

SHOCK OF GRAY PRODUCTIONS, INC.

FIVE LESBIANS PRESENT A THEATRICAL COLLAGE ON BEING “QUEER”

“It’s 1959, I’m lying on the living room floor in a railroad flat in Queens. Liberace is on the TV . . . and my father takes this puff on his cigar and in a burst of smoke he says to my mother: ‘Jeez what a pansy! Whadya see in that queer anyway?’” An eight-year old child first encounters the threat of her dawning identity. And so begins a narrative that takes the audience on a journey of the evolution of “queer” identity from the 1950’s through the present through the eyes of five lesbians.

This new and original play, ***SMOKE AND MIRRORS***, by the **Shock of Gray Ensemble**, traces the journeys of five women as they revisit the images and experiences of mainstream culture and queer subcultures that shaped their identities. The piece explores five decades of cultural messages, from the stereotypes of the fifties to the perplexing sex and gender images of the present. Through personal narratives and emblematic imagery, the women capture the angst, humor and complexity of their on-going struggles to find authentic selves, and in the process, raise provocative questions about what it means to be “queer.” Entertaining and illuminating, the piece appeals to a mixed audience as it surveys the sexual politics of our time.

The members of **Shock of Gray Ensemble** have long been part of the downtown Manhattan theatre scene, some since the mid-1970’s. Influenced by techniques and improvisational forms developed by The Open Theatre and by Story Theatre, the ensemble creates original material that combines movement work and storytelling in the form of a theatrical collage. **Shock of Gray Productions Inc.** is a not for profit theatre collective, developing and refining material collaboratively, with different members taking on primary responsibilities for various tasks: all members contributed to the authorship of this piece; **Carol Bay** took on the role of structuring improvisational explorations and shaping the improvised work theatrically, acting as a dramaturge as the piece evolved over time; **Marge Helenchild** and **Deborah Sherman** provided guidance and direction in the development of the movement and dance elements, acting as choreographers and movement coaches; **Margot Fitzgerald** and **Berenice Fisher**, facilitate production and administrative tasks for the group; and **Beverly Brumm**, a long time associate of the **Shock of Gray Ensemble**, provided direction, and acting coaching at key points during the development and staging of this piece.

SMOKE AND MIRRORS was developed over a period of three years through workshops around such themes of lesbian experience as: childhood and family experiences, sexual self discovery, lesbian pulp fiction, lesbian feminism, assimilation, aging, and contemporary transgender politics. And as the work evolved, the material began to reflect the changing meanings of “being queer.”

