

Clown grows into night-life star

By LOUISE SNIDER

"I wanted to do something serious with the clown," said Howard Buten, and he did.

Howie, as he likes to be called, created "a musical circus clown who metamorphosed into Buffo." Buffo and his accompanist, Robbie Fischer, opened Tuesday at the Raven Gallery in Southfield.

A clown act is not the usual type of Raven attraction, but then Buffo is not your ordinary, slapstick, fall-down clown.

"Buffo demands an attentive audience," explained Howie. "In the course of a concert, Buffo takes the audience through all the emotions."

AS BUFFO, Howie sings, mimes, dances, draws, plays eight instruments and turns on his audience to a whole range of feelings: Funny, sad, serious, romantic, comic.

Robbie, the musician-composer accompanist, wrote the music for Buffo's act. He plays piano, organ and guitar during the performance.

Both Robbie and Howie are earnest, sincere young men. They grew up in Detroit and graduated

from Cooley High School, Robbie in 1967, Howie in 1968.

Howie attended the University of Michigan. After two years he "ran away to join the circus." His next classroom was the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Clown College in Venice, Fla.

UPON "GRADUATION," Howie spent two seasons with Circus Bartok, a one-ring tent circus that toured the eastern states. It folded in 1972, and Howie came back to Detroit. Saturday mornings he appeared in WXYZ's "Super Circus" kiddie show on Channel 7.

When Howie returned to Detroit, he and Robbie renewed their long friendship which had begun in elementary school.

Robbie had been struggling to develop his own career as a musician, composer and songwriter. He played with a rock and roll band for two years while attending Wayne State University. Then he left Wayne to give full time to his musical career.

Howie and Robbie put their talents together to develop Buffo's concert act.

"The clown in pure emotion physicalized," Howie said.

WHEN PAT Paulsen saw the Buffo performance at the Raven Gallery last April, he was impressed enough to put them in touch with his agent. Consequently, they played The Ice House in Pasadena, Calif., and auditioned for the Johnny Carson "Tonight" show.

Howie's idea of a clown is not

the conventional American notion that relegates a clown to children's entertainment. He sees the clown more in "the European tradition of an artist."

Buffo is an important part of Howie's life, but so are other things. He cares about his writing and his humanity. Howie works as a volunteer three days a week at the Children's Orthogenic Center in Detroit.

"I want to try to remain a human being in a very inhumane system," he says.

HOWIE BUTEN and Robbie Fischer are both serious, socially conscious, ethical artists. They are concerned about honesty and fully developing their own talents. They are concerned about some of the unsavory practices in show business which deny these goals to artists of integrity.

Looking at history

Children's Theatre International of New York brings "Arrows to Atoms," a live look at American history, to the Detroit Institute of Arts YOUTHTEATRE, Saturday at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Using mime, music, dialogue and dance, "Arrows to Atoms" portrays certain events of American history with a warmth and humor that points up the "humanness" of historical figures.

RECOMMENDED For young people ages seven to 14 (children under five years of age will not be admitted). "Arrows to Atoms" employs three actors, using oversized multi-colored hats contrast-

ing their traditional mime costumes and make-up, to create 28 characters from American history.

Children's Theatre International has won a national reputation for excellence in producing original theatre for children. The company tours nationally and has appeared on Broadway.

Tickets for "Arrows to Atoms" are available from the Art Institute's Ticket Office. For further information, phone the YOUTH-TEATRE at 832-2730.



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