

# Pioneer Profile

Joanna Sherman (A'69)

Joanna Sherman's (A'69) professional career—creating art and building working relationships among performers, artists and their audiences—has enabled people around the world to recognize a common humanity with that of their neighbors in the global community.

Sherman was trained as a dancer, studied architecture and art at Cooper Union and earned her B.F.A. She received an M.A. in theater and international studies from New York University in 1996. With this diverse background, she ended up in the field of physical theater, a movement, image-oriented form of theater that is informed by various arts: martial arts, dance, mime, circus and the like. Her creative résumé presents her as a choreographer, saxophonist, stilt dancer, juggler, fire-eater and actor.

In 1976, Sherman co-founded the Bond Street Theatre with creative partner Patrick Sciaratta. The ensemble of actors and artists began performing social commentary and recreated classics for New York audiences in parks and as a resident company at LaMama Theater. Today, the company is still dedicated to the vision of theater for social change, and works in areas of conflict and for disadvantaged communities around the world.

Both the initiative and ultimate goal of Bond Street Theatre is human engagement—using art for healing, teaching and opening new worlds of imagination and understanding. Sherman's directorship has brought the company and its original works throughout eastern and western Europe, the Balkans, East Asia, South America, the Middle East, Pakistan, India and Afghanistan. Sherman is a frequent speaker on the role of the arts in areas of conflict, including at the United Nations, the National Council on Women, universities, arts councils and arts-in-education forums, and she has been interviewed on CNN, BBC and many NPR programs.

In 1984, the company made its first foray into the artistic-humanitarian work that defines it today. The company developed an ongoing, inter-ethnic project in conjunction with the Israel Festival. Working with 60 Jewish, Palestinian and Kurdish artists in Jerusalem, the group created huge street spectacles on the theme of conflict resolution and formed Jerusalem's first street theater company, which lasted for many years.

Shortly after the Berlin Wall came down reuniting Germany, the group performed in Alexanderplatz in East Berlin, and further tours brought them to Northern Ireland, Colombia, Venezuela and Brazil where they worked with local artists and began concentrated work with the street children who lived off recycling garbage.



In 1999, in response to the war in Kosovo, Sherman traveled with the company to the Kosovar refugee camps in Macedonia. After the war, in collaboration with Theatre Tsvete, a puppet theater from Bulgaria, the company created a non-verbal version of "Romeo and Juliet," which toured throughout Kosovo, followed by tours in Serbia, Bosnia, Romania and Albania. They established the Performing Artists for Balkan Peace, a network of 10 theater groups committed to exchange within the region to promote peace and social progress.

As a consequence of the turmoil in the 21st century, Sherman and Bond Street Theatre members felt a deepened sense of urgency. Afghan refugees settled by the thousands in camps described by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees as the "single largest refugee crisis in the world." This was a call to action for the group. Bond Street Theatre has made many trips to Afghanistan, to collaborate with Exile Theatre, and work with students and faculty at Kabul University. They perform and teach for Afghanistan-Schulen, a German NGO that builds schools in rural Afghan communities. The program is also present in India, where the group has been working with rural women, training teachers and giving workshops and performances for children.

In 1984, Sherman found the ideal outlet for her Cooper Union studies in art and architecture. The young theater company moved to Palenville, NY and founded the Palenville Interarts Colony, an artists community "run by artists, for artists."

In 1990, the MacArthur Foundation honored Bond Street Theatre with an unsolicited award for its creative intercultural and interdisciplinary programming.

Responding to the growing interest in arts as humanitarian aid, Sherman is initiating the World Theatre Corps, a program that will directly connect artists of all disciplines, from both developed and developing countries, with local organizations in disadvantaged communities around the world. The goal is to empower communities by strengthening their own cultural resources.

Sherman is the recipient of an Exploration Fund grant from Arts International and travel grants from TCG, the International Theatre Institute, the Trust for Mutual Understanding and the U.S. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. She was on the selection committee for the inaugural class of NYU's new Social Entrepreneurship Program, and has been a speaker at Columbia, Georgetown, Johns Hopkins, George Washington, Wesleyan, CCNY and Adelphi universities, among others.

## Regional Alumni Events Fall '07

### Reception in Los Angeles

A lovely sunset reception for Los Angeles area alumni, parents and guests took place at Shutters on the Beach in Santa Monica on October 29, 2007. President George Campbell Jr. spoke about Cooper Union's recent national rankings, construction progress on the new building and exciting directions. Trustee Marc Appleton, great great great grandson of Peter Cooper, and Vice President for External Affairs Ronni Denes attended the reception as did Director of Alumni Relations Susan Moyle Lynch, who extended greetings from the Alumni Association and showed a video about the new academic building.

### Reception in Durham, NC

Alumni and guests gathered at the Washington Duke Inn and Golf Club in Durham, NC, for an inaugural reception on November 13, 2007. Leading the Cooper Union officials were President George Campbell Jr. and Vice President for External Affairs Ronni Denes. Director of Alumni Relations Susan Moyle Lynch brought greetings from the Alumni Association and thanked reception co-hosts Rev. Joan Rose Gelbein (A'57) and Abraham Gelbein (ChE'57). Dr. Campbell presented a video and summarized progress on construction of the new academic building and other exciting academic and alumni activities underway at Cooper Union.

### Art Basel Miami Beach Collection Tour and Luncheon

The Florida Chapter of The Cooper Union Alumni Association hosted a tour of the Rubell Family Collection and a luncheon for alumni and guests in Miami's Wynwood art district during Art Basel Miami Beach on December 8, 2007. The Rubell Family Collection is one of the leading collections of contemporary art in the world dating from the 1960s to the present. Mera Rubell spoke with the group about how the collection was formed and continues to be amassed. Dean Saskia Bos led the tour of the collection and during the luncheon that followed provided the locations of Cooper Union alumni exhibiting at the art fair.