

Synopsis of *Humor Abuse*

Humor Abuse was developed during a residency at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in 2008 before premiering in March 2009 at New York City Center under the auspices of Manhattan Theatre Club. The play received OBIE, Drama Desk, Outer Critics Circle, and Lucille Lortel awards. A.C.T. is producing *Humor Abuse* in association with Seattle Repertory Theatre, where it opened in October 2011.

Synopsis

Lorenzo Pisoni begins his one-man clown show by confessing to the audience that he is not very funny. Growing up the youngest member of San Francisco's Pickle Family Circus, he played the straight man to his father, Pickle cofounder Larry Pisoni, who was known for his clown persona, Lorenzo Pickle. It was a setup that left him with a lot of borrowed routines and more than a little psychological baggage.

Out of that baggage—both literal and metaphorical—come photographs, costumes, comical and acrobatic routines, and the story of a childhood that was as difficult as it was delightful. Lorenzo reenacts the relentless exercises his father made him practice as a child: tripping on command, falling down flights of stairs, juggling. Lorenzo was six when his father presented him with a contract. "I don't want to take away your childhood," he remembers his father saying. "But if you sign, it means that you must do every single show." He signed.

Lorenzo also pays homage to his father, the consummate clown, who never missed a chance to make a situation funny. He recounts his life during the heyday of the Pickle Family Circus, from his stage debut at age two to his parents' divorce and his father's departure from the circus, which was foreshadowed by a series of less-than-humorous events that changed the way Lorenzo saw his father. Lorenzo continued to tour with the Pickles after his father left, but as he developed his own acts, he always felt his father's absence and never thought his performances lived up to his father's legacy.

Lorenzo reunited with Larry later in their careers. Because of an injury, however, Larry was forced to stop performing. The end of his father's career as a clown also concludes Lorenzo's own show.

OPPOSITE A Pickle family portrait: (left to right) Gypsy Snider, Peggy Snider, Lorenzo Pisoni, and Larry Pisoni (as Lorenzo Pickle).