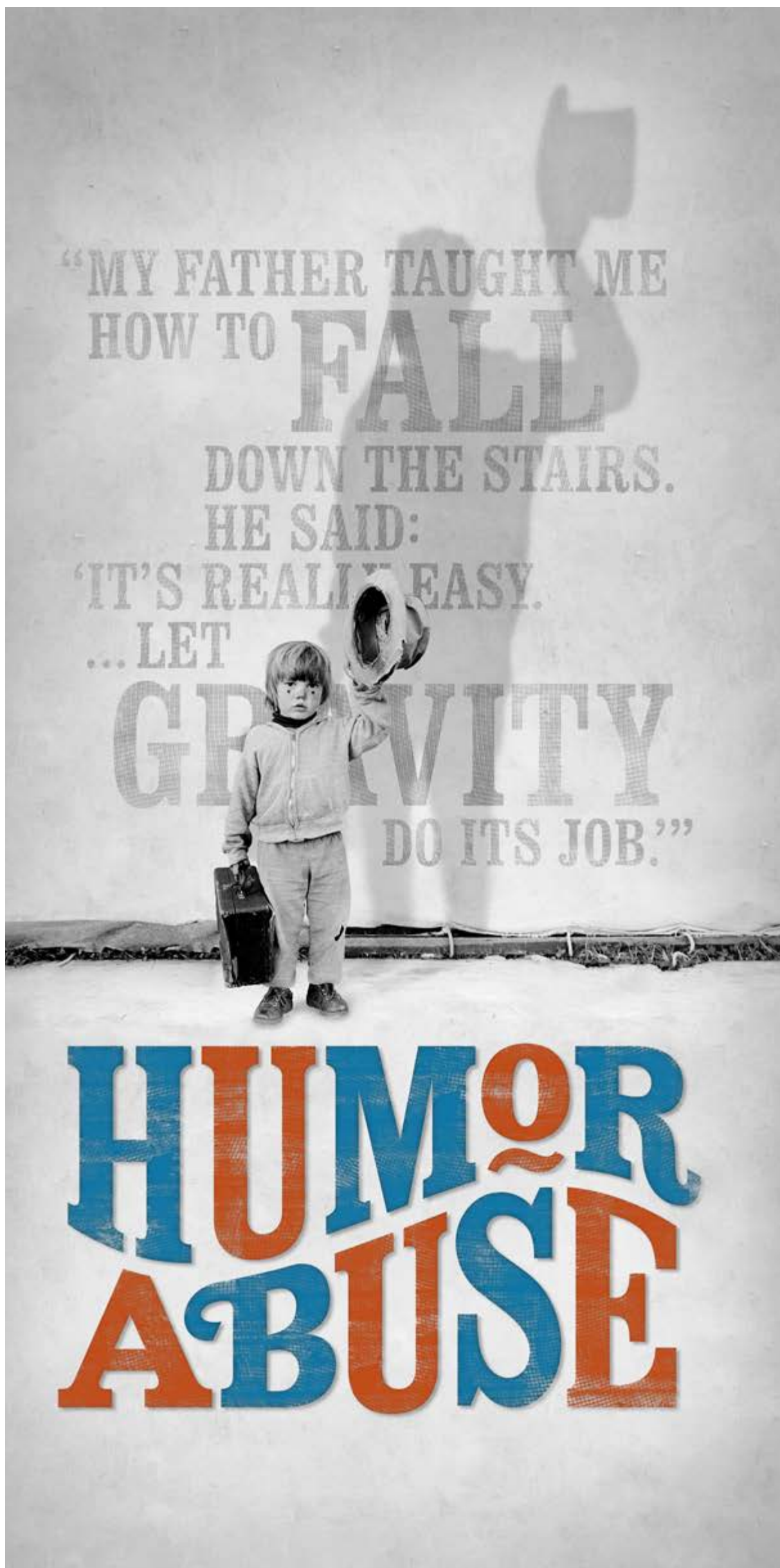


Discovery Guide



Welcome to Center Theatre Group and *Humor Abuse* by Lorenzo Pisoni and Erica Schmidt.

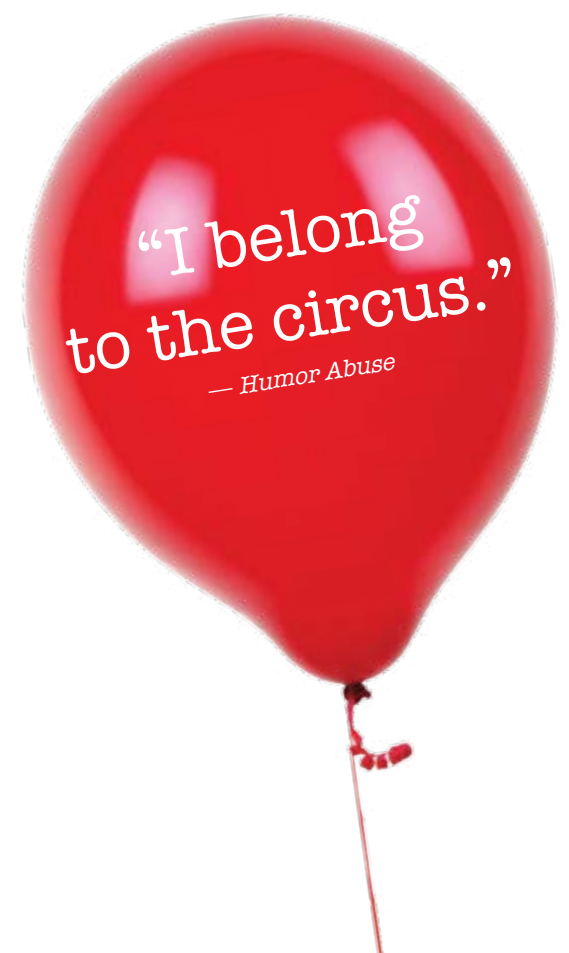
Humor Abuse is Lorenzo's true story about growing up in the circus with a clown for a father. It celebrates parents and children, the joy and discipline of comedy, and the magic of the circus.

In this autobiographical solo show, Lorenzo shares stories about life in the Pickle Family Circus and his unique relationship with his father, who was both his parent and clown partner.

Before we tell you more, take a moment and think about the circus. What words, images or feelings come to you? What would it be like to grow up in a circus? And think about clowns. Do they make you laugh; do they scare you a little; would you like to be one? Is there someone in your family who would make a great clown?

Turn the page to learn more about the Pickle Family Circus. Read an interview with director and co-creator Erica Schmidt about theatre and the art of collaboration. Explore the hard work and repetition required to truly become great at what you do. Discover the importance of clowns throughout human history and think about the universal language of laughter.

Theatre raises questions and challenges audience members to discover their own answers and perhaps, additional questions. See what questions this information raises for you and what discoveries the performance provides. Thank you so much for joining us for *Humor Abuse*. We look forward to seeing you at the theatre!



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“My name is Lorenzo
 my father is a clown...”
 — Lorenzo Pisoni, *Humor Abuse*

Humor Abuse is a true story of what it was like to grow up in the circus. In his autobiographical one-man show, Lorenzo Pisoni shares his unique childhood with us, as his father’s clown partner and a member of the Pickle Family Circus.



Lorenzo Pisoni. PHOTO BY TERRY LOBANT.

BUT THIS STORY BEGINS even before Lorenzo was born. Larry Pisoni, Lorenzo’s father, was the grandson of a vaudeville comedian. He knew he wanted to be a performer, but it wasn’t until he met a juggler at the nightclub where he worked that he realized he wanted to be a circus clown. That juggler became Larry’s mentor, teaching him acrobatic and juggling skills and giving him his first circus job.

Larry moved to California and joined the San Francisco Mime Troupe where he met set designer Peggy Snider. Larry offered to teach her to juggle. Their juggling partnership grew into a romantic relationship. They started a family and

founded the Pickle Family Circus. Lorenzo was born and grew up in this tight-knit circus community. Little Lorenzo was surrounded by adults who loved what they did, and he couldn’t wait to join in.

When Lorenzo stepped into the circus ring at two years old, it was clear he had inherited his parents’ gifts for performance. He could imitate his father’s clown character, Lorenzo Pickle, but in miniature and very seriously, making him the perfect straight man — the one in a comedy team who sets up the jokes, while his partner delivers the punch line. Lorenzo explains, “I really loved being the straight man, because I knew that I was part of the laugh that my father was getting.”

Father and son’s chemistry delighted crowds. It was like nothing they’d ever seen before, and became a cornerstone of the Pickle Family Circus’s repertoire.

Lorenzo titled his autobiographical play *Humor Abuse*. Why do you think he chose that title?

Is there a story you would tell about your own childhood? What would you title it?

“This is
 all true.
 Really.”
 — Lorenzo Pisoni, *Humor Abuse*

The Big Juggle

Every Pickle Family Circus performance ended with the “Big Juggle.” It didn’t matter if you were an expert juggler or a total beginner; everyone — musicians, backstage technicians, ushers, clowns, trapeze artists — came into the ring to juggle together.

Juggling is often used as a metaphor for trying to balance many things at the same time. Are there areas in your life that you have to juggle, such as school, work, friends, family? How do you keep all of these in balance?

In *Humor Abuse*, Lorenzo shares memories of learning to juggle and those days when he was in the zone and just couldn’t miss. Is there something that puts you in the zone and gives you that feeling of freedom or accomplishment?

“The Big Juggle that ends each show is a visual statement of the Pickle philosophy. The harmony of the whole is greater than its parts.

Individuals working together for the benefit of the family.”

— Orrel Lanter, *Juggler’s World Magazine*

The Pickle Family Circus

Created in 1975 by Larry Pisoni with Peggy Snider and juggler Cecil MacKinnon, the Pickle Family Circus was a new kind of circus.



ABOVE LEFT CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Gypsy and Peggy Snider, Larry and Lorenzo Pisoni. ABOVE: Willy the Clown (Bill Irwin) gets a gift as other Pickles look on. (LEFT TO RIGHT) Jonah Hoyle, Mary Winegarden, Melinda Marsh, Larry Pisoni, Lorenzo Pisoni, Peggy Snider, Cecil MacKinnon, Gypsy Snider, Sando Counts, and Michael Margulis. PHOTOS BY TERRY LOBANT.

AS A YOUNG CIRCUS PERFORMER, Larry Pisoni felt something was missing in the over-the-top American circuses of the 1950s, saying, “The clowns often were relegated to covering rigging changes. Their acts were prop-oriented and not character-generated. They weren’t funny; they were just dumb, silly, and grotesque. Or their humor was based on triumph of one individual at the expense of another.... I was looking for something real in those clowns and I didn’t see it.”

He was also frustrated with the circus’s association with freak shows and their “anything for profit” philosophy.

The Pickle Family Circus deliberately moved away from popular American circus traditions, staging their shows outside in a single ring. They performed without circus animals or a tent. Each show included live, original music. The Pickles were among the first companies to feature women in lead performance roles, as jugglers, acrobats and clowns.

Clown acts were the center of the Pickle Family Circus. Many of these acts were built around the clowns’ attempts to complete a simple task — serving spaghetti, playing a piece of music, arranging a series of trunks, dancing with a chorus line of gorillas.

Much of the humor came from the clowns’ inability to agree on the rules needed to complete the task, or their frustration when physical objects — chairs, plates, musical instruments, staircases — kept breaking or falling.

Larry believed deeply in the power and humanity of clowns: “I felt that the role of the clown within the circus was quite important. So much of the circus has to do with... risk taking and the triumph after taking the risks. The risk a clown takes comes from creating authentic and empathetic moments with his or her audience.”

The Pickles were also determined to let the audience know they were an important part of the show. Co-founder Peggy Snider explains, “The audience sat on the grass right next to the ring,

“I looked at the circus as a celebratory act: celebrating human experience and healthy relationships.”

— Larry Pisoni, in *The Pickle Clowns*

and that was a way of showing that there was not a vast difference between the audience and circus performer: if you want to do something, you can do it. We are not extraordinary individuals. We are just like you.”

Just as the art onstage was different, the way the company worked together offstage was also a new model. All major decisions were made collectively. All company members got the same pay regardless of their roles in the circus. Everyone had jobs and responsibilities backstage.

One of the most unique things about the Pickle Family Circus was their business model. Tours were built around community collaboration. In each city, they selected a charity, such as a childcare center or senior citizens home, to partner with.

“One of the aims of the Pickle Family Circus was to demonstrate that cooperative work could lead to the betterment not only of yourself but also of the community at large. Rather than try to teach that by talking about it, we would show it.”
 — Larry Pisoni, in *The Pickle Clowns*

Before the circus got to town, the Pickles would mentor the partner organization in marketing and promotion, ticket sales, and site preparation. Once the show opened, the profits from concessions, intermission games and booths, as well as a portion of the ticket sales went to that organization. The Pickles’ annual visits became a consistent and valued source of income for these charities.

In 1993 the Pickle Family Circus reinvented itself as the New Pickle Circus and joined forces with the San Francisco School for Circus Arts to create the Circus Center, still one of the foremost circus schools and circus arts organizations in North America.

This was the world that Lorenzo Pisoni grew up in — a world he believed “had no limits. You can do whatever you think of.”

Lorenzo grew up in the circus and jokes that “clowning is hereditary.” What is something you have inherited from where you grew up? From your family?

What is a way in which you have followed in your family’s footsteps, or hope to? Is there a way you have chosen to go in a different direction?

The Circus

circus n. from the ancient Greek "kirkos," meaning "circle" or "ring."

Circus is an international art form. Because so much of the circus is nonverbal, it has an appeal that transcends languages, cultures, and borders. The circus represents freedom and adventure, the breaking of conventions, living outside the norm.

THE CIRCUS HAS ROOTS IN EVERY CIVILIZATION. Artwork in ancient Egyptian tombs depicts jugglers and clowns. Descriptions of grand acrobatic performances are documented as far back as 200 BCE, in the Han Dynasty of China. From ancient Greece through the Middle Ages and beyond, groups of traveling performers, musicians and menageries (collections of exotic animals) crossed continents in search of audiences.

Some of the circus's key elements were first brought together during the Roman Empire, but most credit the invention of the modern circus to Englishman and stunt rider Phillip Astley, in 1768. His greatest contribution to circus history was the ring. Working in a circle measuring 42 feet in diameter, Astley's ring allowed horses to comfortably run at a full gallop, maximizing the centrifugal force needed for a rider to stand upright on the horse's back.

John Ricketts established the first American circus in Philadelphia in 1793, and President George Washington was one of its many fans. In 1825, Josiah Purdy Brown invented the circus tent. It was light and easy to travel with, fast and cheap to set up and tear down.

Perhaps the most influential figure in circus history was P.T. Barnum. With exotic animals, daredevil acrobats, and eccentric clowns, Barnum's traveling circus was characterized by the extreme — the largest elephant in the world, the smallest man in the world, the oldest woman in the world. It was a multi-million dollar business.

Barnum was a marketing genius, and while many of his "largest," "smallest," and "oldest" attractions turned out to be fake, his circus attracted millions. Barnum knew a one-ring circus could only seat so many people, so he added a second and then a third ring. To reach audiences across the country, Barnum's circus began traveling by train in 1872, and by the early 1890s needed more than 65 train cars to transport its more than 4,000 performers, technicians, and animals.

"It is a living entertainment performed by ordinary people who are capable of extraordinary feats."

— Paul Binder, Ringmaster and Founding Artistic Director, Big Apple Circus

In the early 1900s the circus was the main source of live entertainment in America, featuring a ringmaster, acrobats, gymnasts (tumbling, trampoline), aerial artists (high wire, flying trapeze), contortionists, jugglers, clowns, and equilibrists (stilts, plate spinning, rolling globe). Many traveling circuses also included a daredevil act, such as fire-eating, human cannonball, knife-throwing, or sword-swallowing.

"Circus day" was often the biggest event of the year in small towns across America. Businesses and schools closed so everyone could enjoy the spectacle. During World War II the circus was such a vital part of national morale that President Franklin Roosevelt gave the Ringling Brothers Circus special permission to use the railroads, while travel for the public was restricted to support the war effort.

But in the 1950s the circus became less popular. In contrast to film and television, which was fresh and new, some circus acts felt old and recycled. In the 1960s, as the political climate began to change, animal rights activists questioned the ethics of caging and domesticating exotic, wild animals. At the same time, many American circus artists and audiences grew less interested in extravagant spectacles.

The 1970s brought a new kind of circus — one that was socially conscious and committed to community involvement. Artists saw the circus as a tool for artistic expression and a celebration of what it means to be human. It was in this climate that the Pickle Family Circus was born.

This Nouveau Cirque ("New Circus") movement continues today, with circuses such as the Big Apple Circus and Cirque du Soleil. The circus arts are booming, with hundreds of schools and performing groups all over the world. Many groups, like Clowns Without Borders, Women's Circus and CircEsteem, are looking at the ways circus can teach life lessons about empowerment, hard work, and cooperation.

"Circus, when well done, is a metaphor. It reminds us of the boundless potential of our human nature. It shows us, by the way of an artistic, living image, that we can overcome our limitations."

— Dominique Jando, *PBS Arts: Circus as High Art*

"A clown is like aspirin, only he works twice as fast."
— Groucho Marx

Clowns

The clown is the heart and soul of the circus and has always been an important part of human life. Using masks or face paint, exaggerated, larger-than-life movements and facial expressions, clowns have served as a source of entertainment, as guides through sacred rituals, and as voices for social change.

MASKED GREEK CHORUSES, court jesters, and Shakespearean fools were valued for their wit and insight, and enjoyed a freedom of speech that no other citizens had. Their closeness to royalty gave these clowns power, and they often acted as the conscience of the court. In 300 BCE, under Emperor Shih Huang-Ti, thousands of laborers died during the construction of the Great Wall of China. Yu Sze, the emperor's jester, became a national hero by using jokes and riddles to criticize the next step — painting the wall. He was able to convince the emperor that more death wasn't worth it.

The silent clown tradition evolved as a result of both practical and political influences. Entertainers traveled to places with different languages and dialects. By focusing on physicality, they were able to connect with a wider audience. An act built around nonverbal communication could play to large or small groups, indoors or outdoors, whether or not the performer could be heard. And when governments passed laws about morality, being silent was often the best way to avoid censorship, or even arrest.

Many of the characteristics associated with modern clowns came from *commedia dell'arte* ("comedy of skill"), a theatre style that originated in 16th century Italy. *Commedia dell'arte* performances were built around a variety of stock characters: master, servant, or lovers. Each character represented a different mood — such as joy, love, arrogance or confusion.

In *Humor Abuse*, we see Lorenzo portray two of the principal *commedia dell'arte* characters. Pantalone, characterized by a mask with a hooked nose, was a greedy old man of high status. (Mr. Burns from *The Simpsons* is a good modern example.) Arlecchino (or Harlequin) was Pantalone's servant. While often portrayed as dim-witted, he was an expert at ruining his boss's schemes.

Today, there are many types of clowns, recognizable by their appearance, status, and the role they play in an act. They typically fall into one of the following categories:

- The **whiteface clown** is generally the straight man and authority figure. They use white face paint as a base and outline their nose and mouth with black or red.
- The **Auguste clown** is usually the most comical and mischievous. Of lower status than the whiteface clown, the Auguste is often the butt of the joke. Their face paint is red or pink, with eyes and mouth rimmed in white.
- **Character clowns** are parodies of an identifiable role — such as a doctor or a teacher. Tramps and hobos became popular in America during the Great Depression. Of lower status than the Auguste, they are down on their luck, wanderers. They can be depressed by their situation or happy with their freedom.

Larry Pisoni's clown character, Lorenzo Pickle, doesn't fall neatly under any of these umbrellas. He picked out the aspects that appealed to him, and combined them in his own unique way. His makeup was often in the style of the Auguste, with white eyes and mouth. His attitude, though, was all boss. Larry explained, "[Lorenzo Pickle] wanted to control everything, it was his show. Aspiring to authority but never up to the task. An authority figure and then he'd get the pie in the face."

Clowns can be silly, political, joyous, sad, mystical, scary, sarcastic or innocent; they can show us every human emotion or desire. According to Lorenzo, his father Larry believed, "Clowning is holy... it's about spirits and brews and chaos."

Why can clowns get away with saying or doing things that other people can't? Is there freedom in being a clown?

What is the power of using humor to discuss difficult topics?

Who are our modern day clowns? Why do we need them?

Speaking Circus

You may daydream about running away to join the circus, or maybe you haven't ever been to the circus. Yet without knowing it, you might be "speaking circus" in your daily life.

Three-ring circus

In 1882 Barnum & Bailey created the first three-ring circus. Today people use the term "three-ring circus" to describe something "wild, confusing, engrossing, or entertaining."

Rain or shine

By 1903 there were nearly 100 circuses traveling coast to coast. Circus advertisements included the phrase "rain or shine" to assure people that bad weather would not stop the show.

Get the show on the road

This was the direction shouted at roustabouts (the circus workers who erected the tents, cared for the grounds and equipment, and handled the animals) when it was time to pack up and move on to the next town.

Hold your horses

When the circus paraded down Main Street toward the Big Top, "Hold your horses" was a warning to local horsemen, as horses tended to get scared when the elephants went by.

Jumbo

From the Swahili words *jambo* ("hello") or *jumbe* ("chief"), zookeeper Anoshan Anathajeyasri gave this name to an elephant sold to P.T. Barnum in 1881, who later advertised it as "the largest elephant in the world." Today the word is used to describe anything bigger than large.

Tossing your hat into the ring

When President Woodrow Wilson threw his hat into the ring during a Ringling circus performance in 1916, journalists interpreted this as a sign that he would run for reelection. (He did.)

White elephant

One 17th century circus featured an "extremely rare, never-before-seen" albino elephant. This turned out to be a hoax: a regular elephant that had been painted white. Today the phrase "white elephant" is used to mean "anything oversized and unwanted."

Larry & Lorenzo

At its heart, *Humor Abuse* is a story about a father and a son.

THERE ARE MANY WAYS IN WHICH Larry and Lorenzo's relationship was unique. They worked together, toured the country together, ate all their meals together. In addition to being father and son, they were colleagues — partners from the time Lorenzo was six until he was ten. As straight man to his father's clown, Lorenzo shared equal responsibility for the success of the act.

This close working relationship gave Lorenzo an interesting perspective on his father's life. He says, "I don't know many kids who not only have a first-hand knowledge of what their parents do on a day-to-day basis, but also get to see their parents enjoying what they do."

While their partnership was unusual, their relationship as father and son is more familiar to us in the audience. Lorenzo shares moments of not wanting to speak to his dad, and times when he wanted to, but couldn't find the words. Of realizing his father wasn't always sure of what to say or do, either. Moments when his dad made him laugh and times when he was angry with his father. Of growing up and making the discovery that "everyone has a moment when they realize the parent they idolize is human."

"He wasn't just my parent, he was my clown partner."
— *Humor Abuse*

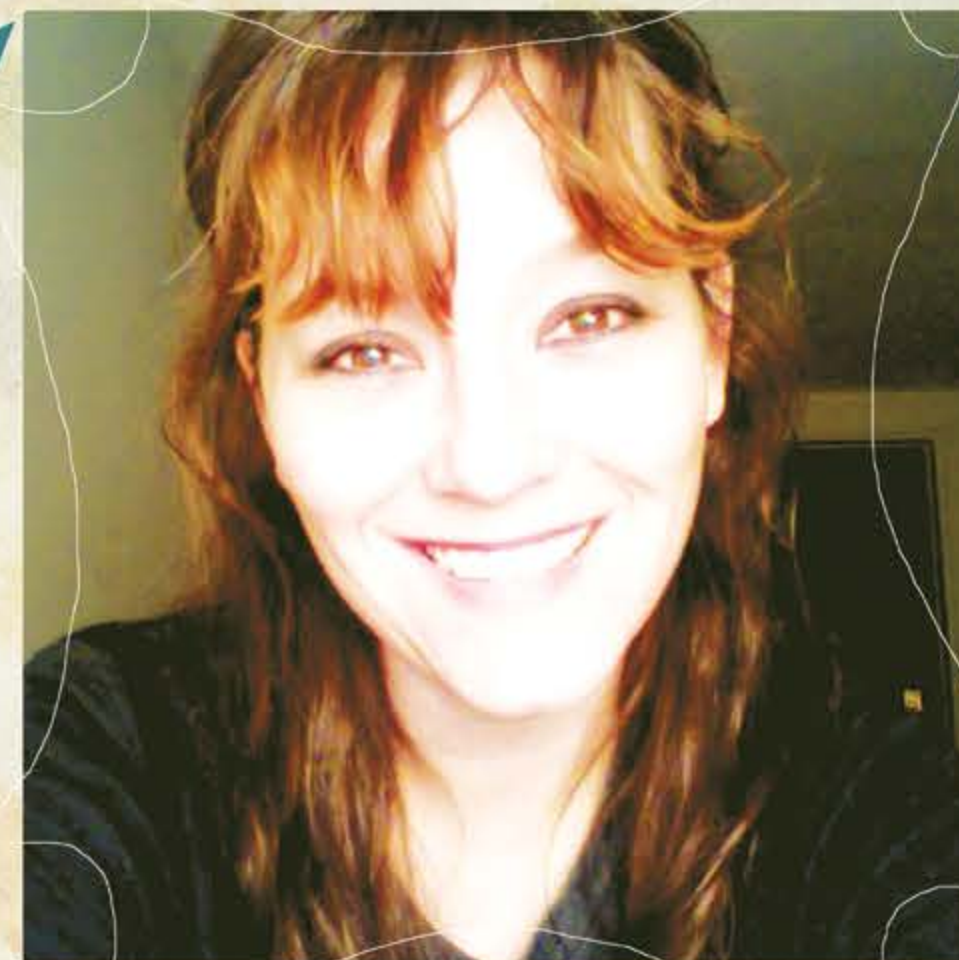
Have you ever been a partner with a parent or other family member? What did you do together? Was it a shared activity like cooking a meal, playing sports, fixing a car? Making music, going fishing, planting a garden?

Why is it sometimes so hard to talk to the people we are closest to? What gets in the way? If you could say one thing to a family member, what would you want to share?



L TO R: Larry and Lorenzo Pisoni. PHOTO BY TERRY LOBANT.

A conversation with
Humor Abuse
Co-Creator & Director
Erica Schmidt
and Center Theatre Group
Teaching Artist Marcos Nájera



Marcos Nájera

Thanks for taking time to talk with us, Erica. How would you define your job on *Humor Abuse*?

Erica Schmidt

My job as a director normally is a bit different than my job on *Humor Abuse*. On *Humor Abuse*, Lorenzo and I created this show together. We wrote it together. Lorenzo is trained as a clown, so he is a physical thinker. So a lot of the moments that you see in the show have come together physically — meaning that the transition into and out of the trunk [a prop in the show] has to do with the storytelling.

I see my job on this show as really trying to tell the story. Trying to keep track of how clearly we follow and understand Lorenzo through the journey of his life. And to keep the audience on his side and understanding him and hoping they laugh as much as possible. And obviously, to help Lorenzo feel comfortable and safe and confident.

Humor Abuse is fun because we get to learn so much about Lorenzo as a kid. What were you like as a kid?

(Laughing) I don't know! I guess bossy. We moved around a lot, my family. So I started over a lot.

Where are you from, Erica?

I moved every three years, so nowhere really. I went to high school in South Carolina and San Diego, California. My father was in the Navy. I think there's a lot of crossover with military families and theatre. There's something about moving, starting over, that's very much like working on plays.

You declared theatre as your major during your first week in college at Vassar. Why did you choose theatre?

I wanted to go to a conservatory for acting. And my parents wouldn't let me. They were pretty passionate about me receiving a "proper" education. But I just knew that theatre was what I wanted to do. I don't know how or why. It seemed like the smartest thing to do was to pursue that.

What drew you to study costume design at Juilliard after college?

I ended up double-majoring in acting and costume design [in college.] I really love clothes and the story told through clothes, so I wanted to study that more. I was an intern at the summer theatre in Mt. Holyoke, and then I did an internship at Juilliard. And you assist designers and you assist the stitchers and the drapers and the first hands [the tailor's assistant who sews costumes and puts on finishing details]. It's a really hands-on experience and was my only employable skill after graduation. I did wardrobe and I sewed and I assisted costume designers. I did all that kind of thing to pay the rent.

And now, do you consider yourself a director or more of a storyteller with many different skills?

I guess I would call myself a director.

Who sews.

(Laughing) I've been practicing the skill of directing on a regular basis. My sewing skills have fallen off a bit!

I read that you wanted to create the shows that you weren't seeing in American theatre. Will you talk about that?

For me, it's about the way that stories are told. Sometimes I just love a dance break. Or a moment that's funny, to let it just be funny. There's so much linear storytelling. It's not that I reject that, that's fine. It's just that I feel really happy in the world that Lorenzo and I have created — which is much more like "Okay, I'm going to tap dance like a gorilla, and then I'm gonna do a backflip!" And we started out creating the show through those skills. And the words came second. We are both pretty proud that it's a play.

I love being a part of something where the rules of "who does what" aren't so strictly applied. The best idea in the room is the one that works. It doesn't matter whose it is. I like new forms. I like when it's surprising.

I love being a part of something where the rules of "who does what" aren't so strictly applied. The best idea in the room is the one that works. It doesn't matter whose it is.

What would we see in your rehearsal room with Lorenzo?

(Laughing) It's pretty funny. Lorenzo does a lot of stretching, a lot of warming up. And then we work pretty hard, and then when it gets to be a lot, because it's just him — then I try to fall down the stairs and that makes him laugh. And then we move on to something else.

Will you talk about why collaboration is important to you and what it is?

Collaboration is people. It could be two people, it could be four people, it could be twenty — however many people — coming together and bringing their different feelings and ideas and intellect to a piece. And because they bring these different points of view, it makes the thing better, or bigger or special in a different way.

If I'm directing an actor and the actor can collaborate with me, can say "I don't want to do it that way, I want to do it this way" or "This is what I see," then that's going to make the thing better because it's going to be more felt, more understood, more thoroughly investigated. And I'm interested in that on every level, in design, in every aspect of the theatre.

With Lorenzo, I know he would tell you a story about his life and you would help make it funnier. What adjustments would you make?

Lorenzo doesn't see himself the way that the common person sees Lorenzo. He doesn't think it's funny that his dad was a clown. He doesn't see how the average person looks at that and thinks, "That's so unique and amazing and special!" It's just his life.

He told me this story; he was maybe two and a half. When they would do the tent set-up, they would put him in a little, gated-off area. Everybody kind of watched him. But everybody was also putting up the circus. And they were very, very busy. And he escaped. He told me about walking down the road and this couple pulled over and they put him in the car. And Geoff Hoyle [a Pickle Family Circus clown] was running down the street in a tutu and make-up. And Lorenzo is telling this story and for him it's about the couple in the car and the strange image of the [clown in a tutu running].

And I said, "You ran away from the circus!" Everybody wants to run away TO the circus! But he doesn't see it that way, so that line, it gets a laugh. And he can play it so that it is funny. But he doesn't think of it [as funny].

A lot of stuff we do out loud. He would send me something. I would edit it. And then in the room, he would say it and I would say it back and then we'd go back and forth to find the different rhythms. It's his experience with my perspective. He's doing a documentary, and he asked me, "What percentage of the show did you write?" And I said, "I think the whole show is your experience, my words. Do you agree?" And he said, "Yes."

We've always clicked in the way we work together. [After college] when we were doing *As You Like It*

for the three or four years that we worked on it, we really hammered out a working relationship. We both got to practice being a director and an actor on each other. We do certain things in the same way which makes it easy to collaborate.

What riddles do you have to solve as director?

I'm working on a new play that I'm going to do after *Humor Abuse*, called *Taking Care of Baby* [written by Dennis Kelly]. And the riddle for me was, "What is the best way that the audience can receive this play, really feel its emotional content, hear it and appreciate it and be moved by it and laugh?" That's the riddle. And the way it's solved has to do with everything — the design, the room that the audience enters, the things they see, and then obviously the actors and the qualities that they bring to it.

With *Humor Abuse*, it's a bit different. It's such a mash-up. The riddle was how to make it into a play — how to tell the story. We're adding a couple of new things for L.A. that we've never done before, so I feel like it's still a puzzle. But for us, the most important thing is just trying to make people laugh.



L TO R: Larry and Lorenzo Pisoni. PHOTO BY TERRY LOBANT.

Do It Again

"I was born to be my father's straight man. But I needed a lot of training."
— *Humor Abuse*

HAVE YOU EVER SEEN a person so good at something, it seems like they were born knowing how to do it? We don't usually think about clowns having to learn or train. It seems as if some people are just naturally funny. But making it look easy actually comes from hard work and repetition. As Lorenzo says about learning circus skills, "It was a matter of putting in the time. A lot of time."

Throughout his childhood, Lorenzo heard the words "Do it again" over and over from his father. "Do it again," as he learned to juggle. "Do it again," as he tried to balance a hat on his nose. "Do it again," until his backflip was perfect. Sometimes it seemed impossible and young Lorenzo would tell his father, "I can't do it." Larry would reply "Can't do it... yet."

Larry Pisoni didn't only apply his "do it again" approach to his son's training. He was also constantly practicing his own clown skills. He did double takes, acrobatics, and pratfalls over and over again. He continued to explore his clown persona, Lorenzo Pickle, putting him in new and challenging situations. All of this time and effort gave him the skills to fulfill his dream: making people laugh.

This "do it again" work ethic enables Lorenzo, and Larry, to master acts that amaze their audiences. Both son and father show us that through hard work and practice, the impossible — and even the magical — can happen.

Is there something you are willing to do again and again in order to become great?

Is there someone who believes in you and knows — even if you don't — that you just can't do it...yet?

Laughter

"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people."
— Victor Borge

LORENZO DESCRIBES HIS FATHER as "serious about comedy." We don't usually see the words "serious" and "comedy" in the same sentence. But often what makes us laugh is when things that don't normally go together are suddenly brought together.

Have you ever had a friend laugh and suddenly you and everyone else started laughing and couldn't stop? Have you ever wondered why humans laugh?

Scientists are asking the same questions. Gelotology is the study of laughter and its effects on the body. Biologically, laughter relaxes us, curbing our "fight or flight" response. Laughter has the power to change the way we feel and the way we act.

The social purpose of laughter is ancient, predating our ability to speak by perhaps millions of years. Before our ancestors could talk, laughter was a simpler form of communication and may have begun as a way of expressing relief after surviving a dangerous experience together.

Today, many believe that the main purpose of laughter is to make and strengthen human connections. While we laugh at comedians, sitcoms and YouTube clips, most laughter is not about jokes; it is about relationships between people. We laugh when we feel comfortable with other people. We laugh at the sound of laughter itself. The more laughter, the deeper the group's connection.

What makes us laugh? We laugh when the familiar becomes ridiculous, such as a tiny car that holds dozens of clowns. We laugh to relieve stressful situations. In the circus, clowns provide comic relief. After seeing a death-defying act — a trapeze artist doing flips hundreds of feet above the ground — the audience needs to laugh to release the built-up tension.

Sometimes we laugh "at" rather than "with," enjoying jokes at another person's expense. Clowns give us permission to laugh "at" them. The art of clowning is to take an ordinary situation and play and exaggerate until it becomes ridiculous. In real life, we don't want to be ridiculous, but clowns give us the chance to not take everything so seriously. By laughing at a clown, we get to laugh at ourselves in a safe way.

Laughter bridges cultures; all humans recognize laughter and express it in the same way. We don't have to learn laughter; we are born with the ability to laugh. Laughter is our universal language.

What makes you laugh? What is the power of laughter?

We know the pleasure of laughing; what is the pleasure of making other people laugh? Are you someone who likes making others laugh? Why is that fun for you?

“See you down the road.”

— Humor Abuse

Center Theatre Group Education and Community Partnerships

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Center Theatre Group's mission is to serve the diverse audiences of Los Angeles by producing and presenting theatre of the highest caliber, by nurturing new artists, by attracting new audiences, and by developing youth outreach and education programs. This mission is based on the belief that the art of theatre is a cultural force with the capacity to transform the lives of individuals and society at large.

Education and Community Partnerships

Theatre is an enduring and powerful tool for communicating ideas, stories, emotions and beliefs that fuel the intellect, imagination and creative spirit. Center Theatre Group believes that stimulating awareness, creativity, dialogue and an inquisitive mind is integral to the growth and well-being of the individual and the community; and that nurturing a life-long appreciation of the arts leads inextricably to an engaged and enlightened society.

Center Theatre Group's education and community partnership programs advance the organization's mission in three key ways:

- Audiences:** Inspiring current and future audiences to discover theatre and its connection to their lives;
- Artists:** Investing in the training, support and development of emerging young artists and young arts professionals who are the future of our field; and
- Arts Education Leadership:** Contributing to the community-wide efforts to improve the quality and scope of arts education in Los Angeles.



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