

TOM GREDER / OSKAR

2011

Finding Comedy:

Creativity, contemporary clowning,
theatre and play workshops

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Workshop introduction

In addition to over 24 years experience as itinerant performing artist, Tom Greder conducts regular creativity, performing, communication and team-building workshops throughout the world.

Based on 'Play' as being the fundamental expression of human creativity and the basis of meaningful interaction and problem solving, the workshops encourage a personally relevant and transformative expression for all those who want or need it.

Toms' distinct approach focuses on the relationship between the 'Person', 'Character' and 'Artist' in all of us. By understanding, exploring and harmonising the often conflicting nature of these inner voices through humour, participants gain a clearer awareness of themselves and their creative process.

The inspiring and challenging workshops are aimed at anyone who wishes to gain a deeper insight into their creativity and abilities, and develop an empowered and liberated stage presence.



Workshop Pedagogy

In order to create articulate and engaging communication or poignant performance, a deeper level of understanding about the human condition has to be awakened. Essential to this is a personal acceptance of the absurd and paradoxical nature of existence. The creative and artistic process is a deeply 'human' one. It draws on the human and speaks through metaphor, parody, analogy, satire and comedy about the human.

Towards this understanding and acceptance, the workshops look at isolating, understanding and utilising the often conflicting relationship between the *Artist*, *Person* and *Character* (*Personage*) within us all. Related to the concepts of Ego, Super-ego and Id, this notion helps participants to identify the different objectives and motivations of these inner voices. Essentially, these voices represent our opposing and irreconcilable desire for both control & chaos, security & risk, predictability & surprise, wisdom & ignorance....the paradoxical human experience.

However, just as each of these *Voices* is integral in the creative process, so too can each interfere with or sabotage the process. Each has its place and significance yet each tries to dominate. It is the *Artist* who must delegate the responsibilities of each voice....and learn to manage the two effectively.

By doing so, the performer is able to identify with and articulate a total personality, and thus, transcend mere entertainment and create transformative work.

This is achieved by unlocking the habitual, rigid *Form* of the participant through creating an environment of *Play*. In this state, the often denied and filtered *impulses* of the *Person* have the chance to manifest. *Play* encourages the freedom of movement, speech and fantasy necessary to the illogical, impulsive experience of creativity and essential to good performance.

Free from normal inhibitions and the constraints of habit and denial, these *personal impulses* are given a form through the *Character* (the stage personage). Expressing this total personality through dramaturgy and performance creates a transformative experience...one which not only engages, but also affects and changes both the audience and the performer.

Although primarily targeted at performing artists, the principles and techniques explored and developed can be applied to any creative endeavor, professional or personal. As such, the workshops cater for a vast range of participants, all of whom share in common an interest or need for creative, personally relevant and profound communication which transcends words and actions.

Workshop Content

The form of the workshop is based on contemporary Play and clown techniques. Contemporary clowning principles are utilised heavily because the clown figure, in its pure form, bases itself precisely on the 'human condition'....on the fundamental paradox that is life and death. In this way it engages and develops both the personal and professional aspects of a participant.

The workshop uses individual, partner and group games and tasks to expand the creative palate of participants and clarify their individual personal and professional paths. The activities focus on combining personal exploration and revelation with techniques for applying these in an abstracted or metaphorical way to the creation of engaging performance.

In addition to theoretical, philosophical and historical discussion on the nature and creation of comedy and performance, the games, exercise and tasks aim to:

- Challenge and release the blocks and habits which stand in the creative path;
- Expand the creative palate available to participants;
- Explore and give physical and verbal forms to creative impulses;
- Expand a vocabulary of the creative process;
- Discover and explore techniques for freeing up movement, speech and fantasy;
- Demystify the stage experience;
- Provoke laughter

Key Vocabulary

Providing participants with a vocabulary through which to understand their work and continue their exploration is essential. This includes:

- **Person, Character, Artist:** The inner voices which contribute or inhibit the creative process. Where the *Person* represents a desire for control, safety and predictability, the *Character* represents the desire for chaos, risk and surprise. These two diametrically opposed “inner directives” must be overseen by the *Artist* if the resulting expression is to be both profound and transformative. It is the *Person* which provides the human and thus, significant, impulses...and yet it is the *Person* who fears to release these. It is the *Character* that abstracts and “plays’ with these to give them a form....and yet it is the *Character* who lacks the restraint to keep focus. It is the *Artist* which must control the relative input of both voices.
- **Breaking form:** Liberating creativity from the confines of habitual patterns of movement, speech and thought. By remystifying the world around us and within us, the performer is able to draw on and comment on the complete human experience. This involves the elimination of ‘filters’ that normally guide our actions and restrict our reactions. What results is a ‘Curious’ and active mind with a broader scope for possibilities and the means through which to express them.
- **Conflict:** wherever there is conflict, so too is humour. The human condition is an absurd paradox, and this dichotomy forms the basis of all comedy.
- **Failure:** As an essential part of the human condition, failure must be embraced. By doing so, performers are able to explore and comment on the full range of the human condition.
- **Impulse:** Impulse forms the basis of natural, meaningful and insightful material and language.
- **Resonance & The Pause:** Allowing time for the effect of action & language to impact on the performer and the audience. It is the pause which reveals the truth of the matter. For this reason, it is often denied by the ‘Person’.
- **Restraint:** Once energy has been generated, it has to be contained and then released with theatrical timing.
- **Abstraction:** Using exaggeration, reduction or distention to highlight the intention or point of action & text.
- **Detail / Distillation / Crystallisation:** Clarity of intention & expression through the elimination of superfluous actions or text.
- **Here and Now:** In order to be sensitive, quick and insightful, each moment in time and space must be accepted. Impulses have to be acknowledged and acted upon. In order to achieve this ‘head space’, the performer must be able to eliminate the past and the future and focus on the heart of the matter as it is here and now. In this way, the participants learn how to ‘command the space’.
- **The rule of three:** The creation of a rhythm is essential in order to create surprise through breaking this rhythm. The repetition of an action or thought projects possible outcomes into the future. By breaking this pattern and offering alternative “surprise” conclusions, comedy is created. The audience must be seduced into believing they know the outcome and then be surprised by the alternative.

Workshop Teaching History. Highlights include:

Europe:

Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts, Masters course, Sweden
Nouveau Clown Institute (NCI), Barcelona, Spain
Budapest University of Theatre and Film, Hungary
Flemish Centre of Circus Arts, Antwerp, Belgium
Performance d'Acteur Festival, Cannes, France
Festival of New Circus, Zagreb, Croatia
Comicodeon Festival, Kapfenberg, Austria
CIPA (Centre for the Investigation & Pedagogy of Acting), El Espinar, Spain
Jyväskylä Arts Festival, Finland
Tampere International Theatre Festival, Finland
Valencian Circus Association (L'Espai de Circ) Valencia, Spain
Festiclown Masterclass, Santiago De Compostella, Spain
International Clown & Comedy Series, Bern, Switzerland
Festival International Clownbaret, Tenerife, Canary Islands
New Orleans Fringe Festival, USA
"Work in Progress Arts Meeting", Srebrna Gora, Poland
International Puppetry Festival of Mallorca, Spain
Studio Teatralne Theatre School, Warsaw, Poland
Coimbra Clown & Creativity Workshop, Portugal
Gdansk Clown Workshop Teatr ZNAK, Poland
Merida, Spain
Vienna, Austria
Graz, Austria
Segovia, Spain
Wales, Cardiff
North Wales, Bangor, Wales

Australia:

National Circus Festival
Tasmanian Circus Festival
Margaret River Circus Festival
Woodford Folk Festival
Fremantle, Western Australia
Brisbane Finding Comedy Workshops
Sydney Clowning Workshop
Melbourne Clown Workshop
Hobart Clowning Workshop
Northern New South Wales Play and Creativity workshop
Ulverstone Clowning & Creativity Workshop
WOW Wolongong Womens Circus
Adelaide Fringe Festival

School & Youth Workshops:

La Marelle Festival, France
Samford Valley Steiner School, Australia
King George 5th School, Hong Kong
Sommerville House Girls School, Brisbane, Australia
Brisbane Girls Grammar School, Australia
Bardon, Nambour High and Upper Brookfield State Schools, Australia
Out of the Box youth festival, Brisbane, Australia
Hands On Arts Inc., Australia. Regional schools workshop tour
Metro Arts, Brisbane Australia. Primary school holiday program
Spaghetti Youth Circus & Warehouse Youth Circus, Australia
Slipstream Youth Circus, Hobart, Australia
Sir Lesley Wilson Youth Detention Centre, Brisbane, Australia
Queensland Theatre Company, Brisbane, Australia 'Theatre Experience Week'

Performance Workshop Reference 1

From: Lilly Blue
New York City 2001

I have spent my life suspecting that there is something hidden just beneath the surface of our interactions. Something behind the selves we desperately endeavour to be in order to satisfy misunderstood expectations, and misplaced dreams.

At some point in my life that suspicion became so overpowering that everything I did seemed touched with a sense of both mystery and investigation. So often we think that searching is about finding things, discovering paths and partnerships, and reaping the abundant rewards of our endeavour. Yet there is a different kind of searching as well. There are the uncoverings that help us to lose things, that support tiny ego deaths, and unravel our contorted costuming so that we can undress. The gifts of loss. The beauty of vulnerability. The pleasure of egoless complicity. The bliss of unreasonable joy. The strength that comes from solitude. The power of simplicity. The value of fear and of taking risks. The comedy of humanbeingness.

These are just some of the discoveries I encountered in a week of working intensely with Tom Greder in his Master Clown workshop.

Clown work is incomparable with any other performance training because it pretends to be easy, and yet for me it is the most challenging and fulfilling work I have ever done. Tom has the sensitivity and insight to create a safe enough environment for his students to take risks, venture into unknown territory, and discover the pleasure of "not knowing". This may seem simple enough, but as performers we have such heavy bags of tricks and ornate masks that we rely on, that it can be a terrifying and exhilarating journey to let go, and uncover the power and beauty of our own ordinariness.

My experience of working with Tom was nothing less than transformative. I am cautious of diluting the experience by using grand language, but the reality is that my work with Tom was intrinsically related to the life changing choices I made after that week. The experience of standing unveiled in front of an audience and inspiring joy and laughter gave me a deeper belief in the place of truth and play in my work.

He helped me to unravel innocence and interest from the chaos that had overtaken my creativity. I remember spending months after the workshop feeling as if I had been born to a new planet. I became intrigued by everything. I wanted to experience life directly and I was no longer prepared to compromise for the sake of acceptance or applause. My sense of play deepened and I became committed to making courageous choices as a performer even if it meant failure. And my relationship to failure changed. In fact failing became such a hilarious and enriching experience that, as a clown, it no longer really existed.

Today I am living, performing, and teaching in New York. I continue to believe that everything is possible and every time I experience that delicious feeling of happiness for no particular reason I think of Tom and smile.

Lilly Blue

Performance Workshop Reference 2

From: Laurie McLeod
Brisbane 2001

Dear Tom,

Please treat this as my personal recommendation for your workshops. There are many aspects of your workshops which I would like to recommend and which has my greatest priority is difficult to decide but I have to start somewhere and really what I respected most was the safe environment you created right from the outset. You also managed somehow to keep this safe and creative space open for the entire workshop period, I was amazed. I have attended many workshops in various areas of theatre: Mask, movement and acting training so I am not a new comer to theatre however, my own participation in the workshop can vary tremendously depending not on the subject but on the quality of the teaching.

I think there are two aspects to teaching. That knowledge is passed on and that a safe environment is created so that participants can feel within their boundaries and still feel free to express themselves to the greatest extent of their creativity. I have no idea how you did this but you certainly managed both - a rare occurrence as far as I am concerned.

Perhaps the benevolence of the naive clown and his world and the energy level needed to operate within this world create an atmosphere very conducive to creative expression. More power to the clown if you ask me. Still I think it was your devotion to the workshop process your confidence and experience with that process which caused them to run so smoothly. I was after all a complete beginner when it came to clowning but felt confident to participate fully in all your workshop activities and since have developed projects of my own in clowning (including an application to the Australia Council) feeling confident to carry them out and your workshops only finished a few weeks ago.

While I say you created a safe environment I would hate anyone to think you were soft on us. I don't remember ever being so challenged in my life and the confidence gained by being so challenged has turned my professional life around as well as my personal life. Congratulations.

The result of all this I think great art and good entertainment. Tom your workshop not only gave us skills to be entertaining but also a deeper understanding of the human condition and where clowns live within the realm of commenting on what we humans experience. I feel just that step closer to achieving the goal I mentioned on day 1 of your workshop:- paradise to me meant being more light hearted. So while the workshops dealt with the practicalities of clowning they also had sufficient intellectual content and quality to be whole in their training.

Anyway I can only wish and hope the best for you and your wonderful workshops and hope that more performers can experience them. Thank you and I hope you can have this positive influence on performers where ever you travel in the world and where ever you teach for you are a true teacher.

Yours sincerely, Laurie

Additional Workshop References

From: Jango Edwards
Clown and teacher

"During my 40 years as an artist and instructor of professional clowning I discovered in the world of the new clown tribe the essential need for masters of the art. Tom Greder is one of them and an equal to the others I've found. His classes are an important part of the information new students must obtain to develop their own vision of the clown as an artist on stage or off. He is a permanent member on the teaching staff of the "Clown Theory Master Class" held each year at "The Performance of Actors Festival" in Cannes, France and I recommend him to both new students and professionals".

From: Professor Jenny Gore
Director, Centre for Professional Learning in Education
The University of Newcastle, Australia

"Toms ideas align with and extend contemporary educational thinking on what matters most in teaching and how to stimulate powerful learning for all students"

From: Jean-Paul Bell
Performer and founder of The Humour Foundation, Australia

"I love your style of teaching which I would describe as being a relaxed antipodean approach with strong European underpinnings"

From: Nadia Cook
Mullumbimby, Australia

"Your workshop opened up a whole new world for me"

From: Sarah Fotheringham
Cardiff 2000

"Tom Greder is a performer and teacher working with a potent mixture of intuition, skill and perception rooted in experience exploring the world of the clown. He is a teacher who enthuses the uninitiated with passion and challenges with humility. You will not feel short changed from this week of many changes! Since Tom's workshop I have trained with Didier Danthios and Angela de Castro in London and Jonathan Kay in Scotland. I rate Tom Greder's work up with the best of them."

From: Lauren Flannery
Theatre director
Hobart 2005

"The workshops really opened up a new understanding of performance, something I think was already there but suddenly became clear."

School Workshop References

From: Meg Arvier, Flipstream Youth Circus
Tasmania 2004

I had seen Tom perform on a number of occasions over the past few years at various festivals and in street performance and I have always thought that he was brilliant – A very serious clown!!!

I have been involved in a youth circus for 4 years as a trainer, and this year (2004) when I found out that Tom Greder would be in Hobart for some clowning workshops, I filled my car with some of our young participants and drove them down there for a very seriously funny weekend.

The workshop catered well for the wide variety of age groups enrolled, and it was jam-packed with surprises and thrills. Very quickly all inhibitions fell, and the group seemed united in joy, laughter and some tears – but above all, we were all focused on the serious business of developing our own individual clowns. What amazed me the most was Tom's ability to quickly gain the trust and attention of all the young performers – some of these young people can be very suspicious of adult driven activities. I still don't know exactly how he managed this, but he seemed to handle gently the quiet sensitive issues that evolved, yet he was tough with the boundaries that he wished to maintain. At all times he was respectful of us all, and he seemed to delight in all our human differences and foibles. He even managed to encourage me to sing alone to the group – absolutely no-one ever hears me sing "publicly" – not pretty!!!!

For me, time spent with Tom was more a journey than simply a workshop. During our 4 hour journey home there was plenty of time to reflect on what had happened and amidst some of the excited chatter were the following comments.....

Andrew (12 years) – "I liked the way Tom was really friendly to us all. I like acting, but this was the best clowning workshop that I have ever been to"

Hayden (13 years) – "It was all great. Listening into the radio ear-phones and trying to copy what was said was so funny – I wasn't nervous at all"

Chris (14 years) – "The whole workshop was fun, but doing the market commentary was a buzz – I just couldn't stop and the words just kept coming out of me. I liked the faces Tom could make, and I felt that he really thought that we were important to him"

Meredith (16 years) – "Tom was great. It was really interesting to learn about the funny things that happen naturally – it was a relief to know that you don't have to really try and be funny".



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