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Title

Phil Porter Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

June 26, 2012

Extant

1 hour, 29 minutes interview and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, Phil Porter discusses his career in dance and theater movements; combining theology and dance in Body and Soul Dance company, providing leadership in worship design at Peace UCC, and serving as Minister of Arts and Communication, among other positions.

Biographical

Phil Porter was born in 1953 in Bloomington, Indiana. He is the son of John Porter, an administrator in the Indiana University School of Business and Dorcas Showalter Porter. The family was active in the leadership of First United Methodist Church. Phil excelled as a student in the Bloomington public schools and was engaged in the arts—music, drama and dance. Phil enrolled at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, and began developing an interest in early childhood education. After one year at Macalester he returned to Bloomington and entered the Independent Learning Program at Indiana University. His focus was on education and creativity. He combined studies in child development and psychology with arts courses in piano, dance and textile art. After graduation, Phil went to Indianapolis for an internship at a church-based community center.

Phil spent two years teaching third grade in a Catholic elementary school. He became active at First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis where he discovered an interest in using the arts in worship. Seeking to pursue graduate studies, Phil applied to the University of California Berkeley where he was accepted to study with Ed Rossbach, considered the “dean” of fiber/textile artists in the U.S.

While studying textile art and graphic design at Cal he also continued training in modern dance and began performing and choreographing with other dancers. He began participating in First Congregational Church of Berkeley (FCCB) through which he began to learn about the United

Church of Christ. And through FCCB he learned of the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) which was a center for activities combining theology and the arts.

In 1979, Phil began a ten-year collaboration with Judith Rock and Cynthia Winton-Henry as Body and Soul Dance Company. The company created modern choreography with theological themes and images that they performed in both religious settings and dance theaters. He also worked part-time as a graphic designer and continued creating textile art, including dance and theater costumes, liturgical garments and fine art.

Phil came out in the late 70's and in became involved in the gay community in the Bay Area. He met and had a long-term relationship with Unitarian Universalist minister Mark Belletini.

Through his involvement in the UCC Fellowship of the Arts, Phil was invited to assist with an arts exhibit at the General Synod in Rochester, New York, in June 1981. There he met some representatives of the UCC Coalition for Lesbian & Gay (later LGBT) Concerns. At the 1983 General Synod Phil did some drama and street theatre with Patricia deJong, the beginning of a long-term collaboration that continues to this day. Also during this time Phil began attending the National Gatherings of the Coalition. Phil was elected to the Council of the Coalition on which he served for seven years, six years as Moderator.

Phil provided leadership in worship design at Peace UCC, a new and largely gay and lesbian congregation in Oakland, in the late 1980s. When his colleague Pat deJong was called to be pastor of First Congregational Church of Berkeley in 1994, Phil returned there and became Minister of Arts and Communication.

In 1989, after the Body and Soul Dance Company disbanded, Phil and Cynthia Winton-Henry created WING IT! Performance Ensemble and InterPlay, a global social movement dedicated to ease, connection, human sustainability and play which is ongoing. He continues to serve as the co-director of the non-profit organization, Body Wisdom, Inc. that oversees all InterPlay activities which have spread around the world.

Phil has served on the UCC's Local Church Ministries Board and Executive Council. He also served on two restructuring task forces for the denomination and on the search committee for a new UCC President in 2008-09. Also around this time he became active again in the leadership of the Coalition and currently serves as Moderator of the Leadership Team.

Phil has lived in Oakland most of the time he has been in California, and currently lives at InterPlayce, which is the hub for the InterPlay community in downtown Oakland. He is active in his neighborhood which is called KONO (Koreatown Northgate). He has been partnered with Chinh Nguyen since 1994.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Phil Porter discusses his career in dance and theater movements; combining theology and dance in Body and Soul Dance company, Oakland, California, providing leadership through worship design, and serving as Minister of Arts and Communication in the UCC Coalition on LGBT Concerns, among other positions.

This interview was conducted by Mark Bowman, the executive director of LGBT-RAN. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Boston University School of Theology and has played a key leadership role in establishing a number of religious ventures and programs.

Access

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<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/phil-porter>.

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Languages

Collection material is in English

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Tags

United Church of Christ/Congregational Church

Open and Affirming in the UCC (ONA & formerly UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns)

Artist/musician/poet

Oakland

California