

Dimitri, the poetic clown

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1973)**

Heft 1674

PDF erstellt am: **12.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691939>

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DIMITRI, THE POETIC CLOWN

Dimitri whose real name is Jakob Mueller, toured for the first time with Knie's Circus in 1970. The Circus entertains Municipal Councillors and Federal Councillors once a year at a gala performance. Dimitri expressed a wish to appear at Knie's every two or three years, and thus the Circus was honoured again in 1973 with the presence of this internationally known artist. Clearly, Dimitri was this year's star of the Swiss National Circus.

One evening in 1942, the public laughed at the antics of Clown Andreff in Locarno. Amongst the young spectators was a boy of seven, Jakob Mueller, who swore that very evening that he, too, would become a clown.

Having shown an interest in the talent of Andreff at a very early age, he soon discovered a funny vein in himself. He tried to entertain his friends and his parents and found he succeeded. The parents never objected to their son's wish to become a clown. But they demanded that he should train for a proper occupation. Thus the young Ticinese completed an apprenticeship as a potter in Berne. At the same time, he studied music at the Conservatoire, acrobatics and ballet. Next he went to Paris and studied the art of miming with Etienne Decroux, teacher of Jean-Louis Barrault and Marceau. He also studied under Marceau. Then he became a student of "Bip's" father and later joined his group. For a time, he did circus work with Clown Maisee.

But Dimitri who excels above all in his miming, prefers not to use words. He does not appreciate talkative clowns, which did not hinder him, however, to accord his unqualified admiration to Grock and Charlie Rivel. *"Our supreme master, though, is Chaplin whom I give pride of place. I also greatly admire Marceau who influenced me considerably."*

Although Dimitri uses few words, he can surprise his public with incredible expressions – sounds, one had better call them. Those who believe they can understand some of these words in Basle dialect, are quite mistaken. This incredible gibberish really makes no sense. Dimitri proceeds like a small toddler who tries to imitate words he has heard. A nice confusion which delights many spectators evening after evening.

The question arises: Why are artists who make other people laugh, often moody and of a delicately balanced nervous system? Dimitri tells everyone that he is not of a gloomy disposition. With him, optimism always prevails, though this does not necessarily mean that he is never sad or melancholy. On the contrary, Dimitri often has such moments. But when he is a clown – and what a clown! – one notices nothing of all that. All his performances are filled with an indefinable charm which only he can radiate. To prove this, the scene of the "Moon Fisher" suffices, one of his most brilliant ideas.

One other thing, Dimitri adores children. He himself is father of five (his eldest is already too old to take part in his "Family Number"). *"I should not be a real clown if I didn't love children."* One must be careful, however, for to be successful with a very young public does not necessarily mean that one is a good clown. To work in front of children means to completely alter one's entertainment. That is probably why it is so difficult to conquer the public at the Knie Circus, for it consists of numerous children whose reactions are very different from those of adults. *"The ideal audience is a mixed crowd, with people from all social classes, of varying education and of every age. That is a public which 'responds'."*

Dimitri lives in the Ticino with his



family. Apart from his engagements with the Knie Circus, he has taken part in various international mime festivals, for instance in Berlin, Zurich and Prague. In 1971, he opened his own theatre at Verscio, and in 1972, he gave several guest appearances in various towns.

If Dimitri could start afresh, he would, without hesitation, make the same choice all over again. *"I should again become a clown, but I would try to do everything even better."*

This confirms that the success achieved through great perseverance, has not turned Dimitri's head, and that he tries to reach the same perfection he admired so much in Grock. This is a further reason for loving and admiring Dimitri.

Excerpt from the Tribune de Genève

Alain Buholzer