



PHOTO BY TERRY LORANT

Lorenzo Pickle: Special Kind of Clown

by Lee LaTour

In the Pickle Family Circus, a clown runs the show. That should tell you something right there.

It's rare, having the clown in charge. Recent circuses have tended toward the Ringling Brothers model, the ringmaster who introduces the acts and, if the audience is truly unlucky, belts out a couple of sentimental ballads. Earlier emcees were often the Masters of the Horse, complete with riding boots and whips. The clowns were bumpkins and idiots.

The ringmaster was the rationalist, the autocrat, the voice of civilization. The clown was instinctive, realistic, common, a child of nature. The clown never got to be in charge; he probably didn't even want to be in charge. But within the lumpy body of Lorenzo Pickle, a synthesis was achieved. It was definitely his Circus, his Family.

Larry Pisoni, creator of Lorenzo Pickle, talks about the development of Lorenzo in the recently published book, *The Pickle Family Circus*: "The first Lorenzo Pickle, the one I did from the very earliest days of the Circus, was a variation on a character that I'd done with the old Pickle Family Jugglers. He had to be someone with bravado, someone who could really draw the people in. Sort of a cross between Chico Marx and my grandfather. I did that guy, the Italian circus owner, for a lot of years.

"Then I began to build a character. Essentially, I was trying to explore the child in myself—I had a pretty awful childhood, which I had tried to forget as quickly as possible but now that I'm older, I want to remember that part of myself and use it. So I knew that the second Lorenzo Pickle had to be a lot more childlike than the first.

"After I'd developed the character, I began to think about the makeup. The most important thing about clown makeup is that it not hide your face. Your face is your most important feature as a clown. If you paint a smile on your face, then you've got to be a character that smiles all the time, which is very limiting. For Emmett Kelly, the makeup around his mouth was just an oval; he didn't have a painted frown. It was his body that was sad, not his makeup.

"I try to have my makeup be very natural, or as natural as a clown's makeup can be; people expect big noses and white paint and stuff, you can't completely get away from that. But I try to show my eyes, so that people concentrate on my eyes and not on my makeup.

"The coat I wear is designed to minimize the width of my shoulders. You know, if you look like you're strong, somehow people are less sympathetic to you. The vulnerability of the character is more acceptable to some people if he looks smaller.

"The red hat I wear is something that I've used as a juggling prop for

years, since my first street performances. It's my signature piece. It's good to have symbols, to impart meaning to them. The hat is an extension of me. You could build another Lorenzo Pickle starting with only the hat.

"The trousers are really big and baggy because I like the line they make when I dance. The legs are cut a little high to expose the spats, which are Lorenzo's pathetic attempt at class. And the red stripes on the shirt are a tribute or a throwback to Joseph Grimaldi, who was a famous English pantomime clown. In many places clowns are called 'joeys,' after Grimaldi, who was considered Britain's greatest clown. He wore red stripes and so do I.

"And then the clown shoes, of course, because they are funny and because people expect them. And that's him, Lorenzo, a sort of man-child, a character who is not denying that he is 34 or 35, chronologically, but is communicating in a child-like way.

"I think the clown has a responsibility to present material that can act as a purge for a lot of things that are inside us. Through transference, someone in the audience can get nasty stuff out, purge it, transform it. The more open you are, the more child-like, the more effective the process

can be.

"So, as a clown, I find something in myself that needs purging, and I offer it to you. I show it to you, and you experience it as well. A clown character is really only a piece of canvas for the artist, for the individual who is presenting this piece of art. And it's a piece of art about the most important things in life."

Lorenzo will be bringing his wonderful Pickle Family Circus to town on August 11 and 12 for three performances at Amazon Park (see calendar section for information on show times). This is the third year the Eugene Waldorf School has sponsored the Pickles in Eugene. Oasis Fine Foods Marketplace joins them as co-sponsors this year because of their desire to take an active part in this annual community event and to support the school's fund-raising efforts.

Advanced tickets (bought before August 11th) are \$3 for seniors and children under 12 and \$6 for adults. \$1 from each advance ticket sold goes to benefit the Eugene Waldorf School. Tickets are on sale now at: Oasis, Marco's Gelato, Pedal Power, Creative Kids, The Red Barn, Friendly's Market, and The Bookmine in Cottage Grove. Tickets bought at the show are \$1 more than the advanced price. For information call 686-6744.



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