

Answering for PPTG
By
Michael Rhynes

1. Origins of PPTG:

A. Michael Rhynes came-up with the name Phoenix Players Theater Group. He originally came-up with the name of Auburn Phoenix Players. Clifton Williamson Michael decided the Auburn must be removed from the title. They both came to the conclusion they were both in Auburn but not of it. Michael selected the Phoenix because it represents transformation and not rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is about other people having control over our lives. Transformation is about taking our own lives into our own hands. Michael felt that PPTG should be about more than the mere rehabilitation of just some inmates. PPTG is about the transcendence of our past lives.

B. The logo belongs to Michael Rhynes and Michael Shane Hale. Michael Rhynes gives his consent for Sarah to use it in her publication.

C. Michael Rhynes had the long distant dream of recreating the Harlem Renaissance with in prison. While reading 'Fences a play by August Wilson in a Cornell acting class. Deputy Superintendent Brown walked into to observe how the class was going as soon as he left; Michael sees an opportunity to seize his long time dream. He followed Brown into the hallway and asks him, "Would he have a problem supporting an acting class created by incarcerated people. He said, "I don't have a problem with it". After class Clifton approached Michael stating he and others were interested in creating some kind of acting class. From that point on we began to reach out to community theater groups. We wrote RTA at Sing Sing, we were told no, they couldn't help us start a acting class because we were to far away. Michael personally wrote the Auburn Public Theater the people there agreed to help start a class, but do to personal issues they had to decline their offer. We also reach out to the Kitchen Theater in Ithaca. With no one willing to help we turned to and old friend Dr. Pete Wetherbee. We submitted our proposal and ask him to find some at Cornell. He was able to contact an old friend of his who was retired

from Cornell professor Steven Cole. A meeting was set up For Clifton and I to meet with Mr. Cole and Doc so we could pitch our proposal. After the meeting Mr. Cole agree to come in and help us start PPTG this took place 2009, a year later Mr. Cole brought in professor Levitt.

D. Michael Rhynes and Clifton Williamson are the co-creators of PPTG. The founders are Michael Shane Hale, Efram Diaz, David Bendezu, Kenneth Brown, and Jason Calkins.

E. No one had any prior background in the arts.

Objectives of PPTG:

A. PPTG's main objective is to reawaken the humanity of its members. The members of PPTG come from environments where the first thing to be sacrifice is one's humanity in order to survive. Then one is placed in prison, which calls for deeper repression of one's humanity. Theater is a conduit we use to reach the still waters of the soul.

B. No the goals have not changed.

Techniques used in PPTG:

A. The two main techniques used in PPTG are 'Bioenergetics' and 'Rasa Boxes'. Bioenergetics' is used to teach the members of PPTG about defense mechanisms they may have developed in order to protect themselves. Rasa is about tapping emotional roots and then using them to break the restraints placed on incarcerated bodies. One must understand prison is about constraining the body. The body or bodily movements are dangerous to the individual and the institution. For example a man in prison may walk with natural buoyancy in his step. This man may become prey because other men

may consider him gay. Prisons don't allow more than 6 men to gather because the potential for demonstrations.

B. No our techniques have not changed.

PPTG's Audience:

A. Yes, it's important to perform in front of an audience. Transformation needs to be witnessed. Our detractors portray us as animals; the media depicts us as super predators. We of PPTG seek to change those perceptions.

B. The expectations we have from our audience are, they come with open hearts, minds and dare to engage in love.

C. We would invite our families; the prison population and we would like to take our performances on the road. We would like to perform for children of all ages. As to why invite our families and the prison population, Michael believes in what he calls 'The Prophet Principle' in the bible Jesus says," A Prophet is not known in his own town". Only outside audiences know what we are capable of performing. To our peers we are less than noting just like them, to most of are families we are the accumulation of bad behaviors.

PPTG Actors:

A. We select those men who want to transform their lives not those who need to be rehabilitated. One must already be in the process of moving through a transformation. We want men that want come to PPTG every week with out fail. We expect the men to engage in being human. That means were allowed to touch, cry, to stop whatever's going and talk about what's bother a person. We expect the men to support one another; we expect each other to express his emotions to the fullest. We expect the men to help maintain the PPTG community. We expect the members of PPTG to live up to our motto.

PPTG Material:

- A. The vast majority of our performance material is original.
- B. After the members have written what they want to perform each member gets to select 3 pieces of material they like from other members.

PPTG and related arts:

- A. At this point in time PPTG does not include others arts, but plan to somewhere in the not to distant future.

PPTG and workshops:

- A. We hope to conduct workshops in other areas of art.

PPTG and general evaluations:

- A. I would say we have succeeded in achieving our goals as a group. We can tell by the transformation in our members. One of the biggest fears of being in prison is being perceives as being different. We've had members who were down right homophobic, now they don't think twice about hugging a human being who happens to be gay.
- B. I see each member taking PPTG to other prisons and then taking it home with them.
- C. I hope my work will create safe places in people and intuitions where people can go to embrace their humanity.