

Interview with The Blue Man Group's Mike Brown



Photo Credit: Caroline Talbot

For over 20 years, the world has been amazed by a bunch of guys covered in blue paint and wearing black sweatsuits who like to make a lot of noise while putting on a one-of-a-kind performance art experience. You might have heard of them. They're known as The Blue Man Group and they'll be taking over the Providence Performing Arts Center March 6 - 8. I got a chance to have a chat with Blue Man Mike Brown, who's been with the performance art collective for over a decade, about how he got his start in The Blue Man Group, how long it takes for the paint to dry, what the future holds for performance art, and all sorts of stuff.

Rob Duguay: How did you become a member of The Blue Man Group?

Mike Brown: I went to school for theater and I'm also a drummer, so those two things were really something that I wanted to be a part of. Having seen The Blue Man Group in '97, I completely fell in love with it and it became a dream of mine. I ended up working for The Blue Man Group as a crew member in 2002 at their New York show while doing backstage work, and after 6 months of doing that, they had an open call audition. I auditioned and luckily things worked out.

RD: You've performed as a Blue Man all over the globe, with stops in New York City, Boston, Chicago, Toronto, Berlin and even on a Norwegian Cruise Line. What has been your craziest experience as a Blue Man?

MB: Well, like you said, I've done this show all over. I've performed at The TD Garden during halftime at a Boston Celtics game, which was really awesome. On this tour I get an opportunity to travel all over North America while seeing awesome places and meeting awesome people. It's really hard to pick one crazy moment, but it all just kind of flows together. I think all of the greatest experiences come out during the show; it's so lively and so fun that I can't get enough of it. I want to do it more and more. I want to do it always. [I enjoy] just being able to get up there and perform for the audiences but also the audience participation really is what I'm getting at. You can't plan for those moments, and bringing someone up on stage and sharing a real experience with them is really beautiful and really awesome.

RD: How long does it take for you to take all of that paint off after a performance? Do you have to get special scrubbing devices to get all of the paint off?

MB: We do have a lot of special stuff. The paint that we use is actually a special Blue Man paint made by a makeup company and it's a special blue color that's made just for us. The application process is very simple and it doesn't really take that long, but the transformation process, like the mind set for

becoming a Blue Man, can take one minute or it can take an hour. What you're doing is that you're stepping into work, kind of like stepping out of yourself and leaving what your normal day was and taking that off. [You're] taking off the layers of who you normally are and putting on this layer of who you're going to be for the next hour and 45 minutes. The Blue Man doesn't really have any walls around him. He's so curious and interested in everything around him that he's just gonna dive right in. To get your mind into a place where you're going to be in the moment is really part of the transformation process, and it takes some time. You just have to be ready, willing and able to go with the flow with everything in the show.

RD: It's pretty much being on you're A game at all times when you're putting on the paint.

MB: Exactly. But it's being something else other than what you naturally should be. It's instinctual. Saying "A game" makes it sound like that you've trained for this. Yes, we do train to be a Blue Man, but you train to kind of just strip it all down and become an instinctual being that doesn't have an ego and is willing just go out there and have fun for the sake of having fun.

RD: What do you think the future holds for performance art? Are there any changes on the horizon when it comes to how it's promoted or the way that it'll be shown on stage? Do you think that it'll stay the same for a while?

MB: From sort of being on the forefront of this kind of performance, I think that it's going to develop and grow into all kinds of unimaginable things. The cool thing about The Blue Man Group is getting out there and doing the show. We're trying to tell people, "Hey, this kind of thing, this is what you could do every day. This could be your job, this could be your life." We're just trying to hopefully have everybody leave the show feeling that kind of spirit and feeling that kind of energy and motivation to perhaps create the next big thing or the next new kind of thing — a new kind of show or technology or even just art, whether that would be a painting or a drawing. We just hope that people feel invigorated from our show. So to answer your question, I have high hopes for the future of this kind of theater.

RD: For people who haven't had the experience of seeing The Blue Man Group perform live, what would be the best way for you to describe it?

MB: As simple as it may sound, it's just pure fun. It's the kind of fun that we've all experienced when we were kids, when we would just run out into our yard and our imaginations would just take us over and we were just ready and willing to do whatever we wanted to do to have the fun that we wanted to have in that moment. The Blue Man Group is trying to get every audience member to tap into in their own hearts and their own minds and the feeling of, "Oh man!! I wanna do this right now just because it's fun." Whether that would be laughing at something, thinking about the show or actually getting out of your seat and dancing, it's an energy level that we want to promote inside everyone. It's just unbridled, instinctual fun that we want everyone to be infused with and invigorated by.

The Blue Man Group will be at the Providence Performing Arts Center this weekend from Fri, March 6 until Sun, March 8. For tickets: ppacri.org/events/detail/blue-man-group-1