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# A Clown's World

Contributed by Bob Cline  
Tuesday, 11 November 2008

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Obviously the circus clown has had many changes over the years. We can trace the origins back as far as the jesters of the medieval times. Even the biblical times tells of entertainers. So how did these pantomimes and court jesters steal their ways into those hearts? They mastered the art of day to day living and made a pun of the simplest things in life.

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Clowns as we know them today have evolved from the singer / jester of two hundred years ago to the fantastic art form of comedy pantomime in huge auditoriums and arenas today. The earliest forms of clowns talked to the crowds as they were small enough to be heard by all. They even sang the enchanting song of the day to such all time greats as "The Daring young man on the Flying Trapeze."

While the Circus clown has been immortalized as the flamboyant punster, film studios have twisted the clown and his grotesque make-up into creatures of evil and horror. Rightfully so, some people today are scared to death of a clown.

The clown has evolved into a piece of art and those they take the part of a circus clown, a circus performer, are true artists in every sense of the word. They have to be creative first of all. Their facial make-up while it may be patterned after another clown is a one of a kind fingerprint for each individual clown. It is an unwritten rule in the world of greasepaint and slapstick that no one wears the same face as some one else.

These facial make-ups are then categorized in different styles or looks. The basic whiteface clown wore the leotards, slippers, and even a pointed hat as in the old Dan Rice style. The Auguste type usually

exaggerates the features of the face with larger than life smiles, BIG eyes, a huge nose, and round rosy cheeks. His costumes are silly; some have polka dots or stripes and usually are accompanied by gigantic shoes. The tramp type clown is usually a down and out character with a dirty unkempt appearance but still utilizing the traits of other clowns such as the large shoes or red nose. Clowns can be as simple as a regular person sitting in the crowd who is actually part of the act. These are called your Plant or stooge.

While most circuses usually carried one clown who interacted with the performance and the crowd, the necessity to add more clowns came about with the enlargement of the circus tent itself. While the circus was basically a one ring affair, the quest to expand and offer more than ever added to the circus press corps delight in securing the notoriety of the never seen before acts, more than ever claims, and the bold brash statements of the "Greatest Show on Earth"

As more and more clowns joined the circus ranks, the presentations and abilities of the circus clown changed as well. Soon the ability to speak to the entire audience was diminished or completely gone due to the new found size of the crowds. To be able to communicate their points, the clowns turned to acting out their scenarios in a dramatic and foolish way. These pantomimes and slapstick used a wide variety of props to achieve their laughs from the audience such as a clown going to the dentist, or the clown Fire Department.

Thronges of clowns now gathered in the canvas arena for a slapstick adventure designed to make you laugh and also to act as a diversion while another circus act was being taken down or being put up for another featured performer. Whistles, Sirens, smoke, Firecrackers, and long, long, very long shirts, all made us scream with delight and laugh at the silliness of what we go through every day.

While the clowns were there every day and were wonderful at what they do, very rarely did we ever remember a single clown's name unless we studied Circus History and events. Emmett Kelly and Lou Jacobs are probably remembered by more people than any other clowns. Emmett Kelly was known as a hobo character who tried to sweep the floor with a spotlight as his pile of dust getting smaller all the time and moving from side to side only to burst all over the place. The legendary clown, Lou Jacobs is famous for his motorized bathtub, his miniature car, and his very long face make-up. A very similar likeness to Lou Jacobs even became a US Postage Stamp. Some great clown gags and scenes with the clowns are preserved in Cecil B. DeMille's epic film "The Greatest Show on Earth" which was filmed on the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1951.

Today's Big Apple Circus has the likes of Barry Lupin's immortal character "Grandma" who is as well know in the Big Apple Circus as he is in Television and Parades. He was a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus performer for five years after graduating from Clown College. He has captivated the crowds at the Big Apple Circus since 1982 and appeared in films like Pee Wee's Big Top Adventure. As a member of the International Clown Hall of Fame he stands in good company with other master clowns such as Glenn "Frosty" Little, Otto

Greibling, Lou Jacobs and many others.

We remember other clowns in our lives but we don't think of them as circus clowns. We can't talk about clowns without recalling the entertaining genius of Richard "Red" Skelton and his many characters and funny faces he provided. His father was a circus clown and "Red" was also on the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus before getting into the TV industry. Max Patkin was known as the "Clown Prince of Baseball" a one man baseball institution with his hilarious hi-jinks on the Baseball diamonds across America. The cross eyed expressions, the rubbery mouth going all over and the floppy double jointed body movements all brought us laughter with out any clown make-up at all. Going back a little bit further in history was the greatness of a true master of the screen in the form of Charlie Chaplin.

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