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THE COURAGE TO CLOWN by Shannon Honeybloom

Clown Workshop for Women: A Nose of Her Own

From the trickster to the troubadour, from the court jester to the fool— the history of clowns is rich and varied. Clowns both entertain and inform – in certain times during history, only the court jester was able to speak out against the ruler, to say the truth, masking truth within story and humor.

Even today, clowns have a way of speaking the truth. The mirror the clown holds up to the world is not one which reflects perfection and conformity. It is a mirror which reflects an individual's warts, faults, idiosyncratic and inappropriate behaviors, out of control emotions – all of the things which most people try to check or hide.

The clown does not hide, and in this act of revealing, being a clown can be freeing. In daily life, many people check their emotions, construct walls of protection around themselves, push down their feelings and impulses. The clown doesn't do that.

Finding one's self beneath all these constructed layers and protective hiding places can sometimes be challenging. Becoming one's self is truly a task of a lifetime.

In response to their own experiences as women and as performers, Laura Geilen and Benedicta Bertau of *Walking the Dog Theater* (www.wtdtheater.org) have started a clowning workshop for women: **A Nose of Her Own**. Laura and Benedicta, in sharing and spreading the work of the clown, help others to find and reveal inner truth within.

Both women have followed a fascinating path as teachers and as performers, and, at the risk of sounding cliché, they take their clowning seriously.

Laura Geilen is receiving her clown facilitation training through Nose to Nose (www.nosetonose.info). In describing this unique program, she writes: “the (facilitation training) work is less about teaching clown technique, though it follows naturally through listening and learning to be fully present, but is more about learning to create a safe space and providing guidance for the "inner clown" to emerge. We are like "midwives" --gently guiding the process to find the tiny clown within longing to be born and set free.”

Laura shares her own journey as a person and as a performer: “I have always had a soft spot for the underdog.” A dancer at an early age, and a fan of Fred Astaire, she eventually left the grueling demands of perfection which dancing places upon its participants for the encompassing truth and humor of clowning.

Laura has worked for many years with special needs children and adults in Camphill Village. She writes: “a lot of inspiration for my work comes from living and working with my special friends in Camphill Village. I feel (and I say this with the utmost respect for the person with special needs) that anyone who wishes to understand the nature of the clown might like to visit a Camphill Village for a while. Many of these friends of mine are not in the position to let their intellect get in the way of their heart, their desires and their possibility to live out of their authentic selves. They will tell it like it is, and respond out of the truth of the moment and of their emotional response to what's going on. How much they are free show us!! And this is often in spite of a so-called challenge to express themselves!! It is this challenge that we admire, makes us pay attention, and endears us to them. We love their humanity and admire their struggle. I not saying they *are* clowns, but that it is the same with the true clown.”

Co-producer of the workshop, Benedicta Bertau, is also an accomplished dancer, actor and performer. She relates her own discovery of her inner clown: “I did not discover my clown. It discovered me. While still in eurythmy school, we were putting on the traditional send-off event for the graduating students... We chose a setting that needed a clown; I volunteered. The day of the event, my clown dropped down on me, and into me. It was a very strange and exhilarating experience, which I would describe as feeling like a champagne glass filled with love, pure love for everyone and everything, including myself. This experience led to my thesis research on humor. Humor is a state of mind entirely reserved to the human being. It helps us take a step back from our existence and take ourselves more lightly. The clown work I have since pursued is a process I experience as a path toward vulnerability and acceptance of who we are, and right now... It takes enormous courage to be, that’s what we practice with the clown ‘work’ we do.”

Both Benedicta and Laura meld art and healing together in the workshop. Laura says of the workshop: “the success (of the workshop) has us convinced that the clowning work can alleviate pressure and help us live closer to the truth, our truth... Whether or not these chances to throw off any inhibitors to our true selves finds its way into everyday life remains to be seen. During the time we spend together, we feel truly seen, truly ourselves, truly human and most of all accepted into the hearts of everyone present because one can’t help but admire and feel warmed by each one’s journey to the beautiful moment of letting be and letting go.”

Clowning is truly a way to get to the heart of the matter. Benedicta writes: “If we consider the face, the human countenance as a mirror and expression of the three qualities of thinking, feeling, and willing, we can attribute the feeling/heart to the middle section of the face, to the nose. The clown wears the smallest mask: a round red nose. It expands and rounds the feeling realm. While masking our true nose, we reach toward unveiling our heart.”

In these times where the heart is often pushed aside, and where people find it more and more difficult to get to the core, to really find and be themselves, workshops such as *A Nose of Her Own*, offer a respite from perfection and rigidity and an opportunity for healing and truth through laughter and acceptance.

For more information on the workshops, check out Nose to Nose at www.nosetonose.info and Walking the Dog Theater at www.wtdtheater.org



Photo by Peter Bruno