mentioning also is the stage management that takes place over these two nights. The tireless, professional, yet unpaid

efforts of a small group of people who find props, set up lighting and stage manage on the nights themselves leaves nothing for the performers to do but create comedy and perform. This also extends to the ground management crews whose abilities in crisis aversion and pre-management are legendary while for the most part being invisible.

This year's line-up included acts from all over with a cunning mixture of both the hard-hitting and the whimsical. It rained for a couple of days and the big circle acts waited for the crowds to arrive while the rovers went about their business and it was great to see what, in the absence of the circle acts, takes place all around them in the form of strange characters wandering around engaging individuals and small groups.

Forgive me as I paraphrase talent:

Andrea House-

Two roving characters, the shadow and the wishing well, one cute, the other cute and creepy, can sometimes be heard under her breath muttering "I am not a bunny."

Bill Ferguson-

The stern uncle of veteran street performers. The words taut, rigid and successful are all understatements. It's a toss-up as to which is longer, his show or his hair. Still immensely successful with a show involving juggling found objects and a pie in the face. Also has a unique combative style and brings fathers and sons closer together using only light violence and pastries.

Andy Zap-

From Australia, Andy brought a new show to the festival that was a cabaret hybrid, involving music, dance and juggling. Used to good effect both in the opening night's indoor performance and on the street. One of the heavy sweaters.

Annie Dugan-

Hula hoop goddess and bulldozing sprite, Annie pulled off show after show despite the high levels of competitive volume that surrounded her.

(The only criticism from time to time was that there was sometimes too many performers working on site. Still overall I think it's a balance issue and programming re: volume is becoming more of an issue as everyone amps up simply because they can.)

Checkerboard Guy and Richard Berg-

With a show that's been around the world multiple times and already having appeared at the Edmonton fest more than once, Checkerboard Guy knew that the only way in this year was to come up with an entirely new act. That is what he and Richard Berg did, with consummate ease, performing a King Kong spoof that drew and held large crowds.

Carrot Top /Cindi-Lou /Jacquie Paul /Lucie Brouillard-

I apologize for clumping all the face and body painters together as I know each has their own style. The evidence of their efforts were the multicolored children that added to the carnival atmosphere and, like the rovers, it's all a matter of the smaller things raising the overall energy of the festival and not relying on big shows to pump the audience for their own ends.

Christof-

"Blunt Aussie charm," a multi skilled interactive clown/buffoon, Christof's energy and quicksilver changes of direction make him adaptive and entertaining in any situation presenting itself.

F.M. Railways-

Mariann Sinkovics and Joanna Wright create moving installations of canned pork and fish; there may have been canned beef also but my mind becomes clouded as I was hardly a passive observer at this festival. They would roam the grounds forming an abstract and obscure counterpoint to many of the other self-ex-

planatory acts. It's efforts like this that give this festival its unique richness.

Guo-Qing Li-

40 years playing traditional Chinese music added a further multicultural aspect to the festival. Unassuming and able to work under all the conditions the festival presented. The only challenge to his formidable composure came on the multiple occasions where his chair would get stolen between sets.

Heather D. Swain-

A multi-character rover, Heather strode purposefully hither and thither and was one of the more vocally interactive performers, contributing significantly to the background roaming atmosphere that shone at this particular festival.

Guillermo Serrano-

A brilliant marionettist, he ignored his doctor's orders to not participate in the festival. An unfortunate side effect of using your fingers and limbs with precision over long periods of time is a kind of repetitive strain condition where joints become painful and inflamed. After a couple of days Guillermo had to stop, just too painful. It's a credit to both him and the pull of this festival that he gave all he could for as long as he could and the performers all wish him a speedy and full recovery.

Lynette Maurice-

Lynette has been a longtime Board member of the fest, past President, and is the prop mistress par excellence. She devised, found, or invented most of the props used in the Late Nights, and is a formidable clown in her own right. Lynette was in charge of the children's area, which was a zone in which children tried stilts, bounced on inflatables, got painted up and participated in workshops on circus/clowning skills, in conjunction with Michael Charrois as well as a host of other activities designed to soak up the

sugar their parents had inadvertently overdosed them with. It was always a hive of energy, and popular.

Gary Palmer-

A soft-spoken Irishman resident in Los Angeles, his chalk art spoke for him.

Deep in texture and subtext, his work is beautiful, serene and striking with his chosen medium poetic in its impermanence. Non-substantial, much like all street theatre.

Humans Against Gravity-

Peter Boulanger, Ninon Parent, Darren Adams and Robyn Fox started the festival with their act of high level gymnastics, teeter-board, movement and balance. Unfortunately, early in the festival Robyn Fox injured her leg in performance and then had the added misfortune of having her foot gnawed off by a passing squirrel. Such are the challenges of the modern street gymnast. Still, the battle against gravity continued, and the humans put on large show after large show with an adapted format, while Robyn spent the rest of the festival being pushed 'round in a wheelbarrow collecting charity.

Queen Elizabeth (Carolyn Sadowska)-

What impeccable class, what pristine grace, how uncommon. The Queen shone as only royalty can, accompanied by her mono-dimensional Corgies; she shared elevators, pickup trucks, opening ceremonies and various other events with us, the common people. And we became better people for it, if only as a byproduct of the mirth that flowed effortlessly in her presence. (Can you tell I'm greasing for a knighthood?)

Impromaniacs-

Dave and Rick are grown men with families and responsibilities, yet have constructed careers out of remaining highly articulate 8-year-olds. They are veterans of improvisation and produced

circle shows and roved in unison throughout the festival as well as directing the first Late Night Madness show.

Julie Donahue-

An interactive rover, Julie performed as 'Game show Gertie,' a character addicted to games of chance and arcane knowledge. She helped, along with the other rovers, to keep the festival percolating while the larger acts were unable to work due to rain and it was characters like herself who constantly provided the public with interaction and entertainment throughout the festival

John Higby, The Yo Yo Guy-

Poe-faced yo-yo poetry with just a hint of manic disorder. John Higby combines high skill with high energy performance to consistently produce shows of any length that all have in common the audience being picked up, swept along and deposited gently at the other end.

Jason Webley-

A voice far older than his years and lyrics ranging from deep pathos to dark humor. Quietly spoken but gravelly harsh and guttural while performing, his street music is unashamedly uncompromising. He wrings what he needs from his accordion and invites his audiences to not so much sing but grunt and bellow along.

Lee Zimmerman-

Humble, yet deeply sexual, Lee Zimmerman is what can only be called borderline casual. His act consists of dangling inorganic matter from strings attached to what look like extremely painful marital aids that he wraps his hands around while waving his arms about to simulate a rock and roll lifestyle. Then he goes back to his real one.

Martin Ewen/Lurk-

A viler practitioner of mock buffoonery I have yet to have the displeasure to see. His vain efforts to disguise his transparent vacu-

ousness with attempts at being vague took what small vestige of dignity was left to him as a professional pantomime.

Mark Segal-

A diminutive Scot with a large show full of danger, risk, balance and an array of calculated stupidity, Mark has evolved his show over the past years to the point now where he can put himself in any situation and create a success of it. This season seems to be the celebration of his talent that he has been working towards the last few years and his enthusiasm was apparent as he bounded out in all weathers to take advantage of the milling crowds.

The Big Mammoth show-

Dave Lawrence and Ken Gardner are Gorg and Nog and are improvisational Neanderthals who, with clubs and wearing furs, create a show from the confusion of being thrust into the 21st century. They would come up with new material regularly and while their show was a work in progress, the audiences had no reason to suspect it wasn't a polished, rehearsed show.

Mehndi Magic-

Sabrina Samuel provided another cultural layer to the festival by providing an invitation to the public to become canvases for the ancient tradition of Mehndi body painting, traditionally used to adorn East Indian brides.

Michael Charrois-

A strange deadpan clown, his twisted interpretation of cause and effect shone in the moments where he tethered children to himself while he wore roller-skates and dangled folded money on a stick in front of them thus giving himself a means of propulsion around the site.

Mike Battie-

A tight circle show containing all the elements: juggling, unicycle and patter.

It was easy to see he had a successful background in both street and corporate theatre. We can't all be unsuccessful romantic masochists.

#### Mood Swings-

Joani Bye and Linda Kidder are a duo with a mass of experience both as session vocalists and in their own right as performers; they dubbed themselves the wandering menstruals and worked well at the opening ceremony and other indoor venues but found the outdoor environment quite difficult, as they work best with a certain degree of preset focus. Creating this in an outdoor setting surrounded by distraction and volume bleeding from adjacent shows proved difficult as the street environment was entirely new for them. They would have learnt lots in a short period but I don't think it was the most fun they've ever had.

#### Patti Stiles-

A bearded old fisherman, Patti roved the site displaying her catch and improvising with the public. She's a respected and talented improviser and proved her worth as well as being the only character who had a raincoat built into her character so surviving the rain that fell heavily over a couple of days.

#### Ron Pearson-

A warm, comfy street magic show, Ron has heaps of experience and constructs a well-paced entertaining show. I don't forgive thumb-tips easily but forgive his, which is a measure of his ability to engage even sad old crusty cynics like myself.

#### Sirena/ Ghostwriter Theatre-

A tent with a barker outside touting the wonders within, this show was a tribute to the carnival sideshow, featuring an illusion of Sirena the living mermaid. It preyed on people's curiosity and received a steady stream of patrons.

### Sharon Mahoney-

Sharon provided lots of conversations amongst various people as to whether shaking your money-maker in the faces of men was exploitive or post-feminist. Still, at the end of the day people were entertained, donations flowed and the boob-tube held up under the strain.

### Scared Weird Little Guys-

Two rocker blokes so talented they should be compost. Not content with the outer fringes of society, they found each other. A seamless comic musical review, the CD I still use to make me smile on cue. Lines like "Come to Australia....You might accidentally get killed," and long-winded, quick-witted absurdity concerning inflammable koalas, the flag and womball. Their show was a guaranteed laughfest and their audiences were treated to new material that had yet to be released; however they just so happened to have more than a few prerelease CDs which I'm sure they sold out of.

### Special Blend-

Or "Special Bend." Eugene and Jessica disappear into their movement pieces which are short and extreme. Awesome flexibility is their foundation but the pieces themselves are so much more than that, movement metaphors form in the audience's heads as they move together and work apart with what amounts to an extremely disciplined simplicity.

### Stickleback Plasticus-

Peewee and Em deftly use ironic manic enthusiasm as a comic device and are one of the few acts that are funny every time you watch them. (Bear in mind that as performers we get to watch -if we want to- acts as many times as we wish, and that over time, very few acts cannot be digested as formula.) Formula aside, no one deals with energy levels like Stickleback. The Don Kings of ballroom dancing.

Stephen Dubetz-

A world traveling balloon artist based in Edmonton, Steven provided mementos for hundreds, if not thousands of people throughout the festival, and also created an unshakable horny balloon man that provided one of the most successful running gags of one of the Late Night Madnesses.

Tesseract-

Two members of Humans Against Gravity doubled their output and worked as a duo, producing a movement piece on a giant sparse spiky thing that they climbed on and moved via momentum. The spiky thing is itself a Tesseract. My dictionary was no help but apparently it's a representation of the axis  $x$ - $y$ - $z$  from 3 dimensional graphs. It's difficult to infuse grace into something only capable of staggering but they succeeded.

Wendy Vousden-

Sister Wendy is a roving nun, sort of like a creepy clown but with all the archetypical subtextual baggage of nundom you can't help but want to trust her, she evokes faith while creating comedy from the fact that you cannot really tell how eccentric a nun has to get before you know it's a performance. She wandered the main venue as well as shopping centers and a harrowing walkabout in the terminal ward of the hospital.

Zandra Bell-

Well-known in Canada for researching environments for site-specific roving performances and creating hilarious characters, Zandra roved as Shirley Best, the high priestess of polyester. A bulletproof character who barreled round the site ricocheting verbally off gaggles of public, she proved her reputation well-founded. Also roved as Estelle, the Goddess of Grooming, providing free fashion advice and coloured hair mascara.

John Ulyatt-

An accomplished Canadian stage actor, John Ulyatt successfully stretched his comfort zone by donning the guise of a Dung-Beetle and rolling a ball on which people wrote the figurative shit in their lives. When it rained all night and day it was John who celebrated his buggy-ness by running, jumping and cheerfully wallowing in every sodden puddle on site. A barren pitch with a madman gleefully sliding and flapping from puddle to puddle was one of my personal highlights.

Thank-you Tezuka-

Kan Tazuka is a Japanese modern pantomime who flew at his own expense to this festival for no other reason than its reputation and the opportunity to perform, proving that you can survive as an extremely strange individual in Japan just as long as you remain polite. He was out there with an Oriental punctuality, popping his elbows in and out of joint and mincing about wearing a gold wig and fruit skin as dentures.

## LATE NIGHT MADNESS

This is one of the highlights of the festival and seems to be being incorporated into more festivals in Canada as its popularity with performers and public grows. Essentially a free-for-all with a couple of days' notice, a designated director or directors and a stage provided for a late night group performance containing improvised pieces with people who haven't worked together before or specific pieces people bring to the program that may not be suitable for the daytime family audiences.

There were two different nights in Edmonton, each with different direction and casts and both nights highlighted the wealth of talent for stagework otherwise untapped. The audiences paid \$10 and certainly laughed harder than they had probably since the year before. The stage management was excellent and props were found as needed by volunteers.

I could see this being the potential start of a traveling stage piece. The quality of material would survive repetition and was stronger than, say, University revue pieces I've seen in the past, that worked in part because of sympathetic and bipartisan audiences. A lot of this stuff stood on its own and audience and performers alike were suitably proud of the madness.

The Directing of the festival changed hands this year from Dick Finkle to Shelley Switzer, who cast and produced and oversaw and ran the whole thing. As administrators go, Shelley runs the festival like she's driving a big Mack down the highway with the breeze blowing through the cab and her arm slung casually out the window. Which is a rare and exceptional thing given the potential stress there is to surf with something this big with its own momentum.

That's all I have to say and please remember these opinions are my own and I have had more than my share of head injuries.

# FESTIVAL: NELSON

Nelson is a small town next to a lake, deep in the mountains, about 12 hours' drive in a mini-van from Edmonton, Alberta.

As if you don't know your fellow performers well enough, you get to find out what only half a day in close confinement will allow people to divulge. Who amongst us is a devout nudest, who of us knows the heights of every major hillock in Canada, at what point repetition becomes potentially homicidal, all the important stuff.

You arrive three days before the festival and get to enjoy all Nelson has to offer: horse riding, renting boats on the lake, the nearby hot springs, mountain biking, trekking or just hanging out unwinding after one festival and preparing for the energy of the next. It's rejuvenating and all thanks go to the festival administration who generously provide it.

It was hot, getting up to 39 degrees (Celsius) during the daytime. And our hotel, which was conveniently central and rustically historical and in every other way commendable, was not air conditioned and as we were all mainly on the third floor where the hot air rose to, it was very hot at night.

How hot was it?

It was so hot staff used sleeping guests as plate-warmers.

It was so hot that Australian Aboriginals died bewildered in the hallways.

It was so hot that the entire surface of your body became incontinent as you slept and you woke feeling like a jaded prune soaking in a pool of cheap white wine.

Gosh it was hot.

Most of us were just from the Edmonton Festival with the exception of Alex Elixir, who is a veteran of the Canadian circuit with a juggling and balance, uncroppable, hour-long show, and an American clown called OJ who is the most amazing physical comedian I have ever seen. He has a fashion cop roving character and a host of set physical and character pieces.

Locally there were also contributions from musical acts of various dimensions and the Nelson skip-rope team, who were this particular year's world champions.

Also there, (as he had been in Edmonton, sort of unofficially), was Justin Case. Justin is a strange man from a small village near La Chaux de Fonds in France. His show has featured in all the major festivals from Japan, NZ, Europe and North America as well as circuses and stages worldwide and yet his equipment falls apart on him show after show and somehow he keeps muddling through. I think perhaps with a translator and a good bike mechanic he could yet salvage what's left of his career. He does ride the smallest bike known to man and improvises with what's left of the bike he rode in on sufficient to still be one of the more popular acts on the circuit.

Day One: Woke up in a pool of my own sweat about 6:30 and stumbled downstairs in search of some sort of heat relief. The road outside was cool but uncomfortable and the traffic downright uncharitable. So I paced about muttering obscenities, flowers wilted, trees blanched.

At seven, the greenroom was opened, so I grabbed my pillow and burrowed into the stacked furniture in the corner where I slept amongst chairlegs 'til the performers meeting, where everyone got to intro or re-introduce themselves. ("Hello, my name's Martin and I'm a sleep deprived wolverine. Please don't look at me or I'll disembowel myself and flay you to death with my intestines.")

The festival takes place on the closed-off main street and had been extended a block from the year before. There were four main intersection pitches and a number of smaller improvisational pitches where people either settled in or rotated. Add to this a gen-

erous supply of rovers and the atmosphere was rich and playful and the locals wandered about very pleased that someplace this small and out of the way could produce an international festival.

There were two water misting stations, where, if you felt you were going to black out from the heat, you could position yourself for relief. But even so, a couple of performers in the high-energy bracket did get dizzy and have to go back to the green room to recover. The skipping team knocked themselves out.

Days One to Three carried on much the same with a slight drop in temperature on the last day.

There were three night-time shows; the first, a ticketed meal and entertainment night for sponsors and interested parties.

Stickleback Plasticus faced a dilemma of having a Canadian Mountie wearing a Kilt as a volunteer and not knowing if he was wearing anything underneath it (they needed to as he had to prove his buttock clenching prowess later); Emma gracefully prat-fell and had a quick squiz up his dress and I don't think he even realised. OJ also did a brilliant high energy dorky character piece.

The second night was a local talent night held at an outdoor stage on the street. Local talent being a little thin on the night, OJ stepped in and did a piece as well as Tupahn and Andrea House also obliging with some solo and duet songs.

The third night-time show was the Late Night Madness. Highlights included Mark Segal somehow deliberately wetting himself onstage as a schoolboy character, Pee Wee slipping and falling in it the next act, a monologue by Wendy Vousden, another piece by OJ, Special Blend, a hastily rehearsed group chair balance piece, and the night was brought to a close by marshmallows being driven into the crowd with golf clubs.

The organisation that made it all possible did a great job and did all they could to make the experience a welcoming one for the performers. An indication of the unpaid efforts people went to was that two drivers brought vans to pick up the Edmonton performers: drove 12 hours to pick us up and then drove 12 hours back, and then did the same in reverse at the end of the festival. On behalf

of the performers I'd like to thank all the locals who gave of their time.

Brooke Leatherman was the director of the festival. And if Shelley (Switzer, of the Edmonton Fest) is a casual truck driver in her onsite approach then Brooke would have to be an outwardly calm while inwardly frazzled Raccoon who still manages to get his extended family unscathed across the highway.

# SHORT INTERVIEW

A Student Journalist Engages The Author

**Q: To you, what makes a great clown performance - if you were in the audience. what are 3 or 4 things that must be present for you to rate a clown performance "great"?**

A: These are all personal answers, I'm just speaking for myself obviously.

I look beyond the physical skill-set and watch for 'risk and redemption' because that to me illustrates the commitment the performer has to exploring the dynamic of clown or any performance.

Risk and redemption is the conscious puncturing of the audiences faith in you, it raises the dramatic tension not so much in the performance but the room or venue itself. Then the performer takes that and with mastery relieves that tension and redeems him/herself and in so doing further cements the trust the audience has. Each time you do this you push the perimeter of what the audience will accept further out. It becomes harder to do consecutively because of this and it is my personal litmus applied to clown.

Dirty Fred is a master at this, Leo Bassi is a master at this, Tony Livingstone, Bobarino Gravitini, Peter Post, also employ this gambit woven into their shows.

I'd be looking at character also, empathy. Do I have any. Is the clown solid or brittle, is it skills-based, in which case it's just cabaret using the clown form and I'm not so interested because while I admire

physical skills and use some myself, clown to me is about empathy more than admiration.

Having been street-based for a large portion of my profession I look too at the interaction between performer and audience. If it is a stage piece without interaction I look for the clown's pacing to see if it's rote or flexible, I look for variations.

That's three things.

Mostly I'm looking at the quality of the relationship the clown has.

**Q: When you walk off stage after a show and it was the most incredible show you've ever done, what four things did YOU accomplish?**

A: I made people cry with laughter, (passive aggression at its finest), I felt a lot of love. I explored a structure of my own making to create laughter and celebration out of passing foot-traffic, I accomplish pride. I conveyed my worth to strangers who reinforce it by donating towards my work. I accomplish the means to carry on.

**Q: Does it make a more impactful show if you can take the audience through a range of emotions ?**

A: Which is tastier, a peanut or a 12-course meal?

**Q: What led you to clowning? When did you first know you wanted to be a clown?**

A: Philosophically I was drawn to both mime and clown in my teens as I tried to work out as you do at that age, what contained within my culture was real and what was simply fluff reinforced by society's collective hallucination of itself. I didn't trust language itself, too slippery, I can wrangle words purty good but I was more interested in the quality of silent communication. I thought it had the potential to be both pan-cultural and perhaps if I were lucky, profound. I saw that clowns are allowed to take liberties, they are allowed that role as long as they can handle and master the situations they create. I found that very seductive as I'm playful and wanted to be so on my own terms.

**Q: Do you wake up as a clown?**

A: Do I exist without an audience? yes.

**Q: How has clowning changed you, personally?**

A: As a male I'm much better at makeup than most.

I have a lexicon that includes status awareness, body language, tone, pacing and subtext. I perceive tension because it's my job to create it in small part and as such I am sensitive to it, it's a factor in comic timing. These things all bleed across.

**Q: Describe how you interact with the audience.**

A: I pretend I can barely tolerate them, they see through it but it's funny.

I submit passing pedestrians to indignities and my audience watches and laughs. Or I do a stage piece which is usually more skills-focused with some emotional attachment. Or I do some conceptual piece of whimsy and the audience interact with their own curiosity more than anything.

**Q: Is it necessary to create anarchy? Can you do a show that is safe and nice?**

A: That's a very polar question. One thing to bear in mind is that to a real degree you are a technician, another thing to bear in mind is that the collective reality of a show is firmly rooted in the minds of your audience. You can make them hear words articulated by a squeaky doll simply by mouthing those words as you make the sound. Sounds incredible, but I watched Hoopal do this night after night and it was eye-opening. I too heard the words in my head that did not exist.

Anyway, anarchy, maybe, more likely moments between studied impulses that seem like anarchy to an audience. Anarchy's a tricky concept; socially it's always been vague and in absolute terms the Heisenberg uncertainty principle suggests that Anarchy is a subatomic constant.

I have nothing against safe nice shows.

**Q: What is the funniest thing that ever happened on stage?**

A: I've had a few things that could go here but the best ones are all me suffering, dancing into an overhead fan in Edinburgh, vomiting on a Japanese audience.

The funniest things in the show to me are those moments where someone shucks off their anxiety and plays in some way with me and the audience roars its approval.

I could list moment after moment. I won't, though, because I can't afford the time right now.

**Q: How do you filter your impulses when you're performing or interacting with the audience?**

A: You kind of evolve behavioural templates, the borders of which have been defined by past experience.

I filter my impulses determined by my perception of where the audience are in their relationship with me, am I still flirting with their approval? Or am I at the next stage once I've seduced them, of perhaps taking them somewhere new.

**Q: Who are some of your idols? And why?**

A: Bassi, Grock, Butterflyman, Dirty Fred, there's lots of others I draw from but I tend not to idolise ( it can be really painful when you divorce).

**Q: What reaction do you get when you tell someone you're a clown?**

A: I tend to say I'm an adhesive chemist, it's just easier.

**Q: What do you do, on stage, that makes you a great clown?**

A: I own the fact that I inhabit this role naturally.

**Q: What rules do you have about interacting with the audience, touching the audience?**

A: I don't have an overt sexual aspect, I can be excessively romantic but I never express any libido of my own. I will mimic a dog and hump a lamppost like someone's leg but that's the dog's libido, not mine.

**Q: Have you encountered clown fear? How do you deal with it?**

A: I try and amplify it for the amusement of others; these people cannot be cured, they can still, however, be useful in the production of comedy.

**Q: Is connecting with the audience the most important thing you are trying to do?**

A: I have to connect with them so that they can connect with each other and become one temporary collective celebratory animal.

You know that scene where the dad's laughing his head off but still remembers to glance across at the family and mum and the usually surly teen and the two younger kids are laughing, as are everyone around you.

That moment of freedom for the dad and everyone as they find themselves unexpectedly celebrating in a crowd or audience.

That's the most important thing I am trying to do.

**Q: Is there a delicate balance between brave and daring and not offending the audience to the point of alienation?**

A: See answer one, "Risk and redemption"

**Q: Touching moments - what have people said to you after a show?**

A: "I haven't been going out because I've been very depressed but I dragged myself out today to join the world and I saw you and watched you and you made me laugh. Thank you very very much for showing me I still can."

## PERFORMANCE CAFE

A neighbour's dog came in today, a young white pitbull, all was well, they're cheerful critters. It smelt two other dogs on my jeans for a while and then went and pissed on a rug.

Which reminded me of a time in which a dog's piss was such eloquent punctuation.

A small Auckland live music cafe/bar, a performance cafe: the owner Andy was tacking new carpet on the stage and I was cleaning up. The night before a local band had mis-arranged their sound and blown up the house PA on the first note of their first song, then followed up by stealing a couple of bottles of spirits from the back of the bar on their way out.

Here they came the afternoon after, sheepish and with their own dog on a string, carrying replacement alcohol. I thought they might have brought the dog to soften the situation. These guys, even the hyperactive drummer/martial artist, knew Andy, a small man with wrists smaller than my own, could throw these guys round like rag-dolls if he so wished. Andy had lived in a village for a couple of years in indonesia and trained under some dude after getting out of the army. He was a powerful little guy. But also he had unfathomable patience at times; his priorities were unusual. These returning band members offering replacement bottles of vodka and whisky were being true to themselves in at least trying to make certain amends so Andy didn't even bother getting up off his knees from his carpet tacking, he grumbled slightly, they put

the bottles on the bar and made for the door and milled, waiting to see to what degree everything was cool.

They had wrecked a couple of thousand dollars worth of sound equipment but replaced the alcohol they'd stolen, we good?

It appeared it was, a sense of begrudging fondness hung there in the air and it was a beautiful thing and then their dog pissed on the new carpet Andy was tacking. The dog had come up, nuzzled Andy, walked a couple of feet away, then looked at him while pissing on the carpet.

I was the only one laughing.

The band broke for the door as Andy began screaming.

# PERSPECTIVES

ROBERT NELSON / BUTTERFLYMAN  
MARTIN EWEN / LURK

1. Props
2. Volunteers
3. Hecklers
4. Bailing
5. Cops
6. Success

## TWO PERSPECTIVES: PROPS

### **Robert Nelson / Butterflyman**

From flying pigs to frying pans, everything can be used as a prop. Imagine anything and everything used in unimaginable ways and there you have it... it's a prop.

The catalyst, transforming these objects seemingly only the performers intent. The object, any object, becomes useful in perhaps a totally different way from the way it was originally intended.

My God!, I saw a guy use a bag, a small paper bag, fergawd-sakes, not only a prop but also as a glimpse into the psyche of his soul. As a prop, he initially used the bag to cover the wine bottle filled with water he used to hydrate himself during the show.

The bag became his prop when he used it to not only imply he was a wino but also when, after using it to “hat” the crowd, he ceremoniously stuffed it down the front of his pants simulating a rather large penis.

The kicker for me, really, was that the final 20 minutes he did after stuffing his pants he did altruistically, for his audience only asking nothing in return. That told me more about him as a person than anything else. But I digress.

Props can handicap you for sure. Anyone packing their six footer-plus unicycle for a plane trip knows exactly what I mean, but that’s not the real handicap I’m talking about. I’m talking about how a physical object, no matter how creatively it is used, is no match for using words alone to stimulate an audience’s imagination.

It is obvious a prop forces you to focus on it rather than on anything else and your creativity is thereby limited to its physical presence. But in limiting your freedom, it does have the distinct advantage of focusing the audience’s attention, particularly if it is sparkly and shiny, ask any Indian.

Hey, I know that was rude but it could’ve been worse. I could’ve said, “ask any black guy.” I didn’t say that because, well, that shit’ll get your ass kicked.

Anyway, all I really have to say, and I’m saying this as a prop comic myself, is that whatever you use as a prop do it with integrity. Use it to say something about yourself even if it’s just “I’m funny.”

Masturbatory fire twirling and technical ‘whatever’ when used “just for show” is boring to me. I like it when performers use a prop (even if it’s another person) to make a point or say something, hopefully something more than just “look at me, look at me.” That’s all I’m saying; is that too much to ask?

OK, never mind, go blow a six-foot flame out of your ass on a 20 ft. unicycle. Go ahead and throw a bunch of sparkly shit in the air and catch it between your legs. Or, dare I say it, go ahead and stretch a wire between two tall buildings and walk across it with a pole. Because, if that’s all you do, then your effect on your crowd

will be amazement only and they'll remember you until they get to the parking lot.

If, however, that flame, wire or sparkly shit is used in a way that says something about YOU, then your audience will remember you forever.

### **Martin Ewen / Lurk**

Props are objects you use, you lay your hands on them or refer to them and they become props, you stop using them and they turn into costume or backdrop or nothing at all. My definition is contentious, get yourself a sub-atomic microscope and go looking for any protons of 'I give a fuck'.

Questions remain, for example, are my stilts costume, or a prop?

A red nose is costume not a prop, unless you actively use it, and Charlie Barnett's money-padded groin is costume that used to be a prop. If he touches it or uses it, it's still a prop; if he doesn't, it's costume.

Volunteers are props, that plane passing overhead is a prop, anything at all you use during your show is a prop.

Some performers go light and some go heavy on props. Anthony Livingstone and Rob Torres are at one end, able to turn up with a small case and from it pull small objects that are dense in theatricality, multi-purpose improvisational objects that help amplify their characters.

That's what a prop's purpose is, to amplify your character, to give you the opportunity to show your commitment to the pursuit of some relationship either with yourself or the audience.

On the other end of the prop scale are the pole-merchants and apparatus junkies.

I use stilts and makeup so I fall into this category. I know why I do it, because it separates me from the world and my show is about building a bridge back.

I can only guess why others do it but the TMO principle, (Tall Metal Object), is so self-evidently cash rich that if liquidity is your

goal, you'd have to be sub-intelligent to pass it up as a means to your end. Even so, I've seen some performers cashing in on the TMO who are dumber than plankton and it still works.

Alakazam is the crown prince of the TMO, deservedly so. He already had skills and personality, (I remember seeing him work in Sydney when he was still earthbound), but he showed what a well-chosen prop could do as an amplifier when he suddenly morphed, and in earnings, audience satisfaction and popularity, literally dwarfed us all. Unlike myself, Al has never had a bad word to say about anyone. In fact, it's too humbling to speak of him so I'll move on.

Sometimes your relationship with your props can be used as a metaphor for your relationship with your audience. Peter Post is a master at this. He fails and fails and fails. He never gives up, he tries to but his suicide attempt itself fails. His props are his enemy and his subtextual cunning is that his despair makes his audience his friend.

One of my props is a hand-held mirror. I use it to amplify the conceit I have for my character and the disdain I have for my audience. Another is a single juggling ball which I make a big deal about before simply passing from one hand to another. Its purpose is identical with that of the mirror.

Each prop is a means to the end of defining your character and your relationship with the audience which is why I always thought technically brilliant jugglers might as well just use a blackboard and chalk and scribble advanced equations as an alternative to using objects to do the same thing.

I use props as bridges. I establish relationships with them, then subject audiences to that relationship.

## TWO PERSPECTIVES: VOLUNTEERS

### **Robert Nelson / Butterflyman**

“Pick me! Pick me!” said the performer as he raised the hand of a rather nondescript member of the audience. I laughed a little and so did the rest of the crowd. It was the first time I saw anyone select a volunteer that way. Maybe I laughed a little less because I saw a little more.

Picking a volunteer can be risky business for sure. You just never know 100% of the time but a seasoned performer knows what to watch out for. Never, I repeat never, use someone who appears too eager. It usually means they have their own agenda and more often than not, they aren’t funny. That and anyone with dreadlocks, don’t ask me why.

Someone too shy or reluctant is just as much of a problem. If you get that vibe, pick someone else and quick... because it can be a real bummer if your choice adamantly refuses to participate. It lets the air out of your comedic balloon pretty quickly and usually has a viral effect on the next selectee.

You might wonder why volunteers have such power over your act and the answer is simple.

A volunteer, once engaged, becomes the representative of every person in your crowd. Whether they consciously realize it or not, every member of the audience sees themselves up there and well, if your volunteer sucks... ‘nuff said.

Even more important than picking a volunteer is how you USE a volunteer. Watching and listening is an absolute MUST. Many performers mistakenly ignore their volunteer and use them as they would any inanimate prop. Ignoring your volunteer is the same as ignoring your crowd and can have demoralizing results across the board.

Besides, you never know. I mean, you just never know. Some people just have IT. They have that indefinable quality that just comes alive when in front of a crowd. Where most people freeze, they know exactly what to do, and like a great performer, play their role perfectly. I used a cop once who should have had his own sitcom. You really don't want to miss out on things like that, you really don't, so you must LISTEN. There's gold in them thar hills.

Always make eye contact with your volunteer before during and after you use or "abuse" them. Either way you want them to feel like the star they are. The way they feel about being up there is the way everyone will feel and hopefully part of their joy will be generosity. I got five bucks from a guy in a wheelchair once who pulled a knife on me during the act. To this day he's the best volunteer I've ever had.

Sometimes you just aren't lucky and the volunteer is an absolute jerk or worse, a jerk that thinks he or she is "entertaining." Good gawd, I wanted to kill this one blonde I once used, I should have known better. The line, "No, no, it's MY fault... I picked her!" still resonates in my head.

So, yeah, it's a roll of the dice but you can load them, so the odds are in your favor. Just remember that in choosing a volunteer, you let your instincts be your guide, but when using them, then your means to an end is clever setups and fail-safe jokes. Paying attention pays off.

And last time I checked, people will pay for a happy ending.

### **Martin Ewen / Lurk**

Volunteers are the swapped spit in the sloppy French kiss that is a street show.

I have a form of psychic herpes so I tend to keep my distance. I don't kiss my audience, my audience exists to watch me sodomize random passers-by. The tighter they are the funnier it is.

(Ha, I'm so full of shit.)

Volunteers denote the level of trust your audience is prepared to have for you. They are your audience's ambassadors sent out into a strange land in the hope the natives are friendly. They are brave folk prepared to take a risk and should be afforded every respect for this.

That's not to say you can't play with them however you want.

Picking your volunteers is an art in itself. There's a skill in picking people best suited for your needs that is part intuition, part experience and part guesswork.

Like the concept of props, there's the potential of amplification at stake. You want someone who has some energy. Sometimes you want a serene type who will survive what you're about to subject them to. Other situations may require individuals whose enthusiasm and ability to take direction makes them OK to take the ball and run with it improvisationally. The risk with seeking live-wires is that some simply have no sense of place. They are unschooled in dealing with the amount of attention you provide them; they become unmanageably excited.

Whatever they are, it's you that got them up there and it's your job to keep them safe, they represent the audience's trust in you so you can't abuse them with anything in your heart but affection if you want to get rid of them. They lend you validity.

Some quick 'Don'ts' and 'Nevers'

\*Don't pick the bouncing-out-of-their-skin person.

\*Don't be a sleezebucket with pretty girls- it just makes everyone uncomfortable, you stupid horny loser.

\*Never make them less than they were before you called them up.

\*It helps to make some form of physical contact initially. It's calming in a primate way.

\*Don't think that you are better than them, you can act like that, but never think it.

Whether guys or girls, if they are in a group of three:

\*Never pick the omega (lowest status), they have nothing to lose and everything to gain by sabotage.

\* Always give them some chance to play, even if it's just you setting them up with an easy comeback.

\*Always thank them afterwards and give the audience that opportunity, too.

Volunteers carry with them a degree of risk; however, the rewards when they supply the return can be awesome. The right volunteer can carry a show, give you impulse after impulse to work with and show both to you and the audience the very point you are trying to broadcast. That having fun sometimes just means trusting yourself. If your volunteer is given the chance to eclipse you in playfulness, let them take it, be amazed. The audience may learn to love you, but they automatically love the volunteer.

The more fun your volunteer has, the bigger your hat. Just don't get too cynical. I know it's hard, but just try OK?

## TWO PERSPECTIVES: HECKLERS

### **Robert Nelson / Butterfly Man**

Friend or foe; a heckler can be either one. How you deal with a heckler being the determining factor. Yes, even an abusive drunk can become an asset to your show... all I had to do was drop my pants and sing Jambalaya with a wino in Halifax once; we killed 'em.

The most difficult situation for me was getting heckled too early before I established my character and got the audience on my side. Actually, that wasn't much of a problem either probably because I was always looking for trouble and more often than not, I found it.

Something about me just pisses people off. Not a great thing when you're trying to win over a crowd. Looking like a bald Jiminy Cricket with two insects stuck to his skull does have its disadvantages. But look at it like I do, use your imagination and never look in a mirror. In my mind I'm a young Jack Nicholson who's a great fuckin' juggler.

Hecklers surrounded me during my very first street shows in New Orleans and in some ways they became my security blanket for an otherwise rather banal juggling act. They breathed life into my show and made me who I am... the king of dicks (some say).

I never knew why I was so good with hecklers but it was probably because I like them so much. I treated them mercilessly; like I would my best friend... maybe that's why I spend so much time alone these days. Aw, it's probably because I live so far away... yeah, that's gotta be it.

Hey, like ANY volunteer, the secret to turning it all around with a heckler is to LISTEN TO WHAT THEY SAY. If a performer can USE whatever the heckler says... well he, more often than not, turns that potential tragedy into comedy and, unless I'm mistaken, that's what Clowns are supposed to DO, right?

Gazzo and I went head-to-head once in '88 and his line "The best part of you went down yer fatha's leg!" was countered with my "At least I got a father and not 100 suspects." Gazzo was left drooling and I'm not saying there is any connection here but he had a stroke exactly 7 years later.

Yes, I would've been nothing without hecklers. Think Rumpel without his nose, think Martin without his wit, think Gazzo without his balls... wait, strike that last one, too easy.

The only danger, and if you are savvy, you can use that, is when facing your possible death. I picked on four badass guys- biker guys- one night and went though the first two before I looked at the third. The third had an American Indian looking head whose face looked like an LA freeway interchange of wrinkles and scars. I saw his alpha-plus personality and with simply a squeaky "OK!" went on to the fourth guy instead. It worked; my proof lies in the fact that I'm still alive today.

There are a plethora of heckler anecdotes that swirl in my brain when I think about this topic. Someday, remind me to tell you about the guy who heckled me in Dundalk and the three days that followed. I still get cards from his girlfriend. Or, better yet, listen to others make up their own bullshit tales about me; even I

don't believe I did some of that shit. Of course, I did do a lot of drugs in the early '80's and that's all kinda a blur... so.

I wrote a story once about being heckled by 40+ stand-up comics. It was the ultimate test for me and I passed with flying butterflies... in fact, the lines delivered back and forth that day were so memorable they could be put in a book.

Oh wait, I did that once. I wonder what happened to that.

It must be around here... somewhere.

### **Martin Ewen / Lurk**

Hecklers.

I don't speak while performing so hecklers can never usually get the better of me although one time in Perth some smart-ass kid with a couple of friends passed by and smirked and out of the corner of his mouth said, "Dick on a stick." and they fell over laughing and it hurt my feelings and I wanted to torture him to death over weeks.

'Cos I'm very sensitive like that. That was over a decade ago. NEVER FORGET!

If you talk in your show I guess it's a live by the sword, die by the sword kinda thing. The only wisdom I have if your show is aggressive is that you will notice that the guy who mouths off at you is never the leader. The leader is happy where he is. It's always the omega or someone in the lower half of the pecking order. By mouthing off they want to elevate their position and cutting them a new a-hole simply cements their position. You pick on the alpha and you are in for a disproportionate response. He or she will defend their status to the death. I'm speaking of passing people rather than heckles coming from a fixed audience. A fixed audience is your omega and you are alpha so it's you who have to defend to the death in that situation.

Because I don't talk, I have the advantage in that I can be more obscene and graphic in response to any language or comment made. If they are teenage, I mime popping pimples, I pull my

pants out and look down then weep. A roll of the eyes and a couple of wrist flicks proclaims 'wanker' in any language. I then move on, if required, to illustrating the tiny size of my heckler's penis as compared to the size of his mouth. Most people realise they simply cannot win at this point.

David Holder and I along with Chris and Peter from Hoopal held an impromptu heckling workshop while hanging out in Lyttelton during the Christchurch Buskers fest one year.

Here's the winning heckler response. I'll leave you guessing whose it was.

"No, no leave him, he's got a right to be angry.

You see, earlier today I was actually at his mother's place, yeah that's right, I was at his mum's place and I was pissing on her face, [gasp] Oh come on, you people, let me explain. I wasn't actually pissing on her face, no I was just visiting and went to the toilet and she had all these magazines in the bathroom next to the toilet, and the top one was 'The Face,' it's a British magazine, you might know it. And anyway it's embarrassing but I kinda sprayed a little and it hit her magazines there by the toilet and the top one was 'The Face'.

That's all, I mean I wasn't actually pissing on her face.

[perfect pause, then offhand..]

No, no, she was tied up in the bedroom covered in dogshit."

Beat that!

## TWO PERSPECTIVES: BAILING

### **Robert Nelson / Butterflyman**

To bail or not to bail... is that the question? Well, far be it from me to tell others what to do but it seems to me that, short of death or the threat of physical violence, there is never a good excuse for a performer to bail on a show.

Now, I'm not talking about before you commit yourself, I am talking about after you are already committed. And you know

when that is, that's right when you have officially started "performing," i.e. when you address your audience.

I'm not talking a huge audience, I'm not even talking about four winos sitting on the one and only bench around, who were there already and drunker than I was. Once you commit, you commit, that's it. It's unwritten contract which, like I said, cannot be broken no matter what.

Ok, I did mention death or the threat of physical violence. Then, I can justify taking the sole purpose of your existence, transporting your audience toward unreality, away. Otherwise pal, you are doing it for yourself and bailing only because you have no balls, guts or honor.

Bailing is for pussies. And pussies have no business in this business.

Would you like to hear that your surgeon decided not to continue with your kidney transplant because the nurse handed him the wrong forceps? Or maybe your kid's teacher decided to quit because your little Johnny was a little dumber than the other kids and couldn't quite grasp string theory on the first go around. How would you feel about that?

I don't care how bad it gets. You can be sitting there on the edge of the stage, the whole audience booing you because you just made an old man's ear start to bleed internally by fucking with his hearing aid and you must continue despite the shame. The show must go on, it has to; it must.

Death, or the threat of it, can be justified, for sure. I bailed three times in my 30+ years as a busker, all three for exactly those two reasons.

When a gun is pulled out during your show it is kind of difficult to turn that reality into enchantment. A gun brings an audience back to reality quickly and to my knowledge, no clever line has yet been written to prevent the collective horror of the crowd. Believe me, I tried, including, "Come on asshole, make my day!"

Finding out one of the members of your audience was dead and not just snoozing can have a similar effect on your crowd. Mentioning to the paramedics after the fact that you were killing

the crowd might get a wry smile as they drag him onto the gurney, but little else.

Similarly, a small fist-fight, even when it's between two clowns, can be so disruptive to an audience's psyche there is little left to do but bail. Although, I must say I quite enjoyed watching their white faces smeared with blood, but maybe that was just me.

So, that's it. For me, it's a big NO-NO to bail except with a potentially mortal consequence and I'll believe that until the day I die. Which could be very soon, I'm told.

See what I did there?

### **Martin Ewen / Lurk**

Bailing; to bail,

--The act of abruptly canceling a show during the performance itself--

Street theater creates audiences in public through a variety of means and for a variety of reasons those same audiences can be abruptly dismissed.

It's relatively rare and understandably disconcerting from an audience's point of view. Whatever trust they have lent is summarily shattered as they come to realize that they are just part of a mob that up to that point was merely useful to the performer before he or she simply changed their mind and deemed them useless.

I'd suggest everyone's bailed at least once but would be interested to see if there were indeed performers who have finished every street-show they have ever started.

Here are some examples. Ends of the spectrum.

Pompidou Center, Paris, a French mime is articulating something so vague and French that only he has any clue whatsoever of what any of his esoteric arm waving and face-pulling represents.

Some well meaning citizen steps forward and drops a coin into his hat, but unfortunately the small coin in question is the final straw.

The mime exploded, stomping off his small plinth uttering a long string of patented French verbal indignance. Reaching into his hat, grabbing small handfuls of currency he threw them away in disgust on the pavement. Glaring at the audience, mostly bemused, he packed up furiously, muttering venomously before stamping off, in his own self-indulgent mind his dignity intact. A perfect example of a dramatic beggar with a superiority complex.

I laughed at him, silly French dickhead, throwing a hissy fit, spitting the dummy and presumably actually setting out that morning to do street theater with the expectation that by day's end he'd be carried around on the shoulders of an adoring public based entirely on the strength of his painfully enormous and demonstratively brittle ego. Clueless to his true function, which to my mind is the dramatic seduction of strangers.

Instead he merely exposed his tiny metaphoric artistic dick and was outraged, **OUTRAGED!!** that the world had not immediately formed a line to suck on it.

He chose to blame strangers for his own failings because simply being pathetic in public was a truth he could not bear. I know this because I've employed a similar mindset in times before I was prepared to take responsibility for my failures as well as my successes.

On the other end of the scale.....

Fly-pitching out of Covent Garden at the corner of the Opera house across from the Shakespeare Pub: I had a focused crowd when three guys stage right exited the pub arm in arm. What it was was an ambush. The two on the ends grabbed the guy in the middle and began their assault. They were actually in my circle. I and my audience could only watch as the victim took a few before being beaten to the ground. He was then dragged to the gutter only feet from me and in front of my mixed late afternoon audience.

They wedged his head into the gutter itself so there was nowhere for the incoming force to be dispersed and then both beefy guys laid into his head with their boots like they were chopping wood, alternating well-aimed boot after boot into his head before running off, leaving the guy howling with the loose vocal

cord pitch and timbre only a traumatized person in a coma can emit, the kind of sound that raises your primate hackles, the kind of sound unique and rare and truly literally spine-chilling.

I bailed. I sat down without explanation, it wasn't required. I had no more defense against this horror than anyone else. What audience remained were in deep shock and even those who had fled earlier had enough brutality added to their worlds to make my small role and laughter itself irrelevant and redundant. They drifted away as police ran up far too late to do anything but stand guard over this guttural howling, brutally damaged man until an ambulance could arrive.

These are the extremes. You bail because you simply on that day accept defeat, and sometimes that defeat, if you look honestly, is yours, and other times it's simply circumstantial. Mostly, I've noted it's simply a defense against sucking any more than you know, on the day, you already do.

## ONE PERSPECTIVE: COPS

### **Martin Ewen / Lurk**

So I'm on one side of the island and Robert's on the other at present, and then very shortly he's off to another island to perhaps have his neck removed and a universal joint inserted so that he can freak kids out doing Exorcist impersonations at parties for big cash. Parents are finally waking up to the fact that their kids are going to be as fucked up as, or worse than, them and the market for stylized mental trauma is still incredibly underdeveloped. Both Robert and I are pioneers.

Anyway, he'll either add to this or he won't.

### **COPS**

Cops are called 'The Man' for a reason. In my opinion ,the majority of street performers are arrested precocious children and very very few of these will ever win a direct confrontation with the constabulary. Keno has; he simply out-witted them, surrounded

himself with his audience. Ducking down, crawling out from the middle of the crowd that he'd got to pack around him, picking his moment and running away.

But he was a genius; we can't all be geniuses although there's nothing that says you can't presume that until proven otherwise.

You can certainly try to use your audience against the authorities; however, it's an all or nothing gambit and bear in mind the difference between a battle and a war. You may win the battle, but the war's still probably on.

Also to consider is if it's one or more authority figures. More than one and they'll reinforce each other's positions and the rule of thumb is, like a chain being as strong as its weakest link, so too a situation becomes less liberal the more conservatives are involved. Police are conservative by function.

But with the solitary cop you at least have the capacity to go mano-a-mano in liberal vs. conservative combat.

I'm not going to suggest any tactics myself. You want to contest a representative of law and order, you'll have to wing it on your own. Good luck.

Anecdotal Olympics follow.

Bad was Julia, a cop who worked Covent Garden where I'd fly pitch. She was just the most deeply evil cop I'd ever met. She'd get into my psychic romper-room and stomp on my precious fucking toys.

She'd bail me up and say things like,

"You're just like the people selling ear-rings," equating me with a retailer.

She passed the guy who was beaten to a pulp and screaming while in a coma in a way that had everybody's hair on the back of their necks risen and merely glanced at him, then looked at me and said,

"As if we don't have enough problems."

Good cops...

In Dublin, I met my first uniform as he came up after a show; the street-kids I was employing knew him. There was some respect there, I noted.

I explained that I had informally got them working for me, made things easier, pointed out the new lad now with a sleeping bag I'd paid for. Told the cop that I was just improvising with the situation but seemed to be doing more good than harm.

He nodded and said "All power to you then."

Which you have to admit is encouraging.

He then assured me that I had no need to worry generally as even if I could see no uniforms about there were plainclothes looking for pickpockets in my audience consistently.

Another was a horse-riding cop in Glasgow in my first "Fuck it! I'll do it in the drizzle" show.

Rides past with his raincoat on, the bottom half of which spread out behind him over the horse's haunch.

He approached and grinned and reaching back, swept his coat away and patted behind him as if to invite me on. (I was on stilts.)

I made a show of accepting then becoming intimidated by the horse and he simply rode on. I recognised he had given me permission by playing with me and there's nothing better than arriving at a place and having that one potential deal-breaker, the law, put to rest.

Cops, mileage may vary.

## ONE PERSPECTIVE: SUCCESS

### **Martin Ewen / Lurk**

"Success: What is it?" (Dons Guru-helmet.)

Success is measured by each molecule of time spent in the conscious process of self-realization.

That's the short answer.

If you use performance to realise yourself then either blatantly or subtextually you must celebrate some primary truth about your journey in doing so.

Most, if not all, truths are shared in the soup we call the human experience.

The human experience is bigger than any one artist can contemplate let alone reflect so to be successful it is probably best to specialise.

Laughter is both a personal and shared truth that actually celebrates futility rather than being overwhelmed by it. Most people just think it's a reaction to funny stuff but at its core it celebrates the profound comedy of our attempts to master the human condition. Be it wit or slapstick or Rob Torres capturing his audience's applause in a small box, laughter is a reaction to a conceit that we presume mastery over circumstance. We don't, and laughter is the acknowledgment of this on an instinctive level.

Success can also be measured as being at peace with the decisions you make from the choices you give yourself.

Money is liquid choice. The choices you make with it are more reflective of you than any amount in itself. Both money and others' opinions of yourself can be the after-effects of success as I've defined it.

If you try to define success exclusively by these terms you will invariably end up hating yourself.

Others opinions of you are secondary at best.

Your opinion of yourself is the yardstick by which you measure success and while I have my guru-helmet on I may as well chuck out some heavy artillery. Just as the words that you use in the thoughts in your head are the cradle of your emotions, so too are the concepts that you use in your show the cradle of your audience's experience. You provide the right cradle and the experience is the baby and a baby is a composite creature. (When two people love each other very much they have a special hug.)

For various reasons you may hate yourself already and simply project your cynicism in pursuit of money and others' opinions, much like a shovel used to dig a deeper grave for yourself in your own wastelands. Welcome to the excessively distractive core of Western society.

As with most things, the real nutrition is out on the peripheries where holy Clowns like Rumpel gibber. I use holy in a spiritual rather than religious sense, obviously. Rumpel is holy because in

an idiotic world, the devoted idiot is king. Rumple wants for nothing because Rumple simply makes one choice at a time. He's not a fucking deity; rather, he's been in the moment most of his life.

I wonder how liberating that must be, as well as exhausting, but here's another truth.

Life is unilaterally exhausting for everyone, being fulfilled and exhausted is the ideal. That's why people with disposable incomes do physical things they don't have to, climb or swim or whatever. Exhaust yourself in the exploration of the most kick-ass show you are capable of conceiving is my advice.

As a performer, success is the ability to share your experience via the amplification provided by the tools you have honed at your disposal to your own satisfaction.

Now stop asking me profound questions. (Takes off Guru-helmet.)

# FESTIVAL: WATERLOO 2000

Waterloo has a university where 70% of the Programming students go straight to Microsoft after graduation, and a large sausage rendering plant. It also has a street theatre festival over 3 or 4 days.

At the core of this festival, in a green room on campus where everyone's booked into, there are two refrigerators. These refrigerators are what makes the Waterloo festival unique. One fridge has things like juices and fresh food and it's the first one you come to as you walk in, it says "Good morning- I contain all the things needed for a healthy and constructive joyful existence." We'll call this fridge the 'Set em up' fridge. The other fridge is in the far corner and contains nothing but heartache. Heartache and headache and depravity and loss of motor skills, especially hand-eye coordination, and, for some, mild intoxication. It says "Good morning, you look like hell, I know you don't really hate me, your mind is clouded, I'll just wait here and come this evening I'll be the most attractive thing in the room." We'll call this fridge the 'Knock em down' fridge.

(Author's note: I realise that articulating whiteware is rife with pitfalls for the unwary and furniture says different things to different people but please bear with me as I investigate this precarious new medium.)

These two fridges have earned a respect from all who have dealt with them, sometimes, indeed, whole campaigns have been waged against one particular fridge. The reason for two refrigerators being the core from which all else at this festival radiates is

simple, close to mystical, and on some level, probably profoundly maternal: YOU CANNOT EMPTY THE FRIDGES.

The fridges seem to be evidence of an eternal and generous dimension. I've seen whole platoons of street performers, many very experienced, armed with nothing more than bottle-openers, hurling themselves in decreasingly organised waves at the 'Knock em down' fridge. All for naught; invariably the 'knock em down' fridge is the last thing standing. Strangely and illogically, this only encourages nightly battle. And every morning, the 'Set em up fridge' is there, non-judgemental and full of bran. I spent two days in the 'Knock em down' fridge, experiencing the magic first-hand, and lost three toes to frostbite.

Beyond the looming omnipresence of the miracle appliances, there's actually a decent street festival. Another example of a small community inviting strange people into their midst for no better reason than they are uniquely mildly amusing for short periods. (Who would have thought that a subconscious knee-jerk response to emotional deprivation could be so attractive to a community?) After years of irksome shopkeepers, traffic wardens with delusions of grandeur, anal constabulary and the like, it's great to be part of an effort by a community to gather us together and treat us well simply because they recognise the worth of the laughter we generate.

Here's who was there:

Silver Elvis, Toronto, Ontario (AKA Pete Jarvis) Formerly a male model and fitness instructor, Pete was unfortunate enough to be leading staff at a paint factory in their morning exercises when a vat adjacent to the gym exploded. While the other victims of the blast settled for well compensated lives of quiet, strangely tinted desperation, Pete went on to carve a career out of impersonating dead people to whom he bore no resemblance. (It's a suspension of disbelief thing).

Mark Segal, Scotland-- Bought up by a cete (it's the collective noun for Badgers) of laid back Badgers in a damp cave in the highlands after escaping his parents at a picnic, Mark survived entirely on hallucinogenic fungus, the occasional stillborn badger,

and licking the insides of lollywrappers discarded by trampers until he was discovered by gypsies, who, finding him entirely deficient as a sex aid, sold him to a small circus which used him as a decorative weathervane. In his time perched on top of the Bigtop, he picked up valuable showbiz tips. He now climbs a ladder for a living.

Michael David Hirschbach, Halifax, Nova Scotia-- Formerly a gang leader with the notorious 'Devil's Undergarments,' a group who terrorised Halifax in the '80s, riding their 10-speeds without helmets and blatantly ignoring pedestrian crossing instructions, Michael underwent a conversion of sorts and now champions the entertainment of little folk.

Chameleon, UK (AKA Doug Dougal and Dave Pickens) Formerly altarboys, members of the Vienna Boys' choir and poster-boys for the Intemperance League of Great Britain, Dougy and Dave's show is all about perspective and balance. For 40 minutes at a time, up to three times a day, they display these sterling qualities while producing comedy. The rest of the time is spent trying to focus and falling over.

The Silly People, Kitchener, Ontario (AKA Phil Leconte and Colin Frank) Phil and Colin performed their first circle show at this festival. It's a rare pleasure to see acts evolve into world class shows in front of you. Young, professional and original, it should be many years before they become jaded bitter former husks of themselves. They were the most impressive new act I saw last season plus they let me stay at their place.

Stephen Elve, Halifax, Nova Scotia-- From a shady past so well buried you could doubt he'd ever had one, Steve formerly produced service industry videos for department stores specialising in playing the role of difficult customers. It is hard to believe that the silver tongued unflappable magician we all know used to earn a living screaming at blanching assistants behind makeup counters. The videos are now collectors items and have been credited with reviving patients from long-term comas.

Karl Saliter, Cornwall, CT-- Karl, who left a perfectly good career as a tree doctor in Arizona to take up street performing, now

lives in Connecticut surrounded by trees he ignores. Initially having a show that primarily consisted of pouring bugs down his shirt and jumping about for coins, he now concentrates on entertaining others. A little-known fact is that when not performing, Karl devises methods by which he can suspend rocks the size of small trucks above his house and while this may not be particularly funny by my standards, it is, in fact, true.

Bill Ferguson, Vancouver, British Columbia-- Formerly humble, Bill has recently cut all his incredibly long hair off so that people apart from himself can see just how big his head really is. Having said that I don't want him to hit me which is why I live in New Zealand.

Tim the Juggling Fool, Peterborough, Ontario-- Juggling on a tall unicycle might sound, to those of us who have seen a bit, not much and that's because it isn't. But God damn it, it works. And if anyone deserves a crack at a boilerplate generic standard, it should be someone young and naive enough not to realise their knee joints will turn to chalk in a few years from having to jump from such a height. Tim is that man.

Lurk, NZ-- I am Lurk: Lurk is me; spooky huh.

Furry Eggs, NY (AKA Ed Stander - glass harmonica) Ed is a distinguished gentleman and apparently a bit of a brainiac. When not circling his damp fingertips over the rims of variously filled glasses to produce sounds pure enough to uncross the eyes of Siamese cats, he trains atoms at a leading university.

Tomko Lamb, Calgary, Alberta (hammered dulcimer) So unassuming that I can only assume he's unassuming, Tomko sits quietly at his instrument, makes beautiful music, sells CDs and seemingly is so secure he feels no need to try and impress. I really hate that.

YoYo Guy, Denver, Colorado (AKA John Higby) Formerly the cowboy in the Village People, Yo Yos are to John Higby what mentholated spirits are to smelly people who live under bridges. Consummate skill, deft stagework and well-chosen musical backing combined with just a hint of irony in his stage presence, cunningly disguise what amounts to a manic/compulsive disorder. The

guy Yo Yos in the shower, married a woman called Yo and has two children, Yo and Yo.

Two's A Crowd, Los Angeles, California (AKA Al Carr and C-Mo Green) Formerly Caucasian, Al and C-Mo first met at a short and strange name competition. They got no-where but spurred on by failure, they began to dance and experiment with making gentle fun of white folk. Initially stuck in their own suburb, they eventually saved enough to travel far enough away to find some.

Humans Against Gravity, Vancouver, British Columbia (AKA Peter Boulanger, Ninon Parent, Darren Adam and Ashlea Earl) Peter never saw the surface of the planet till he was 7. His mother was a coal miner who disguised herself as a man for employments' sake and gave birth to him during work. Scared of being caught, she hid him behind a tea urn 3 miles beneath the surface and fed him at lunch breaks. When at last he was taken above ground he couldn't believe the vast sky above his head, he felt he could fly. He still does, the poor deluded fool. The others in his troupe humour him, they wave their arms and smile and fling themselves into the air, but to Peter it's all so real.

Acromaniacs, Hamilton, Ontario (AKA Brett Tomlinson and Dan Aubin) Formerly skinny little wimps, always picked last for schoolyard sports teams and bullied by even pigtailed girls two years their junior, Brett and Dan eventually found each other, and then found steroids. Now rippling and buff, they balance together using their nipples, arms, legs and anything else firm enough to pivot on.

There was a \$50 ticket sponsor's night to kick off, three days of street theatre with a late night madness, and a children's show to sign off. All produced by Lynne Sosnowski with a dedicated hard-working bunch of volunteers who worked until the job was done. (One night till dawn getting the stage fixed.) I could go on about my admiration for the work put in by the community to make us welcome but really, the inability to gush positively is what separates me from the rest of society and I like it out here.

# WINDSOR 2001

Never has so much love, indifference and sweat been invested in a carpark.

Ken sets it up, his wife Patty's role is to help him avoid a mental breakdown, and this year Robert Nelson's wife Kumi stepped efficiently and unmasked into the role of onsite programmer.

It's really hard to vent your spleen at a diminutive non-paid Asian whose day-job involves serving you coffee at altitude without poaching your genitals. And really, there was nothing to complain about. Same couldn't be said for various staff members of various service establishments at various times.

We left ashen faced chambermaids, simmering bouncers and fragile front of house staff in our wake but we tend to traditionally tip heavily and apologize profusely so it all worked out in the end.

Ken had to stand outside some offices like a naughty schoolboy forging doctor's notes that explained which of us suffered from Tourettes. And that's because we're all highly strung individuals, so creative, so generous with our gift of producing laughter in others that we sometimes digress from society's norms. It has to be understood that this is just a natural side-effect of our genius, and, what's more, to be honest, we're really not much good for anything else. Ken understands this.

Checkerboard Guy  
Alakazam

Reid Belstock  
Hotnuts and Popcorn  
Dado  
Davio  
Stickleback Plasticus  
Cowguys  
Chalk Circle  
Anti-gravity  
Nick Nickolas  
Lee Zimmerman  
Mad Chad Taylor  
Marie Claude

Alakazam's subtext and chosen quest relates to physically manifesting an arcane sexual statistic. It is said that one ejaculation contains enough sperm to impregnate every female on the planet. Al's chosen hobby is to do the same thing the long way. Obviously that's a great many people. If any woman reading wants to bump her name up on the list and get seen in the next 10-20 years rather than later on when he's all wrinkly and jaded, I've heard he sells priority sessions on eBay. Al's act involves juggling, micro bike riding, pole balancing and being a cheeky young scamp whom woman of all ages want to sleep with.

Checkerboard Guy is this guy. And the checkerboard thing is like a marketing ploy that grew like a particularly vicious virus until it devoured him whole. He has a great big cuddly juggling show that he can perform in 15 languages as well as 7 obscure Afghan dialects.

Reid Belstock is a clown who has a rare gift of being as funny as himself as he is in character. He's a hilarious mass of contradictions too large to list here. He's the sort of person who, at a meeting, you just focus on the wall and wait for him to ask a question so that you can be entertained by the way his brain works.

Dado looks like Zippy the Pinhead and sounds approximately Irish and spends his career attracting rainfall. Probably a really sad person to be but a really funny guy to watch.

Davio is French Canadian, and if that weren't strange enough he speaks passable English and balances on women's bottoms before climbing a pole and striking impossible poses that last for 10 seconds and take years to master. Sometimes whimsy frightens me.

Hotnuts and Popcorn: Slick, sick and pass the schtick. Barely clinging to their sanity, every risk dynamic conquered, the only challenges left being general social norms and in-jokes. If they don't get rescued and taken off the street soon they'll either marry and breed or join the foreign legion. Pulled off a 3-peaker 90-minute late night show masterfully so there's still gas in the tank.

Stickleback Plasticus: I paraphrased them last year well enough. In fact this paraphrasing stuff might well stop soon. Don Kings of ballroom dancing plus all the spontaneity and guile of street theatre purists.

Cowguys: Brian and John have a sort of bovine burlesque that involves juggling and the sort of hideous puns that really should only be used in wartime. They have classical training and it's like Shakespeare and Bozo were put into a meat shredder and they've made sausages out of it.

Chalkcircle: Bev and Ulla are two Australian woman who sit in the blazing sun scratching the surface of the planet with coloured sticks. Patterns form and then they leave. I've never understood Australians.

Anti-gravity Theatre: ...what can I say? A cynical panto-sham with a drinking problem. The only redeeming fact being I don't have an ounce of self-pity in me.

Nick Nickolas is one of those freaks of nature science is still struggling to understand. When small organisms were discovered living in unbelievably hot volcanic flues deep in the ocean, scientists actually called them nickyboys until they were forced to change it to something suitably Latin. Nick has been credited with many things and discredited about twice that often. He is the reason for childproof caps and also for Mormons' special underwear. He is a magician and juggler and a sophisticated urbane raconteur.

Even so, it is advised that even if he asks you nicely, don't pull his finger.

Marie Claude is a face/body painter whose work and its quality carries her from major festival to major festival. She unleashes animals from the faces of small children and then sets them free. And that's apparently a good thing.

Mad Chad Taylor should be an ambassador for real Californians because he is in fact very real. It's a bit of a shock really: enthusiastic chainsaw juggling, genuine, upbeat, thoughtful. Freaked me out when I first met him. He's the kind of guy who can go to a strip club and it doesn't seem dirty. He's what Alakazam could be with the right dosage of saltpeter.

Lee Zimmerman is the other sort of Californian... sort of Randy Newman, rock and roll show with puppets; deadpan, ironic, self-taught, highly skilled and witheringly articulate. Had this great monologue about being the bottom feeder of the festival, with the elevated jugglers being the sharks at the top of the foodchain and him being the only performer who really was risking his life rather than it just being a line because if he went home with no money his wife would kill him. I could write what I like because he never comes to Performers.Net, but this plus last year's paraphrase, I'm done.

A challenge known well in advance that's unique to this festival is that it, more than any other Canadian festival, (with Halifax coming a distant second), is a tourist draw as much as it is an opportunity for a community to celebrate itself. It's Windsor and it's just over the river from Detroit. Every weekend, American tourists pop over in large numbers to exploit the slightly cheaper goods and services of their northern mini-me in a sort of 'living beyond, but within our means' sort of 'more bang for your buck' sort of a way.

And before I'm deafened by foaming reactionary flacks convinced in their own tediously facile way that I am anti-American, I can admit that Windsor depends on it. It's just another example of the dynamic of a border town. Copenhagen has the same thing with hordes of Swedes arriving every weekend to drink a cheaper kind of beer and have sex with a slightly different kind of blonde.

Now, at this festival (which, in my opinion, is a two and a half-day fest held over four) the mayor steps up to the mic and in his immaculately kept, politically astute and faultlessly jovial way, opens it and thanks the sponsors without whom none of this would be possible and to whom we're all exceedingly and sincerely grateful. (Sung to the tune of 'We are the world, we are the sponsors') He really was remarkable. All the performers were crying and the sponsors and spectators alike were rushing up and hugging one another. One elderly woman was so touched she there and then donated all her worldly goods to nobody in particular and walked naked into the river. Bear with me, I have a disturbing habit of coming to the point when you least expect it...

My point, such as it is, is that the Windsor fest is as much about getting Americans over the bridge to open their wallets at bars and casinos as it is to reward the local townsfolk with a festival that brings them together to celebrate both their diversity and ours. It tries gamely to do both and I think succeeds to a degree at both. It is sponsored, for example, by both the casino (tourists) and a mental health organization (locals).

Lots of others as well but those two sum it up for me.

At the majority of festivals, even though there might be significant numbers of tourists, the performers are generally aware that they are bringing something to the community and that that is their prime function. While at Windsor (though good hats are made and undeniably good times are had) there are times when, after strenuous efforts and much laughter, a show ends and at least two thirds of an audience turn their backs and insensitively head off to the next piece of free entertainment. Why? Because they're tourists who owe Windsor nothing more than making their money last as long as it can before they head home.

There was one world-class performer who held it in for an hour or more until safely away from the site before slowly subsiding into tears and as some of you will understand, it had nothing to do with the money. Just tired and spent and undervalued and used.

Ken's great, and more than a producer. And it's necessary that Robert's there and the locals, who turn up year after year as volun-

teers to support it, and others who bring the whole family to laugh and cheer and celebrate, are the reason most of us attend. But just because we're romantic doesn't mean we're stupid and the tourist showcase thing just might have to be addressed. (At this point Martin's name gets scratched from every festival casting list in North America because it equally can be argued that the performers earn as much as they do anywhere else or else they wouldn't be there.)

Oh, but the moments make it all worthwhile, and really, that's our strength. We can take tired old formulas and create beautiful original irrepressible moments. I'll just list one or two.

#### Moment

Pee Wee and Em were starting their show (Stickleback Plasticus) with a couple of hundred people gathered in the daytime, just mucking about creating atmosphere, character and focus when Em notices three children in the crowd, seated and staring intently at the ground. So she makes her way over and asks in a stage whisper "What are you doing?" The children, serious as only children can be, point to three bugs on the ground and state, "They're not moving." Em considers this and then asks, "Are they dead then, do you think?" The kids nod solemnly. After another brilliant pause, Em asks, "Shall we bury them, then?" They nod. So Em picks up the dead bugs and the kids follow and they walk through the stage and up onto the grass bank behind the stage and they dig a small hole and bury the bugs with all the respect accorded the moment and then walk back down and the kids sit down. The moment is over and the buildup continues.

#### Moment

The festival is over, cancelled early by a sudden downpour. Performers have been milling on the covered stage waiting for Robert's decision... on or off; now it's off. There's another tent in which 100 or so public have sheltered hopefully. Nick can't help himself. He cobbles a show together in his head that is not the show he's been doing all season but just bits and pieces he remembers along with whatever props are at hand and wanders over. He asks everyone whether they want a show and of course they do al-

though they don't completely trust him at first because he's a bit loose and weird and he's standing on a table that's not too stable. It doesn't take long and it's all ripping along and even though the first two thirds of the show was uphill, we're over the hump and Nick's juggling three balls while trying to strip from the waist up and finally he's done it. His slightly less than pristine body is exposed all sweaty with seismic cutaneous waves sweeping across what years ago might have been a tight form. He's juggling and exclaims, "Ladies and gentlemen, the body of a god." and I swear the kid was all of 6 years old and quick as a flash he yells, "Yeah, Buddha."

#### Moment

John from Cowguys is handicapped by the fact that he's such a nice guy and such a good sport and just by existing in our midst reinforces all that is cruel and unfair and hilarious. He comes up to the busker's area from the public area of the bar and brings with him his dinner and a pint and sits at a table with Pee Wee (judge), Lee (jury) and Nick (executioner.) One of them addresses him while he's eating and as he casts his eyes back to his meal he notices his beer is missing and Nick's suddenly right across the room with a half-heartedly innocent look on his face and a suspicious pint in his hands. John laughs good naturedly then makes a critical error. He says, "You won't misdirect me again." Nick returns and replaces the beer, but then in a rapidly moving, spontaneously planned and co-ordinated series of events, John, with his arms protectively across his plate, manages to have the contents of his dinner disappear, item by item (I think it was steak, veg, mashed potato but it really doesn't matter) from underneath his eyes while 'never being misdirected again.' He's befuddled, sitting there with an empty plate while Nick, Pee Wee and Lee weep with laughter when the unthinkable happens: food starts re-appearing on his plate. The humour at this point strayed dangerously close to potential aneurysm and John finally started to get a bit pissed off as he realised that Nick had actually grabbed his nicely prepared steak off his plate, in the millisecond he wasn't focused on it, with his grubby little fingers.

It may have its downsides, but what we do to the public and what we do to each other and the skill and laughter that go with it are reason enough to meet up regularly and Canada really does lead the way in this area.

If I've offended anyone, sorry; if I haven't offended anyone, sorry. Thanks for the moments.

# VINCE'S HEART

"He has a good heart"

I had a friend in Japan, daughter of a Yakuza warlord, very complex individual, but this story's not about her. She spoke 7 languages, some better than others. This story is about the phrase she used before introducing me to folk. Her English was serviceable but pared down to the bone. She could sum up a person simply by letting me know he/she "has a good heart."

I've met many street performers, mixed bunch all in all, but the best of the best to me were those whose shows radiated 'good heart'.

Vince loved his mum. It would be approaching his turn on the pitch in front of the Bank on the Stroget (Europe's longest pedestrian street, Copenhagen) and we'd know where he was. There were 3 pay phones (pre-internet: gather round, children) at the side of the Bank and Vince would often be there talking to his mum. They were best friends and had grown up together alone in some slummy council estate in Liverpool. We'd signal he was up next and he'd say bye to his mum, hang up and shortly thereafter take the pitch.

I suppose the best way to describe his show was 'warm', he so genuinely loved his work and simply used structures to create and project an atmosphere of seamless mirth. All the jokes were on him, he failed, failed, succeeded, built tension, released the laugh-

ter, celebrated whatever time and place and audience his show inhabited and finished with a flourish.

Bog-standard on the face of it but elevated into something more because he had a good heart and people resonate with that sort of thing.

To be a Clown of any sort you need to have an inner man-child. I hide mine behind carefully fabricated layers of cynicism, you mock me at your peril, but Vince was a gentle soul and so we teased him.

He had a woman in his seated front row once whose laugh was one of those gifts for a show, loud and true and contagious, she was there with a girlfriend right from the start of the show and towards the end, the crowd having grown significantly, she suffered an epileptic fit front stage left. Vince made the choice to simply steamroll over that event- her friend had laid her down flat and let her convulse and his split-second decision worked. The crowd were aware of the disruption but trusted his judgement and refocused on him. Afterwards she thanked him for carrying on and he thanked her for her beautiful laugh.

So anyway we teased him, suggesting there was something in his show that was perhaps triggering. The juggling perhaps? The music? Best be careful! He knew we were joking but there was still a small element of genuine concern.

The next day we reminded him to be extra careful and the dark comedy gods smiled because the little Moroccan boy whose father used to drop him off every day with a stool and a portable keyboard and who used to beat him when he didn't make enough money was playing 50 yards from Vince's show and chose that day to himself suffer an epileptic fit.

We went and helped him out; we're not heartless, just cruel, because after Vince's show we told him what happened and suggested his powers were expanding by the day. Fortunately, it ended there and after a few days free of proximity-epilepsy we pronounced him cured.

The next season Vince was nowhere to be found, the news being he'd snagged a cushy gig as a TV children's presenter back in

England. He would have been perfect for that. He was genuine and had a good heart. Kids are very sensitive to that sort of thing.

A couple of years after that I was told this story about Vince and his mum.

He'd worked in TV and the first Christmas following he'd gone home to his mum's. She still lived in the council flat he'd grown up in. Still paying rent, still getting by.

He gave her her present- it was a shoebox containing new and quite lovely and expensive shoes.

She responded with her usual selfless diatribe. Bear in mind she'd worked tirelessly, multiple low paying jobs, just to bring him up.

"Oh these are too much...I can't, no really, I mean it, they must have cost so much!, take them back, I couldn't possibly... you spent too much," etc.

Vince just smiled.

HAVE I MENTIONED HE HAD A GOOD HEART?

"Just look in the shoes, Mum."

Inside one of the shoes, folded up, were the deeds of her house. She now owned it.

# PARIS

One of the more remarkable street performances I've ever seen was a French Hypnotist in Paris who'd get a crowd, grab a handful of men out of it, put them under, convince them their genitals had disappeared, then ransom the crowd for their return.

I later heard he'd trained in Hypnosis for physicians at the world-renowned Faculté de Médecine-Sorbonne Universités.

It was truly masterful: there were no props but his skill and I watched him for two months work two or three times a week, always with different men selected and the end of his show posed beautifully the questions not often enough asked.

What are we doing?

How did we get here?

How much fun was that?

I'm convinced the most interesting parts of life occur whilst getting from point A to point B.

He arrived like an understated swashbuckler. He wore a turquoise full-length coat that was suitably timeless yet intriguing. He carried a small suitcase and extruded confidence and power-walked like he was going to beat his child when he got home.

He was handsome and swarthy, slender and olive with some cryptic symbol painted onto his cheek. He had that magnetism that sets a good con artist apart and a subterranean yet steely authority.

What theatre is essentially, is manipulating time and space for effect. It could be said that it's a conceit in which certain incom-

prehensible truths are alluded to and felt on some barely fathomable level.

One of these truths is this: we simply don't have a clue what's going on. We take direction and call it individuality. We succumb to rituals and conventions that define us and occasionally if we're lucky some canny technician will temporarily remove our bedrock and yet we will be too entranced to be frightened.

What I love about street theatre done well is that this collective wonder is produced in that

endangered environment known as a public place.

He started out marshaling his audience, pointing and directing, molding the edges, bringing people forward. It was all in French but I understood the mechanics he was employing. I could follow his tone and his subtext. I wasn't so much interested in what he was saying (sadly, I don't speak French) but how he controlled his audience by what came out of his mouth. You can decipher the message by observing the medium. I'm an avid student of street performance dynamics. I think it's the closest thing to real magic I've found.

The pitch he was using was Paris's prime daytime street venue. The sprawling courtyard behind the Pompidou is large enough to run three shows simultaneously, it's gently banked and you can fit hundreds comfortably. He fashioned his crowd. He would face them and bark directions then walk up into them; the banked stage meant he was always visible to all, and select targets, women to whom he'd play small conjuring tricks, eroding tension, establishing trust, marking his authority like pissing on a post using sleight of hand.

He made a point of stepping throughout the main core of his audience. He would make people stand and answer questions, put them at ease and seat them again. He was scanning his audience for the right individuals to use his powers of suggestion on later. Some he would just lay a hand on in passing, as if to use them as support as he scabbled through his crowd. I think he could work out by whatever tension he felt as he passed whether they could be useful later on.

He made his way to his stage, rearranged his small suitcase briefly from the middle to one side and then asked for male volunteers. I suspect he said they would have to be brave and fearless and that they would experience something profound and that not all who volunteered would be chosen. About fifteen guys, as if challenged by him somehow, stood and made their way to the stage. He lined them up and walked their ranks a couple of times, staring into each of their faces, sometimes putting a hand on their shoulder or grasping a hand. He then strode down their line behind them, laying a hand on one or the other, selecting seven men and sending the others back.

He then lined up the men; they stood in a line shoulder to shoulder looking bemused. He told them he was going to put them to sleep, they would remain standing and safe however when he touched them on the forehead they were going to go into a deep sleep. I suspect he had the most suggestible at one end of the line and the others would simply follow the lead but nevertheless he then went down the line touching each of the seven on the forehead and saying some word and they each nodded out, their heads drooping.

He turned to his audience and presented his seven entranced French men and then explained what was about to happen. He established that he had hypnotized these men and they were under his spell and he could do with them as he wished. As a demonstration of his powers he was going to make their genitals disappear. He phrased it something like, I am going to take these Frenchmen and make that which is most precious to them...disappear.

He further explained that he would do this and after snapping his fingers directly in each of their faces they would awake and run to a private place to check and sure enough they would find that that which was most precious to them had indeed disappeared. After checking they would each return and form the line they had left from.

The audience were themselves entranced. This was surreal, unbelievable, and yet the seven men stood there. Primed.

With a flourish he walked down the line snapping his fingers in each face. Each man woke and in some way put their hand or hands between their legs and turned 180 and began to run the 50 feet backstage each to one of the massive pillars at the back of the Pompidou. Each ran with a comic fragile gait, each to their individual pillar that they ducked behind to pull the waistbands of their jeans or pants and peer down to where their genitals had once been.

The crowd was roaring with laughter and that roar escalated as each of the men, sheepishly, convincingly, returned, perplexed and convinced their genitals had vanished. They glanced at each other, on their return, each reinforcing to the other this collective confusion, (or deceit, depending on your outlook), as they once again formed a line and the crowd howled in glee.

The hypnotist waited for that moment to peak and then went down the line again touching foreheads, putting each of them to sleep again and then once he had seven head-bowed victims and a crowd who'd bought into this hilarious situation completely, he went into the heart of his show.

It was quite simple. He ransomed seven pairs of French genitals.

He stated that he had the power to remove what was most precious from these men and he also had the power to reinstate what he had taken but that the question that his audience had to ask themselves was this: what were these men's genitals worth?

He grabbed his small suitcase and opened it and handed it to the bottom right hand of his audience with instructions to put what they thought these men's genitals were worth into it and pass the opened suitcase on. Again, a banked stage meant that the suitcase never left everybody's sight and he directed it go from bottom to top then back down to the front row then up to the back again in a close zig zag that took a good 5 minutes in which he directed and kept up a constant stream of monologue.

The suitcase eventually made its way to the front left of the audience and he grabbed it, snapped it shut and jiggled it, the coins and notes bouncing round inside as he gauged the weight and ap-

proximate amount. He was, of course, insulted at whatever amount was in there and went straight across to front stage right and started the procedure again. This time his monologue was more indignant on the behalf of the seven men lined behind him. He demanded a little more respect for his powers and hinted that unless his audience satisfied him, these men might lead confused lives as a result of his audience's cheapness. I suspect he accused some of them of merely spectating, leaving the fates of these seven men to others, content to avoid responsibility in general and simply take and never give. I didn't speak French but he spoke very passionately and these are the phrases I'm prepared to concoct on his behalf.

He got his suitcase back for the second time and tested it again for weight. This time he was speechless with rage. He stormed back to the lower left and started the whole procedure again and simply screamed, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are speaking here of seven pairs of FRENCH genitals!"

The suitcase made its progress while he paced and muttered in front of his line of stood sleeping Frenchmen. He would glance up at its progress and glower. Eventually it made its way down to the front right for the third time and he once again weighed it and remarking no more about it, placed it standing just to the outside of his seventh Frenchman.

He then declared that he would go down the line and click his fingers once more and each of the men would once again run to a private place to discover that what had disappeared had now miraculously reappeared!

The audience was abuzz with anticipation and glee as he walked the length of the line clicking his fingers and waking the men up who immediately turned and started once again running in various comic gaits back to their pillars to inspect themselves.

The final and most profound piece of magic happened at this point. Structure creates theatre and as a performer, structure interests me more. As an engineer of sorts, I find the way things are structured sometimes profound, just as an audience member I can find the effect of the structure profound.

This is what happened structurally. The hypnotist walked his line of groinless Frenchmen, waking them up as each turned and ran for a pillar. When he got to the end of the line, his suitcase was waiting and he simply picked it up and kept walking, first in a line sideways to his audience and then up away behind them to the nearest metro station a few hundred yards away.

# SMILE

You have to be absurdly fearless to perform on the street. You are auditioning for your life. You have to believe in something, anything at all, and expose your concern, your faith, your fearlessness to the world at large hoping you have disguised your abject terror sufficiently. Bravado masking a hopefully insular desperation for affection..... Well that's a bit cruel, sure you want affection, who doesn't, but it can be a little more profound than that if you give yourself space and over the years synthesize your motive down to one immutable nugget.

If you fail to ignite a flame of curiosity and commitment from the fuel of passers-by smoldering with indifference then that small flame of your own, brought out and placed exposed, risks extinguishment.

For all the pat doggerel about love lost being superior to not having loved at all, the attraction of yourself being a dry latent wick, rather than a doused failure, is self-evidently attractive to any street performer who tries, and fails, and walks away a soggy wick.

I may labor the illumination metaphor however I do so because my one immutable nugget is this...

I want to bring light into the world.

I've seen it individually and in audiences, the light. It's very strong but soft. My Clown is kindling and my structures and form are small puffs applied to the spark that is my ambition to create

and amplify the light that is the momentary celebration of life's random goodness.

You have to do one thing well. You also need to identify and remember that one thing rather than presuming that anything will do.

Because audiences are your own kind and they resonate. They simply will not invest more than you do in your show. A common mistake is to see them as objects to be moved about with simple slights of mind, to lose sight of yourself as prey in the sense that any audience condescends its attention.

You can do the smallest thing and if it means the world to you, that's enough.

There was a woman, a street performer who had synthesized her nugget down to the bone and it was, and is, to me the perfect example of street theatre as profound poetry.

She was a minimalist pantomime of despair and joy. She did one thing well and her show was a setup for that one thing.

She would stand on a small black box with her name on it in white. She wore an Edwardian mens' suit and had a top hat at her feet for donations; she wore whiteface.

She was not happy. She had a wonderful palette of unhappiness, each color individually crafted and immediately recognizable. Winsome and wistfully, regretfully, defiantly, sullenly, achingly, stoically, disappointingly, fearfully.

She would build an audience by looking down at the ground and forming a particular sadness before raising her gaze and directing it at one individual, sometimes scanning the crowd until she selected that person. She would focus on them until she had established some resonance then she would look down again. She remembered each sadness as it applied to each individual.

After creating these relationships and creating also a rhythm of discovery for her audience, who were mesmerized and delighted by each new nuance of unhappiness she would bring forth, she would move onto the next level in which, like a juggler, she would keep all her unhappinesses in the air by shifting her gaze, with

brilliant comic timing, from each audience member she had previously bequeathed some particular unhappy relationship.

It was sad and funny and beautiful and masterful and the setup.

Because the appreciation of her art would reach a point where, unbidden, one of her audience would respond to her and walk forward and drop money into the hat at her feet. As they broke from the crowd and approached she would amplify whichever sadness pertained to them until they had put whatever token into her hat, she would break her gaze, peek down at the hat then look up.

...And smile...at them.

They would walk away or back to the audience and she would follow them with her smile: her smile created light. It was as honed and genuine and pure as each of her unhappinesses. It was a form of love. It illuminated her audience, they smiled and laughed each time. Then it would fade and sadness would return. The particular sadness the audience member who had contributed a donation, that sadness would go to the bottom of the pile, the others would be refueled as they were kept in play and this small but profound game was this woman's career.

I feel privileged to have spent so much time prospecting the world for eccentric public interpretations of the human condition in which laughter is the goal, in which individuals or groups put themselves at risk to gift others with some collective joyful van-tage and, having made that risk, been redeemed in laughter, gratitude and coin.

This one thing, the act of going from sadness to joy, is fiendishly difficult to do. I know because after coming across this act I tried it myself as an exercise, repeatedly, in front of a mirror.

It is very easy to go down, to lower your mood. Lower moods are always there, always available, as genuine as any sadness you've ever felt for the purposes of reproduction. I found the reverse, and still find the reverse, one of life's great challenges. To truly morph from sadness to joy is a discipline and a gift.

It was her one thing she did exceedingly well and it bears repeating.

You can do the smallest thing and if it means the world to you,  
that's enough.

# SQUID JUGGLING AND A DRIVE-BY SHOOTING

My official Clown education began after getting permission from my probation officer to attend Clown School at the other end of the country. Oh, and the crime? Breaking and entering and theft of a fire extinguisher. I happened to be at a party and I happened to be bored and I happened to believe that the host of the party should be shot -but not killed- as a form of entertainment (which is the theme of this piece) so I broke into a nearby hall and stole the fire extinguisher, went back to the party and blasted the host with foam because that was the minimum level of excitement I required and six months later that shit caught up with me and probation followed.

I arrived and unrolled my WW1 officer's sleeping-bag under the shelter of the Grafton bridge in a cemetery. Nearby seasoned tramps roared, fought and laughed but I kept my distance. I was just 20, sleeping in cemeteries was just a stage I was going through. Tomorrow was day one of Clown school.

I learnt to juggle. I was never attracted to juggling. The celebration of mastering objects flying through space seemed to me a bit of a trite concession. I could see it being therapeutic to certain personality types who used it to buttress life's random inputs by using short range focus. A kind of, 'I'm all right, Jack' attitude given physical form. Some people curb panic attacks by breathing into a paper bag, others gaze at their shoes to short circuit overstimulation, some play with toy trains or assemble model airplanes

and some, who want attention in theory but are uncomfortable with it in practice, juggle.

I always thought of it as a kind of symmetrical epilepsy practiced by closet trainspotters and a kind of slowly boiled frog of attention-seeking behavior. People have suggested I'm overly critical. Fuck those people, those people are assholes.

Clown school, the one I attended and ones I've subsequently taught, is about extending permissions and letting pupils explore their own boundaries in Clown character development. Alan Clay taught a street-based Clown format so out of the studio we got to explore Clown perimeters in public.

My first Clown character was called Vernon Vortex, he wore a red nose and a baby bonnet and sometimes a sandwich board on which he'd write cryptic witticisms in chalk. His threadbare backstory was that vortexes were kinda like absences of stuff and that it was his job to go 'round filling them up.

In terms of permissions, I found a red nose was quite the anarchist passport. Downtown, I could climb the outsides of buildings and peer into first floor offices unimpeded. Alan used to release 12 trainee Clowns at once into a four block area downtown: I'd be climbing buildings, another would be walking backwards for block after block, another would be on her back on a traffic island with her legs in the air reading a book called 'Electricity Made Simple' and keening, another would be coaxing her pet ball of string down from a traffic light. Good times.

Vernon was my first talking clown. He evolved from his first show which was "How to create a near death experience: Life...is a near death experience when you think about it. ...I will begin by strangling myself" to a show selling isolation chambers on stage by zipping himself into an adapted shoe holder, saying "Have you ever been in a place...and thought you'd quite like to be...in another place?" Vernon would also appear between bands at high risk New Zealand rock and roll venues with a Bible to talk about his difficulties in his relationship with God regarding Deuteronomy in relation to industrial accidents and bar brawls culminating in the phrase, "and so I killed him." This Clown murder of an invisible

God after the tension created in any theological monologue was the relief the sodden masses needed. I appeared to rock.

But my next clown, Terrance the Artistic Amoeba, was the squid specialist. Vernon Vortex had a rationale: he dealt with vortices. Terrance the Artistic Amoeba just was. Terrence the Artistic Amoeba's first line was always, "My name is Terrance the Artistic Amoeba and my forte is artistic criticism."

Terrance's schtick was squid heavy. I'd begin by introducing thawed squid and explaining that they were just basically protoplasm with well-developed eyeballs programmed to come to the surface whenever lights appeared in the sky. I'd let that hang and then state, "and so I'm going to juggle them!"

Being a reactionary cynical juggler, squid suggested itself. I used an overhand technique and could juggle squid for as long as the concept required as a Clown statement, i.e; Yes, I am a Clown and yes, I am juggling squid .

It was the introduction to my statement about art and what art was. I'd promise, as a specialist in artistic criticism, a conclusive proof.

Which was, after juggling squid, I would introduce a mystery art object, an object hidden in a paper bag at the top of a stick that was one half of a spear fishing unit. My purpose, as Terrance the Artistic Amoeba whose specialty (artistic criticism) was to define art, initially, by juggling squid, then introducing a mystery art object with the ongoing motif that I would reveal it and artistically critique it.

The art object was a squid on a stick, what's more the stick was loaded with a propulsion unit, being the back end of an elastic speargun and so after the reveal I'd state that the squid was an art object, valid because I'd made it valid, and that like all great art, it needed to find its place in the community.

At this point I'd offer them the choice between the 4-story building on the left or the right, and whatever their choice, I would fling the squid over their heads and away as my show's climax.

So let's get to the drive-by shooting and let me say it was justified and I have no remorse. Clown vengeance is a beautiful thing,

given Clowns have to produce dignity from hidden corners of their deliberately low-status lives.

Auckland's biggest indoor venue was called 'Mainstreet' and held around 1500 punters. It was a dead dinosaur, being sold in a real estate deal and as a last ditch keep the lights deal the owner of a nearby performance cafe was given casting rights. Enter weirdness with people from outer suburbs being subjected to Thurs/Fri/Sat of young, bent culture. So I took my squid-flinging act indoors. Numbers on the first 2 days were so low that the whole affair marinated in its own non- event corpse secretions but Saturday night sat about 300. The bouncers were the original staff, along with the tickets sellers and the bar staff, and they were used to agro at the highest level.

I had been flushing my squid in the venue's public toilets after the shows. No fuss. My squid flinging had to be deft, well calibrated and the launches had to be aimed in a narrow spectrum avoiding an array of circular fans and the tables beneath. Easy on empty nights but the Saturday when I stated I was going to fling a squid out from the stage, one table of 6 in the middle at the back vacated defensively and the gods of comedy decreed that's where my squid landed. I thought that was great and retrieved it and flushed it after my act. Shortly afterwards backstage I got a warning that a bouncer was angry and looking for me. 'Everyone's a critic.' I thought.

30 minutes later I was accosted backstage by a livid bouncer who grabbed me in a neck pinch and dragged me to the toilets where it appeared my flushed squid had reappeared and startled some punter who'd shat and then inspected his output to be shocked at an aquatic protoplasm with a well-evolved singular eye staring back at him and had complained to an otherwise bored bouncer.

The bouncer, instead of simply flushing again, came and got me and gave me a coat hanger and plastic bag and told me to get rid of it elsewhere. So I fished it out, rinsed it, put it in the bag. Put it and my other props in the car I came in and had a couple more quick drinks.

We piled into the car and I was still smarting. I told the driver to crawl past the front doors of the place as I loaded my squid-projecting apparatus in the back seat and wound down the window. Comedy gods be praised, there he was, standing out on the pavement looking like a bald, neckless undersized Ork. I ordered a U-turn and we circled round again. I only had one chance. I'd have to shoot out the window and aim between parked cars from a moving vehicle but I had the steely discipline of a veteran sniper, and rage in my heart. The squid, that had once been on stage, then in the air, then in a toilet, then shat on, then rinsed off, was now set free again and shot between the parked cars and hit the bouncer flush in the side of the face as we laughed and sped off.

It was a beautiful thing.

# SCRIPTS

- I. Wallpeople
- II. Table Manners

## WALLPEOPLE

Something to Lean On; Wallpeople, a script for two Clowns  
Here's the bare bones.

I was in Copenhagen teaching at a circus school, 'Modern Clown,' a suitably vague and romantic term.

There were initially I think 3 or 4 students but it was very casual, no-one had invested any money, although I did get paid, and there were really only two very curious pupils.

I created a character exercise in which these two, male and female were 'wallpeople' in that their characters existence depended on having a wall at their back.

They explored the room, if a door was open they would have to reach out and close it to be able to move across.

We experimented for a bit, the innate problem was that they could never get past one another- well they did improvise one under, one over- and that was a victory in itself.

I told then that the next day we would experiment further on the Strøget, the longest pedestrian street in Europe (another reason I was there.)

The next day they arrive in town in characters they had worked on overnight, one had blackface with big white circles round the eyes and the other was the inverse, whiteface with large dark circles. It stays light late and after the shops had closed, (no more open doorways), we selected a long stretch of shops that faced out onto a square.

They started at opposite ends moving towards each other, as yet unaware of each other and exploring this new strange planet (Clown can be very much like that.) They had decided to make trilling noises as their language and each, with fingers and back and arms, explored while staring out at passers by.

Copenhagen is used to strange creative goings on, people further back who could see the inevitable, that they would meet, stopped and watched and slowly a crowd formed as they travelled closer to each other.

At some point they saw each other, still separated by 50 feet or so. They went through the scared but curious alternation as they now moved much more tentatively towards each other.

Before meeting, shoulder to shoulder, their eyes darting, scared but inquisitive.

They tried to push past each other but that didn't work.

They tried backing up and sliding into each other at speed, but that didn't work either.

They tried the one up one down method but gave up halfway, one on the bottom sitting with legs splayed, one on the top, sorta sitting on the other's head.

At this point they could have disengaged and been past each other but they resumed their respective positions, all the while staying wallpeople. This was as far as we had gone in class so I knew they must have something.

I waited, as did now a reasonably large crowd of curious Danes.

They came together again and both scrunched up their faces in a fair approximation of strenuous exertion and then it happened.

Their leading shoulders levered against each other and they popped free of the wall and stood back to back.

The audience laughed and clapped, they themselves were startled and amazed at this new freedom and locked back to back performed a dance, a dance they must have practiced the night before, and remaining locked back to back, they circled and wove and trilled with joy.

They had good timing and did not overplay this but went back to the wall and transferred themselves against it in the opposite manner than they had left it so that now they had managed to pass each other.

The only prop they both had was they each had a tin can, about as big as your head, that they had carried individually with them along the wall and left there while they initially interacted.

They each now picked up what now was not their can but the other's and in a bumbling way returned each other's cans.

It was only at this point they recognised they were being watched and so digested the attention of the crowd fearfully and then playfully. One of them had an idea and trilled and gestured with eyes and arms and the other understood.

They pushed mightily against each other and popped free of the wall again, this time tin cans in hand, they strode straight out deliberately, side-step by side-step until halfway between the wall and the facing crowd, they slowly lowered themselves, back to back, placed the cans on the ground, straightened and then scampered back sideways to the wall where they then crouched together, facing out, staring intensely at the cans, wide-eyed.

The first audience member made the break, walking forward and dropping some coin into a can.

The clowns' jaws dropped, they turned to each other and in unison, squealed and shook both their fists in joy. Then they became immediately serious and stared at the cans again.

This went on for a while, the jaw-dropping, the exchanged gleeful eye contact, the squeal and the vibrating fists of joy with the back to serious cut-off until they had milked the moment and the audience sufficiently. They then broke from the wall and bowed, receiving applause, collected their cans, I came up and hugged them and we walked away.

It really was remarkably beautiful what they did. On quite a few levels.

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## TABLE MANNERS

*A Nice Meal; Table Manners, a piece for two Clowns*

One thing about my creative modules I've noted is they don't seem to age. Admittedly, I do.

Daniel Pearson and I co-created this

It was performed over 30 times, it works. The script has lain idle for close to twenty years.

I'm releasing it on a standard open source code protocol.

Which means attribution of the original is acknowledged somewhere as pertaining to me but apart from that have at it. Thus you can adapt but not exclusively own that which you have taken. You may own whatever derivative you wish to construct.

I could see it being a precursor to a festival, a buzz creating pre-season. Or a parallel piece, set in various restaurants.

It requires minimal props, its production is cheap. It's a 20 minute piece, usually unnoticed for the first 5 or 10.

It is a set piece duo mime show set in a public restaurant. It was initially created for Perth City Council's annual summer program of inner city entertainment.

Using elements of invisible theatre, mime, pantomime and increasingly absurd character development, the piece develops from invisible theatre through to overt pantomime and essentially involves an excessively pedantic food critic and a waiter pushed too far.

The motivation for this work was to produce an initially subtle piece of theatre that didn't impose itself theatrically on dining patrons, but rather evolved in their midst.

It was important also to be sensitive to our host restaurant's prime function of providing quality atmosphere, service and food. Our brief was obviously to add to and enrich rather than subvert the atmosphere or food purvey function.

I had researched restaurant pieces, mainly English, and wanted to produce something that moved away from the accepted character farce and more in the direction of studied eccentricity while still employing basic theatrical structures.

I wanted to construct a piece that was self-contained, a performance that could be referred to by an audience while relieving

them from the necessity of direct engagement. (The dreaded "Approaching Violinist" syndrome)

Evolving from the pretext of a regular interaction between two characters, a waiter and a food critic, into studied absurdity, the piece was constructed to allow audience members to spend at least some time unsure of the context of what they, at various stages, began watching. The performance itself becomes a topic of conversation.

The piece is in fact initially invisible before graduating via eccentricity into obvious theatre. It's a twenty minute piece scripted to 100 cues. It involves an evolving surreal interaction between Waiter and Food Critic. It is a non-verbal piece.

#### SCRIPT BEGINS

Waiter/performer arrives pre-performance dressed in identical garb as other waiters. From kitchen, enters and sets empty table.

Food Critic/performer arrives and is shown to his table.

(Costume was tweed sports jacket with elbow patches, shirt and tie.)

Food Critic takes out small pad and pen and places them on table.

Fastidiously surveys table, switches position of salt and pepper, vase whatever..

Glances slightly furtively around before surreptitiously extracting a retractable tape measure from his pocket under the table and quite subtly measuring the distance between the edge of the table and the ends of the knife and fork then writing those figures on the pad placed on his right and then using the end of the the tape pushing the ends of the knife and fork a set distance from the edge of the table then, satisfied at his successful subterfuge he waits.

The Waiter passes by and the Food Critic catches his attention with a raised hand and finger and mimes a menu, opening and closing his palms. The Waiter nods and exits, returning with the menu and standing to the Food Critic's right as he studies it.

The Food Critic points at a dish on the menu, the Waiter brightens then remembers that item is not available and conveys

that by mimed mumbling and hand movements (hands palms down, one above the other then moved away from each other twice).

The Food Critic shrugs nonchalantly, studies the menu again and selects a second dish; the Waiter's reaction is repeated. The second option is not available.

The third selection is, and the Waiter exits with the menu.

The Food Critic after a short while (2 / 3 mins) on his own realises there is no water on his table.

The Waiter is hovering some distance away at the kitchen entrance.

The Food Critic raises his hand and finger and gets the Waiter's attention. Mouths the word 'water' while miming tipping a glass to his lips.

The Waiter looks confused. The Food Critic repeats his actions.

The Waiter, questioning, mouths the word 'water' and mimes breaststroke.

The Food Critic nods affirmatively and shortly afterwards the Waiter arrives with water and pours it, then departs.

Then follows at least 5 minutes of waiting. The water is sipped, the surroundings are gazed at, but eventually, slowly, the Food Critic begins to get drowsy, eventually succumbing; he nods off sitting.

He remains sleeping for a minute or more before the waiter arrives with his meal and stands beside him, a little bewildered at the situation before clearing his throat (the only vocal sound produced in the performance.)

The Food Critic snaps awake abruptly; the Waiter places the meal and moves to exit.

The Food Critic immediately calls him back. The Food Critic is not satisfied by the aspect of the plate and mimes the turning of the plate. The Waiter is surprised but does rotate the plate a couple of degrees and looks at the Food Critic for confirmation. The Food Critic is not yet happy and yet again the Waiter rotates the plate. Satisfied the Critic dismisses the Waiter, looks at the meal

fondly, then picks up knife and fork and puts first food into mouth. Stops, puts down cutlery and beckons Waiter firmly over.

In answer to the Waiter's inquiring expression, the Critic places his palms above the meal and mouths, "It's cold" He does this twice. The Waiter, understanding but a little miffed takes the plate and returns to the kitchen with it.

One to two minutes pass.

The Food Critic's attention is elsewhere as the Waiter re-enters the room, walking backwards through the tables, holding a lit candle underneath the plate of food, moving it about under the plate in an attempt to heat the meal.

While other patrons might notice this strange behaviour, the Food Critic does not and the Waiter puts the plate down on the table and moves away quickly enough that the Food Critic does not have time to call him back to rearrange the 'aspect' of the plate before he is well away and heading back to the kitchen.

Sighing, the Food Critic attempts to move his plate in an anti-clockwise (or clockwise--who cares?) fashion to find that the plate is indeed very hot.

(Also, because a candle has been used to this effect, the bottom edges of the plate are coated with soot.)

The Critic moves the plate in increments and between these applies his fingertips to his face in contemplative poses. In doing so he streaks soot across his face very obviously to all but him.

The Food Critic then eats his main course with due intensity while making occasional notes.

After which the Waiter returns, startles at the state of the Food Critic's face but carries on regardless, an inquiring expression from the Waiter is answered by a satisfied expression from the Food Critic who surrenders his plate and again mimes a menu while mouthing the word "Dessert."

The Waiter nods and removes the plate and goes into the kitchen.

The Waiter emerges from the kitchen carrying a dessert menu written on a blackboard and does not bring it to the table but

catches the Critic's attention and holds the menu aloft at a distance of a couple of tables away or at the kitchen entrance.

The Food Critic squints at the blackboard then reaches into his jacket pocket and brings out a spectacle case which he opens to discover it empty. He pats various pockets fruitlessly then squints again. The Waiter looks on expectantly.

The Food Critic signals that he cannot see the menu, he shows his empty glasses case and his attitude is apologetic yet persistently enquiring.

The Waiter's expression shows he has thought of a solution, he signals the food critic to wait a moment, rests the blackboard where it is and returns to the kitchen.

The Waiter returns moments later with a pair of binoculars on a serving platter which he crosses the restaurant with and presents to the Critic, who is momentarily puzzled but then quickly understands.

The Waiter then returns to his blackboard and again raises it, and the Food Critic applies the binoculars and studies the menu from across the room.

The Critic lowers the binoculars and mouths the words "Strawberry and Cream" which is one item on the menu. The Waiter nods in understanding, mirrors "Strawberry and Cream" and quickly exits with the board to the kitchen.

[NOTE: The binoculars have been rigged to leaves large black circles around the eyes of the user so now the Food Critic has a face smeared with soot and additionally two large black circles 'round his eyes while being unaware of this.]

The Food Critic, oblivious to his condition and also any reaction from other patrons, waits in anticipation of dessert.

The Waiter re-enters with a large plate on which, placed in the middle, is a solitary Strawberry.

The Waiter places the plate and turns to go but the Food Critic stops him and looks at the plate and back at the waiter and mouths the word "Cream."

The Waiter does not understand.

The Critic repeats mouthing the word “Cream” while miming the milking of a cow, then pointing to his plate.

The Waiter understands “Oh Cream!” he mouths and quickly exits.

Returning moments later with a pressure cream dispenser, leaning over the table and squirting the smallest dab of cream possible next to the solitary strawberry on the large plate. Turning to go, he is stopped by the Critic who mouths the word “More” while miming a big pile on top of the strawberry.

The Waiter, growing finally frustrated, does as instructed and again turns to go but again is stopped and the ritual of “More” is reenacted.

The Waiter then applies a very large blob of cream in the middle of the plate and turns to the food critic for confirmation that it finally is enough.

The Food Critic is satisfied and dismisses the Waiter who walks away but then circles back and while the Food Critic is poised to attack his pile of cream with a strawberry buried in it, the Waiter stealthily administers a final blob of cream from his dispenser from behind the Food Critic and on top of the Critic’s head. The Waiter then exits.

So now the food Critic is eating cream, finding the strawberry, cutting it up and using pieces of it to shovel cream, eating his absurd dessert with relish, unaware that his face is streaked with soot, he has large black circles ‘round his eyes and a medium blob of cream on top of his head in a public place.

Shortly afterwards the Waiter passes and the Food Critic signals for the bill, the Waiter indicates that the meal is on the house and the Critic smugly accepts this development. The Waiter hovers, the food Critic ostentatiously but clumsily shakes the Waiter’s hand while transferring a tip and then saunters, satisfied, from the premises unaware of the shocking state of himself.

SCRIPT ENDS

NOTES

This was performed in a variety of restaurants for both lunchtime and evening audiences.

Some, formica tabled, others upmarket.

Daniel Pearson (my waiter performer and performance partner for this show- I was the critic) who is English, who I had met at the Halifax Street Performance Festival where he was in the original cast of the duo, 'Men in Coats,' was/is a talented clown and mime/non-vocal performer whose timing and characterisation lent much to the piece.

In one instance someone approached Daniel and told him quite seriously that they had never seen a waiter as disrespectful to a customer as he was.

On another, a patron approached and leaned over me and said, "I have never seen anyone treat a waiter as rudely as you; you make me very angry, I want to hit you in the head. I have to go for a walk now."

Strangely, both of those people were German tourists. Just saying.....

It was interesting to see how long the theatre could be sustained as 'invisible;' that is, not recognised as theatre.

Sometimes me falling asleep signalled that there was a contrived element to the situation but often there would be an envelope of time where onlookers might suspect but not have yet confirmed to themselves that what they were seeing was theatre.

The Binoculars were the tipping point.

Before that, even with having fallen asleep, having soot all over my face and my interaction with the waiter being entirely wordless, people still clung to an idea that it could be real.

It was a very interesting experiment. We received a standing ovation from one or two venues and all were applauded.

I have not included every little piece as there were a couple of 'bits' that established character and status that I omitted in this narrative, just as any new rendition would have embellishments that came with the performers' inputs into the process.

**PROPERTIES REQUIRED:**

(Flatware, glassware, linens and dishes supplied by venue)

Pocket sized notebook & pen

Retractable tape measure

(meal provided by venue)

Candle (and matches or lighter)

Chalkboard & chalk

Spectacle case, empty

Binoculars

Strawberry

(plate provided by venue)

Can of whipped cream

THE END.....



# EXCERPT FROM: PANTO DAMASCUS

*By Robert Nelson*

Perhaps the best reality stories on busking I have ever seen. Ewen's insights into the people, places and situations are the driving force behind his clownish romp around the globe. Every story takes you to a new street corner of his mind. It is simply a superb map showing a clown's journey from A to Z.

*By Samantha Rowe*

A job well done - Joy, sadness, nostalgia and substance abuse all combine for a glorious celebration of the true diversity of humanity. I look forward to the author's next installment.

*By Jamey Mossengren*

Wow, what a fun roller-coaster ride of a book! Was very interesting to read professional street performing stories from all around the world, with lots of ups, downs, twists and turns along the way. I hope he releases a Volume 2 someday to add 26 more stories I can read about as it is so interesting to see inside the life and brain of a clown who is trying to make other people happy thus making the world a better place.

*By Fraser Hooper*

I loved this book. It's a spectacular often painful journey into the life and mind of a world class globe-trotting street performer. Martin doesn't hold back, his bitter words hit hard and he describes in detail with great delight some really terrible gigs. He's an outsider, a provocateur and clown, an observer who records with clarity the best and worst of different cultures. What sticks though and is present throughout the book is his passion for his chosen craft and the genuine love for some of his fellow performers. Martin's acerbic writing is dark, sometimes bleak but ultimately liberating, he gives us a rare insight into the street performing world and the wild experiences that have shaped his life.

*By Brian Wilson*

Apr 16, 2018

Martin Ewen brings you along in his tales of travels across the globe as a stilt-walking mime. Ever wanted to know what it's like to be a street performer? A real artist making a living on the festival and street corner circuit? Martin is a brilliant storyteller and this volume leaves the reader wishing that there were more letters in the alphabet.

*By Michael Anthony Bonnici*

Panto Damascus was a revelation to me. In addition to being witty, insightful, articulate; Martin writes with compassion and generosity. Each of the 26 chapters captured the spirit of performing from an interesting and affirming angle. And I felt grateful, again and again, to know someone out there understood several of the sometimes isolating experiences of busking and performing as a lonely troubadour who rarely and only kinda fits in. Because Martin has travelled further and thought more deeply about several of the topics his stories conveyed, I found layers of busking potential opening while I read his work. Most pronounced to me, were the ideas of limitlessness through the indulgence of one's own unique quirks and ideas, the acceptance of life's difficulties and

discomforts as necessary steps toward one's own limitlessness, as well as much more appreciation of my fellow artists. Practically speaking, I found the shows I've done since and while reading to be more free form, intuitive and responsive in general to the crowds and environment, and twice now (London and Vancouver), I've followed his queue to scope out pitches in advance of showing up with my gear. To other artists, I cannot recommend Panto Damascus enough. Bravo!

## FORT GREENE (BROOKLYN)

### LURQUE DU SOLEIL

There I was, lounging in my woodland lair, juxtaposing rancid mind ulcers and bitterly corrosive mindsets while providing male-rolmodelship to a six- and a fifteen-year-old and support and hardship in relatively equal measure to my partner (who, much like a pillar of chocolate stuck into a lump of ice-cream, is used to being surrounded by mental dysfunction and survives and complements it without being directly affected by its flavour). I was—briefly—resting at home in Connecticut, as I was being far-flung fairly regularly that season, to various states of America, Canada, Germany and Japan to allow people respite from the contemplation of their own futile existences by the production of an instinctive and involuntary braying commonly known as laughter.

When I got this e-mail:

*Bonjour Martin Ewen:*

*We are pleased to inform you that you have been selected to take part in our next acting audition in New York.*

*When: September 16th & 17th, 2003*

*PLEASE TAKE NOTE THAT ONLY THE CANDIDATES SELECTED ON SEPTEMBER 16th WILL BE INVITED THE DAY AFTER, SEPTEMBER 17th, TO CONTINUE MORE THOROUGHLY THE AUDITION.*

*At Cirque du Soleil, we are in direct contact with the public; like traveling performers, actors invent characters and magically transform themselves in order to hold the audience spellbound. Non-verbal performance underscores the fact that the body is always telling a story.*

*Please prepare a three-minute act, including make-up and costumes if necessary. You may use small props; however, masks, fire, water or any other messy substances are prohibited. This three-minute segment should not require much preparation time. If you wish to use a soundtrack on CD or cassette, you can, but please, in the case of a cassette, make sure it is already cued to the right place. During these three minutes, dazzle us! Surprise us! Show us who you are!! The presentation of the three-minute prepared acts will be followed by group and individual exercises.*

*The selection process will go on both days.*

*Regards, etc.*

I succumbed to a mental flurry—trains entered tunnels, watermelons exploded, a small potbellied child looked up from the parched earth holding an empty chipped wooden bowl.

'I'll be fucked', I thought.

I immediately began my research:

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL AT A GLANCE

Founded: June 1984

International Headquarters in Montreal  
with over 1,000 employees

Number of employees worldwide: 2,500

Number of artists: More than 500

Average age of employees: 34

Number of nationalities: 40

Languages spoken: At least 25

Number of shows currently running: 9

Number of cities visited since 1984:

Over 240 engagements in 90 cities

Number of spectators since 1984: More  
than 37 million

Number of spectators expected in 2003: 7  
million +

Number of spectators per weekend in 2003:

Close to 60,000

A little searching also revealed a robust tendency to expand productions and a profit last year of a little over \$50 million.

I had chatted with Lee Ross about his experiences; he had taken three principal character roles in Cirque's first Asian tour and before that was an international street performer; and I'd worked many festivals alongside the Stretch people, a duo high-skill balance act with stacked chairs who have that eccentric witty British banter thang going on. Stretch had worked all 2001 for Cirque in Belgium and were happy with what they had negotiated. 'Mutual respect, work you hard, pay you well,' was the impression I was left with.

I also found out that the whole Cirque mega-mega had grown from a group of Montreal stilt performers with time on their hands, one of whom had gone down to Hawaii and presumably camped on a beach and smoked enough spliff to have 'A Big Idea.'

Now as you know, I'm a stilt performer, and in all honesty I'm probably better at stilts than most of the pre-Cirque gang.

But that's all I'm good at—unlike them, I'm not a stilt performer with a grand vision that has cemented a distillation of circus, street and visual cabaret into a hybrid form of theatre that has successfully branded itself into the modern world's consciousness. (In this particular case, I mean the world that has \$50 disposable or more a day to spend, or that can imagine that possibility, and not the modern world where three billion people live on under \$2/day.)

I am merely a Clown who has used stilts as a means to distance himself from people, and as a distraction when presented to their hideous expectations regarding entertainment. That I have been successfully peddling my brand of comic dissatisfaction for over 25 years is simply a cunningly designed consequence of my audience's innate insecurity, and their recognition of a furious discontent and subterranean disappointment that only a Clown like myself can safely manifest in public.

That's the theory, anyway.

So I replied to the email with,  
*Sure, I'll be there.*  
 I had so many questions:

*How many people will be there?  
 Is this a select thing or a cattle call?  
 Are you looking to fill specific vacancies or are you working  
 towards the ultimate database that is itself a substantial  
 commodity?  
 How much heart remains inside your enormous lumbering and  
 artful enterprise, and is it true that absolute power corrupts  
 absolutely?*

Probably most importantly:

*Can I trust you?  
 No really, if I had to get all vulnerable and out on a limb and  
 committed and self-sacrificing, can I trust you?  
 I'm little and you're big, do you retain any memories of being  
 little?  
 Can you identify with my fear?  
 Will the 'greater good' philosophy, on which all self-sustaining  
 groups fuel their existence, grind me into a malleable,  
 disposable paste?*

I kept my questions to myself, tucking them into my frayed  
 mind satchel and filing them under 'Brood at Your Leisure.' A  
 very large file, and my only superannuation plan to date.

So. Three minutes. Mmmm...

I went out to the driveway to stitch up some structure.

After a couple of hours I was tired and sugar-deficient and  
 unimpressed. Did I mention that it was now the day before the au-  
 dition?

I changed plans. I figured that as always, I'd wing it, and that I  
 had enough material to cut and paste to whatever the situation of-  
 fered. I'd just use a hastily compiled music selection as a loose  
 structure.

*Yeah, that sounds right*, I thought as I took off my stilts, knowing that the next time I put them on I'd be there.

So I caught a train to go across to New York City. The train broke down. I waited an hour and then I waited for another hour. The next train picked me up and then was halted by some station down the line that had been closed by the police for a further hour. At this stage it was nearly midnight, I should have completed a two-hour commute and six hours later I'm still on a train, thinking,

*I'm going to head straight home, this is pointless, I miss my comfort zone, I'm speeding down life's highway in a hopeful vehicle that doesn't belong to me and I'm sure to be pulled over and fined by the disappointment police:*

*I'm sorry, sir, but is that a larger than life aspiration you have tucked under your seat there? And by the look of your plates, you're a long way from Loserville. You're nicked, son.'*

But then, this sort of despondency's where I get my best material. I reminded myself that despondency's my friend and I'm the kind of sick puppy that won't lie down. My mood lifted.

After all, in days of yore, I'd walked sixteen subway stops at dawn in the drizzle with all my luggage to save my last five dollars so I could buy one last sandwich as I huddled in a doorway at the Pompidou Centre in Paris, waiting out the rain to eventually earn enough to book into a four-star hotel and dine on fine food and all I could drink by day's end.

The train eventually pulled into Grand Central and I went crosstown to Brooklyn and stayed with friends overnight.

Next morning I made my way to the Mark Morris Dance Center on Lafayette and got myself buzzed in and up to the 5th floor, an hour early at nine. It's a contemporary five-story building that simply states,

*'We are a successful multi-storied, multi-studioed New York modern dance creative phenomenon and if that makes you feel foreign you probably are.'*

Feeling suitably small-town antipodean I got into the lift (a remarkable metal box that transports people between floors of a building so that they do not have to tire themselves using stairs)

and then disembarked in the fifth floor foyer to wait with the handful of prospective auditionees who had already gathered. I got out my book—Porn by Irvine Welsh—and sat down on my chainsaw-case with its protruding fly swat to kill an hour as the rest of us trickled in.

Peripherally, I couldn't help taking stock of the atmosphere, which was casual but tense, wary yet curious, introvertedly competitive but over-layered with just a touch of Stockholm syndrome. The unifying aspect was that everyone there was out of his or her depth.

This was a Cirque de Soleil audition, full of hidden subtexts, mysterious and esoteric benchmarks, and cloaked criteria.

Strange, French-Canadian slash pan-cultural slash neo-circus slash bleeding-edge visual and cultural value systems were at work here, and no sane individual goes to an audition without equal measures of ambition and vulnerability.

We were all there to be judged, we had all submitted ourselves to this process willingly only because surviving it looked to be in our best interests, much like a third world virgin bride prostrating herself willingly under a hairy, sweating foreigner in the financial interests of her family and the hope that one day she could grow to love him—so it was with us.

Or more simply, some of us may have had superficially cast-iron egos and a sense of adventure.

The registration period began; you gave your name and were given a number to pin on yourself. I was 100, which is a 1, denoting substance, followed by two zeroes, one negating the 1 and the other taking the prime value, giving me the equivalent value of a void. My mind is forever calculating. Hey ho.

Your file was found and your CV checked. If your CV was not there, you were asked to briefly make one up on the spot.

Mine was not there.

I had previously submitted one, and it's on my website, but the reality of the situation was that, with 10 minutes to go, I had to sum up my professional live experience while merely guessing at the attributes being sought.

I listed Teachers, Groups I'd Worked For, Groups I'd Taught, International Arts Festivals, and countries where I'd done street theatre.

I felt it wasn't fair and that I was made to feel incompetent, but quickly reminded myself that I am but a speck of dust in the Cirque cathedral and that my sense of persecution is, in most cases, a defensive form of self-flattery.

In the studio proper, 50 prospective performers stretched, warmed up, renewed acquaintances and friendships, waited, spied on each other, feigned serenity, made strange vocal noises learned at drama school, paced, loosened limbs and otherwise surfed their stress tsunamis.

We were called into focus, we were thanked for giving of our time, we were told that Cirque had very specific needs and that we as performers should not try and guess them but just give of ourselves through this process.

We were asked who spoke French, and those who raised their hands were told to keep well away from the table where the director and three other staff members sat, watched and muttered critical asides.

It was added that Cirque had evolved from the world of street theatre, and that street performers colonised public places and worked with what they found there to sustain people's attention, and that we should use the space that we had been given to audition in with that in mind.

During our pieces, we might be stopped and directed to follow some unrelated exercise; this should not be seen as criticism but as an opportunity.

We were treated with respect, and an effort was made to relax a large group of nervous (and in some cases barely contained) human/golden-retriever-puppy half-breeds (I say that kindly, as people, especially performers who literally turn their nervous dispositions into art forms, react to stress in different ways).

One guy was literally bouncing off the walls with excitement, a useful energy. You could instruct someone like that to remove the

snow from, say, an Olympic stadium, turn your back to make a cup of coffee, and it would be done.

We went through a basic warm-up where we did some spatial exercises, some mimicking movement work, and pace was toyed with briefly.

Then we all sat down and got to watch 49 other people perform 3 minutes or so of audition each.

I was excused to get ready, as I was the only person using apparatus (special!). So I missed about five pieces, then re-entered and watched only two more before being selected.

Everything we did, individual and group, was videoed.

I did my piece, which I dedicated to the interpretation, from the perspective of a deaf person, of a jaded peacock accidentally stumbling into a nightclub staffed by vultures who are cruelly force-feeding geese to sell to the French, who are waiting in the chill-out room with burlap sacks for their livers.

One fortunate effect of spending 20+ years in a laughably narrow field of expertise is that, at worst, you become self-evidently above average.

So I pranced and pimp-walked, hither and thithered, wiggled and waggled, shimmied and spun.

With what was left of my personality, I dredged animation from the turgid morass of my tortured, bitter and confused, yet defensively whimsical soul.

People clapped and I went out to change.

After returning I watched the range of personalities.

Some people flaunted a singular whim; they selected one premise and performed it for three minutes. Once you got their premise you simply had to see whether they could survive their time.

They seemed to be selling their flippant disregard for the laws of supply and demand.

Others, who I presumed considered themselves charmed, and life a fantastic adventure that one day they would sell the film rights to, simply went out and did the first thing that came into their heads.

This included (but was not limited to) pretending to pick up unknown objects before becoming engrossed in various body parts, rolling around on their backs grasping at their limbs, and bellowing aggressively in the faces of individual audience members.

Others had set movement pieces, of which some were tentative and relied on either a kind interpretation that subjectively lent depth or divine intervention.

Still others were simply breathtaking—engrossing, evocative, disciplined expressions of fully formed and capable physical artists.

The majority were in between.

Sometimes the director interrupted, and the participant would be asked to parody a modern dance piece or given a theme.

There were some funny set pieces and some really good weird character work, both silent and vocal.

There was top shelf breakdancing and a specialist trick rope and whip performer. Ages ranged from maybe late teens-early twenties to late forties. The room was full of strange, singular show-offs. A break was called and the first cut made. Names were read out and those people met with one of the staff at one end of the room.

The rest of us stayed where we were and watched as the group were spoken to. It was done sensitively and I presume they were thanked for their time and told that they were not specifically what was being looked for this time round, but that on many occasions people in the past had come back for the next audition and been perfect for what was being sought then.

Those of us left obviously felt some relief, but the reality was that cuts were made continuously, sometimes an hour apart, and would continue over the next two days.

We looked at each other at that stage and it was still impossible to discern what the theme was.

The most talented remained (about thirty of us), but some real talent had as well already left the room.

We then went through two exercises. Firstly, you had to cross the room diagonally one after the other, as if being pulled by your nose.

I thought,

*These guys are taking liberties with transparent metaphoric puns.*

Then we had to cross as if led by our hips. This was followed by a cut, only this time the names of those to continue were read out, and the numbers not called were generally thanked and made their own way out. We were down to about twenty.

More exercises followed. It was the last half hour of the first day. After which there was another cut. Numbers were called, of those people back for day two. The head casting woman read out the numbers then paused AND SHE HADN'T READ OUT MY NUMBER!

I had failed. I was unimpressive, and I had risked vulnerability and would have to live with the consequences of my foolhardy, tatty, deceiving, hopeful, deluded, optimism. The only redeeming circumstance was that I was in New York and it shouldn't be too hard to go out into the wrong part of town and be shot before sundown.

And then she said,

'And I'd like to speak to these people as well,'  
and read out my number along with two others.

I was convinced still that these extra people were singled out so that she could advise them to perhaps try harder next time, and that they were the closest almost-rans she'd ever had the pleasure of discarding.

But no. We were called because we were specialists, and while the general cast continued the next morning, we were asked to re-join them at 2PM for the final exercises, with the eventual final cut, when we'd be given an added opportunity to showcase any skills we had not included in our first three minutes.

The relief was tangible; however, part of my personality disorder is that relief from fear or disappointment or depression only ever brings me up to a relieved neutral.

I seem to lack the capacity for corresponding highs to offset my lows, to be at my best when articulating dissatisfaction, either written, mimed, or vocalised, and am indeed a strange and perplexed individual.

I do admit to a certain joy in dancing.

## DAY TWO

Arrived at the casual hour of 2PM, just as the last individual was being sympathetically and with due respect led from the group.

There were now six remaining with the additional three ‘specialists’ making nine.

I guessed correctly that this was the final selection. We sat and watched for an hour as those 6 had further exercises; then a choreographer arrived and we all got put through our paces.

I was terrible, the worst. I have great body memory, but initially learning choreography is all in the head.

It was simple, really—eight counts and two counts and run this way and do this then run that way and do that and then skip this way and do this with your arms then do that with your arms then reverse your skip and same again with the arms and then spin thus and reach and grasp and slow clench and crouch.

I’ve worked with dancers before and always admired their quicksilver ingestion of instruction and their ability to just get it down so quickly while I lumber about, internally screaming,

‘Just give me a set of instructions and two hours by myself, oh God I’m so shit at this!’

I was so embarrassed that passing motorists were inexplicably blushing as they drew by the building.

After we had done the piece in a group, we had to do it in twos. I was left ‘til last and rejoined by one of the woman who’d already done it, because we were odd-numbered.

I got completely lost twice and would have jumped out the fifth-story window, had there only been one in the room.

After this I was asked to get ready to do some stilt work. Again, the relief was strangely hollow after such psychic disembowelment.

Still, I showed them how I could skip rope on stilts, how I could get down onto a folding chair and up again, and various stilt dance vocab.

We then went through the last stage—down now to eight, as one guy whose specialty was vocal was excused.

Our next task was to stare into a camera and change expressions as we were peppered with words.

We had to speak to camera and show our ability to stretch major ligaments.

We had to state our names, where we were from, sing if we wanted to and describe why we wished to work for Cirque.

Some things I didn't say were:

'Because I want a Mini with all the extras.'

'Because I'm tired of working in the rain.'

'Because with my experience and your name on my resume I could go back to New Zealand and live off government arts grants for the rest of my life.'

What I did say I'm going to keep to myself, but it was just as truthful.

We were then given a sheet of paper that read:

*Congratulations! You have passed the first step! We are adding your name to our bank of possible candidates. This does not constitute an immediate commitment on our part. This means that you may be selected for a position in which your particular expertise is required.*

Then followed instructions regarding passports and info updates and it finished with,

*Be patient... and good luck!*

So that was it.

Eight people were left out of fifty.

Eight people with pieces of paper and hopes and dreams intact.

Many who had not continued to the end were awesomely talented and all of the 50 were brave.

I had made it to the end, and the strange sense of fulfillment, relief, exhaustion and pride could almost be called happiness.

