

THE
PHOENIX
PLAYERS
THEATRE
GROUP

Presents:

**THIS INCARCERATED LIFE:
The Foundation of a Pipe Dream**

**A Theatre Performance piece created from the
original writings of the members of
PPTG**

PERFORMED AT AUBURN CORRECTIONAL FACILITY
June 17TH, 2016

WE ARE A COMMUNITY OF TRANSFORMATION.
THROUGH THE POWER OF SELF-DISCOVERY,
WE CREATE THE OPPORTUNITY
TO KNOW AND GROW
INTO OURSELVES.

PPTG has its roots in the same fertile ground that the Harlem Renaissance sprung from. PPTG at its finest is the notion that incarcerated people can redeem and rehabilitate themselves if given the chance. The Phoenix Players Theatre Group by definition is an acting troupe. Our aim is not to create actors, but to engage in the activity of acting to reconnect us to our humanity.

*Michael Rhynes
Co-Founder, Phoenix Players*

PLEASE HOLD YOUR APPLAUSE
UNTIL THE END OF THE
PERFORMANCE

Members' Biographies:

David Bendezu was born on January 25th, 1987. Since his incarceration, he has earned a G.E.D and a college degree in Liberal Arts. He once worked as a teacher's aide helping incarcerated men earn their G.E.D.'s. He volunteers in A.V.P. (Alternative to Violence Program) from time to time, working with men with violent histories. He also volunteered in Y.A.P. (Youth Assistance Program). In that program he assisted young troubled adults not to make the same mistakes and choices that led him to prison by relating to them his personal experiences. And last but not least, he volunteers in PPTG (Phoenix Players Theatre Group). He believes that PPTG is not a program because PPTG is not programmatic

in any sense. In other words, PPTG has no hierarchy, as there would be in a “program.” And because of this, everyone benefits from the experience of participating in PPTG. PPTG is a place where one chooses to grow as a human being rather than being rehabilitated as a human being. He will continue to achieve his number one goal: a second chance at life. P.S. Love and family are the most important things in my life.

Sheldon P. Johnson is a student in the Cornell Prison Education Program at Auburn. In addition to the time he dedicates to PPTG, he is President of the LIFER’s organization, has instituted a book club and parole preparation class, an HIV/AIDS Basic Awareness program, and facilitates the Urban Monks Poetry Corner at Auburn Correctional Facility. In 2012, Sheldon was applauded by the Albany Times Union newspaper for his performance in the lead role of *Macbeth* at another facility. In February of 2015, Sheldon was awarded second place out of one thousand entries in the National Prison Writing Contest. He is currently serving a disparaging fifty-year determinate sentence for non-homicidal offenses.

Demetrius Molina, in his seventh year of incarceration, is thrilled to return to PPTG for a third year. He rounds out his time in prison by working as a peer counselor for a re-entry program and spending time with his wife and son. Demetrius is unendingly grateful for the support he receives from his family as he serves seventeen years in prison. He is close to completing his

Associate's Degree through the Cornell Prison Education Program.

Phil Miller is an aspiring thespian who loves to read classical literature, write poetry, and study foreign languages. He listens more than he speaks, gives more than he receives, and believes that the only limits that exist are the ones we place on ourselves. Phil was recently released from Auburn after serving seventeen years. While in Auburn, Phil earned his Associate's Degree from CPEP. He now works as a salesman, is an intern at a theater company in NYC, and will be starting college in the fall to pursue his B.A. degree as an International Business major.

Nathan Powell was drawn to this theatre group by a fierce need to witness. There is a HUGE GAP between the idea of "Criminal" and "Prison" and "Justice" and their reality. Communicating the facets of this truth is not easy, but this GAP is where inhumanity, brutality, falsehood and racism breed. Awareness can bridge this GAP and witnessing truth is a vital link to understanding and positive change. A living example of the transformative power of PPTG, Nate firmly believes in putting compassion first.

Adam Roberts, a near graduate of Syracuse University, completed his bachelor's from a cell in Attica. Having spent four years in the Attica Writers' Workshop, he now hopes to earn a masters in literature. In addition to spending time with family and friends, Adam fills his days with purpose by

working as a peer counselor. Adam returns to the theatre after a thirty-year hiatus – previously, he garnered critical acclaim for his portrayal of the caterpillar in fourth grade production of “James and the Giant Peach”.

Jim Ryant is a Brooklyn native doing 15 years for burglary. When he’s not studying to pass the High School Equivalency Exam, which he hopes to pass before being released in 2021, J.R. enjoys a good laugh with friends along with keeping in touch and bonding with his family. He has achieved his goal of completing vocational training in electrical wiring. J.R. has been in Auburn for four years. He is grateful for the opportunity to open up emotionally, provided by PPTG.

Leroy LeBron Taylor is the proud father of four beautiful children-- three young women in their twenties and a son who is twelve years old. He has been in Auburn for ten years and has spent much of his time involved with productive, transformative endeavors. Leroy enjoys creating artwork and unique items to share with others, hoping to brighten their day. His portrait of Doris Buffet was given to her as a gift for her support of the Cornell Prison Education Program from which Leroy received his Associate’s Degree in December of 2014. Leroy loves being a member of PPTG and pours his heart into the work they do, using theatre techniques, on their journey of transformation and redemption.

Raymond Vanclief was born and raised in Mt. Vernon, New York. Mr. Vanclief joined the army and was deployed to Iraq and later to Afghanistan. Still believing in being the good father, the kind hearted individual he has been during his imprisonment, Mr. Vanclief seeks to help himself and other people to avoid the pitfalls of life and reach their potential. Currently in Auburn Correctional, he is the vice president of Veterans of Auburn, a Cornell Prison Education Program graduate, a facilitator for the Alternatives to Violence Program, and an actor (participant) in the Phoenix Players Theatre Group.

AND:

Michael Rhynes, now residing at Attica, is the co-creator and one of the founders of The Phoenix Players Theatre Group/PPTG. One of his beliefs is that deep space exploration and exploring the depths of our oceans are not the final frontiers. The inner depth of humanity is. Michael obtained his Associates Degree in arts, humanities and social sciences, and at this very moment he is striving to obtain a bachelor's degree. He did not learn how to write poetry at the finer universities, but he has published a chapbook of poems entitled ***Guerillas In the Mist***. He did not learn acting on the grounds of any campus, but in the bowels of Auburn prison. He considers himself a homegrown poet, actor, and urban philosopher.

Additional PPTG members no longer in residence at Auburn: Kenneth Brown, Jason Calkins, Efraim "De" Diaz, Michael "Shane" Hale, Michael Rhynes,

Clifton, "Skye" Williamson. And Phil Miller:
Paroled.

SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to Superintendent Harold Graham, Deputy Superintendent Programs Thomas Tanea, First Deputy Superintendent G. Robinson, Deputy Superintendent Administration W. Fennessy, Deputy Superintendent Security E. Fagan, Director of Volunteer Services David Roth, Secretary I Kris Tucker, and the Staff of Auburn Correctional Facility for making this presentation possible.

Our gratitude to Kyri Murdough and the staff of the Cornell Prison Education Program for their support and encouragement of PPTG and its members.

This performance is dedicated to Michael Rhynes
And
Stephen Cole (1935 to 2015).

IN ORDER OF PERFORMANCE:

Dear PPTG: Written and performed by David

Pockets: Written and performed by Adam with
the members of PPTG

Rubik's Cube": Written and performed by Sheldon; Intercut with **Walking Tour Part One**: written and performed by Adam

Acts of Kindness, Part One: written and performed by Leroy

Newfound Dream: written and performed by Jayare

License to Drift Off: written and performed by Nate

The Truth: written and performed by Ray

Suffering Separation: Written and performed by Demetrius with Nick and Judy

If You Could Only Hear Me: written and performed by Sheldon

Father: written and performed by Jayare

Acts of Kindness, Part Two: written and performed by Leroy with the ensemble

Sins: written and performed by David

Walking Tour, Part Two: written and performed by Adam

A Tear Gone AWOL: Written and performed by Ray

Walking Tour, Part Three: written and performed by Adam

When In Rome: written by Phil and performed by Nick

Mess Hall Delights: written by Leroy and performed by Leroy with "Lunch Box"

Walking Tour, Part Four: written and performed by Adam

The History of PPTG:

PPTG is ***a grassroots program*** developed ***by*** and ***for*** incarcerated persons and communities in a ***maximum- security prison***. It is ***a transformative theatre community, which*** utilizes theater to reconnect incarcerated people to their ***full humanity***. Experiences gained through PPTG significantly increase incarcerated peoples' chances of transcending the negative labels and histories of criminality that define them within the greater society.

The group was started in 2009 by a small group of

incarcerated men dedicated to the idea that theatre work, combined with group inner healing work, is a true opportunity for all of us to connect and to become more fully human.

Invited facilitators and Performance History:

Stephen Cole (1935-2015), Paula Murray Cole, Bruce Levitt, Judy Levitt, Alison Van Dyke, Nick Fesette, Norm Johnson, Mariana Amorim, Christopher Seeds, Mary Rolland

Inside/Out was performed at Auburn Correctional Facility in April of 2011. Excerpts from *Inside/Out* were published in the Fall 2011 and Winter/Spring 2012 editions of Aaduna Press. This performance was followed in June of 2012 with the performance of *Maximum Will*, which combined soliloquys from Shakespeare with original reflective writings by the men of PPTG. A documentary film about PPTG and the creation of *A Maximum Will*, is soon to be released.

PPTG's third performance, *An Indeterminate Life*, was presented in April of 2014.

PPTG's fourth performance, *This Incarcerated Life: The foundation of a Pipe Dream*, was first performed last month for an invited audience.

