

IAF report from Brittany Plummer

A huge thanks to the Independent Arts Foundation, with the help of your Professional Development Grant I was able to study Second Year Clown with the 'Master of Clown' Philippe Gaulier at his school in Étampes, France.

It was an incredibly rewarding experience, and a very challenging 10 weeks. To be truly vulnerable and make the audience laugh every 7 seconds is not a piece of cake; the same audience every day. We never stopped finding new ways to surprise our audience. I sprouted about 50 new grey hairs! Insomnia with clown numbers going round and round in my head, costume changes – I went from a 'scarecrow' to a 'French woman in her house'. I was banned from smiling, for about two weeks classmates were asked, *"Do you want to be bad like Br Br Br Britt?"* Philippe is famous for being a harsh critic. Eventually you drop the every day masks, and something shifts. Philippe says, *"if you can find seven beautiful things every day then you can be a clown"*. I went through something very special with my classmates, my dear friends which continues to blossom.

There is a certain freedom that studying clown with Philippe unleashes for a performer. The ability to enter the stage and allow the impulse to be with your audience influence everything you do. To not be afraid to flop, the flop is the clown's best friend. The clown lives for the audience, the idiot who dreams to save the show. The clown wants us to believe that something great is coming always. Philippe helps each actor find his or her way own way of being funny and surprising. The most important thing is to have pleasure! We played with different exercises and scenarios, pairings of clowns, accents, and every Friday we would present clown numbers to be part of a show at the end of the term. If the audience laughed a lot then they became part of the list. We then had to present these numbers again to Philippe and our classmates in week 9, if we were funny we would perform in the show. Many lost their magic and didn't make the cut. The pieces that evolved and continued to surprise the audience in new ways, getting big laughs - survived. Then the show in the final week was another test, suddenly a new full audience of the general public. It was wonderful to have new people to play to. Each night after the show we would meet Philippe and numbers that didn't get laughs were cut for the next day. He was ruthless.

As soon as we remove the every day masks when we walk on the stage and show our beautiful humanity and pleasure to be there; we are loved by our audience. As Philippe says, *"When we see your will to be good you are horrible but when we see your pleasure to have fun and be with your audience then you are good. We don't play with the will we play with the fantasy"*. I believe that this work can be carried in to every element of theatre. The clown has a wonderful spirit and desire to play for the audience and so should the actor. This is a pleasure we miss sometimes on the stage. I am very excited to share this work with Adelaide audiences.

Please see next page for photographs.



Brittany with Philippe



Brittany with Armando (a classmate)



Brittany with Francesco (a classmate)



The class