

Scully plays three roles in brave, uncompromising look at being gay

By Joan Freese

It's not all that common for a local performer to take a new show on the road before its Twin Cities debut, but that's what performance artist Patrick Scully did with "Queer Thinking." Before the Illusion Theater, staged it for this weekend's run as part of the Fresh Ink series, audiences in Cleveland; Austin, Texas; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; New York City, and Berlin — where it was performed in German — viewed this vital solo performance.

Welcome home, Mr. Scully. "Queer Thinking" is a brave look at what it means to be a gay man in America. It's told via a series of monologues by three specific gay personae: a drag queen, an HIV-positive man and a "Radical Faerie" activist. Each is introduced as Scully strips and changes costumes onstage to snippets of Nona Hendryx's song "Transformation."

In "What Makes People Uncomfortable About Homosexuals," he becomes the formidable Tanya, a mini-skirt wearing, high-heeled drag queen. From this perch (and it is a perch — Scully is more than 6 feet tall preheels), he slides about a masculine-feminine continuum asking audience members — gay, straight, male and female — to confront their own ideas of gender. Tanya's chatter is poignant, saucy, often wickedly funny. For example, he expresses confusion over the issue of gays in the military and suggests that, in lieu of the Army, the government simply give gays the National Endowment for the Arts. "Don't tell, we won't ask," touts Tanya to heterosexual artists, putting a twist on President Clinton's stance on the issue.

Tanya, however, was not as fully realized as Scully's other characters. Having said this — and I say it with some reservation, because the show is not really about whether he makes a convincing drag queen and because his "characters" aren't really characters, but facets of himself — it's simply a matter of Tanya gaining some attitude and spontaneity.

In "Things I Hesitate to Tell You About Myself" an unclothed Scully engages in a forthright discussion of, among other things, the nature of sexual desire. It is a refreshing change, since most performance work that deals with AIDS looks at the disease removed from the heated context of human sexuality. But Scully reveals it all honestly, adding an important dimension to his work. In this most personal section of a

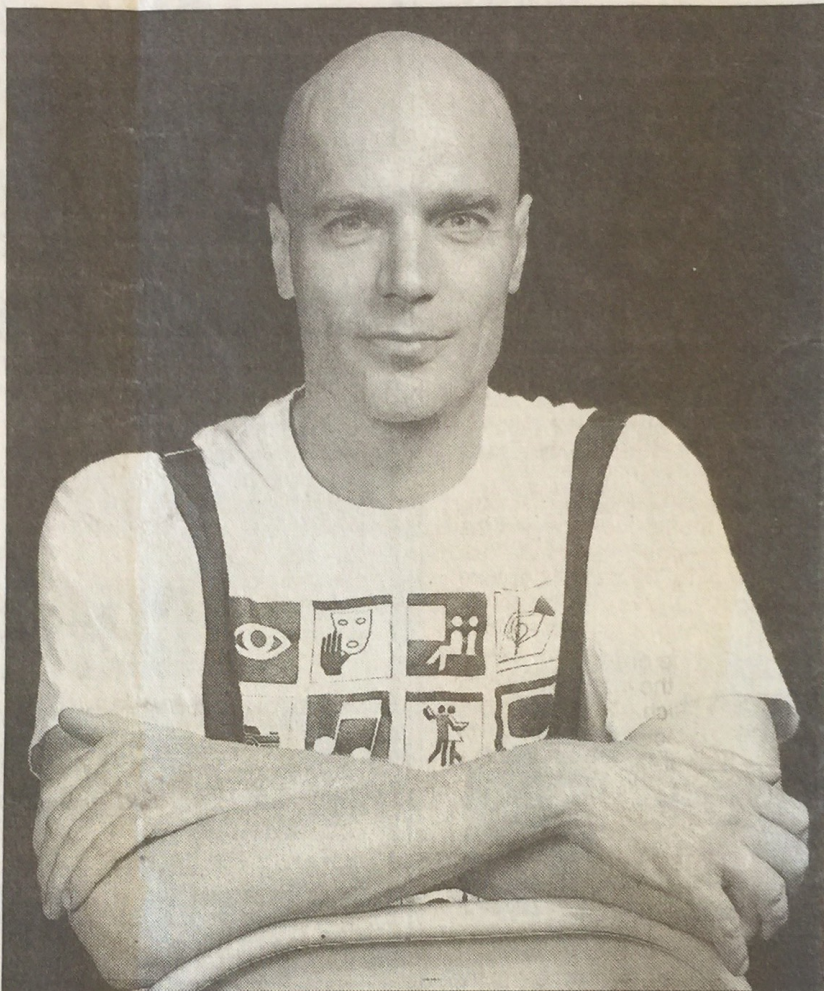


Photo / Bill Carlson

Patrick Scully

A review

highly personal show, he talks about the rules of conduct for living in a heterosexual world, how he survived a gay-bashing incident and what it's like living with HIV.

Scully is a gay activist. In "Secrets," the third section of the show, he becomes a "Radical Faerie," donning jeans and a T-shirt with a requisite in-your-face slogan. Here, the secrets he reveals are no longer his own, but those of others. One by one, he takes on his enemies. He names names — mostly of institutions and organizations that have discriminated against him — and he becomes militant, demanding that people be accountable for their actions. It's all very convincing; after all, he has just spent the past hour onstage being accountable for his.

As is the case with political theater, "Queer Thinking" may run the risk of preaching to the converted. But it shouldn't. Scully doesn't preach;

Queer Thinking

Who: Starring and written by John Scully

Where: Illusion Theater, 528 Hennepin Av. S., Minneapolis

When: Today at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 7 p.m.

Tickets: \$10; call 338-8371

Review: A series of monologues explores what it means to be a gay man in America.

he shares, using the rich details of his full and interesting life. Kudos to the artist for creating such an uncompromising show, and to the Illusion Theater for staging it.

Joan Freese is a Minneapolis freelance writer.