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## Forever Hold Your Piece, Review Performance Twin Cities 1996

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### Patrick Scully, Djola Branner: *Forever Hold Your Piece*

(Illusion Theater, July 5-7, 1996)

*(Following are excerpts from an audience discussion after Scully and Branner's two-person show about the discussions and misgivings preceding the marriage of a black performance artist from San Francisco and a gay activist from Minnesota. The evening's two-part bill also featured "A Gay Cabaret," an adaptation of Broadway love songs to reflect a gay perspective. The discussion included comments from director Kim Konikow.)*

*How hard did you find it hard to work and perform material that is actually part of your life together?*

PS: Most of the material in the show tonight is stuff we've consciously worked on as part of our relationship. I personally don't find it hard to bring that out because it's part of what I see as the job an artist needs to do. At the same time, doing autobiographical work does demand a different kind of energy than the work of telling somebody else's story.

DB: I think there are boundaries, sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious, where I set limits on what I choose to share. Yes, this is autobiographical material, but the process of getting to what you see on the stage is soul-searching, that internal process that complements this work. I think autobiographical material does require the willingness to do

self-analysis.

*This is the first time I'd ever seen a gay couple doing a performance together. It was very affirming and exciting, considering the whole issue of identity. I've never really identified myself as white because — we were everywhere, and the people I grew up with tended to identify themselves more as German or Norwegian, or whatever. I was wondering how much of an issue was that for you while you were dating, or if you felt you lost some of your identity.*

DB: I think I'd be lying if I said it wasn't an issue. But then again, it's an issue for anybody in terms of a partnership, the question of whether you are raised in the same or different cultural backgrounds. I think one of the things we realized really early on was that we had to give each other permission to be who we are if we were going to be together.

*What might you do the same or differently if you toured this piece? You're known as performers here in Minnesota, but do you think some of the references might be lost on other audiences?*

DB: I'm not interested in changing the geographical references; that's an important part of the piece, part of our identity.

*For example how you would contextualize the Radical Faeries in the north, I mean, is that really "on the map"?*

DB: Yeah. There are Radical Faeries everywhere.

PS: Part of that is, if people don't know that much about the Radical Faeries, they could go find out, ask somebody. I'm sure there are people even here in the audience who haven't heard of the Radical Faeries before, for whom that wasn't a familiar concept. But hopefully through the outfits that I'm wearing [in the show] and the discussion I have with the other Faeries in the Faerie Circle, there's enough of a sense of what that is for people to get some idea. And beyond that, to quote myself from the show, we have to assume responsibility for our own education.

*How do you pass on the show, the work itself? How does it last? As artists we like to think about work that resonates beyond our time, that could be read years from now. Is that something that you consider?*

PS: One of the ways to conserve the work is to publish it, or turn it into a movie or [laughter]...

*How do you make the distinction between what you're willing to share on stage and what is too personal for that medium?*

DB: The same way I would if I met you on the street. I would tell you my name but I might not tell you my grandfather's name. You make those choices. Personally, I get really bored going to hear somebody just regurgitate their lives on the stage, so I am very conscious of that as an artist: what works theatrically as well as what tells the story. So the events I choose or characters I

portray are totally, carefully and deliberately created and at times manipulated.

PS: There were lots of stories, lots of memories, obviously more than anybody could put on the stage in one night. It's part of the work as a playwright to craft the work.

*The piece relates the beginnings of your relationship, but that's been a while now. Did you consider including your views as they've developed over time?*

Kim Konikow (director): One of the things we discussed when we started working was, are you going to do this piece from where you are now, two years later, or as you were when those things were taking place? It was a conscious choice to do it that way, back then.

DB: Stay tuned for Part Two!

*As you're performing, is there a certain therapeutic or cathartic effect from going through those experiences again and talking about it in front of an audience, or has it simply now gotten to the point where you're just telling the story?*

PS: I wouldn't ever want it to get to the point where I was just telling the story. That would be flat and boring. I wouldn't choose the word therapeutic because it has a certain judgmental charge to it that's distracting. But part of the challenge of being a performer is having that emotional reality in the moment, even though it's a story you've told before. So in that way, when I'm performing I'm again reliving something that I've been through before.

*The portrayal of the wedding ceremony seemed to really reflect you both as individuals.*

DB: That was really our first collaboration. It had parts of Patrick and parts of me in it. I wasn't so concerned with making it different or nontraditional, but I wanted it to be something that was a part of me.

PS: One of my concerns was to write the ceremony in such a way as to not imply that to be a couple is inherently better, but was just what we wanted for us. I wanted to make sure we weren't putting that idea out there, that this is what everybody needs to aspire to.

*Considering what is happening in government, what has happened in the past, and what you see in movies, television, and even Broadway, I thought how important it is that tonight we saw something uplifting and affirming. Every time you see a "gay piece," it seems to be about death, or someone breaking up, or a lost love, or pain and suffering. And it's not that you didn't talk about those things, or deliberately avoid them, but we got to see something far better, that there was light at the end of the tunnel. Thank you.*

—ptc