

INTERVIEW



CLOWNING AROUND

Laugh-a-minute street entertainer Pedro Tochas, tells us about his award-winning show

WHY ARE YOU CALLED THE SCULPTURE CLOWN?

Because my show is about sculpturing images. I use balloon sculptures to make props for the show, a flower, a sword, a cell phone, a violin and a hairdryer. They're all blown up live on stage. I don't do any props beforehand. I just create them in the moment, that's where the idea came from.

HOW DID YOU GET INTO MIME?

It's more physical theatre actually. I was doing street shows and in that business you either talk really loudly or you don't talk at all. In the beginning I was a bit shy so I decided not to talk and instead to tell the stories just with my body, with my expressions. I realised if I didn't talk I could do the show all around the world. That's why I decided to do a physical theatre show just with sounds, so it's not really mime because I use sounds.

WHERE DID YOU TRAIN?

I went to Circomedia in England. I also trained at Celebration Barn in the US and I do workshops to some improve areas.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FESTIVAL AND WHY?

I really like Edinburgh Fringe Festival, it's the biggest festival in the world, there are 800 shows a day. It's massive. The artists can talk with you and share ideas, opportunities and concepts. It's great, I love it and it's so much fun. The Edinburgh festival is also the first major one I went to. But there are also other good ones. There's one in Christchurch, New Zealand, it's very good. There is one in Canada in Edmonton, there's also one in Fremantle, Australia that is very good. There is just so much going on, it's good to be part of it.

WHAT'S YOUR BACKGROUND?

I was studying chemical engineering and I wanted to be a chemical engineer. There's nothing to do with performance in my family, they're Portuguese working class people. I went to university to study chemical engineering and I'd never done shows when I was young. I just studied and played video games, like a normal kid. When I was at

university I discovered shows and performing and thought 'woah this is really good fun'. I also think I saw a movie about a street performer travelling all around the world and wanted to do it, that was the beginning.

WHO ARE YOUR HEROES/HEROINES?

I like silent movies, they're my inspiration for this show – so Chaplin, Buster Keaton. Then I like some modern comedians, British ones I like are Dylan Moran and Daniel Keaton. For my street show I get inspiration from traditional circus and silent movies.

WHAT'S THE FESTIVAL CIRCUIT LIKE, YOU'VE BEEN DOING IT FOR 15 YEARS NOW?

Yes, I've been a performer that long. I started in Portugal and have been performing around the world for about seven years. It's fun because you go and you meet different people, different cultures and you can travel. You don't make much money, but you can still travel and not spend much money. Nowadays that's great because everything's so expensive and to be able to go around the world and go to places I would never go to is amazing. If I was an engineer then I'd only have two or three weeks off a year, but this way I can have six months away from my country, meet lots of interesting people and make people laugh all around the world. I think it's great.

SO HOW OFTEN DO YOU CHANGE YOUR ACT?

Well my motto is I don't change the show, I change the crowds! I've been doing this show for four years now, but in street terms it's not that long because there are so many people in so many places I haven't been to. I think a street show can last, some people do the same show for ten years because the thing is there are so many places you can go. Sometimes you go somewhere and the crowd says 'do your show again' because they want their friends to see the performance. In Portugal I do other kinds of shows, I do Portuguese talking shows and those are the ones I change more because my country's small. There are only ten million people in Portugal, so I have to change it. But when you do a street show that works, you can

use it for a long time because there are so many places you haven't been to yet. This is my first time in Dubai and how many people have seen this show so far maybe 3,000-4,000 and how many people live here?

HOW DO YOU PERFORM TO A MIDDLE EASTERN AUDIENCE?

There are a couple of changes, but there are changes in every country you go to because there is always a different culture and some different things that you can play with. I just changed a couple of things, because I try to make it work all around the world. That was my goal, that I can make a show and go anywhere in the world and make people laugh. I want to prove that comedy is a universal subject like love and bad and good, people can relate to that all around the world. There were a lot of children in the audience but even if there are children, people see things on different levels. People see the joke and it's a visual thing and kids take it in one way and adults in another way. Most of the show is the same. It's a bit more contained, there are fewer flirting bits. I can flirt a bit more in Europe than here, so I just tone it down a bit, not change it, but tone it down.

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE DUBAI CROWD?

It's been great. I notice that people are not used to this sort of show, it's very interactive and they're used to just watching. It's been wonderful and they want to see the next show and they tell me 'my friends told me to see this show' and stuff like that, so the reaction has been really good, I've been really impressed. I didn't know what to expect actually, I had no expectations whatsoever.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO COME BACK TO DUBAI?

Yeah, sure I'd like to come back, if there's work, it's my job. I had a good time, so I'd definitely come back if they hire me.

ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SAY TO THE READERS?

Check out my website, www.pedrotochas.com. There will be photos from Dubai. *