

### **SF Mime Troupe History:**

Founded in 1959 by R.G. Davis, as an experimental project of the Actors' workshop, the San Francisco Mime Troupe's early works were...silent, (but not pantomime) avant-garde pieces that today would be called performance art. By the early sixties, the SF Mime Troupe began performing spoken plays with character archetypes drawn directly from the Commedia dell'Arte. Continuing in the broad styles of popular theater, the SFMT's productions became overtly political.

In 1965, the city's Recreation and Park Commission revoked the troupe's performance permit, on grounds of "obscenity". Refusing to allow his company to be censored, on August 7, 1965, R.G. Davis attempted to perform *Il Candelaio* in Lafayette Park, loudly announcing to his audience: "Today for your appreciation, we perform an arrest," as Davis was swept up by the police for performing without a permit. The ensuing court case, argued by Marvin Stender, established the right of artists to perform uncensored in the city's parks. The SFMT has opened a new show in the parks every summer since.

In 1965, future rock impresario Bill Graham, then the company's business manager, organized his first rock dance/light show at the Fillmore Auditorium as a bail benefit for the SFMT.

In 1965, Davis, Saul Landau, and a racially mixed group of actors created A MINSTREL SHOW, OR CIVIL RIGHTS IN A CRACKER BARREL, using a historically racist form to attack racism in both its redneck and liberal varieties. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) sponsored performances around the country, the Troupe began its life as a touring company.

In 1970 Davis left the SFMT, and the company became collectively run: instead of a single Artistic Director the SFMT - a company dedicated to telling the stories of workers - committed itself to being run by its workers. They then began a series of experiments with industrial-era popular theater forms: melodrama and its descendants: science fiction and spy thriller.

Adding music, songs, and physical comedy the Mime Troupe's style solidified and its national and global popularity increased. In addition to performing, the Troupe has taught workshops on both the SFMT "style" and its unique method of collaborative playmaking. For 30 years, the SFMT's **Summer Workshop and Internship program** has attracted primarily college aged students but is open to everyone from mature high school age students on up to older adults. Its students come from across the country and around the world to train with us. The SFMT also has 2 longtime annual youth theater components. The **Youth Theater Project (YTP)** which brings students from underserved communities to the SFMT's studio to study playmaking with veteran troupers. And its **Young California Writer's Project** (at Balboa High School) sends a veteran SFMT writer into local schools to teach the art of activist playwrighting.

In 1987, the Troupe's Brechtian style of guerrilla theatre earned them a special Tony Award for Excellence in Regional Theater. The Troupe has since been nominated for and received multiple awards, including OBIE, Drama-Logue, Bay Area Drama Critic Circle, and Theatre Bay Area awards -most recently for its 2015 production of its critically-acclaimed tragic farce, FREEDOMLAND. In its 50 years the Troupe has performed at The Israel Festival (1990), The Festival of People's Theater (Canada, 1991), The Asian People's Theatre Festival (Hong Kong, 1996), The Kwachon International Open Air Theatre Festival (Korea, 1998), The International Festival of Theatre Action (Belgium, 1998), the Festival of Verbal Heroes (Germany, 2001), as well as performances in France, Nicaragua, Columbia, Cuba, Off-Broadway, The Kennedy Center for the Arts, and in tours across the USA. However, the Bay Area parks still remain the Troupe's home stage.