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The Amazing
Niels Duinker

Demise of The Clown, Not the Skills



By Nina Dees. "Twinkie Dee Star"

Any of you in the children's entertainment field know how the requests for clowns, as entertainers, have diminished. Let's review the facts to understand why this may be the reality and just how we need to adapt. First, it seems obvious the influence the media has played in turning the image of a happy, silly, endearing entertainer of children into a frightening horror character. It is the juxtaposition of images that make the plots of the scary clown movies so horrific. When kids are young, they like to go to lots of movies.

Here are the top horror films* that have transformed clowns into terrifying characters: Stephen King's *It* (1990); *Amusement* (2008); *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* (1988); *Clownhouse* (1989); *Blood Harvest* (1987); *Poltergeist* (1982); *Carnival of Souls* (1998); *Killjoy* (2000); *Zombieland* (2009); *100 Tears* (2007); *All Hallows' Eve* (2013).

Notice the years these films were produced date from 1982 to 2009, a range of twenty-three years. So, if a child of ten years old saw the first scary clown movie then, that child would now be thirty-three years old and quite likely a parent by now. The youngest that would have been exposed would now be sixteen years old and that might qualify as "big sister or big brother" who might have some impact on the party plans. Is it any wonder that they do not request a clown for their child's party?

The good news is that the entertainment skills that the original clown entertainer possessed are still requested, it is the "packaging" or presentation that is not wanted. Magic, Balloons, Face Painting, Games, Puppets, and Juggling are all very important at these kids' parties. Of course, the style of parties has evolved greatly just as society and technology has changed over the twenty-three years. Factor in the diversity that has developed all across the nation as well as the world. And of course the economics and demographics in relation to budgets and party plans. Parties have very much changed! The key to selling your entertainment skills is to change

your packaging or presentation.

This realization was lamented by one of the finest clown costumers, “Priscilla Mooseburger” or Tricia Manuel, a former Ringling Brothers Circus clown. Priscilla wrote in a recent newsletter series of her concern for this trend. Being in the costume business, she has a “vested” (pun) interest in the subject. Links to her series are below and I urge you to sign-up for her newsletters. She always has inspirational postings. (see: <http://mooseburger.com/moose/dont-water-clown/> and <http://mooseburger.com/moose/clown-plain-clothes-division/>) For those of you who may not be familiar with her, besides being a former Ringling Clown, she has run Mooseburger Clown Camp for many years, and is a premier costume purveyor in clown goods. Her perspective on the situation can be summarized thusly; keep your skills polished, showcase them with or without the make-up, and don’t ever agree to be a scary clown!

Here on the West Coast, Silicon Valley to be more specific, children’s parties can be hugely elaborate and are generally themed from year to year. I learned early on, that having multiple non-clown characters was a great marketing tool. Not only was I taught this by a lady who taught a costuming class fifteen years ago at a convention, but it was also a personal revelation based on client requests who would hire me year after year. They wanted a new character to go with the new party theme, but they still wanted to hire me! The solution was to come up with new personas. I went with this even though at the time, the recommendation was only to have one basic clown character.

Here are examples of other entertainers who have adopted non-typical clown presentations:

“Empress Cherry Sunday” - Stacey Laureyssens of Toronto, who has a very unique style that reflects her perfectly in her various characters, very high style!



“Dr. Wack-O” - JT Sikes of Florida had his original character “Bubba” as an Auguste clown but as you can see how completely captivating his Dr. Wack-O character is just at first glance.



“Mr. Shap” - Rob Shapiro of San Francisco who is an excellent balloonist entertainer who has a “ringmaster” presentation and in this photo (we happened to be hired for the same event), my character “Twink” compliments his, as if we had planned it.



“Normondo” - Norm Barnhart of Minnesota who typically has a hobo clown, developed his spoof-magician character to win the Family Entertainers Workshop Funniest Magician Contest.

These are but a few examples of “nouveau” characterizations that may be a bit more marketable but rely on traditional clown skills in their entertainment businesses.

I do not refer to myself as a clown, but as a “Professional Children’s Entertainer.” This was good advice that was shared by Steve Kissell who has hosted the “Comedy Magic Workshops” in Vegas. I am a strong proponent of honing your skills by attending as many professional development events as you can manage and then integrating what you learn to keep evolving.

One of the best is the KAX West Coast Event in Oxnard. Still in it’s infancy as far as the actual number of attendees, it is a nice collection of presenters from all over the world that are not clowns but fabulous entertainers not the least bit reticent of sharing their skills. Learn how to make a balloon animal funny, how storytelling can enhance your magic effect, practice timing when you do your routine, play games that are an act by themselves, how creative technology can make your character that

much better, all with perspectives from an international assemblage - these are but a few of the cross-topic presentations from the last conference. Use these educational events to ask what is happening in their areas to see how others are adapting.

Demise of the Clown may be due to some scary past circumstances via the movies, but your personal entertainment business can continue with or without the greasepaint disguise. Re-think old clown, re-package new entertainer?

*Read more: <http://horrornews.net/53209/top-10-scary-clowns-in-horror-movies/#ixzz3TfbT2JFK>

