

ARTFORUM

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Neal Medlyn



Wicked Clown Love is the sixth work in Neal Medlyn's ongoing series of performances based around pop stars. Prior pieces have considered recording artists such as Lionel Richie, Phil Collins, and Britney Spears; his latest component builds on the music and culture of Insane Clown Posse. The show, which features design by Madeline Best (lighting), Kathleen Hanna (set), and Larry Krone (costume), will have its premiere at The Kitchen in New York from February 2 to 4.

THE ANNUAL GATHERING of the Juggalos takes place in the middle of absolutely nowhere—a corner of the woods on the Ohio River in Cave-In-Rock, Illinois. It's a three-hour drive from the nearest airport, in Nashville. There're no lights at night; it's totally dark. Every day ends with wrestling matches and concerts. Flavor Flav was the host one night, Charlie Sheen another. It's kind of like Burning Man or Lollapalooza, but completely lawless.

The Gathering is put together by Insane Clown Posse and their label, Psychopathic Records. The crazy thing about Insane Clown Posse is that they're completely self-generated, totally independent. The Gathering has no sponsorship. The Juggalos wander around selling things among themselves.

Juggalos are marginalized in this way that they're kind of scary. Not mean, necessarily; I feel like the guys who are *actually* mean are the ones that show up at Lollapalooza and you're just standing there, and they come up and punch you in the back of the head and just laugh. Juggalos are into negativity as an energy, as a creative force. I've been reading a lot about katabasis and Simone Weil and

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decreation, and there's a lot of that in *Wicked Clown Love*.

We do quite a few Insane Clown Posse songs in the show, but I've redone all of the music, mixing it together with other cultural material about masculinity. I've included samples of these conflicted, sensitive, intense male singers, like Dan Fogelberg, the Mountain Goats, T. Rex, and Phil Collins. Robert Bly plays a large role too. He started this movement called the Mythopoetic Men's Movement, where men would have gatherings and talk about their feelings. I saw a resonance between these "gatherings" and the Gathering of the Juggalos. These things end up being filters. I just *push* everything through that, and it becomes this other world.

I know people think my work is ironic. That's not really my approach at all. I try to maintain the integrity of the source material. Otherwise I don't get to the place that I want to get to, of creating a space around this stuff and around the people who are in it and the people who are watching it. If there are too many escape hatches, then I'm not satisfied.

I grew up Pentecostal, in Texas, in a very small town. My great-great-grandfather was a preacher and my great-grandfather was a traveling preacher. Rock 'n' roll, hip-hop, and R & B secularized that kind of religious, charismatic presentation. There are some parts in this show when I feel like I'm serving in this preacherly role, doing this presentation that will help the audience understand the Dark Carnival.

The Dark Carnival is the container for Insane Clown Posse's mythology. There are different characters represented by joker cards, which are also "exhibits" in that carnival. There's the Amazing Jeckel Brothers, for example, who juggle flaming balls. It's supposed to be a metaphor about life, about how the world really sucks. There's this extreme morality play. So if you're really bad, like you're a child abuser or a rapist, then you're going to be killed by the Great Milenko.

People have made concept records and it's very tidy and there's one idea. But for a band to spend basically fifteen years on one seven-disk-long concept record, I mean, who does that? And who does that in the world of rap? And regional rap? Detroit-based, evil-clown-rapping, concept records. That's fucking wild.

— *As told to David Velasco*

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