

Buskers Burlesque

Contributed by Hightower & Sparks

Characters:

Freudian Clown (FC) (Wears a Freudian full-length slip, conservative suit jacket, bow tie, and furry snake-like tail.)

Suicidal Clown (SC) (Looks like Jesus or John Lennon when his hair was long.)

Hamburger Clown (HC) (Wears a box on his head which could hold hamburgers. A fast-food paper cup covers his nose, and a paper tray holding fries hangs from his neck.)

Lana Burspeak: (A voice from the Balloon Factory heard on the answering machine)

Silent Personages

Deep Purple Man (DPM)

Oedipus Complex

The Greek Chorus Puppets (Accompany the DPM)

The stage is empty except for several crates, a folded up deck chair, a blanket, a glass, a pitcher of water, a lamp and a large, obscene phone with answering machine. A Freudian clown, wearing a Freudian slip, trips in from stage left, followed by a suicidal clown, carrying explosives. In the background, hangs surreal Greek masks of Oedipus and Elektra surrounded by a Greek chorus of silent puppets.

Suicidal Clown (SC): I spent the whole frickin day putting my frickin ducks in a row, putting in applications, endless applications. I flopped all the way down to the River Bend to the balloon factory, to put in my application as a balloon artist, you know to see if I could get the job. They had me blow the balloon up, twist it all around, see if I could make it into an animal and not pop anything. But they said I was too old. So that was it. I flopped right back home but my right shoe threw a sole, and I'm flopping all the way, tripped three or four times. I even tripped getting on to the street car and everyone laughed. Made me feel good for a couple of minutes. But I've really had it looking for a job. Shoot me. Just shoot me.

Freudian Clown (FC): (Concerned) Why don't you lie down on my couch and rest awhile. For I am the Freudian Clown Therapist slip- tripping with id and ego in a glass half full. Even though I wonder, WHY? Why is their despair and sex in a world where Pavlov's dogs salivate at any bow wow?

(FC and SC struggle to unfold a deck chair, reminiscent of Chaplin's scene, "The Recalcitrant Deckchair", from the 1919 film, "A Day's Pleasure". After the deckchair is finally unfolded, SC lies down and FC pours herself a glass of water. She clumsily misses her mouth and spills half of the water on herself and SC. Her dribbling glass routine takes place throughout play.)

FC: But patience is a virgin and we need to realize that it's not easy finding a job today, especially if you're over 50 and a clown. But let's try to see the glass half full instead of half empty. Don't be prostate with grief!

SC: Uhmmm!

FC: Remember what my father, Sigmund Freud, said. (Looks at her Freudian slip, covered with Freudian quotations.)

And I can say this without fear of contraception. "What is the goal of life?"

SC: "Death!"

FC: Now how do you feel?

SC: I feel like a great pressure has been taken off my shoulders. You know there's more to life than a job. I mean what jobs are out there for us? Babbling and bubbling at birthday parties where the rug rats stuff cake in our ears. You know, I could have had class. I could have been a contender. I could have been somebody. I could have worked the Big Top. But forget about SUCK-cess. Living up to my full PO-tential. Making a name for myself. A legacy. I don't need to be a contender, a somebody, a big topper. All I need is Chee-wees, a TV, some soft pillows and a remote that never goes dead.

FC: Now you're seeing the glass half full and being green, too! We don't need much. We don't need to be affluent. And I'm sure we'll find jobs in New Orleans. This is the City of the Dead. So life's goal has already been met. (Looks at slip for another quote by Freud.) And according to Sigmund, "love and work, work and love, that's all there is." And I love you (try to kiss each other but miss their lips and ram foreheads) and the work will come.

SC: (looking down at FC's slip). Ah, my Freud busker freak, I think you are wearing rose-stained glasses since you missed this quote by your beloved Sigmund.

(SC lifts up FC's slip and reads). "The great majority work only when forced by necessity, and this natural human aversion to work gives rise to the most difficult social problems."

(Phone rings. Both clowns freeze, afraid to pick it up.)

SC: SCREEN! It might be the balloon factory and I'm not ready for another rejection.

FC: All right we'll just listen while we put up our tent for the night. (Struggle to transform the deck chair into a very small pup tent.)

Lana Burspeak: Hello, this is Lana Burpspeak from Balloons are US and we would like SC to come down for a second interview. Please call me at 566-4320 as soon as possible. And when you come tomorrow, could you bring a resume with your complete work history from high school on, a list of five references and a tricky balloon sample. We would also like you to take a series of tests including a personality inventory, a wellness screening, a team building skills test and a

happiness quotient. Please plan to stay for five hours since we will also have the department managers from Human Resources, Admin, IT, Training, Evaluation and Balloon Fatigue also interview you.

SC: AHHH!!! Every interview becomes a huge production. Balloon sample! Five hours! I don't think I can take this anymore. All I want to do is sculpt balloon dogs which morph into squirrels and nutria! Oh, why am I here? Where is happiness?

FC: Oh SC don't become a lost loon trapped in the egodrama of life. You need to stay positive. You have a second interview! And you are truly creative and you can sculpt balloons. And even though you lost your sole today, you'll get it back. You can do anything. We are clowns of today. We can do so much for the world. Now, there are Clowns for Christ who follow the clown commandments of WWJD: "What would Jesus Do." Maybe we can try one of their skits from the Clowns for Christ Handbook and that will cheer us up.

SC: Where's that jug?! First, it's the glass half full, then Freud, now religion. You're really grasping for straws! At least I'm consistent in my gloom.

FC: (Opens the Clowns for Christ Handbook.) Yes, sometimes desperate times require gasping for straws. Oh! Here's a skit called "The Living Cross". We can try to get the audience to form a living cross!

SC: (Sarcastic) That sounds like loads of fun! And I suppose I'm Jesus?

FC: Ummm. It doesn't go into that. Maybe, we'll try something simpler. Here's a skit called "The Flying Stigmata" where 2 or more clowns demonstrate the weight of sin and forgiveness.

SC: So we get to wear chains and flog ourselves. I'm feeling happier already.

FC: Well, let's just stick with this really simple one of us diving into a glass of water. That will teach us the danger of pride. And with pride comes destruction. I'll go first so you can get the hang of it.

SC: I think it's safer when you stick to the Freudian shtick! But go ahead. I don't have anything to do today.

(FC stacks several crates on top of each other and contemplates diving from the top of the crates into a glass of water. She assumes diving position several times, but in the end reluctantly climbs down.)

FC: You're right. Maybe I should return to my psychoanalysis. It's much safer. And maybe, we'll have more of a chance of getting a job. There are more and more clown therapists helping the sick in hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, homeless shelters and schools.

And they just don't use psychoanalysis. That doesn't always bring quick results. It's lost its wonder lust. Now therapists use clown logic and on the spot mime techniques to help others uncover their inner clown and learn to enhance their personal and non-personal relationships. Instead of harmful words, we use ad lib mime to deescalate a situation or resolve conflicts. Even sexual problems. Now one can learn to use clown therapy for sexual enhancement, by miming a greatly enhanced member. No need for words, expensive medication or questionable hump-like devices, just mime your desire.

SC: I get it simply mime and wink.

FC: It's true. Scientific studies are proving the benefits of clown therapy. A recent study in Israel showed that women undergoing clown therapy were 75% more likely to conceive through in vitro fertilization than women whose lives lacked the big red nose. Of the 93 women entertained ten to fifteen minutes by a clown, 33 became pregnant.

SC: In other words bring Bozo into the bedroom!

FC: No, in this study, the clowns were fully clothed and the clowning took place outside the bedroom. The purpose was to reduce stress, which helps promote ovulation and fertilization.

SC: Ummm, I don't know. I've had people really stress out when they see me. I think I would be more of a contraceptive device.

FC: Talking about sex, clown porn is making a comeback. Oh, my God! Remember San Francisco in the eighties when the practice of "clowning" or "clown sex" became all the rage. Then it spread to the Quarter and there were clown fetishists and X-rated clownsploitation flicks being filmed everywhere.

(Suddenly, the Deep Purple Man enters from stage right. He drums with profound meaning using over-sized syringes and PVC tubing; he desperately wants to talk but since he is the Deep Purple Man all he can do is drum and point to the sign he wears around his neck, "Casting call, casting call for Debbie Does the Big Top!" The other two clowns are not interested in auditioning. The Deep Purple Man then becomes aggressive and starts to chase them in circles, trying to inject them with the syringes. The chase resembles the Keystone cops.)

FC and SC: AHHH! It's the Deep Purple Man! He's trying to drug us, and drag us in to do Debbie Does the Big Top. HELP!

(They fight the Deep Purple Man off by suddenly stopping and running in place. The Deep Purple Man passes them and drops his syringes. FC and SC pick them up and chase him off stage.)

SC: Trying to drug us into Debbie Does the Bigtop. I guess the Deep Purple Men are even having trouble finding work. They were selling out arenas, now they can't even drum up enough bodies to make a porn flick.

FC: (Both FC and SC are playing with the syringes, like water pistols.) I suppose this is some sort of tranquilizer. There are times when I still yearn for the white star dust. My colleagues thought I was addicted to cocaine. It was therapy, treatment for my nasal reflex neurosis. Now it's only me and my cigar. I think I need the couch. (lies in the pup tent with head sticking out.) I think I'm having a relapse: shortness of breath, rapid breathing, irregular heartbeat, sweating, nausea, and overall feelings of dread.

SC: What are you talking about?

FC: (During the following speech, SC is playing with his explosive devices. Gives up, wets his nose and tries to stick his nose into a lamp socket.)

FC: I never told you this but I'm still recovering from coulrophobia, "a persistent, abnormal, and irrational fear of clowns". I guess the Blue Man triggered a relapse. I never admitted this but I was actually in therapy for years. It all started when

I was four and Santa left me a jack in a box. I still find it difficult to enjoy Christmas. And then for years I could only speed through the drive through at McDonalds. Wouldn't go inside the Golden Arches. Especially after the one and only birthday party where I threw up my happy meal—all over Ronald's shoes.

I finally found a psychiatrist who was a vast suppository of information and used the psychotherapeutic technique of flooding where I was exposed on a daily basis to hundreds of clowns. I went to every McDonalds and circus in town. I had to watch countless reruns of Bozo and "Return of the Killer Clowns." And then I was kidnapped by eight clowns driving a VW bug. I thought I was going to die. I couldn't breathe, but then the waves of phobia began to subside and I started to bond with my captors. After five hours of being smashed in the Bug with eight clowns, I had an epiphany, a breakthrough. I decided to face my phobia: join the circus and become a clown. Of course, flooding for coulrophobia is not for everyone. Some in the medical community believe that this type of psychotherapy is totally unnecessary and it will often make the condition worse. I don't like to admit this but sometimes when I'm in bed with you and we're clowning around, I still experience the symptoms which are like a panic attack.

SC: Ummm. I thought you were excited.

FC: There are coulrophobics every where, even Prince is one. In 2004, he was performing in New Orleans and he supposedly refused to take the stage until Ronald McDonald was ejected from the arena. According to a source quoted in the Times-Picayune, "Prince indicated that the clown needed to not be in the building. Ronald was escorted to the exit." It's a difficult phobia to deal with. No cure.

Â (Phone rings. They freeze. After two rings, they both yell, "Don't pick it up. I'm not here. Screen!")

Lana Burspeak: Hello, this is Lana Burspeak from the Balloon Factory. I would like to leave a message for SC that he should plan for approximately 7 not 5 hours at the interview. We have scheduled him for some blood tests, a drug screening and a clownoscopy. These tests will take place after the psychological profile.

SC: Next, they'll want to put a microchip in my neck and scan up my butt.

(Hamburger Clown (HC) enters from stage left. Carrying a full plate of fries and a sign which reads, "Will work for fries." HC loves to eat and whenever possible he throws fries up into the air and tries to catch them in his mouth.)

HC: I can't believe it. They gave me the pink slip today and paid me in fries. They said they had to choose between spending more on me or snappy meals.

(Offering the fries to the other two clowns.) They're a little bit cold, but do you want some. (They all start a rendition of the Chaplin gag, "Dance of the Bread Rolls", in this case, "Dance of the Fries".)

SC: I can't believe fast food would feel the pinch. This damn economy! You have fat wads on Wall Street who've put us in this deep shit. I'm stuck too. I have an interview at The Balloon Factory but they want to psychoanalyze me up the kazoo and spend seven hours for a second interview. You've got another sign?

FC: Both of you need to lie down on my couch. We need to dream up something unique. Create our own job. Burlesque is all the rage in New Orleans. There's Bust Out Burlesque, Fleur de Tease, Napoleon's Itch, and Dick's Cabaret. Ours could be "Jestin Time Buskers' Burlesque" or "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" or "Buffed Buskers' Burlesque", or "Buffed and Busk Burlesque". What if we tried pole dancing! I have this book here called the "Idiot's Guide to Exotic Pole Dancing." I was thinking of a naked clowns' calendar but that's already being done. The Clown Conservatory in San Francisco publishes a naked clown calendar to fight MS. I think our break might be in pole dancing!

(SC and HC lie down in the pup tent. Their heads sticking out.)

SC: I don't know. Maybe we can learn each others' shtick. HC you can teach me some more skits used at birthday parties, and I'll teach you balloon sculpting. FC, you can teach us some of that clown therapy instead of pole dancing.

HC: I don't know what I can teach you. I no longer feel like the CHO or Chief Happiness Officer of Happy Burger Land. I pit fell into an existential hell several years ago when the top brass axed fantasy land and my playmates: Mayor McCookie, the Cheeseburglar, and The Fry Freaks. Now, the Corporation has relegated me to "Reality Land", where I only "interact with kids in their everyday life." AHH! And I used to be "the smile known around the world and second only to Santa Claus in terms of recognition." Some recognition, Now, I'm on the street, flagging down for fries, on the skids of shame land. Since meat patties have become fat food, a Yin-Yang Id of cowsup and pickles on a sesame-seed bun. A fat slop of triglycerides. Oh, why am I here? Where is happiness?

FC: Yes, very good! Free associating the id with an all beef patty, with extra yang! But now is the time for me to psychoanalyze both of you so I can help you free your minds from any repressive memories of the past and in that way you'll become less inhibited to fly your parachute, find your dream job through exotic pole dancing! Close your eyes and just talk about your childhood, or anything that comes to your mind.

(SC's and HC's stomachs are defiant. Loud gurgling sounds, gas, and belches resound.)

SC: Since HC came in with the fries, all I can think about is food.

FC: Good, SC. And do you have any memories about eating with your family, sitting around the dinner table?

SC: Well, my mom never let us have seconds. There were just the four food groups represented on the plate we were given and that was it. And the same for snacks, if you could call it that. Only carrots, sometimes apples. I went over to Danny McDonalds' house a lot. They had Charlie potatoe chips.

HC: Oh, that's sad, man! Were you poor or was it a huge family?

SC: No, my parents were Unitarians. And it was only me and my little sister.

HC: Well I came from a big family in Zanesville, Ohio, 3 sisters and 3 brothers and we could eat as much as we wanted. My mom was also asking us if we had enough and to take more. There would be loads of food, corn on the cob, fried chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, rolls, beans. All you wanted and then the desserts! You did have dessert?

SC: Ummm... it must not have been very memorable...let's see, nothing homemade except these peculiar brownies my mom would make. They were like little flat rocks, you could probably skip them across the lake. My dad would sometimes

bring home a pie or ice cream.

HC: Could you have seconds?

SC: No way.

FC: Very interesting, SC. It sounds like you are uncovering some repressed memories which may have influenced your rather negative outlook on life. And how did you deal with not having seconds? Did you ever try to sneak food?

SC: Yes, I used to sneak the dog biscuits and then the dog would smell my breath and growl at me.

HC: I feel sorry for you. I live to eat!

FC: Well, he is delving into his childhood. Not always easy. And HC let's move on to your first encounter with fast food? When was that?

HC: Oh, I remember the first time my family took me to a McDonalds. I can see it like it was yesterday. We were on summer vacation in Cooks Forest in western Pennsylvania. It was 1964 and my dad and mom were in the front seat. I was in the far back seat of the red Chevy station wagon. I'll never forget my first cheeseburger. I still remember that first bite. I was transported. I didn't even like pickles before but after that cheeseburger I did! Just two small round, dill green pickle slices! Yum! And then the fries and catsup!

FC: Good. Sounds like your first fast food experience was a pleasurable one. It may have influenced your calling in life. And how about you, SC? Did your family ever take you to fast food restaurants?

SC: No.

FC: Not even when you were on vacation and travelling?

SC: No. Never. My mom would only stop at a place called Stuckeys and make us drink buttermilk! (All of a sudden SC starts strangling HC and screaming) I hate you Mom!

(HC is gasping for breath and yelling for help.)

FC: (Starts to put on the Oedipus Complex walking head, but soon changes to the Electra walking head) Oh, my, the Oedipus Complex rears its ugly head. Except in this case, it's the Electra complex, hatred towards the mother. But any complex will do! And on the sperm of the moment! Usually transference takes years and it's me they hate! Good! Very good!

(After a while both SC and HC give up fighting, exhausted.)

FC: Fine. And now that you are warmed up, we can rehearse our pole dancing.

(FC takes out the Idiot's Guide to Exotic Pole Dancing. Deep Purple Man returns and plays the music for the dance.)

FC: All right, just follow me . Good! Now put your arms up like two giant testicles. I mean tentacles! Pole dancing is the new craze. Even on Oprah. It will help us become empowered and fit, too! Right now if you google exotic pole dancing on you tube, there are over 130,000 entries. We'll just dance along to this beginning video and see how we do. By being one with this pole, we'll be in the Now and our egos will be diminished. Remember it's not form we're looking for, but the inner being -consciousness that emanates from within!

(SC and HC, follow some beginning steps grudgingly at first. They all end up bumping into each other and the pole. If in the audience, an expert pole dancer , perhaps from Fleur de Tease, may join the group to demonstrate some spectacular moves.)

SC: Oh yea, I'm definitely one with this pole!

HC: Me too! Let's celebrate our oneness in the pup tent!

FC: Yes! A true breakthrough!

(The three clowns and Deep Purple Man enter the pup tent where they squeak their horns and blow their whistles, with the tent finally collapsing.)

The End (Lights out)

phone: 301-1912

©Hightower& Sparks

April 1, 2009