

Spiritually Incorrect



Alan Clements Breaks Silence to Rage Against the Machine

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by Grania Litwin

Arts and Theater Critic

Alan Clements spent almost 10 years in a Burmese monastery as a young man, meditating 20 hours a day, rarely speaking, listening to the inner silence. Now the self-proclaimed spiritual anarchist and human rights activist turned spoken word entertainer talks non-stop for 90 minutes in front of audiences all over North America and Europe.

In his one-man show, “Spiritually Incorrect: A Monologue Challenging Indoctrination, Dogma and the Politics of War,” coming to the Belfry Theatre on Saturday night the former Buddhist monk offers a show that melds comedy, satire and activism. “It’s unscripted and unrehearsed,” says Clements, whose dramatic monologue looks at philosophical, social, spiritual, and political issues. The show also takes aim at propaganda and mind control, historic rivalries, ethnic cleansing and inner violence.

This is the 74th performance of what critics have called, “a new genre of spiritual entertainment.” The tour will visit 17 cities over the next six months — including, Toronto, Montreal, Vienna, and Prague, as well as many cities in the U.S. — and is a benefit to raise awareness of incarcerated Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, known as Burma’s Gandhi.

Clements offers Gandhian-style expressions and concepts in an effort to explode the “Neanderthal rock heads of the Republican right and the war machine of sanctified murder.” He also riffs about, “the religious war ...an American Christian Jihad against Islam, masquerading as a war against terrorism.”

As ironic as it may sound, his monologue will include plenty of humor, because Clements feels that laughter is one of the best means of self-defense against suffering and cynicism. “My show inspires hope and courage. People will find plenty to laugh about for most of the show, and cry at least once, both at the poignancy of the human predicament, as well as its horror. Overall, my show provides an existential catharsis.”

During a telephone interview from Vancouver, Clements quoted Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky and Dr. Martin Luther King, who encouraged “divine dissatisfaction... to cut the habits of complicity with oppression, apathy and war, while encouraging us to rise up in our dignity to confront the lies inside and outside, wherever, politically, spiritually, or socially.”

He also lauded Canada for taking a stand against U.S. President George W. Bush and prays they do not buckle under the pressure to join the “lie in terror.” “Canada has a chance to be a global leader, showing by example the power of dialogue over death and destruction.”

He says peacemakers must find a way to enter the human psyche at “the matrix level of consciousness and decode it of its primordial instinct for violence. We must stop the war machine at its genetic-heart level if we hope to evolve out of our reptilian ancestral heritage.”

His own research into the human psyche began 30 years ago when he became disenchanted with studying government, pre-law, and art history. His ambition to become a diplomat was exploded by the realization that, “I was being reprogrammed to be a sophisticated liar and a puppet for a trigger happy government.”

He decided to turn inward instead. He headed to Burma, where he became the first American to ordain as a Buddhist monk in that remote South Asian nation. For the better part of a decade he meditated up to 20 hours a day, slept for only four hours, ate two meals a day, drank only water after noon, and no sex.

“Our meditation center was sort of like a Cape Canaveral. We were trained to become astronauts of interior space.” By escaping the gravitational pull of fear and desire, he eventually discovered an “interior weightlessness, a simple tender refuge that required no rent or vacuuming. It was nice to know that you didn’t need stuff to be happy, cliched as that sounds.”

Being told to leave the country by Burma’s xenophobic government, he decided to “disrobe” and trade the monastery for teaching in the West and then activism. In 2001 he turned to the stage where he combines it all in what he calls “Activist Theater.”

—PREVIEW

To excerpt “Instinct for Freedom” or “The Voice of Hope” or interview the author, or for foreign rights, contact:

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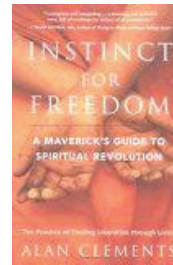
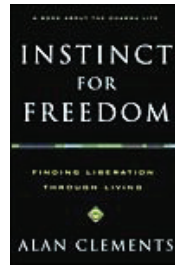
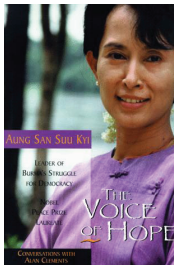
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Additional books by Alan Clements



The Voice of Hope - Conversations with Aung San Suu Kyi, Burma’s imprisoned Nobel peace laureate (Seven Stories, NY).