

Interview with Ira Seidenstein (IS) by Mike Finch (MF), on behalf of Circus Network Australia

Introduction

MF- Ira Seidenstein is a highly respected, skilled and experienced clown, performer, acrobat, teacher, mentor and elder. He is originally from Pittsburgh USA, but for many years has been based in Australia. Ira has worked all around the world alongside a virtual Who's Who of physical, clown and Circus performance from major international luminaries and iconic organisations, to grassroots practitioners and soloists. We are lucky enough to have access to him for this interview about his life, his influences, his methodology, some advice and his hopes for the future. In his own words, "Intuition isn't only knowing what to do next. It is also not knowing what else to do and having no choice".

MF- Hi Ira, thanks so much for your time. Firstly I want to thank you for offering yourself up to be interviewed. We intend this to be the inaugural interview of a series for Circus Network Australia on Australian Circus people, and I'm glad you will be the first!

Let's start at the beginning. Can you tell us what your childhood was like?

IS- Oy vey Maria! It was located in the melting pot of the USA. Pittsburgh is a city with three rivers the Allegheny and Monongahela join to form the Ohio which helps form the Mississippi. There are lots of hills of the Allegheny/Appalachian Mountains. Pittsburgh is surrounded by farms and coal towns populated by ethnic Europeans who were starving in the 1800s. It was an industrial/steel city but has several large and excellent universities and is a research centre for medicine, I.T., industry. Within central Pittsburgh where I lived ethnic community neighbourhoods had shop signs with their particular languages of each community in their Mother Tongues and English. There was also a ruling elite that was most easily racially labeled as WASP - White Anglo Saxon Protestant. Then there was business and sport where all races and classes were intimately involved. In my youth the most revered sports heroes were the baseball player Puerto Rican Roberto Clemente, and the wrestler Bruno Samartino and the announcer Bob Prince. All three deeply benevolent people. We once had a visiting athlete who started the Special Olympics. Jesse Owens. I saw on TV that he was at the Special Olympics at our local university stadium where I played sports. I climbed the fence I knew well and went right down into the track & field green and went up to him, yes, Jesse Owens and said hello, we shook hands and he autographed the paper I brought. Gene Kelly is from Pgh, and Martha Graham, Andy Warhol, and a type of clown/comedian Marty Allen (Allen & Rossi on youtube). Pittsburgh was portrayed in the movies Deer Hunter (miraculously the main actors actually mastered our local accent!!)

and Groundhog Day. I knew nobody who hunted. But we did have Groundhog Day in nearby Punxsutawney. We also had one man each January 1st who would carve a hole in the frozen river and have a swim. We had a policeman, Vic Cianca, who was a clown while in uniform! He would dance and mime and clown while he directed rush hour traffic downtown. A snippet of that can be seen on youtube. Everybody was both American and 'ethnic'. I grew up in the so-called Jewish neighbourhood. Perhaps 40% of the neighbourhood were Jewish. Jewish can mean a thousand and one things, similar to being "Australian" there are a thousand and one ways to be "Australian". Our neighbourhood was Squirrel Hill. There was an abundance of racism between all of the ethnic neighborhoods though definitely not by everyone, not at all. However, as a kid with a Jewish name and coming from the Jewish neighbourhood when venturing on my bicycle and on foot this could easily lead to casual meetings then to occasional racist comments towards me. I was tiny. I wasn't the fastest runner so I very quickly learned to street fight. I got a book on Judo and taught myself a few basic throws and learned a little bit about pressure points. I had fast reflexes, was very agile and had no fear so it was a matter of "The bigger they are the harder they fall". It was a good childhood typical and characteristic of American city life of that era. Baseball, football (gridiron), basketball each in their seasons. Swimming in the pools in the summer. Apple pie, Thanksgiving turkeys, and classic Jewish brunch every Sunday morning - lox, bagels, coffee, smoked fish, omelettes. My parents were 'working class' that means we 'just' got by. My Mother had the steady job for 40 years in a department store Kaufmann's (like Myers in Australia).

MF- There are so many resonances between the longevity of Jewish culture, and its incredible survival, its matrilineage and humour that connect with indigenous Australia, which we'll come to later.

For now, tell us about some of your earliest memories of performers and performances.

IS- My Uncle Moe was a former magician and every time he visited he did close up magic for us. My Father was very funny. Another Uncle Sol who was from a shtetl/town in Poland was the most Orthodox of our family and he was a little bald funny man with a cigar, a wonderful laugh (yuk yuk yuk) and would dress as Santa for us in one season and in another he led the traditional Pesach (Passover) Seder. We had a range of eccentric friends of my Parents. All Jewish people who had gone through the Depression and all had Parents who had escaped Europe's Pogroms and poverty, whose Mother Tongue was Yiddish. Several of these friends were bigger than life. Huge. Living theatre. One was a man who lived in Las Vegas and dressed in immaculate clothes. He had a voice like the greatest classical actor and he was hilarious and a master story teller. A woman named Lena had been an actress in local theatre - likely English and Yiddish theatre. She was like a blend between Bette Midler and Mae West. She

always wore a huge fedora hat and theatrical flowing scarves and dresses. A Mr Berman was big, and rough as guts, and funny. My Father took me to see a large circus each year. Some years it was Ringling and sometimes it was Shriners. I can not say how old I was when I saw my first circus. Ringling's last tent performance was in Pittsburgh when I was four years old. I can't say if I was there or not. I was quite a space-cadet ie a real day-dreamer. The first play I saw was as a teen when a show came to our high school - it was Ionesco's Rhinoceros, an absurdist play. I can only remember staring at the play. I watched a lot of TV in the heyday when great clowns had their own TV shows - Lucille Ball, Red Skelton, George Gobel, Jack Benny, Jackie Gleason, plus the great variety show of Ed Sullivan was on every Sunday. George Carl said he was on it "100 times" some of those I think he was in Johnny Puleo and His Harmonica Gang certainly one of my favourite clown troupes as a kid. There were plenty of acrobats and I think that Cleve Ball's team Bel Caron Trio were on that show. There were many artists at that time who also had variety shows. I saw the Russian clown Oleg Popov on Ed Sullivan's Moscow circus special's. And Marcel Marceau on Red Skelton's show. The variety artists influenced me. After seeing a movie about Houdini starring Tony Curtis, I taught myself to be able to be punched in the stomach (like Houdini) by any other kid. My Uncle Moe's 2nd wife was the daughter of a magician who was Houdini's closest friend. So when Houdini died my Aunt's father was asked to take care of the funeral arrangements. That is ancient history and long before I was born, of course. I taught myself how to escape from being tied up with a rope. I taught myself some pseudo magic by buying a few of the simplest tricks and did one magic show for my sixth grade class. I also taught myself to run into walls and fall and fall down steps etc. I also climbed a lot of trees and could jump from heights once I got up. Pittsburgh was unofficially the jaywalking capital of America. So in that spirit ... I loved dodging car traffic as a game.

MF- The amazing legacy of Vaudeville and the way it crossed over into (and was perhaps slowly strangled by) the early days of Television is in some ways a sad witness to the temporary death of an artform, but also an amazing record of some of those early TV and film performers who evolved in the rich traditions of Vaudeville, Burlesque, Music Hall and Cabaret.

Growing up, including your family, who influenced you most as a young person, and in what way?

IS- Generally my family, a few close friends, a few teachers including several Rabbis. I would say my experience of all of those people was their love and

tolerance as I was incorrigible, unruly, and independent. My Mother was a deeply moral, ethical, and very down to earth person. My two older Sisters were 100% loving, caring, and wise with me. My Father was very quiet and stoic, but, was known as a clown because he was funny and knew a lot of clown schtick (comedy bits) and also knew many clowns who had come through Pittsburgh. My Parents both loved clowns and actually met for the first time one night, on New Years Eve, when they each went to see the headline clown Red Buttons with the support act George Carl (and likely his wife). Once when I was about nine my Father arranged for me to meet The Three Stooges at their hotel next to the nightclub where they were performing. That was Moe, Larry, Curly Joe (the original Curly was already deceased). They improvised right there in the lobby for me and my Father. I was mildly obsessed with them as I watched them on TV after school five days a week - from the age of 5 to 8 until I started to attend Hebrew school in the afternoons to prepare for my Bar Mitzvah.

A very important mentor was my older Cousin, Nathan, who along with his Wife. They hosted me in the summers for a few weeks. Then they were my legal Guardians for one and half years while I was a troublesome teen. I was expelled from the Pittsburgh public school system. Nathan and his family looked after me daily on their rural property during that period when I attended school in their state, Maryland. On one school holiday when I returned to Pittsburgh to visit with my Parents and buddies, we were playing softball in a side street. The ball went into the sewer. As mentioned, I was a tiny, agile wild-child so I finagled my way into the sewer via the gutter opening. Handed the softball out through the opening, but, I could not wiggle in the reverse direction. I was locked in the sewer and the lid was large solid iron so the kids could not budge it. They sought out the local strong man up the street and he lifted it off straight away and lifted little me out with one arm. I told cousin Nathan the story and he said "Well if you tried to lift that sewer lid a few times every day then eventually you would be able to lift it.". That is the essence of how I teach acrobatics, acting, clown, directing - incrementally and 'yes you can'.

Years later my Political Science and Sociology professor from Germany, Peter Dittrich became my 'drinking buddy' and was my mentor as I transitioned from the Navy to clowning. When I decided to become a clown he took me to see the great German clown Lotte Goslar. To see her Pantomime Circus, meet and chat with her after, then to see her solo theatre performance after which I was so moved by her art that I cried and shuddered. We would look at her work now via the coldness of video as fey, dated, etc but in the theatre she was a master of craft, timing and humility. She advised that "A clown has to create their own

world". The world I was born into included the row of houses which was filled with a completely diverse 15 families. Next door was a professor, on the other side a huckster (sold vegetables from a truck), then the ice cream truck man, in the block too was a couple who were Survivors (I only understood that when I collected newspaper delivery payment once and saw the woman's concentration camp number on her arm), we also had - pardon me - a village idiot or genuine fool as the archaic and politically incorrect and impolite term names it - poor old Roland who was an adult and was sometimes allowed to play games with us in front of his family home. And one of my best friends lived also in the same row of houses.

IS- I've answered this question about influences which I took as personal and answered as such. However, I did not talk about the later inspiration I received from artists such as Kandinsky, Klee, Miro, Chagall, Glenn Gould, Martha Graham, Hal Roach, Frank Capra as well as an array of Australians such as Sir John Monash, Roy "Mo" Rene, Arthur Boyd, Clive James, or Percy Cerutti. And lest I forget - when I had my duet at Festival of Sydney 1984 I saw the original Price & McCoy (Terry Price & Tim Freeman) comedy acro duet doing tricks I had only seen in a book. Yes in an actual book. We became friends and Terry Price a year later took me to meet his teacher Clete Ball with whom I started training and some performing. Clete was the person who "knew every trick in the book".

MF- A lived experience that included lots of exposure to art and performance combined with a 'real-world' working class life is becoming increasingly rare in Australia as 'the arts' become more expensive, elite and middle class.

What jobs did you have before you focussed on performance and art?

IS- My first job was at age 9 when I got a paper route. The newspaper company had a variety of bonuses you could earn. So a child could learn how to take responsibility and to develop incrementally in a way it was similar as a Cub Scout and Boy Scout where we learned to be responsible for specific tasks and also there was an award system to encourage study and development. But I was already very much the class clown in every situation so my reward was immediate satisfaction of fun and laughter and mischief. I was the antithesis of a good scout. I would also shovel snow after every snow storm as some neighbours would pay me to shovel their sidewalk and driveway. I had other such incidental jobs including cycling on a stationary bicycle that powered the air-conditioning in a survival shelter being researched at American Institute of Research. I worked about six months in McDonald's as a teen where each of my

Supervisors was a Vietnam infantry veteran. I graduated high school at 17 and was in the U.S. Navy from 17 to 21, during but not in Vietnam as I was stationed in the Atlantic fleet not the Pacific. Then during a two-year Liberal Arts program at a community college I worked as: a landscape labourer; a door-to-door salesman; a taxi driver, but mostly as an art model. And another anecdote regarding work - by accident one day at Wightman Elementary School when I was 10, another student and I bumped into each other and his wallet popped out of his back pocket and I caught it but he didn't know that. I looked inside and there was a ten dollar bill. I got the notion of being like a Robin Hood and went to the candy shop and bought a lot of candy and gave it away. There is no way to prove "past lives" because they are past and cannot occur now. However, somehow it was uncanny that from that day I could pick pockets. I was able to take a wallet, take the money, and put the wallet back. I have no idea how I could do that. This went on occasionally for about three months. That ended with the penultimate when I was standing on the corner near school where the policeman stood to cross the kids at the end of the school day. He was a big fellow with a big belly. While we were waiting for a few cars to pass, I took his pistol from his holster and pointed it at some kids across the street and put the gun back then crossed the street.

MF- A healthy disrespect for authority is never a bad thing, and an understanding of a true command and control culture must have given you an understanding of what a culture can look like without much art.

Did you take anything you learnt from those jobs into your practise as an artist?

IS- The art model job happened by complete fluke and when I got hired I had no idea it involved nudity until I showed up the first day and was told "There's your robe". But in the very first pose, a one-minute pose I experienced a type of epiphany. By standing still in a shape like a statue I found I was creative. In stillness my imagination soared but also flowed through every cell in my body. Modelling was like an hallucinogenic. It opened my creative imagination and anchored it in my body. My simplest exercise is The Three Walks that uses a principle of shape-pause-rhythm. This goes back to my discovery of the power of stillness as the beginning of creative movement. It is said that Suzuki Tadashi's theatre method is 'the art of stillness'. I studied his method from the age of 50-56 years old. I was 21 when I made my own discovery of how stillness can open one's imagination and creativity. Each time I modeled I was in an ecstatic state. That work lasted about two years until I 'ran away with the circus' to be a clown. I

ran away to the USA circus centre Venice/Sarasota, Florida when I was 23. When I was about 22 I became interested in 'fitness' and bought a book teaching a 20-minute Tai Chi form and that led to heightened awareness related to movement and the flow of energy. At 23 I found my clown and circus teacher Danny after being around him and training on his property for two months (he had various bits of circus equipment set up backyard - trampoline, tight wire, trapeze, revolving ladder, unicycle, juggling equipment. He asked me to do a parade gig with him and his family the next day. He said come at 9am and have a coffee and he would put on my makeup and he had a costume for me. When I was made-up and ready he told me "Take this nose and stand over there and when I tell you, put the nose on." So he sat with another young fellow that he mentored as a circus performer. His name was Curtis. He was from Wyoming or Montana and a total country bumpkin - who could do saltos on the tight wire, juggle behind his back, in other words he was exceedingly skilled - taught by Danny. When I put the clown nose on, standing still as Danny requested - something happened. The only way I can describe is that it was a lightning bolt went through the top of my head. Danny and Curtis burst out laughing. Still standing still I looked at each of them and they went into complete hysterics. Then, as I didn't understand what happened with that lightning bolt and didn't understand what so funny and then started some very small movements, well that did it. Within minutes they were howling and could barely sit and finally through his tears and not able to look straight at me Danny said "Take it off take it off take the nose off". Then we each drove to the parade and I was to put my makeup on Danny's son Winthrop who had a tiny version of my costume which of course was one of Danny's. It was an orange suit. We were to walk behind a jazz band but as soon as the band started I danced and danced and mimed the whole parade route. That was my first 'job' and day as a clown. I then went direct to my job I forgot to mention to you. There I removed my makeup and changed. I was a short order cook at the beachfront Sheraton. Back to your question understanding the creative value of stillness that I learned from modelling and from Danny's way to initiate me into clowning, I took stillness (what I often refer to as "Pause") when I was 24 to create one of my first exercises "The Creative Twist" (also called "The Vitruvian Exercise" as I was reading about Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man drawing). That involves stillness (Pause), a particular statue with the legs bent to drop ones centre, and arms held in front, and then moving the shape around the room. Tadashi Suzuki also, as I learned in my 50s, has a primary concept and exercises involving statues and moving statues. He also says 'the purpose of the actor is to move their centre around the stage'. Edward Gordon Craig had a related idea "ubermarionette" and Vsevolod Meyerhold

similarly created his method the shaping and moving of the actor as Biomechanics, and Jerzy Grotowski's idea was that the actor was "plastique". My way is lighter, more fluid, and more an activation for the actor's individuality whereas the others were each a director wanting artistic control over the actor. Still, I consider my idea a universal principle and teach it accordingly.

By the way, my first performance 'job' was in the Navy during Boot Camp. Again by total fluke, a total clown story, I fell into being in the US Navy Recruit Drill Team at Great Lakes Training Center. After a week of general basics of how to stand at Attention, Parade Rest, march, hit the deck, and especially how to wait in lines :) the Drill Team training started in earnest. Marching 8 hours each day for 30 days until we 51 men knew the 8-minutes routine which included juggling with old heavy rifles with fixed bayonet. We then performed each week for the Graduation ceremonies, did a parade in some city, and were the half time entertainment for a football (gridiron) match at Soldier's Stadium in Chicago. As I was the smallest "1" of the 51 men, I had been pre-selected to be the guide-on the one who carried and juggled with the flag. So after 30 days of drill with the heavy rifle I was told to now make my own routine marching between the two squads of 24 men juggling with rifles and 1 man for each squad who was a leader and used a sword. There are two videos of more recent Great Lakes Recruit Drill Team(s) on youtube. Those two are single squads of about 20-24 men with one leader. Ours was two squads in one choreography with me in the middle improvising with the company flag on a pole.

MF- I love that even in a military environment you ended up as a physical performer!

IS - It gets better. After Boot Camp, then after Specialist Training in that I trained as a Radarman/Operations Specialist, one then gets your first Orders. I was assigned to the USS Ingraham DD-694. Fluke, coincidence, kismet, karma? I was assigned to a group that was considered the clown unit of the Fleet. For some reason(s) the Radarmen unit on that particular ship were like M.A.S.H. They were completely eccentric and unruly. 13 men. I was the new 13th. When I went aboard for the first time and was taken to C.I.C. Combat Information Center. The door opened and a sailor was squared down playing a monkey and took my hand and walked me in. There were men hanging from the ceiling beams, men picking nits from other mens head, men on top of the radar and navigation equipment. All playing like monkeys. That was the end of my hopes of NOT being a clown and of being 'normal'. How lucky was I?! I was on that ship for 15 months

until it was decommissioned and sold or given to the Greek Navy.

MF- Brilliant!

When did you decide to focus on art and what influenced that decision the most?

IS- At an Experimental Theatre Festival in Ann Arbor, Michigan I saw two clown troupes one after another and decided then and there to become a clown. Clown though to me is 100% connected to creativity and the philosophy of performance. Clown is also half of acting ie like one coin one side is clown and one side is acting yet they are part of the whole. Additionally of course clown is an extremely diverse art and profession. It's diversity proves that there is no single effective definition of 'clown'.

MF- We'll come to the broad definition of 'clown' later in the interview, but for now,..

What do you remember about those clown troupes and why do you think they had such a strong impact on you?

IS- The two troupes were people about the same age as me and they were having fun, were very physical, creative, funny and the material seemed 'touching' in some way. I think they were throwing away the restrictions of what we think one has to do in society and they were instead doing the opposite which was clowning around. There were radicals of clown and comedy such as Wavy Gravy and Lenny Bruce and Mort Saul. We had an exceptionally rich palette of clowns to draw inspiration from on TV and likely of the 8 or so performers in the troupes they each saw a range of those clowns. Besides Lucy, Skelton, Gleason, Borge, the variety of clowns were incredibly diverse: Pinky Lee, Soupy Sales, Sid Caesar and Imogen Coca and other women such as Ruth Buzzi, Moms Mabley, Phyllis Diller, Totie Fields, Lilly Tomlin, etc. The performers who I know were in either of those two troupes were: Katie Duck, Georgo Peugot, Matt Childs who had all been dance students in the then great program at Great Salt Lake, and Jango Edwards was one of the performers in the other troupe. Both troupes were no frills and based on pure talent. They traveled in tandem for several years in USA, England, Europa and were based in Amsterdam. Coincidentally I was in the last remnant of The Great Salt Lake Mime Troupe. A dancer from the same

dance program joined them by 1977 and was the last 'member standing', that was Barbara Doherty whom I started working with in 1980. She and her partner dropped the Great Salt Lake name and called themselves "Heroes and Regulars" named after the NYC style sandwiches. When I joined we were "Heroes, Regulars, and Jerk(s)" and as a trio we did a 100% improvised theatre show with three restrictions: one hour performance; at 8pm the technician was to bring the lights up on stage; at 8:55 the technician was to slowly dim the stage lights so we could bring the performance to an end. Otherwise no rules and no plan and no discussion about what any of us would do. Sometimes we also worked with a single musician who was under the same rules. One musician during one show did not play a note. In Aachen, Germany we had a near riot. The audience applauded at the end and someone yelled something in German a few times and someone yelled back, apparently, that we didn't speak German so we didn't understand. The heckler was upset because clearly we had more skill and technique than we displayed and he was upset because we could have done more. So others argued that the show was wonderful etc. Gradually in a few minutes the entire audience in a normal classic theatre were on stage arguing - in German. We three were separated from each other but surrounded by the whole audience arguing on stage. Like the two troupes that inspired me, we were children of the times. I do have one photo from that trio.

MF- Those moments when an audience become so involved in the moment that it moves into chaos and they *become* the show are probably my favourite of all audience responses. For a moment like that to include actual verbal and critical debate is extraordinary. I would have loved to have seen it!

On the subject of critical debate, did you study formally within an institution, or with a mentor, or self-taught, or a combination of all three?

IS- A combination. Formally but not in a pre-determined degree program. I studied with my theatre teacher/director Trudy Scott at the community college in Pittsburgh. It was a 2-years liberal arts course like a TAFE only stronger academically. I studied Humanities: sociology, political science, literature, French, psychology. I fell into the theatre by coincidence. Then I took a few courses in classical acting (Stanislavsky & Method) and Modern Dance with Trudy teaching both. Then I briefly apprenticed and was initiated into clowning by former trapeze flyer and Ringling Boss Clown - Danny Chapman. I was just following my instincts and coincidences. Later I went then to Dell'arte in California when I was still a total novice, and the course was not formulated and was an open, informal program led by daily tuition with the founder Carlo Mazzone-Clementi and his

staff including his then wife Jane Hill and his assistant Joan Schirle.

I was quite a handful and they handled me exceptionally well. I had already been training on my own before arriving at the school. There I started my own training from 7am to 9am and the course was 930am to 5pm. I began reading fervently about theatre, acting, philosophy, metaphysics. Some of the books included several by Herman Hesse; "Memories, Dreams, Reflections" by Carl Jung; and "9 & ½ Mystics" by Herbert Weiner. Later, when life took me Downunder, I had several mentors in the performing arts most of whom were Australians and New Australians. My ballet teacher in Auckland - Dorthea Ashbridge was an instrumental teacher for me. There too was the traditional clown/acrobat Russel "Byko" Middlebrook. I wrote an article there about them titled "Consult Elders". Longest consistent mentoring was with Harry Haythorne, MBE former director of QB and RNZBC. 30 years later I was in his final project when he was 87. I was mentored in different ways by two other Australians as well: Clete Ball who was in my STC project "The Male Adored Bride"; and, Owen Weingott who was a fight master and classical actor who also knew comedy inside out - he directed me in a Neil Simon comedy "Come Blow Your Horn". New Australian Guillermo Keyes-Arena a ballet master from Mexico who was Beth Dean's assistant for many years of The Folkloric Festival at Sydney Opera House until she retired. And New Australian Antoine Selah who was Arab-Israeli Christian, graduate in directing from La Sorbonne. He, Guillermo, and myself were all naturalised Australians. Dorthea Ashbridge was my ballet teacher when I did morning Company Classes three mornings per week with Limbs Dance Company in Auckland for two years. With Dorthea's guidance via ballet I made a number of discoveries applied to my own method including the use of the mind in movement. In particular use of counts and integers. There is a youtube clip of Harry and I improvising for a few minutes with my "Laurel & Hardy Exercise" - him at 85 and me not. I also had six years Suzuki training and performance as a veteran performer with Jacqui Carroll and John Nobbs when I was a novice in their Frank Theatre and then a company member.

MF- Owen Weingott was part of the early cultural heritage of the Theatre/Media course I attended in Bathurst and although I never met him I have friends who were taught by him, and I'm curious, so if you'll indulge me with a slight digression..

can you expand on Owen's methods and techniques and your sense of him as an artist?

IS- Owen was fantastic to me. His son Paul was one of the three co-founders of The Actors Centre and I was brought in to help them establish it as the Head of Movement. Paul said his Father Owen was holding auditions for a Neil Simon play and asked if I'd be interested.

Shebang.

Owen taught me about comedy in a play. He was great. He directed "Come Blown Your Horn" in a classic way. It is a farce which implies doors, mis-recognition, fast exits and entrances. So it has to be approached with mathematical precision. The classic way is that the director knows the play inside out. And has worked out each character's moves, entrances, exits before rehearsals begin. Owen explained that he would set all of the moves in the first three days of rehearsal. That included which lines one held on and which lines one crossed the stage on and stage business such as how to handle specific props, and where to walk to when first entering a new scene.

We then became 'colleagues' and he being one of my mentors. We had three more crossovers.

He was in a moved play reading of the Russian play The Suicide by Nicolai Erdman that friends of mine setup. He came along because of me but as the final production was only a co-op he didn't do that. As it transpired I directed The Suicide (a wonderful comedy/satire).

Owen was with me when I tried to set up a Jewish theatre in Sydney. He was my Elder in terms of Jewish theatre and helped at that meeting where a few of us were discussing what play to start with. In the end I made the choice which he supported. I did Woody Allen's play God for the first half and devised work for the 2nd half including continuing absurd threads from "God".

When I was helping two 'ethnic'-Aussie actors setup their own company they found that Equity had a NESB (non English speaking background) committee so they asked me to go with them as my languages as a child included some Yiddish and Hebrew. We went. One person I knew also came for the first time and said they were on the committee 15 years before and nothing had improved. For the next meeting I decided to ask Owen to come.... he did. When he was there he revealed when he was Vice-President of Equity 40 years before he had started the committee ... and nothing had improved in 40 years. (Things have begun improving, marginally, in the last few years).

Owen was also an expert in fencing and was perhaps Australia's greatest fight master for stage and screen. I think he choreographed several hundred fights. He also was expert in Judo. He also worked with British comedian Tony Hancock who that night committed suicide in Sydney. Owen was Jewish though perhaps

'non practicing'. His Father was born in Germany I think. After WWII some refugees started the Viennese Theatre to be able to have plays in their Mother Tongue and Owen I think may have directed them in their later years. Their original name was Kleines Wiener Theater. The Neil Simon play we did was an unofficial remnant of the Viennese Theatre. One of the originals of the Viennese Theatre played my father in Come Blow Your Horn - Harry Weiss was his name. He was a travel agent and enormously and dangerously funny on stage! I have recently found the video of that production!!! And transferred to dvd. When you are in Brisboa I can show you some of that. It is 100% kitsch i.e. It was a period play representing Brooklyn 1940s like much of Neil Simon. :) Owen directed. Neil Simon though is an impeccable comedy writer. A true master. His autobiography is "Rewrites". He and Mel Brooks and Carl Reiner were two of the key writers behind the clowns Sid Caesar and Imogen Coca as well as behind the actor/ clown Dick van Dyke and his show. I was able to use the remaining money from the Viennese Theatre to do our Jewish theatre project that had 29 actors in "God" and extra pieces.

MF- Again, the nexus between Jewish culture, 20th century history and comedy that has produced such a rich contemporary legacy.

In terms of your personal artistic career, what do you consider to be three of the most important turning points?

IS- After years of study and performing and creating I worked with John Bell for one year specifically he hired me to assist him to establish the Bell Shakespeare Company. That gave me a one-year immersion with a 16 actor classic repertory touring company. I was researching some of my theories about Shakespeare. I was officially contracted as the "Resident Teacher and Choreographer". However, I also acted in the three main productions and the smaller schools tour show as well. I co-directed Richard III with John who played Richard and I played the Comic Murderer. But that year was just beginning of many more discoveries which I am still making. A 2nd turning point would be 6 years with Jacqui and John that overlapped with my PhD and finding scientific and theoretical validation for my discoveries. 3rd was an epiphany during my final bow in Cirque du Soleil. A 4th turning point happened in the Paris metro en route to my own workshop when I came up with "The Four Articulations" which provides a continuous revelation in physical creative processes - with breakthroughs even yesterday and today during class.

MF- We'll talk more about 'The Four Articulations' later when we talk about your

project ISAAC, but for now,

what exactly was your epiphany during your final bow at Soleil? Was it a particular realization, or simply a watershed moment?

IS- Background: "Corteo" had a stage in the middle of the tent with audience split 50/50 on each side. After the final act, a theatrical high bar act with the whole cast as support choir, the act finishes and the final image of the Dead Clown in Heaven cycling occurs with the cast looking and waving to him in Heaven. The show is the director's is homage to Fellini's movie Clowns which has a finale of the clowns funeral. Corteo's director Daniele also made the show an homage to his father who was a photographer and photographed Chartres Cathedral several times and took Daniele as a child. It was also homage to Daniele's clown teacher who was a classic European White Clown. In the bow the actors kneel while the technicians run through for a flash bow. The White Clown which I mainly played kneels facing the Dead Clown who was then played by my wonderful colleague Jeff Raz. Jeff whispered "Ira when I tell you to go into the centre, go." I whispered "What's going on?" Jeff said "GO". I slowly rose as I didn't know what this was all about. As I was rising I went into a transcendental state. What some athletes have reported happens on odd occasions. It was a full house of about 2800 people. It was the last show of my contract and the last show before the ensemble went on Xmas/New Years holiday. I see the shouting audience in their standing ovation but their calls went into a din or buzz. The high bar mats were still out. As I turned there were two of the actresses (acrobats) whose costumes were red. They too were walking towards the centre and the look on their face was stunned. We joined in the centre and we didn't know what to do so I took the hand of each and we bowed. Then turned around and bowed to the other half of the audience. Then we turned back and there was the tour director Richard with three large bouquets of flowers for each of us. The cast ran off as usual and the three of us walked off with me walking just a bit slower and a bit behind. I was still in a 'state'. When I got into the Tapis Rouge (the Cirque performers lounge/ training room/dressing area) the cast was there to congratulate and farewell the three of us whose contracts were complete. The pack up was starting, the buses were waiting to take the performers and others to the airport for holiday journeys home. So, mixed with the mundane of packing up, getting out of makeup, I was still in the other transcendental state just as some athletes have reported - they are in the altered state of reality while the competition is still in full action. What happened was that I understood that my dream as a 5 year old of being a clown in the circus was complete. I understood that now my 'real' life would start. And that seems to have been accurate. I have done several other performance

contracts since then, including being in Slava's Snowshow, and in my own project "The Madness of King Lear", plus a few odd performances. In March I performed in collective show in Canada. As I no longer perform any acts I offered to move props etc. The next day fellow performer Jango Edwards came up to me at lunch wagging his finger "Ira you entered 73 times last night... and those were just the ones I saw". I may even do more performing, but, my relationship to performing personally shifted on that bow late December 2007. I had always mixed performing with directing, choreographing, teaching - sometimes all of those in one production like Richard III with Bell Shakespeare. There are numerous other 'other worldly' experiences many performers have. I've had my share. On numerous occasions I had only my intuition for guidance. As Red Skelton said "Oh, I have no problem with the sixth sense. It's the other five that get me into trouble.". Ditto for me.

MF- You have worked with many male artists, but you have also done lots of pivotal work with female performers and clowns.

IS - Most significantly and definitely yes! I've mentioned my teacher Dr. Trudy Scott, Lotte Goslar's advice to me, Joan Schirle and Jane Hill were there 100% for me at Dell'arte and I was a self-contained polemic at the time, my ballet teacher Dorothea Ashbridge, not to mention performance and life partners. Additionally so many of my students have been female and each brought a world to my work and development. Jacqui Carroll I worked with for six years. Leonie McDonagh and the other Ponydance women Oona, Paula, Deirdre. Many actresses that I have worked with on stage and as director. My Henry the Fifth was with 12 women. Anna Volska who is the highly remarkable other half of the phenomenon known as John Bell and Bell Shakespeare. Amanda-Lyn Pearson/ Crackup Sisters. Maryke del Castillo/The Tutti Frutti. Shall I go on :)

Do you have any opinion on the sweeping gender stereotype that “women are less funny than men” and do you have some examples?

IS- Women and Men are different. As we also now come to accept there are also numerous variations on gender actualisation. One does not have to be the most funny to be very funny. Comedy women such as: Lucille Ball, Carol Burnett, Joan Rivers, "Effie" Mary Coustas, Whoopie Goldberg, Joanna Lumley, Magda Szubranski, Lilly Tomlin, Mandy Bishop, Nancye Hayes, Amanda-Lyn Pearson, Eloise Green, Flip Kammerer, Moira Finucane, etc are brilliantly funny. As a teacher and director I respect and allow women to be funny in their own ways - just as I allow each person to search for their own humour in their own way

though I act as a provocateur. There are issues with the genderised teaching of clown and comedy. Male clown teachers frequently are biased as to what is 'clown' and what is 'funny' and what is 'female' and what is 'feminine'. I don't think a woman teacher is any more or less effective than a man even when it comes to teaching women though their private communication woman to woman is also absolutely vital, important, healthy. When it comes to clown teaching generally women teachers prove to be just as dogmatic about 'what a clown is or isn't' as their male counterparts.

MF- As an aside; the maintaining of the Gender Balance policy is probably one of the things Circus Oz has been most consistent about. Essentially an unbroken 40-year history of equal numbers of men and women in the Circus Oz ensemble, including bases, clowns and technicians. I believe this single policy has had some positive impact on Australia's reputation for strong, confident female Circus performers, and has helped provide an ongoing line of role models through multiple generations both inside and outside of Circus Oz.

MF- Which performers or teachers from history would you most like to work alongside, learn from, work with or teach, and why?

IS- Well I loved working with my mentors. I also loved working with Slava Polunin and his wife Elena and their team and their main project "Slava's Snowshow". The actors were tremendously generous and respectful to me as a senior clown. I had the chance for Suzuki Tadashi see me training in his method and performing in it with my special spice added in and he was tremendously excited by that and had a private discussion about my training and background with his Assistant Mrs Seito and myself. I loved being in Daniele Finzi-Pasca's show "Corteo". I was honoured to personally coach the finest White Clown in that show who was my replacement. He was a young elite gymnast, but when I saw him in the role a few years later it was like seeing a 'stage god'. His name is Duke Van Vleet.

Recently in 2017, I was teaching for a week amongst several other veteran clowns including Jango Edwards. I was the guest in his show in 2016 in Paris and that was a treat working with him and his partner Christy. But really, I'm open to performing with any young or veteran performer - for a limited season. Bill Irwin invited me to be his stage partner for his first NYC show (long ago) but I understood that he had one journey and I had another so I declined an offer that 'one can not refuse'. I heard a different drummer. I'd like to do a project with Suzuki Tadashi, Robert Lepage, Marie Chouinard, Sasha Waltz,

James Theirree, Oona Doherty, Leonie McDonagh, Kristel van Issum (with whom I co-created a wild physical theatre quartet in 2014). I love the work of Sisters Grimm, Bangarra and there are plenty of other fellow Australians I'd enjoy working with - for a limited season. I was lucky to work directly with Sir Robert Helpmann, Kim Carpenter, David Malouf, Krissie Koltai, Owen Weingott all 'back in the day'. In Harry's adaptation of La Boutique Fantasque we got to have direct lineage to Leonide Massine with whom Harry worked, so for me that was a highlight along with our creative team time with Wendy Barker, Andris Toppe and myself as well as the youth and community players. I love the work of Dmitry Krymov Laboratory Theatre, and Pan Pan Theatre, so who knows what the future may bring?

MF- With such a diverse and prolific body of work, this is perhaps a tough question, but

which projects over your career have you felt most satisfied with?

IS- Recently I loved the process and result of "The Book of Clown". My ISAAC collective in Paris is fantastically exciting though in a quiet way. We have various branches each with a different world view and aesthetic. When I come there we gather and I take each person further and deeper into their own creativity and to see the flexibility of my method. In that process we create a new show for about 16-19 actors. The show is for testing the method and is only 3 performances. One of the greatest groups I've ever seen was "The Angels of Light" in San Francisco (talk about wild and crazy). The last ISAAC collective show was "Cubist Clown Cavalcade" and was inspired by pre-Occupation Paris but I included a funny character from Germany "Uncle Adolf the Shithead" who wanted to be a comedian and was taught by Sarah Bernhardt in our soiree scene. The main characters were Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Tolkas. I absolutely loved working with and mentoring for several years Leonie McDonagh and her Ponydance team who are each going great guns individually. There are quite a few projects I've created in the last few years - with ISAAC in Paris and twice in Italy and in Sydney every once in a while I suddenly do a project including directing the four plays of Valentino Musico (2002 - 2016). Most of my work has obviously been ephemeral, short term, and freelance - though the continuum threads have a 43 year track record of creativity and experimentation. My body of work though includes a number of shows have been themed around: the hidden life of clowns; masculine-feminine paradox; notable artists (Arthur Boyd, August Stindberg, Toto, Chaplin, Gertrude Stein & Alice B. Tolkas, Pirandello); as well as

themes of questioning notions of nationhood (Artist in Exile...Requiem for Strindberg; A Play On Worlds; Can A Wog Be A Larrikin?; Harlequin Dreams, The Battler).

MF- On the flipside of 'success'..

have you had any artistic disasters, and if so, what happened?

IS- In my own way is one continuous disaster being averted into remarkable creative discoveries. Certainly as we well know my work (i.e. Me) in Australia went from being everywhere at once during my eight years in Sydney to being highly misunderstood, or ignored, for simply saying something minutely controversial within the limited framework of artistic 'discussion' here in our homeland. Anyone who simply offers to share a coffee, heart to heart, mind to mind, artist to artist with me has always found I am most receptive to genuine sharing and opening up. My door and inbox is always open. That is not necessarily the Aussie way nor the way of the world. Somehow, even the greatest of the very great such as Keaton, Stan Laurel, and Orson Welles as but a very few of an abundance of examples were relegated to their morning tea and books and videos. When Cleve and I were very close during my years in Sydney and before he moved back to Albury he would drop over my house periodically at 7am. Seven in the morning!!! His opening line was without fail "Oh, I thought you'd be up doing your yoga. I can come back." He was about ten years younger than I am now. He'd have ideas, and thoughts and want to run them by me. Finally I put him in a show with me. So we'd perform together nightly for a short season of about two weeks at the STC Wharf Studio, and every night we'd have a beer at the bar and he was in heaven because finally he felt like he was back in the game, back in show business and he said that openly. So the disaster is having a home for the first time in my adult life and not many people are interested to chat with a so-called old fella who still is agile physically, mentally, creatively. Still my four hours training (i.e. teaching and demonstrating) in the ISAAC studio every day with just a few folks is probably one of the most interesting performance niches in Australia. So the disaster is freedom and honesty. Very strange. But when you come of an age, only then can I know what my very dearest Aussie mates and mentors went through once they got 'of an age'. It doesn't have to be that way. I made specific choices along the way. No complaints. None. And yes I have had 'disasters' but that is another, most enjoyable, interview most appropriate with a bottle of red wine and pasta and salad. I will add that one 'disaster' like all the others had some wonderful aspects as well. In one case, with a short term performance partner who cheated me on

the contract and I caught the person outright. This was at a casino. There were 20 Russian dancers in the troupe and 20 Spanish and us two. When we couldn't come to a resolution I said look I'll leave the contract and you can get one of the Russian fellows to learn the act in three hours, they won't be funny, but they can learn all the choreography. The Stage Manager suggested I go see the owner because he loved what I did. OMG. I went to the Bouncer/Body Guard. Was taken into the owner's office. OMG. It was out of the Godfather. His right hand man offered to translate. Soon when all saga was clear the right hand man said "You have learned something my friend". When he looked at me he knew I did not understand what I had supposedly learned. He said "You don't understand. Your friend is not your friend." I nodded. Now I understand. Then with a wild laugh he offered to kill my friend. I was on the next plane to a contract that was waiting with someone who said "Just in case anything goes wrong you have a job here". Crikey. Years later, in Australia, I had a very harsh lesson. After several incidents I realised that a friend of a friend was not necessarily my friend. I had lived a life in which a friend of a friend is a friend. Not necessarily so I learned very late in life. Another harsh life lesson in Australia is that a lot of people in the arts seem kind. Some certainly are!!!!!! But many in the arts are kind to their friends or to those who have connections. It is not real kindness. It selective kindness. Again I lived a life thinking in the first instance one should always be kind to anyone. I failed many times but mostly I strived to be kind. Selective kindness in our arts is probably demeaning to the whole community. Kindness does not depend on reciprocity. Kindness is an act on its own and demands continued efforts and no reasons to be kind.

MF- Australia at its worst is notorious for 'The Tall Poppy Syndrome' as well as having a thread of anti-intellectualism combined with a fear of change or 'the other'.

Can you expand or explain the context of the notion of being misunderstood for saying something 'controversial' during Australian artistic conversation?

IS- I moved here after I toured a few times, even on the first tour I was asked to return asap then after a few more tours I was encouraged separately by four Australians to move to Australia. Two were Indigenous and two were 'Anglo'. I mention this briefly in Harlequin Dreams (on youtube). I was also invited on my first contract in Melbourne return asap from overseas and set up a physical theatre training for Circus Oz and local modern dancers. That did not happen

because the dance studio to be used lost its fire permit and I received a lot of offers to NZ for the same period. So I just flew from my residence in Sweden to Auckland and went with that. Four years later and after a few more tours in Australia, I moved to Sydney to follow up on the four invitations. Just six months later I said "If I fart in Sydney they know it in Perth". I had a lot of dates and a lot of cafe meetings and got to see a lot of shows. It was wonderful. But sometimes on a first meeting or date ... the person was surprised to meet me and actually find that I wasn't at all like they heard. People were open and curious to meet me, and hire me for all types of projects. However, after 8 years I had the feeling to pursue my own method/ideas/philosophy/search and began a long, ongoing process related to that. At first I called it "Quantum Theatre: Slapstick to Shakespeare".

At this junction I will provide another story which explains how "Denialism" affects the quality and development of our theatre. When I was a lecturer at CSU in Wagga Wagga a theatre person came to promote his idea of getting Australian acting schools to hire a certified fight instructor and to teach stage combat. As a movement person, acrobat, clown I know slapstick and teach that style of stage combat. Of course also sometimes I staged fights in dramas as well. This person said that Australia had never had stage combat. I was silent and just listened to his horseshit. A few years later their association started to spread. They were still in denial that Owen Weingott, one of Australia's most experienced stage choreographers ever existed. I wrote to them regarding recognising Owen. They then made their annual award The Owen Weingott Award. I don't know if that award still continues. A few of the clown teachers in Australia, generally, are in denial that I exist. That is not personal as they are in denial of clowns outside of their 'brand'. They are in denial partially based on ignorance about the depth and breadth of Australia's clown history that stems from Roy "Mo" Rene, George Wallace, Jandy, Theo Zacchini, Dougie Ashton, Garry Grant, Sue Ingleton, Daphne Pollard, Mary "Effie" Coustas, Mandy Bishop, Los Trios Ringbarkus, Zig & Zag (yes I know about them and saw them), Wacko & Blotto, Annie Lee, and trust me this is a very long wide history. So of course they are in denial that I have anything to offer. But "Denialism" though often intentional is also coincidental. It gets more interesting. My Mentor Harry Haythorne, MBE invited me to see him perform in Graeme Murphy's "Tivoli". Murphy for sure is one of our greatest theatre makers albeit via dance. He's been tremendously creative and is also one of the finest physical theatre (via dance) directors. In "Tivoli" Harry played the drunken clown on roller skates. We went out after the show. I asked about the Baroque acrobatic act and knew that it was modelled on the "Ganjou

Brothers and Juanita" act that Clete Ball had been in for a period. I asked Harry if he realised that an Australian named Clete had been in. He said no and he said he was sure that Murphy did not know either. So, several weeks later I drove from Wagga to visit Clete in Albury and asked him if he knew about "Tivoli" and that they were replicating in part the Ganjou's act. No. He then showed me a video of the act. Though I knew about the act as Clete had told me when I wrote an article about him (1989) this was the first time I saw it. A Queensland dancer, Tracey Carrodus, did an INCREDIBLE job as the flyer!!! Perfect and so too the brilliant men who tossed and caught her. Tracey in an interview said that Murphy had a tape of "Mademoiselle Mignon et Les Chevaliers" who performed in the real Tivoli theatre. So there has to be a link between Les Chevaliers and Ganjou. Somehow. I already spotted a form of Denialism when I first moved to Australia. I was thirsty to know about its clown history and the Pram Factory and Nimrod Theatre and anything about its performing arts. I found that some amazing senior people were still quite around - Clete was only about 55 when Terry Price took me to meet him. On two occasions I saw how others outside of his students treated him (at that time, and fortunately things have changed thanks to a number of people). Just like 'oh there goes that old fella'. WTF. So as an immigrant I deeply respect this place and have to make an effort to learn more and more. I also have made a choice to stand up for its performance history as well as for myself and to discuss the international history.

There seem to be many folks in the contemporary circus, clown etc who are in denial about their own history and what I can say is our shared history. Then ... the funny part is ... some performers hit 35 years old or thereabouts and start to understand ageing and ageism and lo and behold they start ranting about being in the business 15 or 20 years yet they are in total denial of those who have been in 50 years or who as in the case of the traditional circus who have 6 or 7 or 8 generations of being in the business. When I worked and learned from people such as Owen he had 40+ years in the business and had worked with people when he was young who had been in the business 30, 40, 50 years. So there is a lineage. I've made an effort to learn from the elders and be inspired anew by the younger ones such as James Thierree or Dmitry Krymov etc. I understand clearly that so many have worked so hard yet the field requires an effort to acknowledge and even welcome the elders. I know of course there are some exchanges, duh, and some people certainly even welcome me. This interview is such a welcome.

In 2005 Charmaine Childs pulled me out of the cupboard. I was mentoring her partner Maryke del Castillo and their The Tutti Frutti act. So Charmaine got me to

the Tassie circus festival in 2005. Reg Bolton then seconded me to join ACAPTA and to go for being on the committee. Then Abi Collins interviewed me for ACAPTA's online newsletter. In 2002 I had written an online essay "Who Loves Lucy?... clowns and frowns". 15 years ago and I crossed over a few of the themes around 'denialism' within the clown 'community'. Returning finally to your question - I think the misunderstandings about me and my work and what I can offer any company or artist, is not only because of my own many faults as a person. Rather I think the judgements are based on a cultural denial about what it means to be Australian and how to relate to the place, space, time and interact with the Indigenous Elders. How to fully integrate with those of us from many other cultures who cherish being Australian. Any day one walks in the Brisbane CBD it is such an obvious multicultural success. The Ethnic Business Awards have been going for nearly 30 years are on SBS and youtube and are so deeply inspiring. Any time there are fireworks celebrations at South Bank here in Brisbane you can see the total celebration of all the battlers from troubled lands and troubled suburbs here. But when we look at the theatre, contemporary circus, and TV and film, it is so unrepresentative. Pauly Fenech has gone the farthest to be representative of the population. His humour is as dark as it gets. Yet we ignore the genius of him and Chris Lilley. The misunderstanding about me, is not exactly personal, it is a mirror of the misunderstanding about the industry's history and about the breadth of Australian society. It mirrors the animosity between Melbourne and Sydney. Brisbane's 'written off' yet it has the greatest collective contemporary circus success. Yet it too lives in the malaise of denialism. There is a legacy of eccentric creative theatre from Brisbane that goes back to the early 1980s. Of course it is not the only place in Australia (or the world!) creating physical eccentric theatre. Brisbane had comedians George Wallace, Jr and Brian Tate there for decades. I saw Tate in a duet with another senior performer in 2002 and they were incredible clowns. In 1987 Marcel Marceau hired me to portray his clown "Bip" for a Queensland commercial for Today Homes. 1988 for World Expo On Stage I was in Kim Carpenter's The Sky Wizard as the sky wizard. Just after that Carpenter gave his company the name Theatre of Image. In 1991 I directed Annie Lee, Tony Kishawi, John Hagg in their devised clown and mask show for Arts Queensland. 1992 we opened the only BSC season of one of the last touring Actor-Manager Shakespeare seasons in the world. A living breathing dinosaur. Three of the major plays in repertory which opened in QPAC's Lyric Theatre then with all three plays to Newcastle, Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra.

1992 Carrillo Ganter brought Tadashi Suzuki to Melbourne to establish his Suzuki

Actor Training Method - SATM in Australia via Macbeth performed by Australian's in his aesthetics. Suzuki's company performed several years before at the Sydney Opera House. His company is absolutely astonishing I last saw them in 2012 in Electra. 1993 was the start of Frank Theatre and Zen Zen Zo - companies based upon SATM. Jacqui Carroll was an influential and inspiring teacher of Graham Technique at QUT's dance program. Later she brought SATM. Amongst her students was Leah Shelton. Leah with two of her friends and fellow QUT students Lisa Fa'alafi and Fez Fa'anana formed the company Polytoxic - a multicultural performance dance theatre. After several years they made a great trio show Teuila Postcards. Soon their troupe included Mark Windmill, Amanda-Lyn Pearson, Natano Fa'anano. From that emerged Fez and Mark's bad boy masterwork "Briefs". Fez and Mark are two of Australia's great clowns. As Briefs took the festivals by storm Lisa, who is also one of Australia's great clown/actresses formulated a female response to Briefs called Hot Brown Honey which showed women of colour are talented, intelligent, and hugely funny and thus another fab clown troupe emerged and is flourishing. Out of Polytoxic Amanda-Lyn realised her own vision as The Crackup Sisters - another great clown team! Natano created one of the 'best' circus acts, a tear jerker of culture and art recording his Samoan process of initiation supported lovingly by his large baby brother. In the same program Natano made a fantastic clown act of eating everything in sight.

In 2002 I was in one of the most amazing clown theatre pieces I've ever seen, heard of, or been a part of. That was created by Annie Lee and her team of zanies "The Cleaver Family Wreckers" - 18 thirty minute episodes during one week at Woodford Folk Festival. I was called in to help Circa very shortly after those incredible former Flying Fruit Flies arrived - Darcy and David - to work with Chelsea. I did one or two sessions with them to help them find a key into a trio. The reason I called my method "Quantum" is because so many directors had validated that I helped their actors and projects take a 'quantum leap'. Cirque du Soleil is well aware that I have a 'secret' method. We're in discussion regarding that. In 2011 I taught twenty sessions for them. 15 of those were observed by the tour director and every single time, with each cluster or artists I worked with, within minutes the shift was observable to the director. The adjustments went into the performances in the evenings. In the early days I could not explain how the leaps happen. Now I can teach it as a template. A non-dogmatic, flexible and adaptable template. So although those who deny me will say of course that it is because of the weaknesses of my personality, it is in fact that I am and always have heard the beat of a different drummer. I acknowledge the Australian

performers past and present in the same way protocol of acknowledgement of Indigenous Elders teaches us. But do we get the lesson about Elders throughout our society and industry? Lest we forget, I think there is room for improvement. Your gracious invitation and generosity and curiosity for this interview is such an expression.

MF- Cheers Ira! It's such a pleasure to get such an in depth insight into your work and very full life. On that note,...

do you believe in life-long learning, or do you think there a point where an elder turns to focussing mainly on passing knowledge on to the next generation?

IS- A central tenet of Jewish culture is "v'dor v'dor", which means from generation to generation. We're all in this together. If you close off from your Elders you close off your soul. It is simple and mathematic and all indigenous groups know this. Although it is completely socially taboo for me to discuss being Jewish and to talk about hidden dimensions (no secrets as it is all in books and always has been) but we are indigenous albeit in a most controversial situation. In my culture we are meant to study daily with a peer a chavrusha (a study buddy) ... forever. If you don't have a buddy we have an abundance of teachers who have written and explained things. It is said whenever one studies the Torah it is like a maggid or a type of spirit teacher arrives like an angel. So, I live in a kosher dreamtime in clownville. It is beautiful. I study and occasionally do a little training myself. Physically it, the home building, is a shared environment of just a few people in separate living situations, who are very 'live and let live'. It is where I can study. And learn. And think. And communicate with a lot of people by writing via www and not just FB but a lot of email mentoring. I'm on the airwaves. And I love a bit of a conspiracy theory and I look only at the more factual presentations and get to question 'reality'. So, I'm trying to maintain my composure and my sense of self and worthiness simply as a human and to share my expression of what it means to truly be alive on Earth and in the Cosmos and in the world called "Arts and Letters". Recently when I was teaching in Canada a week in one city and a few days in another I was surrounded by many many young bright open generous intelligent young people. Wow!! And some fab seniors like me. Learning is living and living is learning.

MF- Those are words to live by. You clearly take a philosophical approach to each project you do...

Can you describe the main project are you working on at this moment?

IS- International School for Acting And Creativity. It is a centre for rediscovery of ones self, ones art, ones creativity. And for learning authentic clowning and authentic acting. A hidden national and international resource based in Brisbane but open to travel. ISAAC is a studio for continuous professional development at any phase of one's career.

MF- Tell us more about that, ..

what is ISAAC, and how does it reflect your philosophies?

IS- ISAAC is my traveling workshops, my long course, my philosophy, and the work of ISAAC Associates internationally, including my email mentorship internationally. It is also my studio for the development of individual creativity via the performing arts. The word 'school' implies a 'school of thought'. The thought or philosophy is: "Let us rethink about what we believe acting, clown, theatre, dance to be. We live in a post-post-modern artistic world. We live in an artistic world where such people as Robert Lepage, Dmitry Krymov, Marie Chouinard, Kristel van Issum, Steven Page, James Thierree exist, explore, are examples of modern creativity in the performing arts. Let's rethink."

Creativity is human nature. Acting is human nature. We are always acting. ISAAC is a process to reopen discussion and discourse about creativity particularly for performance. It uses East - West principles of learning and creating. I view acting and clowning as two sides of one coin with movement in the middle. If you want to be an acrobat you need to do some conditioning exercises like a simple pushup that strengthens your core, arms, back, stomach, neck all of which get some exercise in that simple pushup. You can then do the yogic or martial arts pushups which are more challenging. The foundation training template within ISAAC is The Four Articulations for Performance. I also refer to the template as "Pushups for Clowns".

Clown as I teach it is a way to become more creative generally and applicable to any field as it is about a way of thinking, questioning, testing, experimenting, resolving, changing and that includes challenging any definition of clown. ISAAC uses a basic professional outlook similar to a dance company: anatomical training of the body and concentration; then some etudes or studies like a painter starting with sketching; then focused technique or theme; then creation, editing. Play and games are developed spontaneously in every ISAAC creative exercise.

Play within the limitations, play with the limitations, break the limitations. Finally rehearsal where we learn how the universal principles in the warmup actually work in application. In ISAAC, I actually teach three warm ups to breakup anyone's idea that I have a single 'rule' about acting, clown, theatre.

The basic format, The Four Articulations, I can teach in five days at about 5 or 6 hours per day. Then it is up to the individuals, the directors, choreographers, or companies to practice by the set chronology or by their own adaptation. The Four Articulations is not intended to replace other trainings rather it can enhance any other performance training. In a succinct and time efficient way gives a performer a way to go inside the mind of the greatest performers in a practical way and to progress. Most importantly, because I focus on universal principles any performer, even a veteran can find out for themselves something wonderful still within their own talent and find a way to allow it space, today, to bloom.

ISAAC creates a fresh dialogue within oneself and can create a fresh dialogue within any company or project. Importantly although I am a very disciplined teacher, ISAAC and The Four Articulations are not dogmatic. I insist if anyone wants to train with me that they get at least one other teacher, that is a movement teacher in any method that is scientific, anatomically correct, and an incremental and observable progression, and has a longevity already. So I usually recommend ballet, or martial arts, or Iyengar yoga. I only recommend specifically because those teachers are trained to correct you and do so in every class. I am not saying Iyengar is the 'best' yoga. All yoga is good. Iyengar teacher correct the individual anatomically/scientifically. So too do all ballet teachers, and most martial arts teachers within the Western context or their assistants will correct the learner's posture, movement, technique. By having a teacher separate from the context of ISAAC the actor can see that ISAAC uses the same anatomical/scientific principles but applied to creativity. There is an organic aspect within acting, clown, theatre which I guide the actor to understand in a deeper context, but, in their own way. ISAAC unlike most performance methods does not impose a single aesthetic. It is clear where other methods are ambiguous. It is non-judgmental yet disciplined. It starts by understanding we are now in the post-Cirque du Soleil world, post-Robert Lepage, we are in a new world if and only if we choose to shift the authoritarian dogma in many studios.

MF- Now, back to the body. Yours specifically...

You are an older artist who is incredibly good physical condition. What

does your daily physical routine consist of?

IS- Even though I was a fairly good acrobat ie. hippie version - I could do a row of ten backflips (each one not good); all variants of walkovers; very high aerial cartwheels and back saltos, minor contortions, hand-to-hand (top or bottom); partner tosses (either flyer or thrower) I found the training rooms lacked inspiration even though there was a lot of perspiration. I had practiced my own yoga every morning for 20 years. So at some point I thought what happens if I slack off from acro and let go of yoga and some very wonderful things happened. As mentioned already at 50 I started my PhD and that coincided with giving a paper at a Shakespeare conference and another presenter was Jacqui Carroll. I had just seen one of her shows for the first time "Doll Seventeen" and was very impressed and wrote to her and John..... they did a very unAustralian theatre thing and immediately wrote back to a stranger who had nothing to offer them. So, they invited me to see and try their training. I loved it. As I left after three hours hard core John called out "Hey mate, are we ever going to see you again"? I replied "If I can walk tomorrow I'll see you on Wednesday" (ie a day off in between). I could walk. Barely. Not uphill. So I walked downhill and took the ferry to UQ. Thus began a fascinating journey for six years of training. Then again I took time to stop and see what opens. So I did a two year intensive in Yoshinkan Aikido. One can have a black belt until you are 105, but earning a Black Belt after you are 30 is challenging. So I thought if I could train for two years and earn a Brown Belt at my age I thought that would be fine and fun. It was fine and fun and VERY hard!!!!!! Now it is a matter of learning now what... at this age does one do? The body changes with variants depending on many factors and we are all very different so there is no formal science of the body that is applicable across the spectrum. I have a decent amount of exercise as my teaching still involves demonstrating. For over 40 years part of my regular training is my own exercises even if only the minimal "Core Mechanics" from my technique. I also try to keep my form of improvisation part of which I call "Neo-Expressionistic Dance". Both Core and Neo are valuable because they move the energy through all parts of the body so they are automatically healthy for anyone. But I also need to increase normal physical conditioning including resistance training, cardio, and stretching. I'm doing okay. Elsewhere I've stated: What used to be my warmup is now my training. One cuts back, cuts down, cuts out gradually - each in their own way and timing.

MF- As someone who hasn't performed acrobatically for many years I'm in awe of older performers who have maintained their agility, flexibility and strength. I'm currently trying to work out how to re-boot myself! From a corporeal perspective

to a global one; you're based in Australia, but have strong northern hemisphere connections.

What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the Australian physical theatre/circus community as juxtaposed with elsewhere?

IS- When I was first on tour in Europe with my theatre shows I saw Circus Oz in their first overseas season in Holland 1980. They were very skilled for contemporary circus at that time. A few years before, in 1975 I had been at the premiere of the Hanneford Family Circus' new one ring tent. Mr Hanneford dedicated the opening to the Australian circus legend May Wirth. Ms Wirth was there in evening attire and as she was a friend of my teacher I was also introduced to her at interval. I saw a variety of Australians in traditional European circuses 1979-81. There was obviously a high level tradition. At the time I did not know about Australian Knockabout, nor the Ashtons or other Australian circus families other than meeting one of the Wirth dynasty in 1975. The USA has a very fine tradition of teaching in all fields. I think Circus Juventas is a fine example of circus technique mixed with contemporary community issues and with a forward thinking aesthetic and artistic integrity. One of the head trainers is a former colleague Chimgee Haltarhuu. She is a graduate of the Mongolian Circus School during the time when Valentin Glazerin was the head trainer. She was first in Ringling and we met as co-teachers for Cirkus Smirkus. I have a very high regard for the Quebec circus variants Cirques: du Soleil; Sept Doigts; Eloise; Alfonso. the acting/artistic expression particularly for the Sept, Eloise, Alfonso is very high. For du Soleil the demands and size are so different so there are other attributes demanded from the artists. It doesn't matter how high the reviews are overseas for the Australian contemporary groups I think there are one of two streams that are rigid in outcome: either the groups are so focused on humour; or, they are focused on presentation of particular aesthetics of the body.

Perhaps we can discuss one circus technique as a focus of comparison? A few years ago someone said to me "Did you see the teeterboard act" in one of our contemporary companies. It was obvious that the questioner was impressed that there was the unusual technique of teeterboard in a contemporary Australian company. The act highlight was one person doing something like a layout twist and being safety assisted by two people and landing on a crash mat. All things in their time and season. One has to start at basics. So at least for one of the first times teeterboard was in a contemporary Australian circus. Tim Freeman brought teeterboard into his Leaping Loonies and into Circus Oz. NICA, Flying Fruit Flies,

and contemporary circus had Vasily as the teacher who brought Russian bar. Mr Lu and the Nanjing brought in hoop diving, Chinese pole, etc. Helene Embling, Rodleigh Stephens, Ruby Rowat brought a higher standard in training to swinging trapeze and various aerial acts. Scott Grayland along with his other magic brought an exemplary cloud swing act. Clete was brought in to teach 'Toss-the-Girl' - at the right moment when there was an able trio of Chelsea, Darcy, David. Micky Ashton brought in hardcore acrobatic training in the early days - at the right moment - of Flying Fruit Flies. George Sparkes and Rudas' acrobatic and dance studio in Sydney were teachers of Clete. And even little ol' me had more than a few niches of influence teaching acrobatics to a range of individuals - at the right moment. Back to teeterboard - to compare - when I was in Corteo there was a teeterboard act that was the finale of the first half. This was created and performed by two very young French men as the main actors along with two other acrobats in the support acting roles who were from Eastern Europe. The French men were so brilliant ... they did not have to do any acrobatics - though they did a mesmerising variety of highly skilled saltos and twists all while they lived the drama of the piece. Additionally the creation around them involved the whole ensemble of 63 performers including the musicians and all of us playing rhythm and singing. As a youth seeing USA style three ring circuses some such as Ringling would have three teeterboard acts from Eastern Europe - one in each ring. Each would have a flyer doing a salto either to the top of three men standing on shoulders or to a chair at least 3 men high. George Carl the great clown was a top-mounter to four-high in the Tom Mix Circus in the 1930s. Decades later the East European flyers with safety wires went to 5-high and 8-high. So to see a single flyer not going onto shoulders but going on to a crash mat is simply a great and necessary step in the right direction. Things take time. Darcy Grant's new piece "Gravity..." for Backbone has very high technique. So if one is comparing Australian and USA strengths and weaknesses we need to discuss the angle or boundaries which are to be considered. Recently The Great Moscow Circus owned by the Australian Edgley family revived their circus and it included an outstanding teeterboard act from 'Russia' (former Soviet). It was a large troupe of about ten acrobats the star flyers were a woman who was the head of the troupe and a small young man who did saltos on a long stilt (a norm in Eastern Europe and China).

Naturally the official Poo-Poo Committees will bring up the issues of style, taste, kitsch, etc. Although Emmanuel Kant was the one who wrote about "Taste", someone else said "There's no accounting for taste". Shakespeare in Hamlet said "There is nothing either good or bad, only thinking makes it so". So there are differences all of which are a matter of taste. Of course I love the Australian

humor exemplified by Circus Oz as I saw in 1980 and generally each time I've seen them. But in terms of aesthetics, - GENERALLY SPEAKING - I think it is the Quebecois who have set the world on fire (Lepage, La La La Human Steps, Marie Chouinard, Eloise, Alfonso, Sept Doigts, CDS, Carbone-14). Of course Franco Dragone was the actual director of CDS's early master works and he has his own billion dollar enterprise. I think that Circolumbia's "Urban" is the new level to emulate in terms of the simplicity of the onstage presence of the individual and ensemble rather than an equipment based art form - directed by an English woman the Afro-Latino cast of "Urban" are the radiant lights. We have just heard that the Australian Great Moscow Circus and Edgley's has folded, although many of the acts have already moved onto other shows, I think the Russians have now returned home.

MF- Yes it's interesting to see how the modular and global nature of Circus allows the content of one show or culture to morph very quickly into the content of a different show. Meanwhile the growth and scale of these shows presents an ever increasing demand for skilled young performers. As Circus training institutions attempt to meet this demand lots of young physical performers are emerging freshly minted as 'artists'.

IS - We all live in a world of Cert-IV and an overabundance of people certified with Post-Graduate degrees. It is a world in which people are certified but not qualified. Certified means you passed the tests it does not really mean you are qualified. Qualification takes time. Years. Time and years after graduation, out in the field, different aspects of employment or engagement is the only way to be qualified. Qualification comes years after certification. The learning institutions are all businesses and that includes the independent ones. It is a rat race and we are all in it in some way. Cirque du Soleil had a program "From Athlete to Artist". Having skills and an act does not make you a fully qualified artist. Hopefully it gives you a foot up into the industry. But too many people are generally qualified. Being a skilled performer is a type of artist. But to truly be an artist may take something deeper or more ethereal. Perhaps. Being an artist in any field is about engagement, questioning, interrogation, and probably a large dose of struggling with those elements.

MF- To take that idea further;...

If you had 3 pieces of advice to give to a young artist embarking on their life as a performer/clown, what would they be?

IS- As Polonius says to his Son, Laertes, "This above all to thine own self be true". Polonius is a great clown character who also has a Daughter, Ophelia. That is in the play Hamlet. Very often after Polonius is killed the same actor playing Polonius returns as the main clown Gravedigger. In that scene we see the most famous image in Shakespeare of Hamlet with the skull. The skull is that of the clown, court jester to Hamlet's Father who was the King. Shakespeare borrowed "... to thine own self be true" likely from Plato's message above the Cave "Know Thyself". So the first thing is take responsibility to educate yourself and to go beyond basic knowledge and seek original sources and Elders. 2nd - Know your body. Not only the form but also the function which from one angle I present as the vehicle for the mind and soul of humanity. Knowing the body is more than the musculature and skill - it is also to understand your body as its radiant qualities which are from its electro-chemical composition and perhaps many levels even more subtle such as DNA/RNA, memory, and who knows whatsits :) 3rd - deepen your practice and broaden your horizons, move beyond national aesthetics and experience, be part of global developments in arts, letters, sciences, humanities.

MF- The ideal of an Enlightened Renaissance Human is not necessarily celebrated in these days of micro-celebrity, but some contemporary 'clowns' are achieving just that.

Who do you consider the most interesting contemporary clown at the moment and why?

IS- James Thierree. Immediately, people with vested interests in making a saleable definition of what a clown is or isn't will jump and say "He is not a clown". There are clown teachers in Australia who love to say that Slava is not a clown and that Slava's Snowshow is not a clown show. Clown like all fields has fundamentalists. Pierre Bourdieu the social theorist explains that phenomenon as the battle between orthodoxy and heterodoxy. In clown many who are fundamentalists are the teachers and often are the same 'teachers' who know exceedingly little about the richness of the history of Australian clowns. James Thierree - wunderkind, beautiful artist, and totally unique clown. His Father is a clown, a funny man, an actor, an absurdist. His Mother is a divine angelic clown, master of stage costume design, and was the director of James' early shows even though the shows were his conceptions. She, Victoria Chaplin, was one of Charlie Chaplin's children. The Thierree/Chaplin family of Cirque Invisible - Mother, Father, Sister, Brother work as a co-operative regularly seeing each other's works and offering suggestions.

I was at the premiere of James' company. I met him briefly after the show with his teacher whom I met a few weeks before. The teacher was an older German circus acrobat who also ran the lights for James' Parents' Le Cirque Invisible. I have seen only a few of James' works live and one I have seen once in Brooklyn and a few years later in Adelaide when we also had a chat after his performance. Like his Parents, they like to have an improvisational element in every single performance. So they have a moment or a few moments in each show that they are fiddling with to find new possibilities, to let the show deepen and evolve.

He's the clown most allowing the space for the freedom and range of the body's versatility. The previous generation was people such as Bill Irwin, Slava, Katie Duck, and myself and a few others who were most exploring a new way to mix dance and clown. Not the clown as a dancer per se. And not a dancer clowning. Briefs and Hot Brown Honey are on to this combination of dance and clown (which they mix with circus and burlesque). Slava has mix of dance and clown particularly in his Saint Sebastian scene when he runs on with the arrows all stuck through him and does a dance of death and rebirth. Also the first scene of Snowshow's second half when Slava enters and discovers the other clown following him.

After only three weeks in Slava's company he asked me to do Slava for Slava. He asked me to do his entire role during the technical run-through. Immediately when that run-through was over he had me and the actor playing Main Green swap costumes so he could see me then play the opposite character in the same scenes. The only people in the audience were Slava, his Wife Elena (who is a great clown!!!!!! And a major and equal force in the company) and their Granddaughter. Can you imagine if the Granddaughter says "Grandpa I don't like that clown", or worse "Grandpa that clown is funnier than you" :) I LOVED the perplexity of that moment in my poor clown soul. I was also deeply honoured to play Slava for Slava and family. James Thierree though has gone the farthest to reopen the book of clown. He clowns with the kinetic nature of the body and with the aesthetic protocol of our beliefs about what theatre is and what a clown is. But the last time I saw him, in Adelaide, was with a friend of a friend. My theatre pal is fourth generation Australian vaudeville acrobatic clown. I think he will forgive me for mentioning that he was deeply moved to see this young master clown in action that he couldn't stand. He was shuddering and crying. The Maoris say 'it is an honour for a man to cry'. For him it was something he had dreamed as a clown that actually we don't have to just be the funny skilled entertainers,

but that we could take our high skills to another level to another dimension. James is the clown that he dreamed of and to become.

As a clown I was able to move an audience between gob smacked tears to tears of rolling laughter in a single show and sometimes from one moment to the next. I did this in a variety of shows I created as well as the scene I directed and acted in of the Comic Murderer being pushed to kill Clarence in his cell in Richard the Third. Various experts in Shakespeare including former members of England's RSC said it was the first time they had seen that scene actually work. When I played the Dead Clown, main role, in Cirque du Soleil's "Corteo" I only got to do that twice within my short contract though I played The White Clown 102 times.. On one Sunday, two performances, in front of about 2800 people watching each show and without changing any of the 'choreography' of Dead Clown, I did it Ira-gangnamstyle and when the Dead Clown died, and in earlier scenes, the whole audience was crying. It was reported that this was the first time in the years of the show playing that this happened. A clown can be very very funny, absurd, or very moving. There is plenty of room for all interpretations. James Thierree is also gradually finding his time and space to allow the soul of his Grandfather (Charlie Chaplin) to move through him to be very very funny. He's maturing, growing, exploring. I haven't seen his whole duet film yet "Chocolat" so I can't comment on that but look forward to that. When last I met with Bill Irwin, I had just seen James' great show "Rauol". Bill asked me if I saw it. Yes. "Is he really as good as people say?". Yes. At that stage Bill had never seen him. James' work combines the design creation of his Mother using his dreams or concepts, so as a clown it is more than just the humour, it is the combination of visual and spatial trickery, play, invention. I never say to participants in my training 'you will like so-and-so'. So I am not saying anyone should like James' approach to clown. But if you ask me, and you have, I would say James Thierree and family are guiding lights in the world of clown. His Sister Aurelia is also magnificent!!! Though she is working on a more intimate scale for smaller theatres. They also have an Aunt, also one of Chaplin's daughters, who is a type of clown. Her speciality is modern French farce. I saw her company when I had my show "The Madness of King Lear" in Avignon. I had a dinner and talk with her and her Husband who is the director. The moments when she actually clowns are astonishing. The form though is straight classic French farce.

Before I met James, I met his parents when they toured in Sweden and performed at the theatre across from the circus school I ran at that time. I was beside myself trying to understand how to welcome Chaplin's daughter and son-

in-law to our neighbourhood and to invite them to visit the circus school. I managed to organise funds for all of the students and staff to see the show's first of four nights. I personally bought a huge bouquet of flowers and had them delivered to the theatre during the day. I sat at the back of the theatre in front of the two touring technicians. Afterwards one of them took me to meet Victoria Chaplin and Jean-Baptiste Thierree. Ms Chaplin arrived with the bouquet and then the techies accompanied me and our school's circus master Assen Panov out. I was able to see the show the remaining three days.

At the same time, I have always said there is no such thing as 'the best clown'. It depends on taste and preference. There are absolutely fantastic clowns in traditional circuses - clowns such as Fumagalli, Totti, David Larible and last but certainly not least Bello Nock. Fumigallis' Father is in the later part of Fellini's movie "Clowns". He is the older clown who runs around the ring and gets exhausted (really, during the filming) and is seen then sitting ringside. Totti, Larible, Nock all come from circus families which have 6 or 7 generations. Some circus families like the Ashton's are now likely into their 9th or 10th generation. I have as much respect for all types of clowns and that includes someone like Sam Starr who was in a short workshop of mine a few years ago. She came in with ten years experience doing up to six birthday parties per weekend i.e. being able to go into the homes of every type of Australian, every class, most cultures and bringing joy, happiness and comedy. Often wonderful clowns do not call themselves clowns. Examples are: the gardener Costa Georgiadis, John Safran, Andrew Denton, Clarke & Dawe, Ellen Degeneres.

MF- I am definitely in favour of the broadest definition of 'clown' and you have listed a truly amazing collection of people..

Hypotheticals time: if you were appointed the Director of a large Australian Circus Training Institute for a year, what would you do?

IS- Quite a few years ago when Flying Fruit Flies were about to make a big shift they were seeking a new head of training or artistic director? I didn't know that until they phoned and informed me that each person they had spoken to including Clete Ball had recommended me. So would I be interested? Yes, but what does that entail I asked and I explained that I was more theatre than circus but yes I was a tumbler, and did things like hand-to-hand (either top or bottom) juggling, etc. I was asked what I would teach and said mime, clown, slapstick and basic acrobatics what I call "lrabatics". Then I was asked was there anything I would want add, or change. I said well I would only take the job if they would also

arrange to have a local dance teacher teach dance in the program. Well.... the change in her voice was obvious. Then she asked what type of dance. Ballet. Thus ended the interview within 30 seconds. Well, well, well it wasn't long before a dancer was the head of training/artistic direction ie the very wonderful Kim Walker! Still, I don't know how much dance was taught during his stint but he absolutely brought fresh light into the artistic expression and he loved the work and excelled there. In 1989 I happened to be traveling through San Francisco when Cirque du Soleil had one of their first seasons there. I loved that show. A few days later I was back in Sydney and saw Circus Oz. I mentioned to someone in the show that perhaps at the finale moment of their act they could do a 30-seconds dance. I was sneered at. I then added that I had just seen this group called Cirque du Soleil and most of their show was highly choreographed and that this is the way circus was going. Bigger sneer and loud pig like chortle and snorting.

So, slowly returning to your question :) I'd say dance is one of few missing elements in the Australian contemporary circus - generally speaking. What dance and what aspects and why and how is another conversation. I use a free form "Neo-Expressionistic Dance" rather than a formal technique. I have created a method that integrates the body work in combination with classical acting and with mime and with clown and with individual creativity. I was interviewed by Abi Collins online around 2005 for ACAPTA. In that interview I believe I spoke about the need to improve the intellectual education process for Australian circus artists. I am not talking about graduate degrees which generally program people into sedate academics in a cloistered environment. There seems to be an Australian way of blocking discussions, free thinking, and individual realisations. John Clarke's ABC trilogy "Sporting Nation" exposes this blatantly. Sir Donald Horne who coined "The Lucky Country" opened the can of worms. We can witness in Parliament the continuous insulting, insinuating, snide comments there where national discourse is meant to be exemplary. We can see in the corridors of academia there are voices in hushed tones submitting incrementally over decades and succumbing to any variety of political correctness which has already blocked arguments/discussions about artistic, social, and political issues. The arts councils are definitely guilty of the same pre-programmed pre-digested formulaic control as gate-keepers. The arts companies are equally guilty for dancing to the tune of the piper/payer. So I would first recommend: a) dance b) integration of movement/creativity and yes I think I have a perfect template that is flexible and non-dogmatic c) develop and improve our protocol and manner of discussion ... for starters. Additionally, as I have posted numerous videos on FB

titled "Dance is physical theatre: Evidence item # - - -". So yes as ACAPTA was meant to be a network that recognised that physical theatre was now connected to circus, and as a person who actually goes to see international contemporary dance companies I can say they excel in physical theatre. What would I change in the first year? I would attempt to change to dialogue, the way of conversation, the topics of discussion and specifically I would introduce ways of not only integrating dance but also freeform movement and creativity in an experimental frame of mind. I would introduce weekly or bi-weekly reading and writing assignments on a range of subjects. This is another topic for discussion. MF- I'm sure I will regret asking this next question, as the answer will inevitably contain more than a few 'Why didn't I hire Ira in to do that?!' moments,...

Another Hypothetical: If you were appointed the Director of the largest Australian Contemporary Circus Company for a year, what would you do?

IS- I would have 30 to 45 minutes daily of "The Four Articulations". 20 minutes daily of "Neo-Expressionistic Dance". I would create with the team weekly readings and discussion process on a variety of the team's chosen subjects, themes, writers - perhaps one hour per week. The mindset is set. It needs to shift. How? To what? That requires trials and errors and experimentation. I would increase the non-result orientated creative presentations about 2 or 3 times a week. Very short pieces (2 or 3 minutes) in which the artists could simply express themselves or any idea in any aesthetic without the onus of creating a performable circus act. I question Australian contemporary circus and training's use of choreography. I don't think a lot of it is actually choreographed. I saw this already in Sweden and in other places. Contemporary circus companies such as Pickle Family, Make-a-Circus, Big Apple, Circus Oz all used live music. So the band or circus artists who also played music could accompany each act so there was obviously a direct relation between the action and the music. However, smaller groups and individuals using recorded music are the ones I am saying lack actually choreographing... even though any number of professionals will say they 'choreograph' to or with the music I have a very different understanding about what we mean as 'choreography'.

When I came in as Artistic Director of Sweden's national circus high school for people 16-20 years old, the first change I put in was "No Background Music" in the circus acts. With a waiver that 30-45 seconds within an act could be non-choreographed. I also integrated my acrobatic method (Irabatics) with the more advanced trainer's methods. For the first time in ten years that the school had been opened, the staff of seven said they came to work happy. Everything

automatically improved as a united team of staff and students. I also taught my method of how to interpret music which was the complementary aspect to "No" ie the How to interpret the No Background Music. No meant maybe. One student, who was extremely disciplined and interested in mime, I coached in that idea of interpretation and choreography daily (4 days per week) and other concepts in creativity for more than a year. After graduation he immediately had success with his street act and after several years entered Cirque du Demain Festival and won two awards. He now tours with his own solo theatre show.

The second directive I gave was that the students had to show up to their academic classes with their text books. When I arrived at the school there had been a long standing animosity between the academic teachers versus the circus students. In fact several of the teachers actually said that the circus students were dumb. Nowhere in the world are circus students dumb. Circus students are the opposite. They are young people firing on all pistons and who have a profound lust for life and that includes curiosity. A great many are geeks. The dumbing down has to do with teacher and directors attitudes towards young circus people. So I had a chat together with the students and the staff. Very quickly, in that first semester the circus students (at least many of them) began to excel in class and started to love learning and achieving a handle on the standard subjects. One afternoon one of the wildest students burst into the circus hall screaming with a paper in her hand. She had the top score in one of her subjects.

In the early days of NICA I heard a variety of harsh remarks from a number of contemporary Australian circus performers about NICA students and graduates including a bit of 'who do they think they are'. In most cases even from the beginning the entry level of the NICA students meant that most had trained arduously for 4 to 10+ years in gymnastics or sports or juggling or youth circus and of course now many have been in any of the main Australian youth circuses for many years before entering NICA. So those who get into NICA have been young people deeply committed over many years. We had a phenomenon happen in the late 1980s when about five wizkids were taken into Circus Oz. Most were from Flying Fruit Flies: Scott Grayland, Mathew (of the trampoline Pool Inspector act - it may be that he was a diver or trampolinist first then a Fruitie?), Matt Wilson (arrived later- in 1998), Natalie Dyball, Simon Yates, Teresa Blake (not a Fruitie). This came just a few years after Jono Hawkes master minded "The Great Leap Forward" bringing a small team of Nanjing acrobats to teach. From that the good fortune was for Guang Rong Lu from Nanjing to be

given space at Flying Fruit Flies to shift the whole of Australian contemporary circus training. When the fab five new Oz (Scott, Matthew, Matt, Teresa, Simon) who entered not in the same year but near enough to overlap. With those people the skill shot through the roof. So too did a new style of creativity but it seemed that after even one or two years those young people could have taken over the artistic direction. When they were 'green'. Circus Oz started when the originals were very young. So too Cirque du Soleil, Sept Doigts, Eloise. There could have been a quantum shift had the first wave of Fruities and their contemporaries into the company been given actual artistic directorship. They were of course given some artistic autonomy for their own wonderful acts. But that directorship changeover was not 'meant to be'. However, since I'm answering some questions you've offered me, I saw a documentary about Oz on youtube. You are the protagonist and explain that you came into the artistic directorship at 27 years old. Somehow you managed to stay a long time and traverse a knife edge in shared management/directorship. You even managed to do something that Sue Broadway tested ie bringing in ethnic diversity albeit via individuals. She hired Mr. Lu not only as company teacher (circus master) but also as a performer. His vertical bench act was not only highly skilled, and high, but also he's a great clown and master of the stage. On stage he was a 'cheeky bugger' - beautiful. I would never audition for Oz because of the end of show statement "All Australian made". I felt excluded, by my own perception. But when it was announced that Sue was going to return from UK/Europe to be Artistic Director, I applied as I knew she had a more international understanding. She made me an automatic finalist. My understanding is that she applied for two more paid performers but the Australia Council would not comply. It was my understanding that I was 'in' but was 'out' because I was one of the two intended as the extension via a grant increase. That was a wonderful and interesting show she and the ensemble created. Of course there is a legendary story about the great appearance in that show of Deb Batton!!!! OMG we all asked 'where on Earth had she been hiding'? Seems she was hidden in an actual file in the office filing cabinet in a marked folder "Never see again". I'll leave that to the Circus Oz history writers. Per Westman was an unusual 'ethnic' with a Swedish heritage. When I saw Oz in Copenhagen he was the star. Speaking Swedish which the Danes understand - he killed them with his wit. After you came in people such as Sosina and Frodo both from other cultures had the chance to come into Oz and enrich it. Of course there are others who are Australian with ethnic heritage but that is usually on the back burner. Fair enough. One's ethnicity does not have to be played out on stage. One of the most outstanding contemporary circuses I have ever seen though is mainly Afro-Latinos all former street kids - Circolumbia and their show

“Urban” besides the excellent acrobatics every member was a fantastic actor, dancer, and clown.

A lot of the contemporary Australian contemporary circus seems Aussie-centred, necessarily so, yet, also to its own detriment. It appears to be a social stigma if one rates a foreign contemporary circus as ones preferred aesthetic. Then of course when an Australian gets in one of those foreign troupes things change a bit. A bit. Cirque du Soleil is interesting culturally. Like the traditional circuses it has both a national and international understanding. Any show of CDS likely has people from at least 30 nations - both in artistic and technical departments. CDS is at once Canadian, Quebecois, North American, and International. In that sense it is a high example of older traditional circus values of 'we are the world' and 'kumbaya' :) So in addition to some technical suggestions I'd say Australian contemporary circuses need to have a look at some obscure sources to stimulate the sphere of their conversation: John Clarke's "Sporting Nation"; "The Lucky Country" by Sir Donald Horne; the satirical 'How to be an Australian' books by Robert Treborlang, in order to get a handle on rewiring some thought processes about one's notion of nationhood. I also have a blog which is a series of essays on performance which I have written. One of the most recent is "Clown vs God ... notes on the clown movement".

As an aside: Answering in an intimate way that lets you into some of my secrets is done at great risk, because we are all 100% immersed in a culture war that places our mob as I define it "Left-wing/Labour/Greens/Live-and-let-live-liberal-minded-arty-farts" diametrically opposed to anything and anyone with whom they are in fundamental disagreement. No room for shades of grey, only black vs white. I see this as one of the key issues for people of all persuasions joining together to find ways to usher in a better future. I can't admit to many friends that I read *The Australian* (a national, daily Murdoch-owned newspaper) even if that is only one of the journals I read. I have always particularly loved the Letters to the Editor in *The Australian* which show that there are wonderful individual angles on the same themes. Obviously I've chosen to ignore the story of that paper's owner. Being Australian is something I engage with consciously every day. Each day adding to my knowledge of Australiana (thank you Austen Tayshus). One strand of my philosophy of life is that every Australian needs to become more 'indigenous' that means actually learning more about the collective history which is evolving as well as about the place and space in which we find ourselves at this time.

MF- Because you've referenced 'my part in it' I could make a response here. One or more of the responses below. What do you think?

MF- Yes, the casting policy of Circus Oz is a notoriously endless circular conversation. So many factors to building and maintaining a permanent ensemble. The endless creative tensions between 'New Blood' and 'Wise Elders', 'Improv Clowns' and 'Disciplined Safety', 'Group Unity' and 'Individual Unique Virtuosity' and many many other dichotomies.

MF- In terms of casting ethnicity I always defined 'Australian' not as citizenship or heritage, but as 'someone who has chosen to make Australia (and more specifically Melbourne) their home', regardless of their job with Circus Oz. As Jon Hawkes once said; "If you want to have a *message* it has to come *from* somewhere". Having said that I have to admit that I was usually averse to using a North American accent on a Circus Oz stage just because so much of our current popular culture is imported from America and I wanted to consciously subvert that trend. A performer such as the extraordinary Canadian aerialist Ruby Rowat was a strong part of Circus Oz during her time, but her voice wasn't heavily featured. Ira, I'd like to think that if you and I had had this conversation a few years ago, before I retired from Oz, that I would absolutely have been encouraging you to be considered to join the company!

MF- You say that "every Australian needs to become more 'indigenous'" and from that I take your meaning as each of us living on this continent need to learn more about place, country, our collective history,

can you expand more on the idea of being more indigenous?

IS- Basically we are all in this together: Indigenous, First & Second Fleeters (which included Jews, Africans, Americans, some from Norway, Sweden, Portugal and others), 10-pound Poms, Afghan camel drivers, Chinese miners, NT Pearl divers, Dunera Boys, refugees, and us New Australian's by choice, and pioneers and pastoralists. Reconciliation is not only understanding whatever the Indigenous communities require from us for their own deep healing on their own terms, what in Jewish culture is called 'tikkun' or repairing a broken vessel, but, we each have to find a way to connect further to the land, place, and I also believe the modern cultural history. The bush was as foreign to me as any pioneer. I have not mastered the bush, not even close, but, gradually with the help and guidance of many Aussie Aussies and Ethnic Aussies (wogs) I attune more.

Note: my show "A Play On Worlds" co-created with Fred Copperwaite, Theo Coumbis, Maha Hindi, Eva di Cesare expressed that everyone in Australia has

two cultures at least. In other countries I I've also created shows on localised existential themes: Sweden - "Artist in Exile...requiem for Strindberg"; Italy - "Commedia Toto" combining images from Italy's cinema clown Toto and the absurdist playwright Pirandello. All of my shows deal with the masculine/feminine energies inside the human, as well as the secret inner worlds of a clown which represents another angle of the inner world of a human. In the same way much of Beckett's works focus on masculine - feminine interaction in every one-to-one human relation, and, Shakespeare's works either refer directly to the human as an actor (clown) or we see most of his characters acting (clowning, playing, pretending, in disguise) to get what they want. Just after I moved to Australia, ten days later I presented three short acrobatic duet choreographies for Sir Robert Helpmann thus he hired our duet and used my choreographies which we spun together for his production of Romeo et Juliette at the Sydney Opera House. During that season I hosted an overseas guest, an older woman clown from USA. We wanted to see 'something Australian'. Rodney Fisher's production of Ray Lawler's "Summer of the Seventeenth Doll" was at the Opera House - with Ruth Cracknell, Heather Mitchell, Kaarin Fairfax and others. That was an exemplary production, play, acting, direction. As I was working with Opera Australia I could take guests to the Green Room and have lunch. Kaarin Fairfax happened to sit by me and we chatted. I thanked her for the performance and explained that I just moved here and was in one of the operas. She asked where I was from etc and I said I had just been living in NZ for four years. She replied "Oh, you'll be right. You've acclimatised." I have, but, acclimatising seems to need continual updates. I've been here long enough to equate Clive James with Isaac Bashevis Singer. I relish Australian obscurities gleaned from the likes of Sir John Monash's biography that he had a one hour private conversation at the age of 10 with Ned Kelly that profoundly inspired him in his life. Kelly was waiting to sell Monash's Father some 'acquired' horses. Monash set up an entire education program for the troupe ships headed to Egypt then of course those troupes got seconded by the British to go to Gallipoli. He finally masterminded the comical escape and thus was upgraded to head the European front. There were by the way about 1000 New Australians who fought in Gallipoli and in France/Belgium in WWI. Most of those 1000 were Russian or East European and escaping the Communist agenda. Many those 1000 were Jewish. Just saying migrants are a direct part of Australia's history and it's great multicultural success and have been all along. Issues around reconciliation need dealt with of course!

Acclimatising continues aided by reading a bit more about Australian culture, arts, history, and Indigenous culture which I have to do mainly via books and

listening to the birds and moving with the seasons albeit these days in Brisbane seasons which are visible in the changes in the trees and flowers and clouds. As a child I relished the equivalent changes in every season which were also manifest physically through each season's sport. It was all visceral and kinetic. These days cycling along the river to training through the seasons is an organic way to acclimatise for me. But so too is the cerebral. There are of course people who will say that one can't learn about Indigenous culture via words written mainly by non-Indigenous people. I understand that perfectly well but there is a huge range of incredible people who gave their lives to understand and respect and learn of and from Indigenous Australians. Marcel Marceau said the greatest mimes were the Aboriginal Australians. Some of the obscure books are my favourites: Aboriginal Music by Catherine Ellis; Love Songs of Arnhem Land by Ronald Brentt (this reminds one of the Song of Solomon); one of the most obscure is Freud's book Totem and Taboo which is largely based on the research of Germans who visited outback in the late 1800s; then there are the books from the dancer Beth Dean who created the naive ballet "Corroboree". That ballet was revived for the opening of the Sydney Opera House and Cleve Ball was in that.

Naturally these are all contentious thoughts yet if one has no ways or means or purpose to go bush then living viscerally in ones surroundings and using reading to develop a once removed appreciation of the depth and variety and intellect within Indigenous cultures are two ways to 'become more indigenous'. Someone who grew up farming and someone who grew up in the city and someone who grew up at the beach have three different understandings of what it means to be an 'indigenous' Australian. Likewise one can guess or surmise or wonder - is it not somewhat similar for the Indigenous Australians who grew up in very different circumstances one from another? We are all one on this land, place, space yet we all have different threads that create the Australian tapestry. Part of the journey of being Australia would benefit by searching out ones roots to this place and space. That means also respecting and learning about the Elders of the place who are the Indigenous Elders whom we non-Indigenous are encouraged to also refer to as "Auntie" and "Uncle" which is the equivalent to Dame or Sir that is a title of honour and respect. In Jewish culture due to our diaspora experience there is a new concept of 'return' to our culture that is called Baal Teshuvah. African-Americans have been through such a process to find their indigenous culture. The Dalai Lama invited a group of Rabbis to meet with him to try to understand how on Earth the Jewish culture survived through its diaspora and what the Tibetan culture in exile could learn. A record of that journey is in the book "The Jew in the Lotus". In the Dalai Lama's autobiography Freedom in Exile

he tells about the Tibetan culture and its history of going from a warmonger nation to something else. I love his story about the cleaners of his bedroom who loved to swear and tell him rude jokes. He also tells about the Oracle he consults periodically who following rites and ritual and dressing in the ceremonial robes goes into a trance and tells all until he collapses in a heap and like a carcass gets dragged out. In Jewish culture it is said that often the Prophets when they had a vision would disrobe and speak their vision while naked.

There are cultural secrets within Indigenous societies that are near impossible to fathom unless one is an insider. It is the tandem work of initiated anthropologists and Elders who have chosen to liaise to share knowledge to provide written records of 'insider' knowledge. I find the dreamtime myths translated into English hard to crack because the myth or story is only the first layer of the knowledge which is not only poetic, symbolic but also practical. In my culture this is called Pardes (orchard) and represents the four levels of understanding of the myths of the Torah (Old Testament). The story or myth is only the surface and of course that is where most people stop because either: like most myths it doesn't make sense without inner knowledge; or, seems to be politically incorrect and thus outdated; or, seemingly has no historical or scientific proof. Yet there is an entire field of science called "Biblical Archeology" that each year finds more scientific proof for many of the biblical stories. That is not to say that even one of those stories is 100% factually true. But as we grow to understand that Indigenous knowledge is hidden within stories so too the Western canon including the Bible has aspects that have historical truths amongst the fables which are a cultural storehouse of knowledge of life on Earth. It is only in the late 1800s that Heinrich Schliemann discovered there had been an actual and factual Troy (near Gallipoli). The cultural Jewish practices are a living meditation in thought, speech, and actions which show the teachings of the myths to be usable or at least of value to improving ones life. Many of those practices are recognition of the real world around us - nature including human nature. The key to that, just like in Indigenous cultures is the Creation myth(s). Bereshith known in English as The Book of Genesis has symbolic knowledge, like Indigenous myths, which physics is exposing as wisdom of evolution on a cosmic scale. By fluke or coincidence or kismet - the very day I was to open my production of "Creation" (a Mystery Play rewritten by Peter Anderson) there was the ceremony to reveal the double stained glass artworks of Creation. One window was represented the Australian Aboriginal myth and one represented the Western Biblical myth. This was at a cloister of Australian nuns who do not go away from their cloister. Our narrator, the young actor Jordan read the prologue of "Creation" for the ceremony at

the cloister.

Kandinsky, who was part of the Bauhaus movement, transitioned from painting of myths/stories to painting the elements of shape, colour, rhythm all of which overlapped. His book is "Concerning the Spiritual in Art". What we refer to as 'dot paintings' reveal a related insight into the elements of art and life according Indigenous Australians. For my Doctorate, in its early stages, I was mentored by Dr. Franca Tamisari who was an Anthropologist from Venice, Italy. Dr. Franca was initiated into an Indigenous community in far North Queensland. She spoke their language and danced their dances. One of her colleagues at U.Q., Dr. John Bradley, was initiated into another Indigenous community, the Yanyuwa people. He made one of the most amazing cultural studies. He had permission to tell some of the non-sacred myths/stories/songs which he showed were complete scientific knowledge about that particular region and the seasonal nature there. In his book "Forget about Flinders" (2003) each song had a series of illustrations (by Nona Cameron) showing exact locations of the natural elements of their culture, and how the song told the knowledge. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-07-08/forget-about-flinders-atlas-preserves-yanyuwa-culture/7572832>

Three of the Yanyuwa people's Elders came to UQ at that time (2003) and taught us a new cultural song/dance - The Mermaid Song/Dance. One of the women was Jemima Miller it was her aunt who dreamt the song/dance, an old woman by the name of Elma a-Bunubunu. From the dream it was understood that they were to create the Mermaid song/dance and to teach it. Cultures evolve. They do not occur "ex nihilo", out of nothing.

In the clown and performance world one of the greatest relics is Waiting For Godot - filled with Beckett's knowledge of art, music, space, light, time, and Biblical myths. It is about the existential nature of being human in a dreamscape of space, light, time and myth. On one hand I have the highest regard for scholars in the arts and thoroughly enjoy their writings. On the other hand the whole academic system has been infiltrated with jargon, political motivation as the driving force, and the financial requirement to over publish, and having to choose sides in an argument. In Beckett's case his longtime friend and publisher finally got disgusted with the bias of the academic 'experts' about Beckett. They made sure to ignore things about Beckett which did not suit their politically correct bias. John Calder's great books were The Philosophy of Samuel Beckett (2001) and, The Theology of Samuel Beckett (2002). Images of Beckett (2003) is another insightful book by a longtime colleague of Beckett's. The deepest

thinkers in the arts understand that the human needs to return to some primal myth to find true harmony with the surrounding world. Even the single most advanced director of modernism and technology in live performance - Robert Lepage - has also been unique to integrate the intimacy of an individual human life. One of his 'solo' shows "Far Side of the Moon" had 12 technicians 100% integrated with the technology. Lepage has another autobiographical solo "887" relating to the home he grew up in. Yet, it seems his theatre relates to Noh Theatre of Japan which is based on a shamanic understanding. Noh stems from indigenous performance knowledge which is based on the body in space and time.

NAISDA was instrumental in conjuring artistic reconciliation processes with the Page Brothers of Queensland catching the lightning and transforming it like a potter into the shape known as Bangarra - one of the brightest of Australian performing arts companies. The Page family are descended from the Nunukul people and the Munaldjali clan of the Yugambah tribe from southeast Queensland. Big hArt is another visionary Australian company. In its own way Cirque du Soleil is on such a spirit path albeit in a much more commercial aesthetic - obviously. Harry Haythorne was billeted in far North Queensland while in the Army during WWII. That time affected and inspired him and when he was Artistic Director of Queensland Ballet in the 1970s he instigated ballet to be taught for those Indigenous Australian's interested in such dance who lived in the smaller northern towns and cities in Queensland. Wesley Enoch's stage creations have been wonderful. Fred Copperwaite, Lily Shearer, Lisa-Mare Syron were the team starting Sydney's Indigenous theatre company Mooghalin Performing Arts. And of course there is an entire body of work in cinema and TV attempting to present the paradoxes of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians sharing space and place. There is a whole history of reconciliation through the performing arts which deserves a few volumes.

One of the landmark shows in this 'movement' was Bran Nue Dae. It was an Australian and Indigenous musical. The show was utterly brilliant, and although often very moving it was also a grand 'clown' show. Yotha Yindi was the on stage band!!! Jimmy Chi was the writer. Andrew Ross the director. Andrew already had a friendship with Indigenous great playwright Jack Davis. He visited Jimmy's home once and saw some manuscripts laying in a corner and asked about them. One of those was Bran Nue Dae. The musical toured Australia for six months and got a throbbing instant standing shouting ovation every night. The audiences were 90-95% white. They got it. They celebrated. That show broke open the

hearts and minds. It then had a second tour. Not long after that, Wesley Enoch created The Sunshine Club - a different story and told in a different way but still it had a huge effect. But things take time, and layers. I saw both of those shows live and saw Davis's Dreamers also with an all Indigenous cast in Sydney and directed by a woman who also played the Grandfather. Astonishing theatre. No mainstream reviewer made the effort to see or review it. I was incredible seeing that production - to see the acting talent and skill of the Indigenous actors. It was completely shamanic. So seeing that showed me also the 'battle'.

Returning more directly to your question of what I mean by 'becoming more indigenous' I think Circus Oz was on track for that in the 1980s when they toured in the outback and rural areas and as simple as it seems that fab clown routine I saw in 1980 of being kangaroos with Robyn Laurie (I think?) as the animal trainer, and no doubt during the outback travels they also taught workshops for Indigenous communities. Kate Reid is the person who has dedicated herself to outback and rural teaching for Indigenous children. Bondy Bond of Chooky Dancers aligned with you (Mike Finch) to attempt next steps of involving Indigenous performers in circus. Several years ago was the first Indigenous Circus Festival in Sydney. One of the young men from that has been performing in "Briefs" since 2013. Another fab clown act from Circus Oz referencing Australian nature was the trapeze act as galahs Antonella and Mel were radiant clowns in that. There are the writers such as Ethel Pedley, May Gibbs, Norman Lindsay who wanted Australian children to have books connected to the real and imagined local nature. And of course painters including Lindsay were looking to the land for inspiration. Arthur Boyd was an exemplary explorer in that. I knew little about him until I was commissioned to create a show for the Retrospective exhibition of his works in 2000. I researched and 'meditated' on his work and was woken several times around 3am with inspiration for poems about him and his work. Those poems and his paintings were the basis for the choreography. I directed 20 second year acting students and in consultation with the local Indigenous community there were 2 Indigenous musicians, one of whom was mentored by Arthur Boyd. When Boyd went to London to have advanced training in painting, the only thing he could paint was the bush! So many artists simply by our nature are inclined to express a yin-yang of whoever we are in a 'Western' or modern sense and where we are in another reality in Australia.

In 2000 I was also commissioned to direct the Riverina Regional performance for the Olympic Torch relay. That included an Opening Welcome by the local Indigenous community - Wiradjuri people - and a variety of local choreographed

pieces with the live music provided by Kapooka Army Band. Ruth Galene was another dancer/choreographer who honoured that reconciliation via the arts in valuable with her company Red Opal. Not everyone should do this. But everyone in Australia needs to make their own reconciliation with the Indigenous community and the shared fact of place, space, time and shared evolving myth. In 2000 we shared a living myth with Kathy Freeman and Djakapurra Munyarryan (who has also been an instrumental Elder with Bangarra Dance) and little Ms Ginger Meggs aka Nikki Webster.

MF- Interestingly, the thing I became most passionate about in my latter years at Circus Oz was the vexing absence of Australian Indigenous Circus and I initiated an ongoing investigation into how to enable a larger pool of aboriginal performers and authentic indigenous Circus. This started as Blakrobatics, became BlakFlip, and is now manifesting as the show Chasing Smoke, directed by Natano Fa'anana. In my mind Australian Circus made by Indigenous Australians seemed an absolutely perfect match of genre and culture; irreverent, physical, musical, brave, agile, diverse, inclusive, collaborative, using dance, humour, music. There's a large and vibrant indigenous music scene, visual arts, dance, even stand-up comedy. Why wasn't Australian Circus absolutely full of Aboriginal performers? Our vision was for Circus Oz to have an indigenous presence at every level of Circus Oz, from the Board, right through the ensemble to the office, design and technicians. With a longer-view of one day Australia having what we referred to as a 'Bangarra of Circus'. I hope that both of these visions will one day be achieved, and will serve as a living hopeful example of how indigenous and immigrant cultures can be combined and offer a hopeful and celebratory example of co-existence.

MF- On a good day I think that it can, but...

do you have any evidence to support the idea that art can change the world?

IS- Can it? Art can change individual lives. It can assist any community to heal, mend, prosper, develop, flourish, bloom. But on a global, a world perspective art doesn't seem to be holding even its own integrity. I have no evidence that art can change the world. Art can and does make life better and more tolerable. Too many artists are too myopic and self obsessed and nowadays too politically correct and obsessed with identity issues. If art changed the world there would not have been Chernobyl or Fukushima. There would be no paradoxical lies from our preferred leaders of the Labour/Greens or their equivalents overseas. Artists fall into trends of good values that soon become fundamentalist dogma. If art is going to change the world, the artists need to change themselves without becoming dogmatic and antagonistic towards anyone who has a perceived

weaker understanding or preference on how to proceed forward in life and art. Artists are no better than politicians or lawyers any of whom can be absolute lying bastards or the best and most considerate people. People are people - nothing new under the Sun. None the less, years ago I had a dream of an Aboriginal Elder explaining to me "You're an artist. That's as close to nature as you can get." That tale is told in "Harlequin Dreams" that is on youtube.

MF- I refer to it as an endless struggle against mediocrity,...

What do you think is the most important new artistic development in the last decade, not just in human performance, but in all artistic practise?

IS- I think the potential of the internet is still unlimited particularly for communication and movement of ideas. At the same time I am not sure that it has helped deepen communication. The indication is that the opposite has occurred. I admire the work of Dmitry Krymov and his laboratory theatre. I admire the work of Robert Lepage. I think Krymov and Lepage are leading lights on a global scale. At the same time they are normal, humble, craftsmen as much as artists. Before them perhaps Max Reinhardt, and the Bauhaus, and the Indigenous, and Asian artistic/cultural philosophies may offer us a beacon into a better future. I think permaculture and the small house movement and Ivan Illich's ideas of sharing resources can bring greater benefit to human societies. Doctors and Clowns Without Borders are wonderful but they actually end up taking particular Left wing propaganda dogma as the 'gospel'. As my dear friend Terry Price has always said to life's complex paradoxes "It's a funny ol' world". Another company that I think is a guiding light is MAU a New Zealand (Aotearoa) based theatre company led by Lemi Ponifasio and his long time colleague Charles Koroneho.

MF- OK, before we wrap up, a question specific to your American heritage, but relevant at a global level.

What do you think will be the long-term impact on the USA of the Trump era, and what might be required from U.S. citizens over the next decades once his term is over?

IS- Oy vey Maria. Today as I write I share the concern of many, a forlorn anxiety not about the long-term but rather the immediate. Just as I deeply loathed the manner of Prime Minister Abbott's 'executive call' approach and Trump I just ignore so as to try to maintain a sense of composure in life I actually have a

bad case of faith and trust in the Universe. Mr and Mrs Universe - Uncle and Auntie Yin Yang are the phenomenon that is called 'God' or the Universe or perhaps the Dreamtime or Rainbow Serpent. The Sun comes 'up' and goes 'down' in our local perspective. We ARE in outer space. We ARE in orbit. We ARE flying, spinning, evolving and devolving. Trump is simply a bump in the cosmic web. Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke, Keating gave a great sense of hope and certainly ushered in the greatness of modern Australia. Each with their own weaknesses and huge egos. I really liked Gillard but many friends said I didn't understand. Trump. In my very very naive sense, I have formed a glimmer of hope that Trump appeared at the right time to be a spanner in the government of China success and steam roller in the Pacific and in our neighbourhood and in their over reaching victories in taking control of Africa's natural resources. The USA is an imperialist army for the umbrella corporations. Their 700 plus military bases are for the USA business's vested interests. Perhaps Trump's single cosmic role is to put a roadblock in front of the power of India, Russia, Iran, China government/military obvious machinations and provide counter influence (counter to the USA/UK imperialism) which is growing every year. But China, India, Russia, the disunited States of the Arab nations have put a block into the USA corporate/military monopoly. Having seen Pilger's newest "The Coming War With China" we can see the 'war' started with the opium trade which funded the surge in USA financial success more than 100 years ago. That was President Roosevelt's Father's opium business. Similarly the Bush family patriarch did fund the rise of Nazism in Germany and his son George Bush senior - former head of the CIA - has corrupt ties just as Clinton had during his time as Governor and since.

I am unofficially an Expatriate from the USA where I was born. I like Americans and know that it has a tremendous legacy in the arts, but, I felt and feel more aligned to the lifestyles in Australia and Europe. I have three passports. I always travel as an Australian except when entering the countries of which I have a related passport. Australia is my Mecca, my adopted homeland. I have Australian friends who see the USA as their wonderful adopted homeland. I love living in Australia. It's an incredible society. I'm glad I arrived in the old Australia and know what it was like in the old days. It has changed. Drastically. The USA I left because "It was heading for nowhere". Now it has arrived there, nowhere. Not because of Trump but because its own citizens (corporations and even academics and scientists and doctors and lawyers) sold it down the river. It is not the bottom line that counts it is the quality of life. The USA incrementally sold it's citizen's quality of life in exchange for a fundamentalist belief in the bottom line.

Arthur Miller warned us with "Death of A Salesman", "The Crucible", and "Broken Glass". His autobiography "Timebends" can still tell us more about art and society than perhaps anything. Frank Capra's film "You Can't Take It With You" is one of my favourites on the theme of modern life. Chaplin's few feature films were all on that theme. He was deeply interested and concerned with the global fate of Mankind. Martha Graham, Leonard Bernstein, Louis Armstrong, Mae West tried to warn us through the arts to 'wake-up' - without political dogma. Three notable manipulations of the good American people are: the creation of the Federal Reserve - which is not federal as it is a private company; and, the removal of the hemp industry; and, the defunding of national railroad developments. Trump comes long after those things. He is like Al Capone, a very interesting criminal. Rudd was a crud. Trump is very interesting. It is a wild and hairy story. If you wrote it, no one would believe it and the arts councils and madness thrust upon us with so-called dramaturgy would not 'get it' unless it ticked the trendy boxes in their limited mindset. It was astonishing to watch Trump one by one take down and knock out each one of his opponents. He is like the cosmic foul fart of the USA. He is the result and not the cause. Not even close. He's a loose cannon so who knows what will transpire. Hope is important. Let us pray for a better day. Be thankful for all we have. Let us hope that the universe has its own logic as it has for billions of years in our terms and possibly for eons beyond our comprehension. We live in fear to speak freely as artists as I have done with you. Back to your question about the USA citizens - education is the only solution and that requires political activism. Charlotte Iserbyt has been outspoken about the "Dumbing Down of America" and since that book's publication she has told some secrets about the moves of the elite class into which she was born and privy to. Another important former insider has written "Confessions of An Economic Hitman". There have always been economic controllers behind all despots. The artists are guilty in their own way for accepting the dogma imposed by arts council bureaucrats and even the peer assessment processes which continue the locked in psychology of gatekeepers and looking after one's mates. Mateship is such a deep profound notion and the Diggers who included Indigenous people, and ethnics of all sorts, and all of the women at the Home Front in all capacities were true mates. However, society has changed. It seems like the term "mate" gets used in two new ways: a) it's as if one has to keep saying "mate" as a way to test whether or not you can trust your close friends, and, b) unfortunately "mate" often means that while you and I are mates we look after each other's backs but then, thus, can screw over anyone who is not a 'mate'. "Lest we forget", I think we've forgotten a number of great things.

MF- On that note, I'd like to say that over your amazing life so far it doesn't appear that you've forgotten much!

Thank you so much for all you've done and for sharing so much of your time in this interview.