

Small donations on kickstarter asked to help fund project



PHOTO BY JIM KNOWLES

Charlene Raimondi and Yvonne Ryan pose for a photo with Brian Copeland at Zocalo Coffeehouse last Thursday night.

By Jim Knowles

San Leandro Times

Brian Copeland would perform his one-man show for every school in the country if he could.

But since "Not a Genuine Black Man" is on the reading list of so many schools, that would be impossible. So Copeland's show is going to be filmed, so a DVD will be available to teachers, students and everybody else who wants to see the show.

Copeland explained the idea for the video at Zocalo coffeehouse on Bancroft Avenue last Thursday night.

"The book is required in a lot of schools so I would like the DVD to be available to them,"

Copeland said.

The play, and book that followed, tells the story of the Copeland family moving to an apartment in San Leandro from Oakland in the 1970s when this city was over 99.9 percent white and racial discrimination was customary and real estate agents didn't sell houses to black families. Copeland tells the story through the eyes of the 9-year-old boy he was at the time in a way that's both poignant and funny.

Even though San Leandro is a diverse city today, much of suburban America is as white-bread as ever, so the show is certainly current.

"Take a drive out 580," Copeland said at the coffeehouse. "You'll find there are quite a few places that are not much different than we were in 1971."

Copeland got the title for the show from an anonymous letter he received about his radio show on KGO from someone who said he was disgusted with him because he "wasn't a genuine black man."

This made Copeland wonder about all the stereotypes – what does it mean to be a “genuine” black man? It also set the stage for a bit in the show that’s really hilarious.

The show will be filmed on three nights at the Marsh Theater in San Francisco where Copeland first performed the play in 2004. It was the longest running solo show in San Francisco theater history and has since been performed in 30 other cities.

Copeland plays over 20 characters in the show, including his mother, his father, his sister, policemen, lawyers, a waitress, a pastor, white teenage racists, a hate-letter writer and several irate neighbors.

Schools and colleges around the country have requested a DVD of the play to go along with the book. The show will be professionally filmed and edited into a 2-hour recording, and later sent to film festivals and aired on television.

The DVD for the schools will be divided into chapters for classroom use and include extra commentary by Copeland.

The project is using a new funding idea called kickstarter, which funds films, art, music and technology projects through its website www.kickstarter.com. If a project raises enough money from small, individual donations, other funding kicks in to make the project possible.

The "Genuine" project needs to raise \$30,000 by Dec. 29 to be funded, with donations coming from individuals, no matter how small. If it reaches that goal, kickstarter backers fund the additional money that the project needs, said associate producer Dawn Valadez.

The project has raised over \$10,000 so far, one-third of the way to the goal. The exact amount raised at the moment is updated on the kickstarter website.

To make a contribution or for more information, go to www.kickstarter.com.