



Clown workshop can open new personal doors

Freedom found in clowning

LIZ NICHOLLS
Journal Staff Writer

Edmonton

"It is meat and drink to me to see a clown"

— *As You Like It, V, i, 11*

And if it tickles you to clap eyes on one, muse upon the possibilities of donning the ceremonial red hooter yourself. What happens next, according to Jan Henderson, whose eighth annual clown (and mask) workshop is slated for June 3-23, is a species of liberation.

"It's freedom," says Henderson, a co-founder of the now-defunct Small Change Theatre into her 15th year of clown midwifery. "The clown only feels what he *really* feels, only does what he *needs* to do. . . . Clowns hate false sentiment."

In this single-minded devotion to "truth of emotion," the clownly brethren share something with children. But Henderson hastens to add, "it's innocence *after* experience; it's rooted in the child, but you can't discard your experience since."

When you kiss linear logic goodbye, "a whole universe opens up," she says. "It's awe, wonder, stupidity all at once. We're here to witness the universe, and clowns have the perspective."

Consider, for example, the plight of a physiologist from New Zealand, an award-winning scientist with things to say about electrons and muscles, and generally a sensitive left-wing guy.

In the course of Henderson's three-week workshop, the clown who emerged from him unexpectedly turned out to be a swaggering, macho jock type who, like the Captain in *commedia dell'arte*, was craven when the chips were down. "He was always flexing his muscles, but when a bee flew into the rehearsal room, he cowered behind the women."

The physiologist was "aghast," says Henderson. "It took him a while to realize it was OK."

Henderson has just finished a week's artist residency in an elementary school. "It was redundant in a way," she says of the 250 kids who were not only hugely receptive but, in a sense, all clowns already. Interestingly "it was the kids perceived to be the losers, the underachievers who really shone."

"The licence never results in revenge," says Henderson. "It seems to be a direct line to self-esteem."

As for running a workshop for nasally ruddy anarchists, Henderson admits it has a certain whimsical quality. "By the third week, when clown day approaches, I can't find my pen or my notes. . . . I walk into the room and people might be swinging off the ceiling."

Application deadline: May 15. Information: 455-0807.