

Ginevra Sanguigno

Let's Go!

Journeys with the red nose of a clown, a travelling clown, a joy and peace bearer, as the traveller in whom I believe, the traveller I would always like to be. A traveller who "would like to die on the road", as the eighty-five year old woman traveller whom we met on the Transiberian railroad confessed.

I have always thought that travel was the necessary condition for me to understand, to find, to get lost and to find myself again: in order not to leave, not to be dependent, not to have attachment, in the Buddhist sense. In order to ponder about everything, to understand better the love I feel for my partner, to rediscover my roots and my family. In order to meet brothers and sisters, and fathers, mothers, lovers, children; to enlarge my threshold of perception, to touch on my limits and leave again. In order to go into the absolute void and then fill it, to rediscover the sense in things, in the choice of making theatre, in the deep and true meaning.

And yet I am not convinced. Still, I am not. I am neither fish nor fowl, only an actress, dancer, tumbler, serenade player. I am all of this. This I can say, at the age of forty-five, after travelling for twenty years and still on the road. I would leave tomorrow, if you were to say, "Let's go!" I would set off once again, the bag on my shoulder that makes me feel good, with a spare pair of shoes for rainy days hanging from the bag. And with a piece of plastic big enough for when it rains if you find yourself in a station, waiting for a train that doesn't exist. More and more coloured dresses and costumes travel with me now, and just a few normal clothes.

I remember waiting in the railway station in Japan to catch the cheapest train - hours of waiting - and somebody comes and asks me where I am from and in the end I understand as I have been asked hundreds of times and I answer: "Watashiwa Itaria jin desu". Happy, they go to the drink dispenser and get me a hot coffee and then: "Bye-bye kioskete kudasai, sayonara".

Children stare at us in the villages. Some of them think that my partner Italo is a devil because he has got a long nose like some of the Japanese Tengu masks representing demons that drive spirits away, probably made to look like the first foreigners ever seen there. We are people with long



noses - *gajin*, foreigners, demons - and they throw stones at us. Then, fortunately, I am almost mistaken for a Japanese woman. Actually, when we arrive in Hokkaido they take me for an Ainu (the native population of Japan) and they speak Japanese to me, I pretend I understand and inside myself I am happy to look like one of them. They are wonderful people who are disappearing like the Native American Indians.

Then the women invite me to the sacred ceremony of salmon, to dance with them after cleaning the fish. It is a job that disgusts everybody, but it is necessary in order to make friends with the women. I put my hands inside the stomach of I don't know how many salmon, I remove the guts, I clean and open them up. At the end my hands stink for three days, but I have made friends with the women who invite me to dance and teach me the steps of the *tsuru* (heron).

We sing for the dead Ainu, killed by the Japanese. They make an altar before a wonderful landscape of endless nature and woods and a gloomy, deep song is sung so the dead can hear it and rest in peace. Then the spirits fly through the *inao* (frayed birch sticks, each fringe is a spirit) and I am moved as if I were singing a funeral song for someone dear to me. And I stick close to these nice people whose dearest goods are continuously insulted: the land, the spirits of nature, their culture.

When I travelled to China I had an expectation of an ancient and mysterious culture. What confronted me at first was vulgarity, confusion and blind foolishness, until I managed to see what I could not see behind the screen. It is rare and not much, but it is there full of light and transparent beauty.

I see it through Chi Gong exercises at five or six in the morning, before the whole city of Peking wakes up. Hundreds of people crowd the parks and sing, dance, hug trees. I

see it during the Peking Opera performances: the extraordinary skill of their artists, their precision and concentration leave me breathless.

Once again travel shakes my anticipation. We always make plans for our lives, for what to expect or not expect, and suddenly travel - which is a way to the highest and greatest perception - throws us into *chaos* again. I remember George Gurdjieff's book *Meetings with Remarkable Men* and René Daumal's *Mount Analogue* and Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines*. We are building a new planetary tribe that has roots in the air and communicates through songs, stories, theatre and e-mail.

And more: Bali, the school with masters like I Made Djimat and the expert and elderly Sang Ayu Ketut Muklen (first the money for the lesson, then the lesson). Every day I go to study with some master, but in between is the road and what I experience on a bicycle going from one place to the other. The people who see me every day, after a while greet me and ask me about my life, my country. I sow a seed there and that seed will travel, I am sure of it. I remember the children (some of them run after me when I pass by on my bike), the heat, the flowers, the smells, the good and comforting food, the friends who come from all over the world, the candle-lit evenings talking about crystals and other precious things that lie beneath the Balinese soil giving magic and magnetism to the place.

Our special friend and master Cristina Wistari tells us that the old masks - those used a lot in the dances where performers fall into trance - move by themselves. I do not know whether to believe it or not, but this is not the question, everything is in its proper and natural dimension: the dream is confused with true reality.

A good question: what is true reality?

Perhaps it depends on where we are geographically and where we live and how. In Bali true reality is dream and trance and that which we call supernatural is intertwined and exists as part of people's daily lives.

And again in Japan where I study with a Japanese master and live on a farm where everybody is both farmer and performer. I wake up at 5.30 in the morning and go to the fields and then there is the dance training and improvisation and again work in the house and in the fields.

The master follows me and says: "Reach your limit! Do not spare yourself! What is your true limit?" And I do not understand why I have to work so hard in order to understand where my limit is. But little by little, after six years going back and forth to Japan, it happens. I feel really changed in my perception of things, and I see leaves moving in the wind (it is not a miracle, but before I

did not see or notice them) and I slip inside their movement and I am moved by all this.

I think it is also thanks to myself, not only my master. But I love Min Tanaka very much, although I have suffered and sweated so much, and I cannot help loving him even though he never replies to my postcards; and I will keep on writing to him, whenever I see a beautiful sunset.

And still more journeys for solidarity and aid: to Nepal, Pakistan, Romania, Brazil, Russia. Journeys with the red nose of a clown, a travelling clown, a joy and peace bearer, as the traveller in whom I believe, the traveller I would always like to be. A traveller who "would like to die on the road", as the eighty-five year old woman traveller whom we met on the Transiberian railroad confessed.

I feel like those wandering souls that never find peace, but if I stop and listen I like this way of being. It is stimulating, alive



Ginevra Sanguigno at an orphanage in Siberia Photo: Mauro Minozzi

and it gives essential nourishment. So I have chosen to become a travelling clown, as a way of life and of living my way of making theatre. Clowns are healers despite themselves and they are aware of mending, cementing, helping and curing.

August 2001: the latest travel with the clowns to Ulan Ude, on lake Baikal, in Siberia. We are the first clowns to enter a youth prison. The game consists of breaking established roles, but the shaven headed boys are intimidated by the guards and don't want to play at first.

The official salute to the foreign group of clowns begins in the courtyard. I penetrate the ranks with a military step keeping the beat with my red nose. A boy laughs and the others show their crooked and black teeth in approval and they laugh too. The prison director laughs. Perhaps something permeates the walls of the prison. We leave soon after, but something stays and will remain there for who knows how long.

I travel in time and memory to an orphanage outside Ulan Ude. I see little girls with chiffon ribbons in their hair and white stockings, little boys with berets like workers, an excitement in the air as crisp as fried chips. They have never seen clowns! They look like frightened deer, they touch me; the smallest of them smell me and even lick my nose. The small arms hug, feel, explore and don't want to let go. I improvise a small scene with one of the children.

The laughter is like a river or like small clear torrents. A fizzy fresh joy and a feeling of deep beauty fill me and I would like never to leave again. I feel like the greatest clown and the most satisfied actor in the world.

I continue this way, with love as my

motor and fuel. This way convinces me. Finally I will prepare a show to narrate all of this, doing the same as storytellers and street performers did. I greet all those who travel with the body and mind, all those who are, in their way, searching, loving and sowing seeds: hallo and good-bye!

Translated from Italian by Maria Ficara

GINEVRA SANGUIGNO (Italy) is an actor, mime artist and clown. She graduated from the Theatre Academy of Milan and then travelled to India, Indonesia and Japan, where she studied dance, theatre and cleansing rituals. Since 1997 she has been a travelling clown with Patch Adams, Teatro Proskenion and the international network Linea Trasversale. In 2000, she founded Clown One Italy. In Italy, she is a hospital ward clown in collaboration with the Fondazione Garavaglia for the Doctor Smile activities.