

What is a clown?

by Eileen Mulderry

We all know the clown is the funny man in the circus. The first time I experienced Giovanni Zoppé as “Nino” my definition deepened. A dozen shows later, I understand the first recorded witness to a clown dated 2270 BC. A young Egyptian pharaoh who said a clown is a “divine spirit to rejoice and delight the heart”.

As easily as breathing the Italian gentleman takes a back seat, as the old soul that is “Nino” emerges. A soul that in a past life likely performed in another century on the cobblestone streets of Italy. A spirit holding onto the Old World while dancing in the new, he gifts every audience with ageless heartwarming comedy.

Was it coincidence or a perfect universe that set Giovanni Zoppé’s birthplace in Chicago in the parking lot of the Bozo the Clown studio? A twist of fate or part of God’s plan that put him back in that lot on his tenth birthday, where Bozo invited him to be the star clown for the day? A divine spirit? That Italian clown?



When you see him hold a child in the ring, listen carefully. You will hear angels singing.

There is an intensity about “Nino” that defies modern passivity. Like a porpoise frolicking in the sea he spreads happiness around the tent. Whether playing in the ring, airborne across the big top or popping up in the bleachers, he delights the audience with every move.

A man who hides behind a mask yet wears his heart on his sleeve, “Nino” represents the best that life has to offer. A link to history, unbridled passion and an invitation to laugh and love freely. “Nino” must be a divine spirit. What else but a miracle explains how a character who looks homeless and hungry, who is both deep and silly can create so much joy in the hearts of strangers?