

PANTHER HOLLOW

Fresh from its presentation in New York's renowned Off-Broadway, United Solo Festival, *Panther Hollow* is now available for booking! Email David at david@passagetheatre.org for more details and information.

Storyteller and monologist David Lee White details his struggle with love, sex and clinical depression at age 25 while living in a one hundred year old house in Pittsburgh's hidden neighborhood, Panther Hollow.

PANTHER HOLLOW

**Written & Performed
by David Lee White**

**Directed by
John Augustine**

**A play
about
freaking
out,
popping
meds and
holding
on...**



"Unique, compelling and honest. I laughed forty-four times and cried twice, which is the perfect solo show ratio."

- Lauren Weedman, HBO's LOOKING

"A tapestry of hilarious and poignant stories. White is an engaging storyteller."

- Nancy Giles, Commentator CBS NEWS SUNDAY MORNING

From Panther Hollow:

“Everything I’m about to tell you is true. And, fair warning, some of it is upsetting so I’m going to apologize in advance. There are eleven corpses in this show – eight victims of suicide, one tragic accident, one fake dead body and one cat. I apologize for that. I especially apologize for the cat, although it’s not me that kills it. There are references to sex in this show – awkward, humiliating sex or, in my case, the humiliating and awkward lack of sex. I’m sorry. There are also two skinheads, one reference to public fornication, a few ghosts, Satan and Shakespeare. I’m sorry that I take a few potshots at religion although I feel it’s warranted. Also, because of lifelong feelings of self-loathing, I feel the need to say “I’m sorry” for everything you might find offensive and for that, I apologize. So let me just start with the first dead body and you can tick everything off as I go along...” – **David Lee White – from Panther Hollow**

What people say about Panther Hollow...

“What makes David show so unique, and his show so compelling, is his honesty. He’s such a good writer. I laughed 44 times and cried twice. The perfect solo show ratio. Corpses...dead bodies....depression...suicide – subjects that are tough to pull off but David does because his humor is so self-deprecating, and so honest. Most importantly, for a solo performer, he’s a really likable guy. Panther Hollow is a personal story of imperfect humanity perfectly told.” – **Lauren Weedman, HBO’s “Looking,” “Hung,” and Comedy Central’s “The Daily Show.” Award winning solo performer and creator of the solo show “Bust.”**

“David Lee White’s solo piece PANTHER HOLLOW is a tapestry of hilarious and poignant stories (among them a bout with depression, a group called “Teens For Christ,” and White stalking the author of Prozac Nation). White is an engaging storyteller, who’s expressive and a lot of fun to watch.” – **Nancy Giles, Commentator, CBS News Sunday Morning**

“David’s take on depression and suicide will have you laughing in the aisles and crying in your soul. Panther Hollow is a deeply personal work of bravery, joy and honesty. A truly inspirational tale that does what the best theatre can, showing that we are all human and even the deepest wounds can be healed. Better than CATS, better than ET.” – **Robert Carr, Director of Programs and Services, The New Jersey Theatre Alliance**

“An account of the playwright/performer's first salvos in his battle against clinical depression, the piece sheds light on a condition people still seem to think happens in a vacuum. White takes us back in time to early 1990's college life in Pittsburgh. You can practically see, feel and smell his old neighborhood as he describes the awkward, uncertain, hilarious, grisly, and emotionally (and physically) naked events on his quest to find health, happiness, and even love. As a performer, Mr. White commands the stage with the same energy, wit, ease and charm that he had when he was actually in his early twenties. PANTHER HOLLOW feels like an entry in your best friend's diary that you weren't supposed to read, but now that you have, you need to share it with another friend whose life literally depends on hearing it.” – **Scott Sickles, Writers Guild Award winner and three-time Emmy Award nominee”**

STAGE REVIEW: 'Panther Hollow' at Passage Theatre

- By Bob Brown
- Mar 10, 2016

Passage Theatre Company in Trenton has presented some courageous theater over the years. This season's Solo Flights Festival, which continues through March 20, exemplifies the kind of work that you rarely get to see — solo works performed by their authors.



Passage's artistic director, June Ballinger, says in production notes, "To be alone on stage performing a story you yourself have written is terrifying, exhilarating and very different from having an acting partner on stage with you. The solo actor *does* have dialogue and conflict and resolution with "other characters," you yourself play those others!"

David Lee White's *Panther Hollow* is a perfect example of going out on a limb. Mr. White, Passage's associate artistic director, has written several plays that were produced by the company, but as far as I know, this is his first solo piece.

And what a performance piece it is! Talk about terrifying, Mr. White does nothing less than get up on that stage with a chair, a table, a white-board, and two cups of water, then proceed to disrobe his psyche for the next 70 minutes. After an opening joke about suicide to loosen the crowd (ba-da-boom), he warns us that his story — all true — will contain 11 corpses, 8 suicides, 1 abused cat, and sex — the awkward and humiliating lack of it. It also offers up loads of self-deprecating humor.

The story goes back to Panther Hollow, an other-side-of-the-tracks Pittsburgh neighborhood. There, Mr. White lived the life of quiet desperation familiar to all 25-year-old virgins. He informs us that Pittsburgh is a sort of "suicide central" whose many bridges are a constant temptation to the suicidally inclined. Mr. White punctuates his story with diagrams and photos that he pops onto the white-board.

Interspersed with a history of obscure suicides, one of which he encountered by accident, Mr. White recounts his theater gigs. He directed the bloody Jacobean revenge tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi*, and he once filled in as a corpse for a performance of Tom Stoppard's *The Real Inspector Hound*. He dives onto the floor to demonstrate the stifling posture he had to maintain through most of that play.

He talks of his limited relationships with women. Among his acting students in years past had been a marvelous young woman, who kicked her cat across the room for peeing on her leather jacket. He had tentatively kissed her. And he developed an obsession with Elizabeth Wurtzel, whose alluring picture on the cover of her memoir *Prozac*

Nation had aroused him enough to make some rash moves. But there is no sex on the horizon. “Constantly thinking of sex,” he says, “tends to dull your empathy.”

He dips into his bouts of depression and the pain of loneliness. He decides that as diseases go, “clinical depression” has a PR problem. Why can’t it be called something like *suicidal cogitatis*? He toys with suicide methods that are appropriately theatrical. He explores self-cutting. And he enters therapy with a counselor, a woman who will (horrors!) likely probe his nonexistent sex life. Cognitive therapy follows, and prescribed drugs, which lift him out of depression and up to euphoria. They have given “a false sense of well-being,” the therapist says. But isn’t that what they’re supposed to do?

Inevitably he meets a woman with whom he can talk for hours. She isn’t even deterred by the fact that he lives in a neighborhood frequented by skinheads, a place where you might stumble upon a rutting couple or a fresh corpse on the ground any given night.

Mr. White’s darkly hilarious story has a light at the end of the tunnel or he wouldn’t be left to tell the tale. He’s a marvelous storyteller and, although the details suggest otherwise, his telling crackles with wry humor. Laughter in the face of death is the best medicine. Ultimately, the story is about the redemptive power of love and, yes, sex with the right woman. The content is about adult matters, but I’d give it a soft R for content. No language that would shock a 13-year-old.

White pulls you into a slice of his life so seductively that you feel each agonizing moment with him — laughing all the way. Solo pieces are unlike any other live performance. They’re kind of theatrical bon-bons, choice bits that you can savor. Then go onto the next, each one unique. You won’t want to miss David White’s bon-bon, or any of the others in Passage Theatre Company’s Solo Flights Festival.

David White’s Panther Hollow will have two more performances: March 12 at 3 p.m. and March 18 at 8 p.m. His and other solo pieces are part of the Solo Flights Festival, which continues at The Mill Hill Playhouse, 205 E. Front Street, Trenton, through March 20. For tickets and information, go to www.passagetheatre.org or call 609-392-0766.



University of Pittsburgh

THEATRE ARTS

Bringing Light to Dark Places- Pitt alumnus David Lee White on his new one-person play "Panther Hollow"

In a recent conversation with alumnus David Lee White he explained that theatre has “always been what I’ve done. It’s my medium, it’s the language I speak... the only way I’ve ever really seriously interacted with the world.”

White began studying at the University of Pittsburgh as an acting MFA in 1991. Since then, White’s theatre experiences have multiplied along with his talents, expanding to include director and playwright. Among White’s early experiences playwriting were the “great” classes of Pitt’s Dr. Kathleen George, and a staging of an original piece by the school. He is now the Associate Artistic Director and Resident Playwright at Passage Theatre in Trenton, New Jersey. White’s most recent endeavor, the one-man show *Panther Hollow*, is the newest fruit of White’s lifelong labor and passion for theatre, as well as a deeply personal return to the landscapes of Pittsburgh.

White recently brought *Panther Hollow* to our city for a performance at the Arcade Comedy Theatre, and is currently in talks with Pitt about an upcoming, on-campus production, the details of which we will be excited to announce.

Panther Hollow is directed by John Augustine and confronts, in comedic and confessional fashion, the darkest point in White’s struggles with clinical depression. He summarizes the potent concept of his play- “Back in 1995, I had just finished grad school and was still living in this run down house in Panther Hollow. One morning, I found a dead body hanging from a tree down the street from my house. I spent the next year cruising therapists, popping meds and trying to piece my broken life back together. When I turned forty-five, I stumbled across my twenty-year old journal and starting piecing the story back together. This show is the result.”

And this result, believe it or not, is hilarious as well as moving. “I’m unable to avoid comedy,” White said, and he does indeed demonstrate excellent humor in discussing even the most difficult of times. Bringing forward the comedy that surrounds serious issues can be “breathtaking” for White, who cited the work of John Guare and Christopher Durang as examples. White accomplishes this same juxtaposition in revisiting the most “internally intense year” of his life with openness and a readiness to make people laugh.

This is not to say the writing process was easy- White says he struggled with how to honestly approach these experiences, how not to judge such loaded subjects or himself. He also wrestled with how to portray that period in a dramatic way because “depression is really kind of boring.” Eventually, enthusiastic audiences convinced him that this is a story they wanted to see told and subjects they wanted confronted. They were drawn in by White and his journey as well as the intriguing atmosphere of Pittsburgh, which developed into an important component

of the play. Asked to describe Pittsburgh in three words, White went with “nostalgic,” “confusing,” and “ever-changing”- an intriguing setting indeed!

Despite the highly autobiographical content of his play, White’s vision is large- the motivation for telling his own story comes in part from his long-time mental health advocacy. White described how the play is a way of sharing information about the deep and unique structures of depression and illuminating ways of emerging out of it- for those who may suffer, and loved ones who struggle to help them. More basically, it is a means of creating communication and openness about illnesses and even treatments still shrouded in mystery and, too often, stigma.

Through the process of developing the play and facing its challenges, it became “liberating” for the playwright and audiences. White explained, “staging the worst year of your life, and having people laugh at it... to put this out there and share this with other people who’ve experienced this” is a way “to say, ‘Let’s not be embarrassed by it.’” By “it” White does mean depression and mental illness, but he also means any experience that causes people to feel isolated and embarrassed. White’s speaking honestly about difficult and lonely times, the sort that had once ashamed him but in fact help define us all, becomes a way for audiences to regain compassion for themselves and openness towards others. This simple but very important transformation of perspective and emotion is just that sort that theatre is able to create, and a testament to White’s multi-faceted commitment to the form.

Asked to advise young artists less far along on their paths, White offered “don’t wait.” “Don’t worry about whether or not it’s going to make you famous,” he said, “do what you want do as soon as possible. Right away.” It’s a good lesson from someone who has not stopped exploring and discovering his creativity and himself, and who has strengthened and contributed to communities in the process of hard work, honest bravery, and an eye for the humor to be found just about anywhere.

- Clara Wilch



Short List: Jan 13 - 21

David Lee White's one-man *Panther Hollow*; comic Jermaine Fowler; Martin Luther King Jr. Day events; William Close & The Earth Harp Collective at the Byham

By [CP Staff](#)

SPOTLIGHT: Fri., Jan. 15 — Stage

In 1995, aspiring actor **David Lee White** — who'd recently completed the University of Pittsburgh's graduate acting program — found a dead body near his home in *Panther Hollow*, that isolated neighborhood where Oakland meets Schenley Park. The body was hanging from a tree, an apparent suicide. White, 25, was already in what he now calls "a very deep depression," and began having suicidal thoughts himself. Eventually, he undertook therapy, and prescription anti-depressants; met the woman he'd later marry; and left town. He's now a playwright and educator, and associate artistic director at Trenton, N.J.'s Passage Theatre. But after rediscovering his journal from that time ("I write the worst poems," he acknowledges), White realized that those dark days were his life's turning point, when he confronted the difference between his self-image and reality. The result, from the writer of plays including *Blood: A Comedy* and *Slippery as Sin*, was ***Panther Hollow***, a solo dark comedy. Speaking by phone, White says the play was inspired by work he's seen that "acknowledges the cringey, embarrassing aspects" of life without being sentimental. In November, *Panther Hollow*, performed by White, premiered to strong reviews at New York's United Solo Festival. On Jan. 15, White brings the play home, in a sense, staging its Pittsburgh premiere at **Arcade Comedy Theater**. *Bill O'Driscoll* 8 p.m. Fri., Jan. 15. 811 Liberty Ave., Downtown. \$10. 412-339-0608 or www.arcadecomedytheater.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PANTHER HOLLOW
WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY DAVID LEE WHITE
PITTSBURGH ACTOR & DIRECTOR RETURNS TO PERFORM ONE-PERSON SHOW

PITTSBURGH, PA - From 1992-1996, David Lee White was a local actor and director in the Pittsburgh theatre scene and was part of the University of Pittsburgh's MFA program. On January 15th at 8:00 PM, David will return to Pittsburgh to perform his show "Panther Hollow" at the Arcade Comedy Theater at 811 Liberty Avenue. Tickets can be purchased online at <http://arcadecomedytheater.com/events/> or by calling (412) 339-0608

Part stand-up comedy confessional, part examination of the cultural taboo of mental illness, Panther Hollow details White's struggle with clinical depression while living in a century-old house under a bridge in the eerie Panther Hollow neighborhood in Pittsburgh. White began working on the show in the Passage Theatre Play Lab where the piece attracted the attention of director John Augustine. The pair entered the piece in the United Solo Festival off-Broadway where it premiered on November 11th, 2015.

"Back in 1995, I had just finished grad school and was still living in this run down house in Panther Hollow One morning, I found a dead body hanging from a tree down the street from my house. I spent the next year cruising therapists, popping meds and trying to piece my broken life back together. When I turned forty-five, I stumbled across my twenty-year old journal and starting piecing the story back together. This show is the result. I have such affection for Pittsburgh and the people I met there. I'm thrilled to be able to perform the show at Arcade."

"Unique, compelling and honest. I laughed forty-four times and cried twice, which is the perfect solo show ratio. Panther Hollow is a personal story of imperfect humanity, perfectly told." – Lauren Weedman, HBO's Looking.

"A tapestry of hilarious and poignant stories. White is an engaging storyteller who's expressive and fun to watch." – Nancy Giles, Commentator, CBS News Sunday Morning.

David Lee White is a New Jersey based playwright and educator that has worked with Passage Theatre, McCarter Theatre, Dreamcatcher Rep, PlayPenn, Rider University and Drexel. He was recently commissioned by the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and Passage Theatre to create the play SANISM, which will premiere in 2017. His play BLOOD: A COMEDY was been produced at Passage Theatre (2009) and Dreamcatcher Rep (2012). His play SLIPPERY AS SIN also received its world premiere at Passage in 2011. The one-act play WHITE BABY was originally produced at Passage Theatre, then at Emerging Artists Theatre in NY. He created "Stoop Theatre" with the Trenton High drama club and created the show THIS TRENTON LIFE which was the subject an Emmy-Award nominated broadcast on PCK Media's STATE OF THE ARTS. David Lee White is the Associate Artistic Director and Resident Playwright at Passage Theatre in Trenton.

For more info, go to www.davidleewhite.net

Arcade Comedy Theater is a unique non-profit, comedy-centered arts organization founded in February 2013. This intimate 75-seat space hosts stand-up, improv, sketch comedy, variety acts, and more. With a BYOB policy and vintage video games in the lobby, the Arcade provides a fun and affordable addition to downtown Pittsburgh's Cultural District. The Arcade Academy offers a range of comedy classes for learners of all levels. Arcade Comedy Theater was voted Best Comedy Venue of 2014 by the readers of *Pittsburgh Magazine*.

BIOS

David Lee White (writer and performer) is a New Jersey-based playwright and educator who has worked with Passage Theatre, McCarter Theatre, Dreamcatcher Rep, PlayPenn, Rider University and Drexel University, as well as many other theatres and theatre programs in the NJ/NY/PA area. He is currently working on a commission from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center and Passage Theatre to create the play *SANISM*, which will premiere in 2017. Recently produced plays include *BLOOD: A COMEDY* (Passage Theatre, 2009, Dreamcatcher Rep, 2012), *SLIPPERY AS SIN* (Passage Theatre, 2011), and *WHITE BABY* (Passage Theatre and Emerging Artists Theatre, NYC). David also worked with Passage's Artistic Director June Ballinger to create the mainstage shows *TRENTON LIGHTS* and *PROFILES*, based on interviews with Trenton residents on the topics of race, identity and local history. His newest play *REAL TRUE CRIME* received a reading in the Hive Exposed series in NYC in March of 2015, and his solo show *PANTHER HOLLOW* will be seen at Dreamcatcher Rep, Drexel University and the United Solo Festival in the Fall of 2015. Upcoming works in development include the play *THE FESTIVAL QUARTET*, and the musical *LIVE STREAM* with singer/songwriter Sarah Donner and director/co-creator Adam Immerwahr, which has been workshopped twice at Bristol-Riverside Theatre as part of their *America Rising* series. He is a member of The Dramatists Guild and Actors Equity Association.

David is also an arts educator and activist. Since 2005, he has been creating oral-history based plays with Trenton area teens based on social and cultural issues. *IF I COULD IN MY HOOD I WOULD...* explored inner-city gang culture, *FIRE GIRLS* took on the issue of girl-bullying and *URBAN CENTRAL* examined the 1967 race riots that took place at Trenton Central High. Subsequent shows in this vein include *GET OFF THE BUS* and *BOBASHELA*. He created an outdoor "Stoop Theatre" event with the Trenton High drama club, whose performance of *THIS TRENTON LIFE* became the subject an Emmy-Award nominated broadcast on PCK Media's *STATE OF THE ARTS*. In the summer of 2015, David created the show *FIVE MINUTES TO PLACES* for the McCarter Theatre Education Program's Comedy Conservatory. David also serves as the Associate Artistic Director and Resident Playwright at Passage Theatre in Trenton. He runs the Passage Play Lab, which supports the development of plays by New Jersey-based playwrights. David is also the curator of the Rider University New Play Festival, an instructor at PlayPenn in Philadelphia and a professor of Dramatic Analysis and Improvisation at Drexel University. He earned his Master's degree at the University of Pittsburgh, just down the road from Panther Hollow. More at www.davidleewhite.net.

John Augustine (director) John Augustine (Director) John grew up working in all aspects of theatre. He spent seasons with the famous Kenley Players, a "star package" theatre, before moving to NYC. In addition to *Panther Hollow*, he directed *The Hummingbird Tour*, currently running off-Broadway and is working on a new play by actor/writer Dave Droxler, *Walken on Sunshine*. He has directed Allison Janney in *Window of Opportunity*, Camryn Manheim in *Pamper Island*, Sherry Andersen in *Scab Writes a Song*, Gerit Quealy in *The Censorship Play*, John McDonnell's *Kaput* and many other "downtown" plays. His own work has been presented in New York City at The Zipper, HERE, Naked Angels, All Season's Theatre Group, Expanded Arts, Ensemble Studio

Theatre, Miranda Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, 59E59 Theaters and National Theatre of the Deaf (*O, Figaro!* Co-authored with Willy Conley) He is published in two short play anthologies: *Take Ten* and *The Best American Short Plays of 1993-94*. His play *PeopleSpeak* is published in *Shorter, Faster, Funnier*. *Augustine's Confessions* is published by playscripts.com For television, Mr. Augustine wrote for the Fox TV show *Titus* and for *Encore! Encore!* with Nathan Lane and Joan Plowright. He has taught at Sarah Lawrence College, New York University, Bucks County Playhouse and Playwrights Horizons Theatre School. He is a Revson Fellow in Playwriting, and a member of The Writers Guild of America, The Dramatists Guild, SAG, AEA and SDC. www.johnaugustine.net