

## Keene, NH

**SETUP:** Is there some common character attribute you've found in circus performers, something you see in yourself more clearly after having met and worked with others? I suppose this could be something about thrill-seeking, or a need to please, or a need for attention, or a physical sense of balance that needs addressing. But probably things I don't understand at all...

**QUESTION 1:** So, what drives you? It's not just some other job, obviously. It's very very special.

Circus is an art form. There are many different people from many different backgrounds. The common character attribute they have is that they are human with all the variety that encompasses. What drives me is the desire to make people laugh, to surprise them, create art and most of all to not waste their time. If someone is going to take time out of their life and come to the theater to be entertained, by golly if I'm on stage that day, I am going to respect their decision and fulfill my part of the deal.

**SETUP:** Certainly some of this is true about all performers and there are common creative impulses in all the arts. But classical musicians and high art painters seem to have license to say they're in contact with a metaphysical reality. Rock musicians and - I'm out on a limb - circus performers appear not to be given the same credit about their work.

**QUESTION 2:** How do you imagine circus arts are different from other arts? You're working in comedy so, how do you think circus comedy is different from standup (aside from the obvious standing on a wire or mouthing some ping pong balls...)

Circus arts are different from another arts because it is a different art form. Art is an expression. First comes the desire to express something and then comes the medium. Some things are best said with music, other things with dance, in my show I am expressing what can only be said by catching oranges thrown from audience members on a fork in my mouth, walking on a way too loose rope and committing general chaos eliciting applause and laughter.

As for the difference between stand-up and circus comedy; anything that is funny is comedy. Stand-up comedy often involves someone standing up, talking into a microphone and being funny. Circus comedy is untethered by this formant. One can stand-up, stand on a rope, headstand, speak, not speak or even stand up and speak into a microphone. I have performed in stand-up comedy clubs and at the

Just for laughs festival in Montreal. I would love to see a stand-up comic in the middle of a circus. Comedy has no boundaries, neither does stand-up or circus.

**SETUP:** This might all seem too heady and, since I'm emailing, I can't read your face or voice to know if this is uninteresting to you. But it leads to another question, generally speaking, about fear. When I ask regular people why they find the circus so entertaining, many people talk about "death defying" feats. Well, that's true for the trapeze and the high-wire, for the knife throwers and the sword swallows. But juggling probably won't kill you even if you screw up. Fear still plays into it, I guess. People are afraid of screwing up whether it means death or just embarrassment. People like to see others do something they wish they could do themselves but can't, sometimes because they're afraid, and also because they know they're too undisciplined to succeed.

**QUESTION 3:** What role does fear play in your career? When you're performing, what is it that you're aiming at your audience; what are you hoping to evoke in them? Do you hide your fear or use it in the act? Are you ever afraid?

What is fear? Which is scarier; going on stage and performing death defying stunts that no one in the audience can do, or going on stage and being yourself and hoping people enjoy it. I am not afraid when I juggle on a swinging rope, I have practiced it to a point that it is actually quite relaxing. I do fear all the other moments of the show where I face the audience with no tricks to do and it is "Be funny or die". That's scary!

**SETUP:** I've been wondering if people's love of the bigness of the Circus Spectacle is a kind of envy of community - the community that seems so evident in the precision of a touring circus group. You've been involved with that scene, I think, and now you're out on your own. You are the proverbial one-man show. The limelight's all yours, and there are fewer distractions from the work you do as a performer. I'm not sure if you're traveling with a crew and that might change the discussion. Your circus act has one laser focus: you. The show is intimate, tailored, and directed.

**QUESTION 4:** Can you fill me in on the difference in working alone and working with a bigger team?

It is much easier to improvise alone. I can go as far away from the script for as long as I want as long as it is real and entertaining. However, I am never alone

with my one man show. Backstage I have my wife my wonderful wife (who took all the photos and made the website for the show; Jamieadkins.com and does a whole lot of other things that does not receive applause, but deserves it.) and my beautiful Twenty two month old daughter who is the shows director, or dictator, I'm not sure which.

On stage I am not alone. I have a partner, the audience. The audience and I communicate without words for the entire show and in this way just as every audience is different, every show is different.

**SETUP:** I'm willing to bet that when most Americans think about circuses, they think about big spectacles of parading animals, loads of performers, the big top, all that. Maybe some of that comes from the American need to conglomerate [Ringling, Barnum, Bailey all got together to make The Greatest Show On Earth] or just the American idea that bigger is better. In fact there must be some ways in which Americans relate to your show that are distinctly American. Or maybe not. Maybe the response is universal. You're in the middle of a long performance run in a spectacularly beautiful setting at the Théâtre de la Cité in Paris. And you're well-traveled as a performer, so...

**QUESTION 5:** Are audiences the same the world over? If not, I wonder if you can tell us about ourselves. Don't feel pressure to be nice; this is a good lesson.

I have performed in twenty two different countries. The same show, but differently. Comedy is cultural, every culture has it's own rhythm and sense of humor. The pleasure and challenge for me in each country is to find that magic combination of rhythm, humor, poetry and Wow!

**SETUP:** Performing without words requires a distinct set of skills. These might be different for comedic performers or perhaps the sense of pacing, of drama, of exaggeration for effect, all that might be the same for the dramatic arts overall. I certainly wouldn't know. But when watching clips of your show I'm wondering how one refines one's skills in this regard. I read somewhere that you were influenced by Charlie Chaplin but only through Bugs Bunny which is an amazing thing to say. Cartoons required a particular sort of pacing but they evolved in the time when vaudevillians were still alive. I sometimes think that early cartoons got much of their thrust from vaudeville performance and so it's not surprising that you connect yourself in a line back to vaudeville performers like Chaplin. Your performance includes some clever balancing on a ladder and

this is reminiscent of Chaplin's highwire-monkey-and-ladder routine in *The Circus*. In Vaudeville and in early silent films, the routines are still in service to Narrative and, watching clips of your show, you seem to also follow a narrative thread.

**QUESTION 6:** I'm wondering how you think about narrative and pacing in putting your show together. And even if it shouldn't be too simply summarized, is there a lesson?

Everything has logic. During the show I am confronted with many problems, for which I come up with many solutions. They are just not the solutions that the average sane or intelligent person may come up with and High jinks and hilarity ensue!

**SETUP:** Once upon a time, the arrival of the Circus in town was the first and only time people might see such a spectacle: exotic animals, bizarre sideshows, amazing feats of human effort. Nowadays, if I want to see Jamie Adkins I can go to YouTube, dial up a video, and watch it on my iPhone. But still there is Jamie Adkins' Circus Incognitus, live, on stage, in Paris and in Keene, NH. I'm curious how the accessibility of these images impinges on the impact of a live show. Does the over-saturation of the culture with real and also manufactured sensational experience diminish our capacity for wonder?

**QUESTION 7:** Your show is remarkably low tech and scaled for humans. What effect do you think this has on the audience? Does it change the venues to which you have access (maybe I'd have to ask your agent.)

In the last twelve months I have performed in Los Angeles, on Broadway in NYC, at the Sydney Opera House and Currently at the Teatre de la Ville en Paris. I am very happy to perform at these venues, but I am equally happy to perform in Keene, NH. Once the lights go down in the theater we could be anywhere and isn't that the magic of theater.

I believe the more we are steeped in a high tech digital effect world the more we need real human experiences. I offer in my humble little low tech show a real human experience. For people who may enjoy that, they should come to the Colonial Theatre Sat March 3, 2012 at 2PM.