

City of Fools: Chicago's Clown Theater Festival

Send in the clowns--but keep the kids away. This festival of clowning features adult-oriented shows by local and visiting artists, along with a "clown jam" and workshops. Running through April 15 and featuring two to three shows a night, it's the first edition of what organizers hope will be an annual event. All performances take place at the Chopin Theatre, 1543 W. Division. Admission is \$10 per show (except where noted otherwise below); a four-admission pass costs \$30. For more information call 312-697-0723.

Following is the performance schedule for April 12 through 15. In addition to these shows, noted director and teacher Sue Morrison will lead a two-day course, "Introduction to Clown Through Mask," on Friday and Saturday from 2 to 6 PM each day at the Actors Gymnasium, Noyes Cultural Arts Center, 927 Noyes, Evanston; call 847-328-2795 to register for this course, which costs \$120.

THURSDAY, APRIL 12

500 Clown Macbeth

This performance by Molly Brennan, Paul Kalina, and festival organizer Adrian Danzig, known collectively as F, finds a trio of clowns performing Shakespeare's "Scottish play" in a low-budget, high-risk production beset by every imaginable mishap. The cast "perform this intensely physical comedy with energy, daring, and grace," says Reader critic Jack Helbig. 7 PM.

Blah Blah Blah

Anthony Courser and Noel Williams offer their new show about a devil and an angel engaged in passive-aggressive games of courtship. "The premise is promising, [and] Williams and Courser have considerable chemistry. But . . . after a while the two seem stuck in variations on the same handful of gags," says Reader critic Jack Helbig. 9 PM.

Clowns in the Vagina

The all-male quartet Asylum 137 (Anthony Courser, Voki Kalfayan, Shaw Nigro, and Jonathan Taylor) present an improvised performance under Sue Morrison's direction. "Clowns in the Vagina has a strong ending, [but] getting to that point is laborious to say the least: the piece goes through a couple of false starts, has no discernible plot, and involves too much unmotivated clowning around," says Reader critic Jack Helbig. 11 PM.

FRIDAY, APRIL 13

Out of My Skin

Canadian performer Shannan Calcutt takes on the persona of Izzy--"a modern clown with modern issues," among them do-it-yourself breast implants and forbidden desire. This one-woman show, a world premiere, includes nudity. 7 PM.

Clowns in the Vagina

See listing for Thursday. 9 PM.

500 Clown Macbeth

See listing for Thursday. 11 PM.

SATURDAY, APRIL 14

If You Don't Have Arms,

You Cannot Surrender

The Theatre Corps presents Rachel Klem and Kelley Ogden in a dark comedy about two revolutionaries imprisoned together. "There are some amazing moments in [this show], especially when . . . Klem and . . . Ogden engage in the kind of gross-out humor women were once believed incapable of. . . . But If You Don't Have Arms could use trimming: less than an hour, it still feels a good quarter hour too long," says Reader critic Jack Helbig. 7 PM.

Out of My Skin

See listing for Friday. 9 PM.

Clown Surprise

This late-night showcase of clown improv features festival participants. 11 PM.

SUNDAY, APRIL 15

If You Don't Have Arms, You Cannot Surrender

See listing for Saturday. 7 PM.

Does This Mean Anything to You?

This piece by Anne Goldman and Alice-Gray Lewis--aka Gerkle and Zetta--is "a strikingly casual, sophisticated, unpretentious combination of vaudeville, physical performance, and character-intensive acting. . . . Goldman and Lewis's rapport [is] deep, their sense of when to break the fourth wall impeccable, and their bits . . . ravishingly well executed. Like Andy Kaufman and Ernie Kovacs, they understand that decontextualized pathos is a surer route to humor than strung-together gags," said Reader critic Brian Nemtusak when he reviewed the show last year. 9 PM.