

## **More about Bill Rauch**

Bill sat down with radio producer Steve Rowland in late 2006 to discuss a variety of topics, including the importance of stories and live theater, OSF's values and national reputation, and why he wanted to come to Ashland.

### **Artists' role**

Sometimes when I despair about the state of the world: the amount of conflict, and the amount of violence, and I get afraid for my children and my children's children, I take comfort in the fact that Shakespeare lived in a very scary time, a very violent time, a time of huge controversy and conflict based on religion. I take comfort in that because I look at what happened and got created out of the pain in those times, and I think our roles right now as artists are to try to make something beautiful and something enduring out of the times we live in, and it gives me some hope and some peace.

### **Language and OSF**

The Oregon Shakespeare Festival is a language based theatre which means that language is at the center of the theatrical event. That the visuals matter, that everything matters, but language is the central event, the spoken word. There's a reason why in that 1,200 seat outdoor theatre there is no amplification, that it is the naked human voice communicating to 1,200 people. It's about the connection between human beings being as direct as possible, that naked spoken word.

So one of the things that I'm thinking about in my new position is how can I build on that legacy of being a language based theatre, but connect to other, more contemporary language based movements. Spoken word, hip hop theatre where people are celebrating language, are pushing the boundaries of what language can do in ways I think are spiritually, directly linked to ways in which Shakespeare, for instance, was pushing the boundaries of what different language could do and mixing in terms of socio-economic classes in relation to language, mixing poetry and prose, mixing genres, in ways that were not supposed to be mixed and yet, it's that rich mixture of different approaches to language that makes the work so vibrant. So I'm very interested in the fact that we're a language based theatre. But I also feel that we are a narrative based theatre, that we are in the business of telling stories, of telling powerful stories in a powerful way.

I think theatre is, in general, a language based medium. But I think there are many, many theatrical practitioners and theatres that are trying to push beyond the boundaries. I think there are many theatres and theatre practitioners that would not define themselves as being primarily language based; where visual, spectacle, where the events may not be about language. That it may be much more movement based. That it may be musically based, and that spoken language is an ingredient, or in some cases, may not be an ingredient at all, as opposed to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where because Shakespeare is our middle name, and because we are a classic theatre, I think language is the central event and needs to continue to be the central event, but I excited to explore new ways for language to remain the central event continue to catapult us into the twentieth century and beyond.

## **The power of narrative**

I am a believer in the power of narrative and the power of storytelling. Of course there are a lot of really exciting artistic movements and theatrical movements that are not about story. For me, personally, I celebrate story, I love story, and I believe in the story leading us to new forms rather than new forms for its own sake.

I love it when we're telling a story, right, we have a story that we're burning to tell. The story we're burning to tell requires a new form to be able to contain that story. To be able to communicate that story clearly, this story demands a new form, a form that hasn't existed before. That's where personally—I'm talking about—that's where I come as an artist: what's the story? What's the best way to tell the story? Then we figure out the form we're going to use to tell that story as opposed to other artists who, I think, are really interested in experimenting with form on its own and may not be as interested in narrative and story.

## **On Ashland and his family**

We have never felt uncomfortable as a gay family in Ashland, Oregon. The state of Oregon is not uniformly progressive, I can imagine there are places in the state of Oregon, where we would not feel comfortable as a gay family, but I think that's true of the state of California. I think that's true of many, many places in the world we live in right now. I also have to say that people surprise you. I'll tell a quick anecdote that I think is important.

I was not "out" to my parents as a gay man during Cornerstone's early years even though Chris and I were already together as a couple. Even in Cornerstone's first years in L.A. I was not completely out as a gay man. In my work life I wasn't hiding it, but I wouldn't identify Chris as my partner even though we worked together.

We were doing a big bridge show in the year 2,000 that involved people from every L.A. community we had ever worked with in the last eight years. Some of the people in this circle know that I'm gay and know that Chris is my partner and some of these people don't. I focused on one particular woman who I knew was a born again Christian, and I thought, she may get up and walk out of this room if she knows that I'm a gay man. She may be very, very offended, freaked out, frightened, whatever.

Chris wheeled in our baby, our son, Liam, and I thought, this is not one of those moments like the early 90's where I could say here's another company member, Chris Moore, because whose baby is that? It's my son, that's Chris's son. It was an incredible moment of truth. I had to have the courage to say, this is my partner, this is my husband, and this is our baby. This is our child. I was most focused in my fear on this particular woman who I knew was a born again Christian. But, of course, I identified who my husband was and who our kid was and as soon as we broke, she ran over, and she said, "Let me look at that baby. That baby is the luckiest baby in the world to have the two of you as dads."

This is not to say that there is not homophobia in the world, and that there aren't hard moments ahead for our kids and for us as a gay family, but people surprise you. I think the work of Cornerstone Theatre Company if it taught me nothing else, taught me that when you can make a one on one connection, with a person, some very abstract politicized issues can evaporate because it's one on one and it's human being to human being.

### **Why we need stories**

I think stories nourish our souls in the way that food nourishes our bodies. I think human beings cannot survive without stories; we just can't. And whether you take in stories as a human being in a theatre, a live theatre, a movie theatre, whether you're going on the ride of a story through a painting, or through a piece of music or whether it's just sitting in your back yard on your stoop and trading stories with those you love, we need stories.

We need stories to make sense of the chaos of our lives and to give us hope and to warn each other. It's so essential. When people talk about the arts being frivolous or frill or unnecessary, it just blows my mind. It's so completely wrong, and if you eliminated every single artistic avenue for people, people would still be making art in their daily lives. If you took away all the official venues, people would find a way because, we need those stories.