

## **CULTUREWORKS, INC.**

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### **ARTISTIC PROFILE**

#### **BRIAN SHAPIRO**

Originally from Los Angeles, California, Brian Shapiro has lived and performed in San Francisco, New York City, and Austin. Influenced by performers Spalding Gray, Anna Deavere Smith, Karen Finley, choreographers Pina Bausch, Bill T. Jones, musicians John Coltrane, Bob Marley, and Mark Dresser, he individually and collaboratively develops theatrically-based interdisciplinary performances with crisp, continuous transitions and mutable relationships between performers and audience members.

In 1995, Brian received his MA in Communication/Performance Studies (San Francisco State University) with the solo performance, *American's On Line*. Based upon research interviews he conducted about the impact of computerized technologies on human interaction, Brian performed selected interview segments by embodying the interviewer's vocal and physical characteristics.

Having moved to Austin in 1997 to pursue a Ph.D. in Performance Studies, Brian participated in performances by legendary Performance Artist Linda Montano and studied with former Merce Cunningham dancer and choreographer Deborah Hay. Brian also received The University of Texas Majorie Davission Parker 1997-98 Award for Excellence in Performance. It was during this period Brian began developing autobiographical performances to examine cultures impact on behavior and perception.

In 1999, inspired by the writings of anthropologist Edward T. Hall, religious scholar Huston Smith, and ethno-botanist Terence McKenna, Brian founded CultueWorks, an innovative educational performance group. CultureWorks generates original interdisciplinary performances that investigate how culture influences perception and behavior. CultureWorks initial performance was the critically acclaimed, *And You Come From Where?* ("A must see." -Austin American Statesman, 1999). A series of vignettes including a personal narrative, an Eastern European migration tale, and a West African myth about the origin of white people, a good-natured but culturally ignorant parent visits his children's classroom and unexpectedly takes a crash course in intercultural communication. To tell this story, Brian collaborated with Austin musicians Steve Marcum and Barbara Manson to develop movements synchronized with text and original music.

Influenced by the music and themes associated with Trinidad's Carnival, *Play Mas: Carnival Americano* (2000) was a collaboration with several Austin community members to explore the fractured relationship between sexual expression and dominant American cultural values. The performers worked independently and together, generating multiple interpretations of the Carnival experience. Several times in the show, audience members were invited to jump on stage and joined in this celebration of sexuality.

Brian moved to New York in Spring 2001 and developed *8.46 Half Day + Tax*, a collaboration with dancers Graceanne Dorse, Rebekah Davidson, and Abby Dehnert. *8.46* examined the costs, difficulties, and rewards of unearthing beauty in highly urbanized settings, and premiered at HERE in Manhattan. Audience members participated by answering questions performers asked, and the answers, written on cards, were strewn across the stage to inform improvised movements.

From the wake of the World Trade Center attacks, Brian created and performed the solo dance *Whoa Nelly!*, which premiered at *From the Ashes*, a WTC benefit produced by Dixon Place in October 2001. Several characters were spawned to highlight the emotional reactions experienced by witnessing the attacks, simultaneously revealing the potential roots for those reactions.

*The Sun Rises in the East* (2001) was an evening length solo performance that incorporated *Whoa Nelly!*, a solo version of *8.46 Half Day + Tax*, and personal narratives, that further examined the emotional and intellectual responses to the WTC attacks. *The Sun Rises* premiered at Mary Sano Studio in San Francisco, ran at The 2002 New York International Fringe Festival, and was produced in by The Vortex Repertory in Austin.

Brian's latest project is *The Institute for Relativity Studies*, a fictitious scientific organization that humorously conducts "studies" to investigate how humans develop different understandings and perceptions of similar phenomenon. Headed by the rational and quirky Professor Whittey, who Brian portrays, these "studies" are actually interdisciplinary performance pieces developed in collaboration with other artists. The first study, *Rhythmic Relativity*, a collaboration with Brooklyn musician Ed Davis and dancer Abbey Dehnert to explore how music and language influence perception, was produced by Dixon Place in Nov. 2003. *The Institute's* most recent show, *Research Findings #2: Everything Appears To Matter* (Feb 2004), was a string of collaborations that played to packed houses at San Francisco's C.A.F.E. Off-Market. Brian teamed up with San Francisco dancer Maria Picar, musicians Thollem McDonas, and Todd Nelson, to present *Rhythmic Relativity*, *Dr. Deepocket Chumpchange*, and *Mother Whittey's Taco Bell Islam*. *Research Findings #3* is currently planned for the Spring/Summer 2004 in San Francisco.