

COSTUMES NOT A MUST

Want to be a clown? It's an actual art form

But Ronald McDonald is a fake, says French theatre director-actor

SINGAPORE – We've heard of clowning around, but did you know "clowning" is an actual art form? (And by that, we don't mean just being silly or messing about, so don't use that excuse with your teachers.)

Clowning is so named because it is an act enacted by comic performers, whether by employing slapstick, miming, or when dressed as a clown, although costumes are not a must.

Apparently, clowning is not as simple as donning a huge nose and a giant wig. "Each clown develops his own 'art of clowning'. However, they all have something in common: Precision. There is no clowning without precision," said French theatre director-producer Jean Lambert-wild in an interview with TODAY. "To be a clown, you need certain personality traits, in particular an inner intense sorrow coupled with a joviality that transcends it," he added.

Still, fellow French theatre director-playwright-actor Marc Goldberg acknowledged that most only remember the "Auguste Clown" when asked what their impression of a clown was — that is, someone who has a red nose, does pranks and slapstick and engages in fake clumsiness. But there are other types as well, he said.

There's the Whiteface clown, a clown who is often artistic and poetic with his face covered with white makeup, the Tramp or Hobo Clown (who are usually vagabonds with either a devil-may-care attitude or a sad, down-and-out persona), and the Character Clown (who can be used to depict any character of occupation such as pirates, police officers and doctors).

But don't for a moment think McDonald's famous mascot Ronald McDonald is a legit clown — Goldberg pointed out that the notable yellow and red character is "obviously a fake".

"He is there to sell a brand, to divert your attention from what you are actually doing ... He is totally empty, with no connection to the various individuals who get paid to impersonate him," he said.

Both Goldberg and Lambert-wild were in town for the Voilahn! French Festival Singapore 2016. They are co-creators and collaborators for Le Clown des Marais, or the Swamp Clown, which screened at the festival last weekend.

Referring to the limited knowledge people here have of clowns, Goldberg pointed out that this could be because Singaporean artistes "have not explored and integrated modern clowning into their own practice".

Still, there are many stage traditions available here which include many types of "Asian clowning", he said.

For example, when playwright and theatre director Kuo Pao Kun resorted to xiangsheng (also known as crosstalk, a comedic performance in the form of a dialogue between two performers) in the mid-1980s in *The Coffin Is Too Big For The Hole*, and in *No Parking On Odd Days*, he was "devising a kind of local contemporary clowning based on Chinese traditional crosstalk", he noted.

"So, actually, I do not believe that Jean's work is that alien to the Singapore stage. Still, this show is definitely a great opportunity for the Singapore audience and artistes to discover to what unpredictable dimensions the art of clowning can be elevated."

Lambert-wild, who plays the role of the Swamp Clown, which is about the metamorphosis of a man into a clown who takes on various roles, was whimsical when asked what clowning is actually about. Citing French clown Pierre Etaix, who once said the clown is "a poet in action", Lambert-wild says the art of clowning "involves a deep refusal, a form of resistance" that defies usual habits and the normality of everyday life. "This is not something that everybody has," he noted.

Watching a clowning act allows people to "escape for a moment from everyday self-imposed normality", he added.

So what are his views on clowns being portrayed these days as sinister and malicious (if you have seen the Killer Clown prank clips, you'd know what I mean)?

"It happened because we live in a state of perpetual war, which creates a degenerate laughter that can be turned into something terrifying, something which foreshadows future violence," said Lambert-wild.

"Clowns are not malignant. Not at all. Even though they are haunted by the primal instinct of foxes," he quipped. **JOY FANG**



THE ART OF CLOWNING

To read about things you probably don't know (and should) about clowns, go to <http://bit.ly/1s24DvJ>



“To be a clown, you need certain personality traits, in particular an inner intense sorrow coupled with a joviality that transcends it.”

Jean Lambert-wild
FRENCH THEATRE
DIRECTOR-PRODUCER

French theatre director-producer Jean Lambert-wild in character. PHOTO: TRISTAN JEANNE-VALES



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WALK-IN INTERVIEW

Date : 28 May 2016, Saturday
04 June 2016, Saturday

Time : 9am - 1pm

Venue : Kampong Kembangan Community Club
Level 3, Room #03-02
(5 mins walk from Kembangan MRT via Exit B)

To read about things you probably don't know (and should) about clowns, go: <http://www.todayonline.com/entertainment/arts/things-you-probably-dont-know-about-clowns-and-should>

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