

SHORELINES
CULTURE NUT

The Naked Truth
Donna Blue Lachman's
Personal Landscape

By Heather Augustyn
As seen in the July 2006 issue of Shore magazine

Seventeenth-century mathematician Jacques Bernoulli had emblazoned on his gravestone the principle by which he was obsessed: *Eadem Mutato Resurgo*, or for those of you who missed your Latin course in school, "Although changed, I rise again the same." Bernoulli felt that this law, found in nature and life through such manifestations as the nautilus shell and sunflower seeds, reflected the notion that beings possess self-reproducing properties. In a nutshell, we might look different or changed, but we really are just a different form of the same thing we have been all along.

Enter Donna Blue Lachman. Today, she has an Emmy Award, is a director at a prestigious boarding school, and was owner of her own theater for well over a decade in a hot neighborhood in Chicago. Only a few decades ago, this same person lived in a nudist colony, let it all hang out on the White House lawn, and enjoyed the life of a hippie in the days of free, well, everything. Is she really such a different person now? Or just a manifestation of the same person she has always been?

Lachman says she has always been a "raconteur," and the changes she witnessed and experience in her own life, as well as the changes in culture as a whole, are part of the whole story that Lachman tells in her newest one-person show, *Dancing on the White House Lawn*, playing at the Acorn Theater in Three Oaks, Michigan, every Friday and Saturday night from July 14th through July 29th. Lachman calls her performance a "spiritual monologue." And it is not so much just about her life, although it is that. But it is also about the decades that many of us lived through, and even if we didn't, we still know about the times that shaped our cultural landscape.

"It's a crack-up," says Lachman. "During the sixties, that's when I came of age, during the Cultural Revolution, and I was a wild hippie and traveled all over the world and was thrust into the center of culture," she says. "I went to a major political demonstration in 1971, and they had rock bands on the White House lawn and about 200 to 300 women took off their blouses and danced on the White House lawn, hence the title. You couldn't get away with that today," Lachman says.

The performance is a redux of her 1994 off-Broadway run, and sees Lachman revisiting these scenes of her life that are snippets of the time. "I act them out like when I was a clown in San Francisco, or one highlight is when my brother was thirteen years old and came to visit me in the nudist commune, only my parents didn't know I was living in a nudist commune. It's kind of like stand-up comedy, but it's a play," she says. "I perform about Poland behind the Iron Curtain, Voodoo in Haiti, Israel, Native American ceremonies, the Halls of Congress, and finally to the Center of the World—Yep! Three Oaks!" she says. "It makes fun of the hippie culture because it was so wacky and crazy."

It's not just Lachman's life that gives the material its color, but it is how Lachman weaves that tapestry that is the performance. Lachman is an artiste. She is a cultivator of

comedy and drama. She is a teacher, a connoisseur, a lover of all things theater. From 1985 to just two years ago, Lachman owned and operated her own theater. The Blue Rider Theater in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood was home to hundreds of performances and brought the community together in the name of art. "We did festivals and I brought people in from all over the country to lecture. I did eleven one-woman shows there," Lachman says. One of those shows, *Frida: The Last Portrait*, won the Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Performance. It is only one of her two Joseph Jefferson Awards as well as many other honors. She also earned an Emmy Award for hosting "Free for All Chicago," a television show for the City of Chicago.

Lachman toured all over the world with her performances, but today finds solace in performing in the region and directing the drama department at the La Lumiere School in LaPorte, Indiana. "I enjoy that I don't have the theater anymore," admits Lachman. "It's so hard getting all the money and the grants." And she is no newcomer to teaching. Her teaching credits include the School of the Art Institute, graduate programs at Columbia College, and as artist-in-residence for Gallery 37 for the Arts. In 2005, Lachman served as dramatist-in-residence for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. "Now I teach kids from all over the world and I try to stretch their sensibilities and we have fun. I love theater in the country," she says of La Lumiere's gorgeous campus and unparalleled academics. Lachman also performs at the [Lubeznik Center for the Arts](#) in Michigan City.

She lives in Three Oaks with her husband in a home they have owned for years, but made a primary residence after the Blue Rider closed its doors in 2004 when the landlord changed the space into lofts. She frequently performs at the Acorn Theater.

But the closing of one door has opened another, like the chamber of a nautilus shell, making more room for the growing life force to enter and inhabit, a changed form of the same. Lachman too has entered a new phase of her life and brings her changes to the audience, for their entertainment, their identification, even their surprise. About her newest creation, *Dancing on the White House Lawn*, Lachman says she has many messages to convey. "I can't say it was all good or all bad, but there are messages that the audience will come away with," she says. "It's about community. It's about the changes we go through and the lives we live."

INFO BOX

Dancing on the White House Lawn

July 14, 15, 21, 22, 28 and 29

The Acorn Theater

107 Generations Dr

Three Oaks, MI

www.acorntheater.com.