

there is almost nothing that he thinks that doesn't come right from that network."

In 1981, Shawn co-wrote and co-starred in *My Dinner with Andre*, a film by Louis Malle, which Mike Nichols called "the funniest dialectic since Plato." Moviegoers can see Shawn in Malle's current hit *Vanya on 42nd St.* as well as *Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle*. He has appeared as a Ferengi on TV's *Deep Space Nine* and in the films *Manhattan*, *Simon*, *Starting Over*, *All That Jazz*, *Annie Hall* and *Atlantic City*.

Zack (Performer/Director) most recently performed *The Fever* in living rooms in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He has directed/performed in a number of San Francisco/Bay Area productions, including Leslie Scalapino's *The President*, Harold Pinter's *The Collection* and Camille Roy's *Bye Bye Brunhilde*. For Common Cultural Practice, he has directed/performed in Vaclav Havel's *...Difficulty...*, Megan Terry's *Home*, Kier Peters' *Past, Present, and Future Tense*, and Eugene Ionesco's *Salutations*. His original performance works have been seen in San Francisco, New York, Paris and Los Angeles.

Fran Sholly (Director) has performed at many San Francisco/Bay Area theaters, including Life on the Water, New Langton Arts and Theater Rhinoceros. She received a Bay Area Theater Critics' Circle Award for her performance with the Angels of Light. In addition to performances with Common Cultural Practice, Fran has sung in the acapella choir Music in the Blood and performed with the improvisational comedy troupe Fish.

Common Cultural Practice was founded to foster an environment where theatrical ideas can be discussed, explored and developed through performances and workshops. Our aim is to bring about a reexamination of the theatergoing experience by introducing audiences to experimental forms and ideas. Our most recent performance, Vaclav Havel's *The Increased Difficulty of Concentration*, played to sold out houses in San Francisco in April, 1995.

CCP's Board of Directors: Gianni Carrara, Dey Ehrlich, Gene Rigler, Dwayne Schanz, Fran Sholly, Shawna Spiteri and Zack. Producers: Tony Arturi, Carola Farthing, Francisco Guzman, Mackie Messer, Kate Sholly and Tem Tarriktar. CCP's Angels: Elaine and Julie. Special thanks to Raphael et Gianni Coiffeurs and Dan Froot.

THE BENNINGTON JULY PROGRAM PROUDLY PRESENTS

COMMON CULTURAL PRACTICE'S PRODUCTION OF

THE FEVER

by Wallace Shawn

Performed by Zack

Co-directed by Zack and Fran Sholly

Produced by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc.

“ This piece was originally written with the idea in mind that it could be performed in homes and apartments, for groups of ten or twelve. The piece can be performed by a wide range of performers—women, men—older, younger,” wrote the author of *The Fever* in 1991.

And that is exactly how Wallace Shawn first started presenting *The Fever*, performing the piece himself. Later, he took it into theaters where it seemed embarrassingly non-theatrical. How and why did this change of environment change the experience of those watching it?

By 1991, the art of solo performance had been gaining popularity for quite a while, even reaching mass (commercial) audiences. At the same time Shawn was performing *The Fever* in theaters, many other performance artists were firmly established: Laurie Anderson, Spalding Gray, Eric Bogosian, John Fleck, Ann Magnuson, Lily Tomlin.

Wallace Shawn had never done solo work before *The Fever*. He had written several plays, and almost all of them have speeches directed toward the audience, encouraging an intimate relationship and implying a complicity.

ity between characters and spectators. But Shawn kept revising and refining his method, creating works with fewer characters and less dramatic action, until he was left with a single voice; it was as if he felt a need to reduce the conflicts at the heart of the dinner conversation in his film *My Dinner with Andre* until they could be contained by one character rather than two.

Shawn received a great deal of negative press for baring what reviewers quite obviously mistook for "his" soul—but then, given the contemporary scene at the time, it is understandable that critics evaluated his own performance of his own work solely as autobiographical, and naturally they made associations with Shawn's own life style, his career, and his past (his father was William Shawn, longtime editor of *The New Yorker*). Instead of noticing the creation of a character's moral yardstick, they seemed intent on holding that yardstick up to Mr. Shawn himself.

But Shawn's purpose is not to expose anything truly intimate about himself, but rather to paint a portrait of a near-generic neurotic upper middle-class white person who can cathartically voice the roots of logic that most self-proclaimed liberals rarely face. The same cool logic of the social criticism voiced by the character of Lemon in his play *Aunt Dan and Lemon* (unanimously praised as a vivid portrayal of intelligence without compassion) disappointed the critics when it came directly from the author.

We have never seen Mr. Shawn perform *The Fever*, so we're not sure on how much "character" he used to filter his own voice through. Probably not much more than Spalding Gray uses, but probably a lot less than, say, Lily Tomlin or even Laurie Anderson. But how would this work look when performed by someone other than Wallace Shawn? What if the critics and other audience members knew nothing about the speaker? Then what would they think about during the performance? Maybe their own relation to this character's experience or point of view.

We were attracted to Shawn's writing because of its particular combination of cynical humor and sharp criticism, its balance of colorful description and conversational idioms, and its resistance to painting a pretty picture of contemporary American life styles and thought patterns. We finally decided to produce *The Fever* because its content addresses a number of issues we find relevant to our lives today and its form fit with the theatrical mission of our company.

The Fever struck us as having the power to remind audiences of an essential aspect of theater: the connection that occurs when a group comes together to witness a narrator; we think of the play as a modern version of a story told by a member of the tribe, gathered around the fire. In this day and age of renting videos to watch on our home entertainment systems, the ever-increasing cost (for both producers and audiences) of spectacular mixed-

media events like *Phantom of the Opera*, and the blurring of the line between reality and theater (as in the O.J. Simpson trial), we can all benefit from a jolt of basic, primal human interaction.

While watching a conventional theater performance, we often think of the costumes, the sets, the skill of the performers, and the comfort of our seats in addition to the play and its content. It felt perfectly in keeping with the text for us to replace these considerations with other more relevant "distractions"—an actual living room that is probably somewhat familiar to those in the audience, a simple performance stripped of makeup and other theatrical effects aimed at creating another reality, and perhaps most importantly, the other spectators, from whom we are usually isolated and cut off when attending most theatrical presentations. It is our hope that by performing *The Fever* in homes as opposed to theaters, we can allow you to resist the usual aesthetic critical way of watching a performance and instead encourage you to really hear what Mr. Shawn is saying.

Wallace Shawn (Playwright) has written works for the theater that are performed infrequently and invariably provoke outrage and walk-outs from a startling proportion of the people who come to see them. His plays include *A Thought in Three Parts*; *Marie and Bruce*; the Obie-award winning *Our Late Night*; and *The Hotel Play*, a panoramic work written to be performed by a cast of seventy.

In his notes on *The Hotel Play*, Shawn wrote "I don't in general find it all that fascinating or amusing to see actors proving their versatility by playing many different roles in one evening. It reminds me that I'm in the theater, rather than allowing me the more interesting impression that in some odd way I'm watching life unfold even though I'm looking at actors on a stage ... I'm just not crazy about stage makeup or impersonations."

Perhaps his best known play is *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, which was published with an essay "On the Context of the Play." This essay foreshadows *The Fever* with its discussion of the "bondage" of morality, but it also contains a justification for presenting works of art which stimulate thought and discussion:

"The process is simple. I speak with you, and then I turn out the light and go to sleep, but, while I sleep, you talk on the telephone to a man you met last year in Ohio, and you tell him what I said, and he hangs up and talks to a neighbor of his, and what I said keeps traveling, farther and farther. And just as a fly can quite blithely and indifferently land on the nose of a queen, so the thought which you mentioned to the man in Ohio can make its way with unimaginable speed into the mind of a president.

"Because a society is very little more than a network of brains, and a president is no less involved in his society's network than anyone else, and