

Hallwalls Slates Performance By Jeff Way, Costume Artist

By JAY BOYAR

WHO IS THAT masked man? No, it's not the Lone Ranger. It's Jeff Way, a performance artist from New York who's bringing his act to the Hallwalls Gallery, 700 Main St., at 8:30 p.m. Friday.

For nearly six years, Way has been making the masks and costumes that are so central to his performances. His outfits include a horned bull mask worn with a flowing white robe, a street bag-person disguise, a tuxedo with an incongruous green mask, and 8 or 9 others.

"I had these dreams, and the masks grew out of them," explains Way, over the telephone from his apartment in New York.

WAY WEARS THE costumes one on top of the other, and his show is something of a modified strip-tease. "I have many layers of costumes, masks, and various props, 90 percent of which I have on from the beginning," he says, describing his show. "The performance is a gradual shedding of these layers, revealing different masks, different costumes, different personae, as I call them."

The piece, which takes about 45 minutes to complete, is called "Transformation Performance." Music is important to the work, and Way uses recordings of Captain Beefheart's "Do the Low Yo Yo" and Professor Longhair's "Ball the Wall."

"I was a lot of rhythm instruments in the performance (too)," he offers. "Mostly things that I've made. The piece is primarily sound and movement and costumes. There's no talking in it."

"**TRANSFORMATION** Performance" has been in diverse settings, including his studio, a shopping mall in Poughkeepsie, va-

rious museums and galleries, and a barn in Vermont. "I've done it for a tremendous variety of people, ranging from museum trustees to mental patients," he offers.

Recently, he did his act for several hundred elementary school children in Brooklyn. "It was unbelievable," he says breathlessly. "It was nearly bedlam, but it was really exciting. It was like being a rock star at a dwarf concert."

Jeff Way is also known as a painter and, in fact, several of his paintings were shown at Hallwalls last year. Gallery-goers may especially recall a large work featuring a gorilla holding a human leg, rendered in vivid — even garish — colors.

THE PERFORMANCE he does grew out of the paintings, and out of his first loves, dancing and theater. "I grew up in a family where my mother taught dancing," he reminisces. "It was in a small town in Ohio (Waverly), so she had her own dance school. My father was a singer and he did some acting in local summer theater groups. I got involved in that through them."

In college, Way continued to focus on dance and theater. His sister, in fact, is Jenifer Way, a dancer in Twyla Tharp's company.

"Then, when I came to New York . . . I really just concentrated on painting for a few years," he recalls. "At a certain point, I felt like I wanted to use other parts of me, other things I had done. The masks are one way to do that. . . . A lot of the imagery and ideas are the same in my paintings and in the things I use in the performance."

BEST KNOWN among his many costumes is one he calls "Ubu Punk," patterned on a character in French literature. It looks

rather like a cross between a pair of pajamas and a Klanman's hooded outfit, with some angry maracas thrown in. "I made what started out to be an origami folded-paper hat," he admits, laughing. "The hat was too big, and it became a mask (because) it slipped down over my head."

Much of Way's inspiration derives from the masks of African and American Indian tribes. "The notion of artist as shaman" is very important to him, and he allows a little self-consciousness, that he's got a mystical temperament. "For me," he says, "art is ultimately a matter of spiritual pursuit."

Another important source of Way's inspiration is a wonderful but obscure entertainer named the Bananaman, who used to appear on the "Ed Sullivan Show" and "Captain Kangaroo."

BANANAMAN WAS a clown, of sorts, who'd pull prop after nutty prop — including many bananas — from his pockets, transform himself with costuming, create a huge train to hold all the props, and, finally, ride off in it. "Every now and then I run into someone who remembers that guy," notes Way. "That really was one of the chief inspirations for my piece (but) I don't construct a train at the end."

The interface between the silly Bananaman and the scary shaman is where Way feels most comfortable working. "One thing that is important in my work is the edge between what's funny and what's frightening," he offers. "That's something that's always been part of me."

"When a lot of people go to horror movies, they laugh because they're nervous. It's funny to them in a way, but it's also frightening. Sometimes the laughter is a mask for another feeling."



Jeff Way in one of the many costumes he dons and doffs during his 'Modified striptease'

MEDIA STUDY

Lennon Found His World But Savored It Only Briefly

By MITCH GERBER

Courier-Express Record Reviewer

JOHN LENNON aged well.

In the publicity photos distributed last month with the release of *Double Fantasy*, the new Lennon/Yoko Ono love-song collaboration on Geffen Records, we saw an almost Oriental serenity about the

scream" therapy (listen to the *Plastic Ono Band* album from 1970); a dabbling in political radicalism; a lot of traveling; a move to New York; some exquisitely, painfully honest soul-searching that is reflected in many of his '70s song lyrics; and, finally, a resolution of his relationship with "ho-

York, and he took control of his life. That's a catchphrase, "take control of your life," and it's a particularly odious one because its chief use is by those who would, for their own purposes, have us turn control over to them. But Lennon did it in a literal sense. In 1973, after a tumultuous and head-on