

Falling on Purpose:

Learning to Laugh in the Face of Failure
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Artistic Aims

So much of how we communicate occurs in the form of body language. Before we learn how to say “pick me up”, we instinctively know to extend our hands up to our caretakers, open-armed and open-eyed, to ask non-verbally to be picked up and held. Humans learn this language of the body before we even begin to speak. This fact applies to all humans across all cultures, making this form of communication, gesture, universally human.

Since I was younger I’ve always been amazed by how a circus clown could captivate a crowd of hundreds or thousands of people, inciting laughter just by using their physical body. A whole tent full of people of different ages, from different cultures and backgrounds, speaking different languages, all laughing at the same moment. *Falling on Purpose* is an attempt at bringing an audience together in one unique shared experience that transcends the boundaries of spoken word. This show is a tribute to pioneers of the craft some dare to call “clown”.

In creating this piece my goal was to use physical comedy and pantomime to bring audiences an experience that not only encourages their engagement, but depends on it. These interactions between the performer and the audience are designed to create a conversation that includes everyone in the space. In engaging in this piece, everyone in the room, including the performer themselves, explores the things that bring us together: failures, triumphs, music, dance, and laughter experienced together as a group.

This show intends to inspire laughter and an exploration of a range of emotion through gesture and expression and without the use of spoken language. Meant to be an experiment, a conversation, a celebration of play, this piece was not made with a plot or story in mind. Despite this, somehow during the process of creation, it became a show about figuring it out, taking risks, and getting back up again, inspired by my own trials and tribulations of creating the piece. Hopefully, by the end of the performance, we would have reengaged that sense of play that we as adults have seemed to have relinquished.

Looking back, flipping through the slides of my Senior Project proposal, I realized that I truly wouldn't know what it meant to put up a clown show until after I'd done it. My concept at the beginning dealt with a lot of story. Something about friendship, loss, and self-love. At some point I'd juggle something, then I'd throw in a hat trick, and that would be that. But in the following months as I'd develop *Falling on Purpose*, I would discover that I'd find more meaning in the process of creating and putting up the show than if I had conceptualized my own meaning from the start.

In the end, the theme of the show would develop to become about being unafraid of failure, overcoming it with determination and creativity and refusing to give up. In the beginning, my process was stunted by the fact that I felt like I had absolutely no idea what I was doing. For the first time ever I was my own director, my own writer, my own producer and I had a constant creeping feeling that maybe I had bitten off a little more than I could chew. Despite my vision and despite all of my research, week after week I'd find myself in the rehearsal space absolutely stumped. The show was beginning to

come together on paper but I was having a hard time getting it on its feet. When I tried out what I'd written on paper I didn't feel funny, I felt stupid. I was used to being an actor and not a clown. I found myself fixated on trying to figure out some kind of interesting clown character to perform. That is what actors do after all: bring life to characters. This stumped-ness would go on for a few months, before one day, looking through my notes, I would have a revelation.

I couldn't possibly successfully perform this piece playing a character. Of course I didn't feel funny playing this abstract idea of an exaggerated *someone*, for comedy lies in truth. Looking back on all my show notes I would rarely use the 1st person pronoun, "I", as if I was not writing for myself, as if this was to be written for someone else! I was trying to be like Bill Irwin and David Shiner and George Carl and they all perform and connect with their audiences as inflated versions of themselves. None of them under the guise of a clown persona detached from themselves. The show needed to be seen through an exaggerated lens of myself. It was something I'd been told before by one of my mentors, Mark Gindick, but never truly understood until I was struggling to make my own clown show. It was when I realized this and applied it to my work in the rehearsal room that the show would begin to physically take form.

Largely inspired by swiss clown, Dimitri, *Falling on Purpose* pays homage to him and many of the greats of physical comedy. *Falling on Purpose's* main inspiration, a piece by Dimitri called *Le Porteur*, inspired a great deal of the prop use and informed my choice to utilize a minimal set. Other inspirations for the piece include Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights*, Bill Irwin's *The Regard of Flight*, David Shiner's *Silent Movie*, Irwin and

Shiner's most recent show together: *Old Hats*, and a number bits and gags I've seen circus clowns perform in the many trips I've taken to the circus since I was younger. In consuming these comedic creations and letting them inform my work I'd create a quilt of attributes inspired by the clowns that motivate me the most and create a piece of my own.

In becoming a clown I have learned quite a lot. We learn by failure and clowns thrive in the face of it by using their unique understanding of the world to navigate their way through it. From the first trip and fall to the final choir of kazoos, *Falling on Purpose* is a series of failures and triumphs. The closing song at the end of the piece was written about having the courage to fail, knowing you'll learn from your mistakes and do better when you try again. Creating this show single-handedly taught me how important it is to take risks. Now, in the face of opportunity, I won't think twice before I jump.

Technical Essay

Creating *Falling On Purpose* was unlike anything I had ever done before. I had no experience in creating a one-man show and very little experience with clown performance so it would prove to be a difficult challenge that seriously tested my problem solving and creative abilities. Constructing this show would teach me about preparation, improvisation, and compromise in building and putting up my own original work. By the end of this process I'd learn the tools I'd need to be an efficient and productive creator post-grad.

The process of creating *Falling on Purpose* began with a search for inspiration and consisted mostly of consuming quite a lot of clown media. I didn't really know much about where to look or who to look for, so I took to Youtube using keywords like: "clown performance" and "clown theatre" and while I would have to dig, I'd eventually begin to find what I was looking for. Before long, in my research I'd become familiar with the names that would ultimately inspire my piece and eat up all of the recordings of them that I could find on the internet. I'd open up a notebook to a blank page and scroll through the many videos, writing down little blips about what made me laugh and why. Eventually I turned to real-life, inspired by the quirks of life and those around me. Whenever I caught an idea I'd jot it down wherever I could. Before long it was quite hard to keep track of what I had written and where I had written it. What I'd write in these notes would in time mold into what would become a fully conceptualized original piece.

Kat Taylor, my stage manager, was pretty hands-off at the beginning of the process, partially due to the fact that they were stage managing their own full-length senior project (on top of working on two other projects), and partly due to the fact that I was afraid to have anyone in the room. I'd ask them not to come to rehearsals while I "figured it out". Their busy schedule would prove to become a convenient excuse for my avoidance. Kat would book the room and I'd show up with my juggling hat and my juggling balls and put a chair in the middle of the floor. I'd do a warmup and then I'd practice with the balls, then the hat and then I'd pack up and go home. Sometimes I'd sit and flip through my notes. Sometimes I wouldn't show up at all. I didn't know what I thought I was doing and it really freaked me out.

I was mentored by Mark Gindick and Keith Nelson. I'd meet Mark the first year I'd take the circus skills class in 2017, and I'd meet Keith a year later when I returned to the class to be a Teacher's Assistant. While I learned basic prop skills from Mark, I attribute most of my circus prop skill learning to the fact that I assisted Keith for so many semesters that even though I kept coming back, I was no longer able to receive credits for my participation. Keith, the co-founder of non-profit circus company Bindlestiff Family Cirkus, has made an entire career on his wide variety of circus prop knowledge and skill. From juggling to sword swallowing, it seems like he can do it all. Mark, however, being "The first and only clown to have completed the trifecta of circuses," having performed with Ringling Bros., Big Apple Circus and Cirque Du Soleil, introduced me to what it truly meant to be a clown. Both a Purchase alum and having done a

one-man clown show for his own senior project, he had a lot of advice to give, and I sure needed it.

I was stuck. I dreaded coming into circus skills every week only to hear Keith ask “How’s the show coming?” The truth was, it wasn’t. I was at a standstill and I told him that. One week, Mark would substitute for Keith, returning as the circus skills instructor for just a day. They would both tell me the same thing. Break it up. Focus on creating small moments and then figure out how to thread them together. Taking that advice, I was able to develop a rough outline for my show. While some moments I’d eventually decide to reimagine or cut out completely, this outline would serve as a rough draft of the final skeleton of the show. The biggest problem was that it desperately lacked meaning, but that would be something I’d discover as I pushed through the process of creating it.

By the end of the semester I’d have Kat back in the space and consequently, things were beginning to make progress. I’ve always said this show would not have gone up if it weren’t for my stage manager and very close friend Kat Taylor. Suddenly Kat was in the space with me and this force of a being was snapping me into shape. They’d catch me in the middle of rehearsal at a literal full standstill and they’d give me a nudge, telling me to “Get out of your head,”. They’d listen to me describe my idea to them for a few minutes before interrupting me and finally saying, “Stop talking about it, let me see it.” They were helping me overcome this fear I had of performing alone in an intimate setting. The show would grow exponentially with their help.

The Kickstarter went up in mid-January, a little later than I had hoped. This lateness was due to the fact that the show would continue to be ever-changing right up until its opening. Bits and props were being added and cut almost every other week due to consequences of capability, time, and how it fit into the puzzle of the show. Finally, we'd settle on a budget of 1,000 dollars which would be just enough with some room for changes. By the end of February we'd meet our goal (admittedly with some financial help from my mother).

Surprisingly, the tech week that followed would be the easiest tech week I'd ever experienced. The choice to utilize a minimal set and very few lighting cues made tech very very easy. It took about 20 minutes to lug the big trunk full of assorted props across campus and load it into the space. This trunk (borrowed from the conservatory's prop storage) and a black stool that was conveniently found in the space, would be the only set pieces for the entire piece. The assortment of props that I'd pull out from that trunk would be an array of things both borrowed and bought. Programming lights for the show start to finish took maybe 30 or 40 minutes at most, the only lighting cues being lights up at the very beginning and a shift to a reddish-orange wash at the beginning of the closing song. It was in that week the show would come together for the first time, the first full run being the faculty show in an improvised costume, as the full costume wouldn't arrive until the day of the show. The faculty show would also be the first time running or even practicing the live sound effects.

Since the first inkling of a concept for this show, I had considered utilizing a foley artist and live sound effects inspired by performers before me. It was not something

that was prioritized due to the fact that it was difficult to create comedic sound effects for a show that was not yet finished, but we realized a little too late that a number of bits based on live sound effects and interactions with the foley artist were not only written into the script but were also important turning points in the arc of the show. Kat, who had previously entertained the idea of doubling as foley artist, would then volunteer to take on the additional role of and by the end of that week Kat and I would have accumulated a variety of simple sound makers: a desk bell, a slide whistle, a squeaky dog toy, and a number of auxiliary instruments. While we had never practiced fully with the instruments, aside from talking through what we could, I told Kat to just go for it. They did a lot of improving and I really have to give them a whole lot of credit, they had great instincts and did a very good job with what they were given. While I was quite happy with their work it is without a doubt that if I could change one thing, it would be that we could have spent more time developing the sound. Looking back at the recording of the show, it is clear that the foley needed work.

The show would go as expected for the most part with only a few unexpected happenings: a shortage of ukulele strings, a wardrobe malfunction, a booboo as a result of smashed ceramic plate debris, but luckily nothing that would have the potential to stop the production. I surprised myself with my ability to figure out and overcome these obstacles during the show or just moments before. Despite being ecstatic with the final results and despite the positive feedback I had received, there are a number of things I'd change about the show, technical and otherwise, if I were to do it all again. It was all

worth it for that very fact: I now have an original show that I can call my own and reproduce at my own will.

Laughing Matters

Everyone is familiar with the idea of a clown, but not everyone is familiar with the idea of the clown having therapeutic and healing qualities. Clowns have existed for centuries, not only as entertainers, but also as shamans, doctors, and peacemakers. But in the last half a century, clowns have become known and used more for their striking and distinct image rather than the beneficial properties of their craft. Not only do clowns affect others positively, but the self-searching involved in becoming an effective clown has a positive effect on the clown themselves. Society, now too familiar with the popular contemporary depiction of an unsettling and/or evil clown, shies away from the word “clown” itself. Due to this recent widespread acceptance of the clown as a creepy or scary character and consequently, the dismissal of the clown’s very real therapeutic abilities, the world misses out on a rich opportunity for unity and healing across cultures.

We all know what it's like to experience laughter. It doesn't matter what shade you are or what language you speak, this visceral phenomenon is recognizable across cultures as a symptom due to feelings of excitement, pleasure, and joy. Reported to decrease pain, alleviate stress, elevate mood, and even strengthen immune function (van der Wal and Kok, 473) it's no wonder humans enjoy laughter, considering it to be “the best medicine”. Laughter in itself is an undeniably universal experience, and because of its healing qualities we frequently seek it out in the form of comedy. However, because of often referencing and poking fun at politics, society, media, and day-to-day life, many forms of comedy can be alienating to those outside of intended

audiences and cultures. Clown humor, however, utilizes a number of practices that in effect make clown a universal art form, avoiding the alienating of individuals or groups while enabling audiences of all types to come together and share a laugh.

A multitude of ideas may come to mind when you think of the word “clown”: the birthday clown, the circus clown, the killer clown. You might even hear the word used to describe an unfavored political figure. An Urban Dictionary entry for the word suggests that “clown” describes someone who is a “Chump, punk, loser, a duck ass person, joke destined to fuck up”. The author of this entry, Honey301, uses the word in a sentence: “I’m breaking up with his clown ass today!” (urbandictionary.com) Comprehension of the word has shifted from a term used to describe skilled performers, entertainers, and healers to a name you call your “duck-ass” soon-to-be ex-boyfriend. This understanding of the word “clown” as a descriptor acts only to diminish the value of its true meaning. Beyond the image of garish face paint and cartoonishly oversized props, there is a foundational craft underpinning real clowning that centers itself on unlocking the truest version of yourself in order to connect more deeply with the people in front of you.

To begin to understand this craft of clown, one must first consider clown as a state of being. To do so is to open up a well of possibilities of how clowns can positively affect the self and in turn, society. Clown pedagogue Laurel Butler brilliantly delineates the idea of clowning, writing, “clowning is about relinquishing one’s knowledge, certainties, and reliance on conventional symbols and cultural codes; it is about stripping down, leveling, paring away, arriving at the most basic state of humanity and then re-approaching the world, rediscovering it and repossessing our ability to create

and assign meaning and value to our experiences.” (Butler, 71) By arriving at this childlike state where everything is new and we don’t yet know the lay of the land, we unlock the potential to free ourselves from the societal rules that are meant to make sure we don’t disrupt the flow of everyday life, stifling our individuality and creativity. This phenomenon is what makes clowning liberating and amusing to both perform and experience. As the saying goes: “comedy lies in truth”, and discovering your true sense of self, stripped bare of all social conventions and norms, vulnerable for those standing before you to see, is the daring act that comes to life at the forefront of successful clown performance. This might sound like a big feat for one measly clown, but that is why for Jaques Lecoq, father of the theatrical clown, clown training comes at the very end of his two-year physical theatre school. He states, “You can only be a clown when you have built up an experience of life.” (Lecoq, 157) Not everyone agrees with this. In fact, the aforementioned Butler believes that “by locating clowning in the authentic body, or framing the clown as self, we actually render it vastly accessible”. Truthfully, everyone who is willing to engage in play, regardless of age or experience, can take part in and benefit from participating in the transformative and empowering art of clown. (Butler, 63)

The state of mind that is clown operates as a tool that is used to open the imagination to play. In unlearning social norms and conventions, the renewed childlike vulnerability that is unleashed allows the clown to re-access the liberation that allowed them the courage to play freely as a child. Under layers of “intelligence, sensibility, sophistication, and social nicety” we all have a clown, according to British pedagogue

John Wright. (Wright, 184) Wright describes play as “[occupying] a liminal world between the actual and the imaginary where anything can become something else and metaphors breed like rabbits” (Wright, 30) The act of unlocking this “liminal world” of play can be of great use to us. In learning how to play we exercise the muscle that allows us to think quickly and creatively. In playing with others we exercise the muscle used to collaborate and think together, and in doing so we can create not only fun interesting product, but also a telepathic, creative and emotional bond with one another.

A factor that contributes to the universal nature of clowning is the fact that clowns primarily utilize pantomime as the means of expressing themselves. Verbal language is very central to the way we as humans communicate, despite the fact that, due to the variety of different spoken languages, it is one of the many things that holds us apart from one another. On account of this, it would be to the clown’s disadvantage to have to be reliant on it. Being that circuses have always toured around the world, in order to appeal to all audiences, clowns primarily communicate with the audience through gesture and expression using methods like slapstick and physical comedy. This allows clown performance to be readily accessible and available to all audiences who have the privilege to experience through viewing.

In a similar way to how clowns bring joy to audiences in the theatre or the circus, clowns have the ability to provide therapeutic relief to those in physical and psychological distress through humor and play in a number of settings. Clown-doctors or medical clowns are frequently used in children’s healthcare all over the world. These specially trained clowns are often utilized to bring comfort to children suffering from

serious illness and to their families. Evidence supported by randomized controlled trials in Israel and Italy suggests that the relief these clowns bring to patients is literally “as effective as tranquilizers, with no side effects”. (Wilson, 00:02:37). Important to these therapies is the idea that the patient is not only engaged but also involved in the spectacle. By performing “red-nose transplants, kitty cat scans, chocolate milk transfusions [and] plate spinning platelet tests,” medical clowns can even help to demystify and remove intimidation of complicated medical procedures patients must anticipate. (Peacock, 129) These clown doctors’ clowning around is clearly serious business. In fact, laws have been passed in Argentina that make it so that it is required to have medical clowns present in the public hospitals of their largest province. (Wilson, 00:05:25) These clowns, whose sole purpose is to bring joy to those in pain, are without a doubt quite important to the communities they serve.

The healing powers of clown don’t stop at the hospital. One unique organization takes advantage of the universal nature of clown and utilizes it to bring laughter to those who need it all around the world. Clowns Without Borders is a non-profit organization that sends clowns to war- and violence-affected areas to engage communities and bring much needed fun and joy. The children in these communities, which consist of conflict zones, refugee camps, and sites of crisis, are kids that have been stripped of the ability to have normal healthy childhoods and instead take on an immense amount of daily stress. In reaction to trauma, “Children are naturally resilient, but without access to play or laughter, they’re unable to fully develop and heal.” (clownswithoutborders.org) Play acts as a crucial part of a child’s social and emotional

development and it is important to re-establishing that development after a trauma. (Peacock, 12) In engaging in this clown play, refugee children and their families are granted an opportunity, for a moment, to not have to worry about the future and to forget what's happened in the past, for clowns and clown shenanigans exist deeply in the present moment. It is a shame that these important clown interventions are often overlooked and undervalued in the present day due to the emergence of clown fear.

In the last decade, the popularity of the clown as a performer has been seeing a steady decline. The traditional depiction of the silly, benevolent circus clown has become an iconic image. This idea of the clown has been reinterpreted, recreated, and reused so many times that it's been watered-down and consequently distorted. Clown scholar Louise Peacock claims that, "When the clown becomes over-familiar, it becomes debased. Society loses its wonder at the clown. [...] In this situation, the skill of the clown is no longer recognized, nor is the potential benefit which the clown can bring to society." (Peacock, 153) One particularly influential innovation has fundamentally changed the way Americans think about clowns and that is, of course, the television. In the 1950s and 60s clowns were introduced into the media as children's tv show hosts, mascots, and salesmen. These characters such as Bozo or Ronald McDonald may have looked like clowns, but they certainly did not function like the previously mentioned clowns of the circus and the theatre. These new representations of clowns were oversimplified beings, complete with catchphrases and gimmicks, whose sole purpose was to sell. Due to the popularity and accessibility of television, "clowns of the tv age had more reach and influence than clowns had ever had before,

and they came to overshadow clowns performing in more classic venues like the circus.” (Paskin, 00:16:43)

Assisting in the clown’s sharp modern decline is the killer clown horror trope. Widely seen throughout contemporary pop culture, the scary or the creepy clown might be the most widely popular conception of a clown to date. It is almost without a doubt that the killer clown trope might never have been born but for the crimes of one man: John Wayne Gacy. Gacy is known for the assaults and killings of 33 boys and young men, but what made his case popular was the fact that he made a living as a birthday clown. This tidbit struck fear in the hearts of American families. Who were these entertainers that they were hiring to perform for their children and inviting into their homes? These beings whose painted smiles, originally meant for the stage, seem less genuine up close? Gacy was arrested in 1978, the same year Stephen King is reported to have conceived his popular novel *It* which depicts a story about an evil being, manifested as a clown named Pennywise, who would lure and hunt down children. *It* was published in 1986 and then later released as an ABC miniseries in 1990, making itself available beyond the scope of book readers. The clown had become something to be afraid of and circus clowns, theatre clowns, and clown healers alike, not to mention the audiences they serve, would suffer the consequences.

For modern audiences, the mention of clown now results in an instant correlation to the horror genre, causing the general public to be avoidant of comedic clowns. This fact has caused a number of clowns to lose their jobs. Tricia Manuel, former clown for Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus, claims that for many clown organizations,

“the phone stopped ringing.” Several of these companies went out of business. (Paskin, 00:26:03) In response, many circus clowns have stopped wearing traditional clown make-up, instead donning a lighter, less flashy alternative or just the red nose and sometimes no clown makeup or nose at all. Some clowns prefer to call themselves physical comedians due to the stigma surrounding the clown artform. In order to continue working, these performers and entertainers must abandon traditional ideas of clown while remaining true to the craft. This change in approach doesn't need to mean the end of clown but instead may herald an emergence of a new era in clowning.

The clown's valuable purpose in society is undeniable. Laughter is so important to emotional, physical, and psychological healing and clowns have the ability to create laughter in a way that is truly very accessible. Utilizing play and primarily non-verbal language, clown comedy is made to appeal to any and all audiences and has the power to bridge the gap between them. Despite their decline in popularity over the last century, as they adapt to a new age where the impulse is to be afraid of them, clowns continue to work as health care workers, entertainers, and peacemakers, among other things. It's in our best interest as a society to take advantage of the opportunities for healing and unity that performing clowns offer. To this day the clown remains “a bearer of hope in a world where people are becoming more and more cut off from each other.” (Bu)

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Show Outline

**Everything that follows is done using only pantomime until the closing song at the end.

PRESHOW

I'm fast asleep. I'm cuddled up with a pillow in the house as the audience finds their seats.

Set on stage is a stool.

ENTRANCE

I am sat amongst the audience, fast asleep. My head rests on a pillow.

An alarm goes off on my phone.

It goes on for a bit before I finally come to.

I wake up looking around in a daze.

I am surrounded by people.

I am confused, then I am shocked.

I scramble for the device to turn it off. In my scramble, my pillow falls to the floor.

I finally get the beeping to stop.

I bend to pick up the pillow. It seems to be stuck under the seat of the person sat in front of me. I tap them on the shoulder.

I gesture for them to move their chair.

Perhaps they don't understand. Perhaps they try to scooch their chair forward.

I continue to pull, pulling hard—too hard. The pillow bursts.

Feathers fly across the audience.

I begin a frantic descent down through the audience.

As I make my way over a ridiculous number of people, house lights come down and stage lights come up.

“Oops-ing” and “Ouch-ing” through the crowd, I finally make it out of the sea of people and disappear into the darkness.

It is relatively quiet before a loud crashing sound comes from somewhere in the space.

There is a moment of silence.

I begin to enter, stumbling, carrying a ukulele and wearing a brimmed hat.

In my entrance, I trip over the edge of the stage platform and completely fall flat on my face.

There is a long moment while I drag myself across the floor to the stool, pulling myself up from the ground and onto the seat.

THE FOILED SONG

Straightening my hat, I prepare to play my ukelele.

Maybe I take a moment to survey the audience.

Maybe I take a handkerchief and give her a quick dusting.

After a short moment of adjusting and re-adjusting my position and generally being extra, I begin to play my song.

It sounds absolutely terrible, the ukulele is wildly out of tune.

I tune a little and I try again. No better.

As I begin to tune again, the string pops.

I look out into the audience, it is almost a pleading look. It might be a dying inside look.

Subtly, or perhaps not so subtly, I get rid of the useless instrument.

I stand before the audience.

I am stalling now.

I stand up. I'm looking around. I'm not really sure what comes next.

Maybe I scrutinize the audience, check out their shoes.

Maybe I scratch my head or check my non-existent watch.

Suddenly, I sneeze and my hat rolls down my arm.

HAT FUN

I catch the hat in my hand.

I check in with the audience to acknowledge how dope that (hopefully) was.

I begin to play around with my hat, showing off a little.

I get really into it until the hat rolls off my body and onto the ground.

I bend to pick it up but as I do, I accidentally kick it out of reach.

Awkward!

MAKING FRIENDS

Now what?

I've hit a wall.

I stand in front of the audience awkwardly.

There's a long beat while I figure out what to do.

Suddenly, I have an idea.

I shield my eyes from the light, peering into the audience.

I take great care to step down from the platform before stepping into the audience aisle to look for someone to join me.

I gesture for someone to come up and join me on stage,

I take them and pull them up, and have them stand next to me, facing the audience.

I shake their hand, I give them a thumbs-up, and then I take the stool far upstage before taking a seat behind them, leaving them high and dry at center stage.

After a moment of watching them do... whatever it is they're doing, I go back up to them to consult.

I suggest they do a dance.

Maybe they don't understand so I give them a short example.

Maybe they show me, and I don't like it.

Maybe they show me, and I'm intimidated.

In any case, after their attempt, I gesture for them to stay put, and I promptly leave the space

MOMENTS pass.

My new friend is forced to stand in front of the audience for a REALLY long time.

To the point where the rest of the audience is wondering “will this weirdo come back?”

Suddenly, the sound of a struggle is heard as I re-enter the space.

With difficulty, I am dragging a trunk to the stage.

My friend helps me lug the trunk to where I want it to be.

I resume my position center stage next to my friend.

HAVING FUN WITH FRIENDS

I gesture, asking if they can juggle.

I retrieve three juggling balls from the trunk and hand it to them.

I encourage them to go for it.

If they do well I cheer them on! I try a side by side partner juggle with them.

If they do poorly, I demonstrate again, and I give them another chance. (I’m thinking geez, they suck, let’s try something else.)

I retrieve a plate and a stick.

I make sure my friend is watching before I take the plate and spin it atop the stick.

I show off for a little.

I go to pass the stick off to them.

The plate falls from the air and crashes into the ground, shattering.

I look to the audience, aghast.

I sheepishly give my friend an apologetic handshake and send them back to their seat.

We’re back at square one.

I awkwardly make my way back to the stool where I attempt to sit down, missing the seat completely and knocking the stool over.

I’m slightly frustrated now.

I go to pick up the stool and In doing so I spot a paper bag stuck to the bottom of the seat.

KAZOOS ARE FUN TOO

I check it out a little.

I ask the audience to check if they have something under their chairs too.

They do!

The audience and I take a hold of the kazoos we find inside.

I play one little "TOOT"

I gesture to them that it's their turn.

Hopefully they toot back.

I give them another now longer "TOOOOOT"

I gesture again.

"TOOT TOOT"

I gesture.

I toot a 4 note melody.

I gesture again. They follow.

Now I try something. I point to house right toot-ing the first note, then house left with the second note, house right again, third, left, fourth note.

They follow along as I point into the audience.

I'm super pleased, clapping giddily until I accidentally step onto the pile of plate shrapnel, remembering that it's still there.

I make my way to the trunk to search for something to help me clean up.

THE DANCE

I find a little broom and dustpan and begin to sweep up the mess.

I find a nice rhythm to the movement and my actions become increasingly dance-y.

I sweep it up and dance my way back to the trunk.

I nonchalantly dump the broken ceramic shards in.

I glance in before I kick it shut—
Something caught my eye.
I open the trunk up again and I retrieve a boombox.
I confidently set up the boombox on the stool.
I press play and dance for and with the audience to a variety of genres.
The last song really gets me hype and I drop down into a split.
Ouch.
I am hurt.
I gesture to cut the music. No one does.
I do another round of crawling in pain towards the stool.
I strike the speaker. The music ceases.
I make my way to my seat and stand center stage.
I am not very happy.

THE SONG, FINALLY

I gesture towards the audience angrily, perhaps offensively.
I mock their laughing.
Is this what they want?
I strum the air as if I'm holding my instrument from earlier. In time with my movement,
the sound of a ukulele can be heard.
Wait... Where did that come from?
I'm confused.
I strum the air again to test it, and the same sound is heard coming from off stage.
I shield my eyes from the light and look up at the foley artist who has been present this
whole time.
They hold a perfectly good ukulele in their hands.
I dramatically storm up and grab it.
I can't believe they've had a functional ukulele this whole time!
I make my way back to the stool.

I am cool. I am calm.

The lights change. I am being dramatic.

I strum the tune I'd begun to play at the beginning of this whole mess, except it sounds much better now.

I go to sing but no sound comes from my mouth.

I stop strumming and stand, looking around.

I gesture for a microphone, a little pissed.

From offstage enters a crew member with a mic on a mic stand.

I give him a bit of a look but I'm ultimately thankful.

He goes off. I return to my seat, being dramatic again.

I begin to strum the chords again.

I sing:

*"Got up for a little bit of time.
Most days I'm not up for the climb.
Even after falling on your face
got to show them that you're a star not a disgrace.*

*Falling is easy to do.
Fall and no one can expect anything of you.
You'll try and fail and you won't wanna give it a chance.
But to take that next step you gotta learn to stand.*

*Falling on purpose just to see what it feels like.
Falling on purpose just to get back up again."*

I stop strumming but I gesture to wait.

I demonstrate the kazoo melody again.

I have the audience join in as I strum along.

Before long, the song ends and with that so does the show.

END

Production Photos







