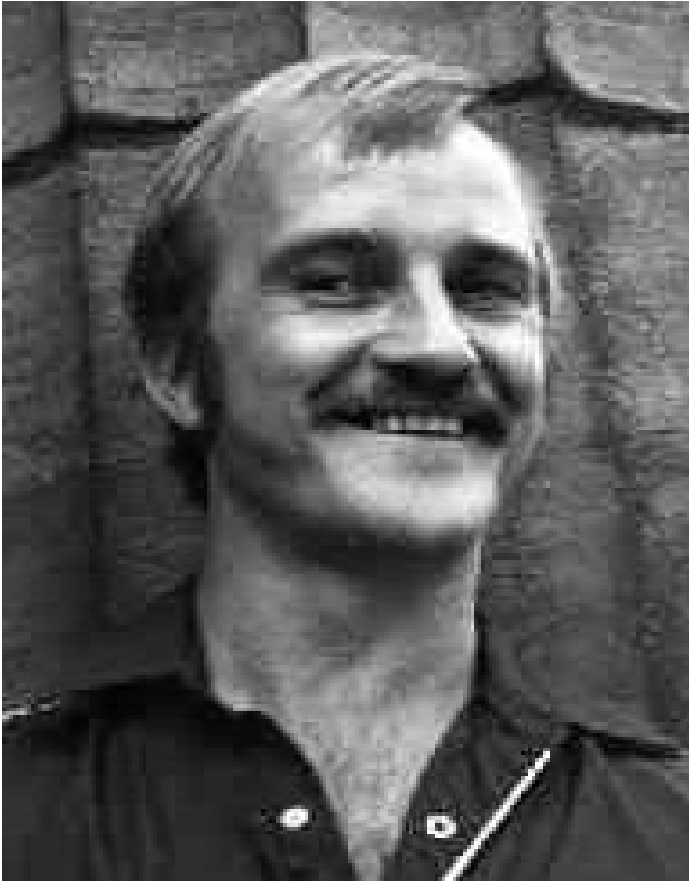


Richard Pochinko and Clown through Mask



Richard Pochinko (1947- 1989)

Richard Pochinko, while studying mask and mime with Jacques LeCog in the 1970's in Paris, became fascinated with clowns.

"We lived across the street from the Cirque d'Hiver. From the window I could see the clowns coming and going and became intrigued with them. I began following circus after circus all over Europe . . . It wasn't just the circus I was following.

"It was something bigger, something to do with the ability to laugh at yourself. I realized that this must be what clowning is all about and got more deeply involved."

In 1972, he returned to Canada but was immediately invited to teach mask work at the University of Washington in Seattle. While in Seattle, he came into contact with his North American Indian, spirit-guide JonSmith.

It has been said to me that JonSmith only visited Richard in his dream state. But his influence is part of the mystery and magic of Richard Pochinko. JonSmith told Richard how ". . . his people had always had clown clans as part of the social make-up of their tribes, and that clowns were revered as powerful shamans, healers, as well as being

delight-makers. . . . They were the ones who kept people in touch with the every day while fulfilling the need for a connection with the sacred. Functioning as social regulators, they had absolute freedom to ridicule whomever they pleased, and whenever the society became too rigid, the clowns were called out to perform their raunchy antics. They would insult and humiliate the chief and the elders in public, to show them that they were only human. They would defy accepted behavior, turn the world topsy-turvy and bring new insight into the truth about Man's place within the order of the universe."

"Then one day, quite abruptly," Pochinko reported, "JonSmith sent me away: *'I'm not going to see you again. Good-bye,'* he said. *'But I'll always be there if you really need me.'* Pochinko continued, ". . . sometime when I'm standing in a class facing a problem, not knowing which of the multiple possible solutions to choose from, I can feel him looking over my shoulder . . . and I hear him giggle."

It is with the native American Indian tradition of honoring the directions that Pochinko developed the search for the inner clown. The results of exploring the six directions: North, South, East West, Sky and Earth all come together to make the direction of the clown which becomes the seventh direction.

Richard Pochinko believed North American Indian clowning to be the highest refinement of the ancient art. "In the American circus," he says, "the clown is not important. What's important is the gag . . . the audience laughs, not at the clown, but at the gag.

"In the European system you're laughing with the character in a situation. . . . But the North American Indians consider the clown to be a holy man; he is the *Messenger of the Gods* - and the gods have an incredible sense of humor."

Richard died of AIDS in 1989, but his tradition lives and gets stronger every year with clowns and within the theater because his work rings with the sounds of pure truth. I am grateful that he lived and I will probably hear Richard giggling in the corner of my workshops, but more likely he'll be snarling at me if I am dishonest. I am also grateful to John Turner for taking the work into his life and sharing it so abundantly and honestly. Richard must giggle for John too!

Please check out thiswebsite for more on the Pochinko method.

<http://www.richardpochinko.com/mask1.html>