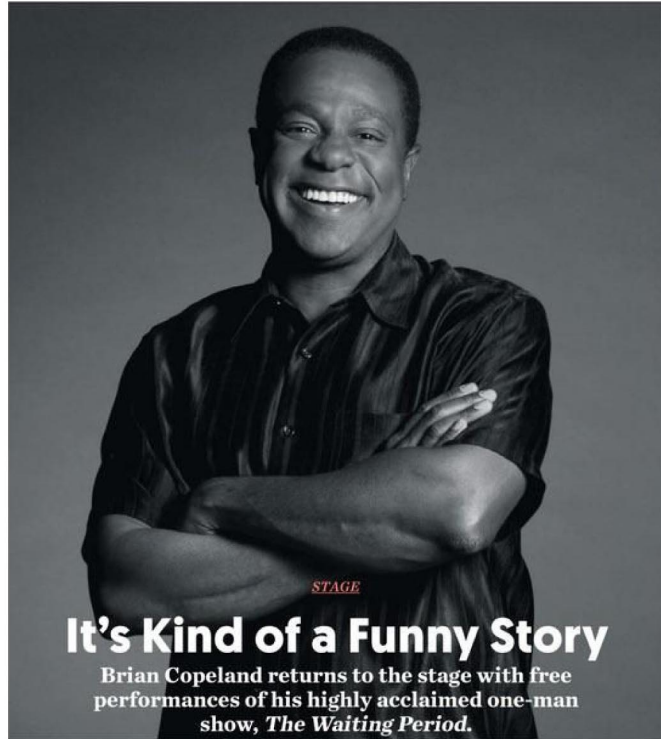


San Francisco

THE SPRING STYLE & CULTURE ISSUE

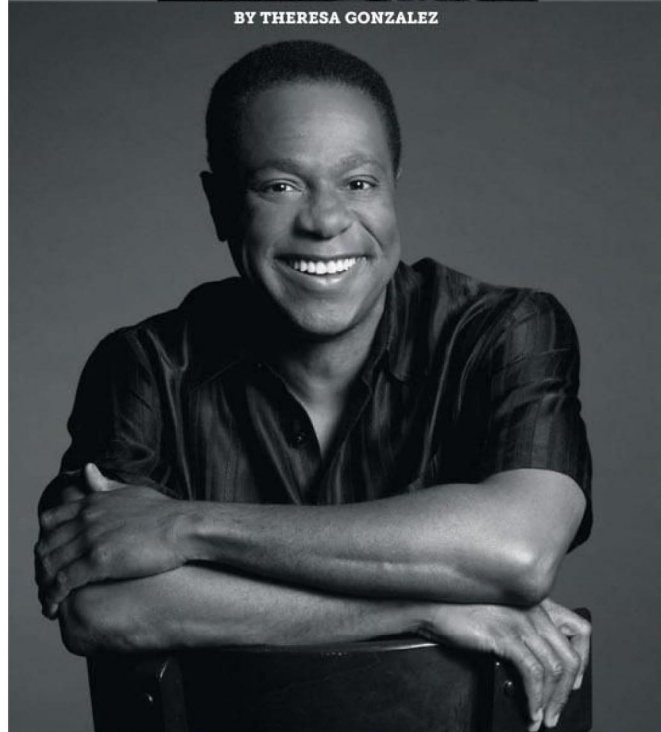


STAGE

It's Kind of a Funny Story

Brian Copeland returns to the stage with free performances of his highly acclaimed one-man show, *The Waiting Period*.

BY THERESA GONZALEZ



POLITICS AND #METOO took center stage during the recent one-night sold-out showing of Brian Copeland's latest play, *The Great American Shit Show*, co-written and performed with playwright Charlie Varon. Copeland addressed Bill Cosby, who he opened for during his early stand-up days; Brett Kavanaugh; and the many high-profile scandals of last year. "That's not what a liar does," he told audiences at The Marsh. "What a liar does is rant and rave and obfuscate and blame Hillary Clinton and refuse to demand an FBI investigation."

Copeland has made an award-winning career out of one-man shows that comedically address decidedly unfunny subjects. Case in point: *The Waiting Period*, which tackles Copeland's personal struggle with depression during a time when he attempted to take his own life, and the mandatory 10 days he had to wait to purchase a gun. "It's a show about depression that's not a depressing show," says Copeland. Receiving the *San Francisco Chronicle's* highest review rating when it debuted in 2012, *The Waiting Period* struck a chord. "There are literally people who are alive today because of this show," says Copeland, referencing the anecdotes from survivors and family members who were impacted by the performance. Now, The Marsh will show five free performances of the critically acclaimed play through March 17, thanks to an ongoing

GoFundMe campaign. "I did not want there to be any kind of barrier for people, especially younger people, to come out and see it," says Copeland.

"It's a show about depression that's not a depressing show. ... There are literally people who are alive today because of this show."

Another Copeland revival, *Not a Genuine Black Man*, which explores the racism he faced growing up in predominantly white San Leandro in the 1970s, is a testament to the comedian's timeless themes. The

somewhat sleeper hit became San Francisco's longest-running solo show after it debuted in 2006 and returns at a time when "America's lost her empathy," says Copeland, who hopes "that maybe by seeing the world through the eyes of this bullied 8-year-old boy," some of it can be regained. The show, which runs in Burbank through March, is the subject of talks for becoming a TV series for a major streaming company and is the inspiration for Copeland's best-selling book of the same title—now required reading in some high schools and colleges across the country.

Since touring as a road comic with legendary acts like Aretha Franklin and Smokey Robinson, Copeland has mastered the dramedy in four solo plays. "What's great about these shows is that I'm able to go deeper, and it doesn't have to be a joke a minute," he says. "What I've found interesting is that the drama makes the humor funnier. It's almost like a release."

What topic will Copeland poke fun at next? Single parenting. Why is it, he asks, "that single mothers are vilified in this society when they're the ones who stayed?" *Grandma & Me: An Ode to Single Parents*, a story about his grandmother raising five children after his mother's early death and his own experience raising three children post-divorce, opens at The Marsh next fall.

1062 VALENCIA ST., THEMARSH.ORG