



The Blue Man Group. Photo by Darbe Rotach ©BMP

# a case of the blues

**Steve White**  
Theater/Music, '88

It's not uncommon to feel a little blue now and then. But Steve White has been blue for over ten years. No, he hasn't been depressed for a decade; he's been a long-standing member of the highly acclaimed Blue Man Group.

Steve has performed Blue Man Group's unique blend of physical comedy and visual artistry on stages in Boston, Chicago, and currently in New York. The show explores the relationship between three blue guys – a relationship full of conflict, angst, and humor in relation to pop culture and art.

Being one of a trio of bald men painted cobalt blue is a unique experience for a performer. "Physically it's like being armored to outside forces with the bald cap and blue makeup," explains Steve. "Ironically you're completely vulnerable as an actor because the character has no ego. Trying to achieve this egoless state of mind is no easy task. At Cornish, Diane Schenker taught a Lecoq class, where you learn to move like inanimate objects including honey, colors, or the weather. That actually made it easier for me to get the Blue Man character."

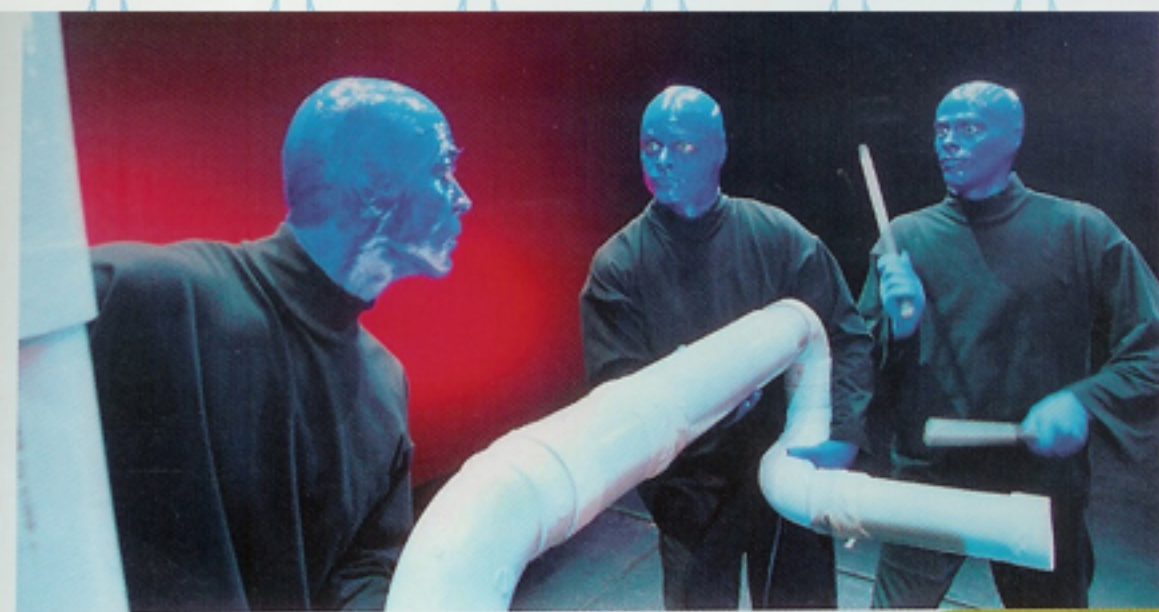
One of the odd things about performing in blue is that it's difficult, if not impossible, to tell one Blue Man from another, so audiences never know who they're watching. The only hint the world might have that Steve is a Blue Man are the stray remnants of blue. "It takes ten minutes to take the makeup off after a show," explains Steve, "but it leaves a little blue tint on my neck and around the eyes like blue eyeliner. If I show up somewhere after a show, sometimes someone will spot it and ask, 'Are you a Blue Man?'"

The show was originally built in 1991 around creative ideas, social commentary and commentary on the art world. Individual ideas were performed in clubs, salons, parties and on the street. Over time, these ideas were fleshed out into much of what the show in New York is today. The three original members continue writing for various events including Intel commercials, stadium shows and recently, the *Complex Tour*. Blue Man Group continues to expand its audience with shows now running in London and Berlin.

For some artists, being a Blue Man might be their sole creative expression, but Steve, a multi-talented performance artist, considers the four or five Blue Man shows he performs a week to be an incredible day job. When not ensconced in blue, he juggles numerous creative projects from music production to performing solo theatrical works.

Steve created a solo show called *Boatmime*, about an out-of-work mime who takes a job on a fishing boat in Alaska. He also recently created a soundtrack for former Cornish faculty member Joanna Mendl-Shaw, whose *Equus Project, Dancing with Horses* showcases dancers interacting with horses in a horse stall. And, he has a studio in Brooklyn where he produces music for a variety of artists. "I like when people come in with creativity and are ready to mix it up," said Steve. "My studio is called the Rumpus Room, so it's kind of a playground for everyone."

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Blue Man Group performing. Photos by Ken Howard ©BMP



Steve White as Heavy Cream



Steve White as Boatmime



Steve is currently getting ready to produce a spoken word/rap poetry album for Mo Beasley. He also recently worked with King Sunny Ade's son, Prince Sunny Ade, and he performs periodically with Puzzle of Light, a giant kalimba ensemble he's worked with intermittently since 1996. Later this year, he'll work with 826NYC producing music written by kids between 8-12 years old. Steve is also finishing up an album with Nigerian musician and good friend, Foly Kolade. "I work best in a collaborative format," Steve reveals. "I like to work with a collaborator where we just feed each other creatively – and that's hard to find. Now we're trying to translate the computer-based music I've been doing in the studio into a live situation. I'm not interested in seeing people just sitting behind a computer. I think if you're gonna be on stage, put some theater into it. So, I've developed a character named Heavy Cream."

The original inspiration for Heavy Cream came awhile back when a friend who hosts a poetry slam, called *Urban Erotica*, invited Steve to showcase his music. "My music is a lot of rhythm-based material using Samba and Afro-Cuban rhythmic grooves," relates Steve, "so I thought, if I'm gonna do this on stage, I should have a persona – so Heavy Cream was born."

Steve's artistic experience with the Blue Man Group is a highly collaborative one. "If there's one thing that Cornish provided me with, it's the ability to co-create with anybody out there. It's a very unique set of tools that Cornish fosters, an openness and curiosity, and we really learned to speak the language of a musician, an artist, an actor."

Cornish gave him a creative confidence to explore new ideas. "I learned that creativity can be very raw," he shared, "and that it's important to have patience during the creative process, as opposed to finishing one's work too early. It's kind of like letting the paint dry." Steve was inspired by his teachers. "Watching Gerry Granelli, Jay Clayton and Jim Knapp, it was all just a gift," recalls Steve, "... those guys are incredible improvisers, and watching them work together... it was amazing collaboration."

Steve sums it up simply, "Chris, one of the founding Blue Men, often mentions that three is the smallest amount of people it takes to create a community. I was lucky to have such an inspiring community at Cornish. And now, to be able to experience that sense of community in all the different areas of my work, is really wonderful."

– Lisa Halpern, Theater '87

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