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Interview with Four Clowns of "Abraham and Isaac" opening today in Brazil

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Poster for the Abraham & Isaac Performance in Brazil
Four Clowns

The following is an interview conducted via email with the Clown Company "Four Clowns" currently in São Paulo performing workshops and creating a performance piece based on the story of Abraham and Isaac from the Bible. The Company is opening their new piece today at the auditorium in the Brazilian Museum of Sculpture (MUBE) in partnership with the Stanislavsky Institute of São Paulo, Brazil. David Bridel is the Playwright and Co-Director of Abraham & Isaac and Associate Director of Four Clowns. Jeremy Aluma is the Co-Director of Abraham & Isaac and Artistic Director of Four Clowns. Jamie Franta, is an actor playing ISAAC in Abraham & Isaac and Company Manager of Four Clowns. Finally, Zach Steel, is the Actor playing ABRAHAM in Abraham & Isaac and a Company Clown in Four Clowns.

For more information about the Four Clowns and their work visit their [website](#). For information about the Stanislavski Institute of São Paulo, Brazil see their [website](#). For information about shows at the Brazilian Museum of Sculpture (MUBE) visit their website [here](#).

Who are the Four Clowns and how did the troupe start?

"Four Clowns is a Los Angeles-based, nationally and internationally touring clown troupe, dedicated to entertaining audiences and shining light on humanity. Four Clowns implements physical theatre, text, music, dance, and the shattering of the fourth wall in all of their productions. Four Clowns is constantly redefining the audience's relationship to the performers on stage."

"Four Clowns formed early in 2010 with the goal of exploring physical theatre and [clowning](#) techniques." [The group took their name from their first show title "Four Clowns"] " developed by director Jeremy Aluma..., and produced at the inaugural Hollywood Fringe Festival where they won Best in Physical Theatre and Dance and was nominated for Best World Premiere, as well as the Bitter Lemons Award for Most Outrageous Theatre

[In 2011, the group] "began a collaboration with influential clown teacher David Bridel," [officially creating the Four Clowns company. A collaboration with Bridel called "Sublimity" with Bridel as the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge premiered in Los Angeles and was invited to the International Drama Festival at the Stanislavski in São Paulo, Brazil.

In 2014 the Company produced "Noah and Jonah" at the Annenberg Beach House, administrated by the City of Santa Monica's Cultural Affairs Division, representing] ' the first stage in an epic cycle of clown plays inspired by stories from the Old Testament." [The company won a grant from the Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of Los Angeles,] " allowing it to take up a residency with the Stanislavsky Institute, " [in San Palo, Brazil.] [There purpose in Brazil, to create the next installment, Abraham and Isaac.]

What drew you to clowning?

JAMIE FRANTA - About five years ago, I was annoyed with more traditional acting and opted to try some alternative forms of performance, and fell in love with clown. I was drawn to the honesty and immediacy it requires, the unadulterated fun, and the freedom it has given me the influences other areas of my

life.

How is your trip to São Paulo fulfilling the mission of Four Clowns?

JAMIE FRANTA - ...Working in São Paulo, we're recognizing how heavily we tend to rely on language in our work, and we're using this opportunity to experiment with communicating story primarily through movement. With the language barrier, we have to improvise material with our Brazilian colleagues that is more physical and less language reliant, with the hope that we'll produce a piece that appeals to a more universal audience.

How extensive is the interaction with the community and how responsive has the people of Brazil been to your Company's endeavors?

DAVID BRIDEL - There is plenty of interaction with the theatrical community of São Paulo, thanks to workshops given by Four Clowns company members hosted by the Stanislavsky Institute, several of which are open to the general public. As a whole, we have found our hosts and all the Brazilians we have encountered to be very welcoming and responsive.

Any culture shock from the Company?

JAMIE FRANTA - We're noticing more cultural similarities than differences.

JEREMY ALUMA - The language barrier has become an asset for our working model. It has allowed us to rely more exclusively on physicality and sound rather than traditional text. This has made the piece of Abraham & Isaac more vibrant and humorous. It's a model we will attempt to duplicate when we return to Los Angeles to work on new material.

Stanislavski Training is not the same as clown training correct? how would you describe the major differences and are you applying both forms of acting to the Abraham story? Are the workshops incorporating one or both styles?

DAVID BRIDEL - The Stanislavski "system" builds a comprehensive approach to building character and creating roles for both comic and dramatic plays; clown training focuses specifically on the presence of the performer and their ability to take risks and interact with a live audience. Our production has been designed with a foundation of clowning, but the work of the Stanislavski Institute has undoubtedly influenced the direction that we have taken in rehearsals. In addition, it is important to say that we are working with three languages - English, Portuguese, and the language of the body. It is the third of these languages that is by far the most important in our process.

The workshops are primarily focused on clown principles and clown training.

Is Abraham and Isaac a work in progress? Improvised?

DAVID BRIDEL - The work has been created exclusively by the team (2 American actors, 2 Brazilian actors, 1 writer-director, 1 co-director) during this rehearsal process. Scenes are at first discussed, then improvised by the actors, shown to the group, discussed again, and crafted by the writer into shape. Then the process begins again. Without improvisation, there would be nothing!

ZACH STEEL - Our show is written by Mr. Bridel through improvisation with the actors which allows the performers to take an active part in carving out their own roles. This eliminates any distance between actor and role as we are creating character and text simultaneously. And because we can't help it, there are moments of audience interaction built in, which means that improvisation will continue even through the performances.

How close is the story to the original without giving spoilers? How much of it is in the style of clowning and how much is derived from other forms of acting?

DAVID BRIDEL - The narrative closely follows aspects of the bible story, although we have been selective in our choice of scenes, in order to keep themes focused and to follow the essential characters on their journeys. However, the style of the performance is expansive and celebratory, and may come as a surprise to many.

JEREMY ALUMA - We tend to look at the traditional text from the Jewish Bible as a starting point with all our stories from the Old Testament project. This is our 3rd installment in the process, our first two, Noah and Jonah were produced at the Annenberg Community House in Santa Monica, CA. After the text is understood and discussed, we begin building improvisations around the plot and ideas of the story. We have also consulted with a Rabbi of mine, Rabbi Adam Greenwald of the American Jewish University on all 3 stories. For Abraham & Isaac, we also consulted with another Rabbi of mine, Rabbi Moshe Greenwald (no relation to the other Rabbi) of the Downtown Los Angeles Chabad Synagogue. We use the text, the analysis from the Rabbis, the improvisations from the actors and our imaginations to create the stories. The heart and moral of the stories are the same as they are in the Bible.

Why the story of Abraham and Isaac? Would a secular audience accept the work? Would a modern audience find it relatable?

DAVID BRIDEL - Abraham and Isaac has fascinated Artistic Director Jeremy Aluma for many years. We believe that a secular audience will certainly accept the play, as it speaks broadly about questions of faith and choice - as modern as they are ancient - and is in no way intended for an exclusively religious demographic. These stories are, after all, the foundations of a great culture.

What will the Los Angeles theatrical Community gain from your efforts in Brazil? Is there a future plan for the work to be seen in Los Angeles? Will the production you create for Los Angeles be different than the one you are currently working on in Brazil?

DAVID BRIDEL - This project is made possible in part by a grant from the City of Los Angeles, Department of Cultural Affairs. We do plan to premier the

work in Los Angeles, although we do not yet have a specific date and time for a presentation. Our favored objective is to bring our colleagues from Brazil to LA to show the work in its original form. We are also in the early stages of discussion about bringing the project back to Brazil for a festival in 2016.

Additionally, the company aims to bring together all of its Old Testament pieces, under one roof, for a huge Old Testament celebration, at a future time.

Considering the amount of religious strife in the world, do you see this play as crossing borders? Would people in other communities relate to your production?

DAVID BRIDEL - We do believe that this particular production is well suited to audiences in many parts of the world. It has been created by actors who speak different languages; as a result, it is especially physical and tells story through body-language and gesture, making it highly accessible. In addition, there is a commonality to the themes of faith, obedience, choice and love that can be understood by anyone and everyone. Yes, the world is torn by religious strife, but this is a story of human beings struggling with each other and their understanding of God, and it is intended to bring audiences together, not to separate them.

There is a video aspect to your work in Brazil? Who is involved with the taping of your efforts and what are the final objectives for the taping? Will this be in a Theater, online, Festivals?

DAVID BRIDEL - The Stanislavski Institute is paired with the Latin American Film Institute (the two organizations are one), and team-members from the LAFI are taping rehearsals, workshops, interviews, and the final performance in order to cut together a short film about our time here. The film will be available through YouTube.

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Laura Tull

LA Performing Arts Examiner

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