



Spalding Gray and Solo Performance: How One Actor Revolutionized an Art Form (Past Times Solo Performance Series Book 5)

Jordan Young

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The autobiographical monologue had not quite emerged as a theatrical form when Quentin Crisp set out on tour in the 1970s, advising audiences how to rethink the world—as he had, develop a personal style, and be yourself. Another charismatic individual appeared on the scene about the same time, rethinking the theatre on his own terms, but it would take years for the spark that was Spalding Gray to ignite a movement. As careers in the theatre go, talking about yourself was one of the more improbable ways to make a living until Gray (1941-2004) honed it to a fine art.

Fearlessly blazing the trail, the actor created and performed some 18 monologues (“Swimming to Cambodia,” “Monster in a Box”) based on his own life, becoming a hugely influential cult figure in the process. What motivated an admittedly private person to reveal the most intimate details of his life to the public? “I’m not sure. It’s one of the idiosyncratic parts of my nature,” Gray said in an interview. “It’s an enormous challenge to take what’s private and go public with it...I’d rather speak in front of a group of people than be at a party; it has more meaning for me.” Poignantly, he stated on another occasion, “I like telling the story of my life better than I do living it.”

“Spalding understood that art is not about truth but about invention,” noted Eric Bogosian, one of many renowned solo performers inspired by him. “He took the anarchy and the illogic of life and molded it into something we could grab hold of. In a way, Spalding was forever struggling and he presented this struggle to us onstage...It took courage to do this. Courage to make theater so naked and unadorned, courage to expose himself in this way, and courage to fight his demons in public.”

This ebook is a chapter from the revised and expanded edition of **ACTING SOLO: THE ART AND CRAFT OF SOLO PERFORMANCE**, which will be available in Fall 2012.

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