

But, seriously, laughter is a lovely sound

Key to the Door Weekly

August 8, 2012

By Stewart Dawson

People don't take me seriously. Entirely my fault, I suppose. Ever since I was very little and became the laughing stock of the first-grade Christmas pageant when my Frosty the Snowman costume malfunctioned, I have always thought it was fun to try to make people laugh.

Consequently, no one takes me seriously even when I'm trying to be. Or perhaps (and I'm serious about this) it's because I don't wear glasses. I've noticed that people who wear glasses are much more likely to command attention and be heard. I guess they just look more intellectual.

But, seriously, I think I'm just a big buffoon. I know this isn't going to sound like a story about American Folklore Theatre, but, trust me, it is, sort of. I'll get around to it.

Last week, as part of a trip back from my other home in Albuquerque, I had to get up at 4 a.m. to catch a plane to Chicago, then got on a train to Milwaukee. I had been suffering from some very serious shoulder pain that had plagued my entire time in Albuquerque.

So I was in physical misery, very sleepy and quite cranky when I boarded the train. I was looking forward to a nice little clickety-clack, toot-toot nap.

Just as I was dozing off, I was jolted awake by the obnoxious, annoying, loud giggling of a little girl somewhere near behind me. I quietly thought a really bad word. Her incessant noise continued, and I knew nap time was probably over. Now I was really cranky. I turned around to give her my serious look. She was giggling too much to notice me.

It was then that I glanced around the rest of the train car and discovered that I was the only white guy there. Of course it made no difference to me, nor should it make a difference to anyone, but I was amused by this, and it distracted me.

The little girl continued giggling. Apparently something on her computer was very funny. My serious look disappeared and my bad thought-word evaporated. Her laughter was altering my mood. As I snuck back around, I began to think about two things.

The first thing was, before I turned to glare with that mean look, I hadn't put a face on the laughter. Genuine glee knows no color. The second thing was, her laughter was turning my pain to undiluted joy. This world desperately needs more children laughing. How truly sad, that at that moment, it was annoying me so.

It was just then that the guy pushing the concession cart entered the car, hawking soft drinks and snacks -- and wearing an inflatable pink flamingo on his head. This was perfect. The little girl went into hysterics along with everyone else. When he left, I said, really loud, "We're on the funny train!" Again, more laughter. All of this was way better than the restless nap I would have had.

And then she fell asleep. I sat there contemplating how lilting and musical and beautifully Zen this moment had been. This world is preoccupied with murderous rage. I was annoyed by a child's laughter. Then I realized how lovely that sound really was.

I work for American Folklore Theatre in the serious, unfunny, noisy and hidden position of building sets. Table saws, chop saws, saber saws and other various, loud, evil machines are all trying seriously hard, behind the scenes, to cut my fingers off (not funny).

But AFT creates some very funny shows and strives to be taken seriously. Even when it does ridiculous, yet seriously thought-provoking shows like my very favorite, "Belgians in Heaven," which stars an invisible, talking chicken who lays a

real egg. Her name is Mildred. How beautiful. I'm sure she is distantly related to an inflatable pink flamingo.

Next time you hear a child laughing, please (and I am dead serious) savor the moment. Within the human condition, there is no sound more delightful.



Stewart Dawson is the head carpenter for American Folklore Theatre.