

## Artist Statement

I started working on this project at one of the lowest points in my life, when it seemed like the world was literally collapsing. The country was swinging so far to the right I almost felt as if I didn't recognize it anymore. We had a puppet for a president. And all around me, I felt like I was watching my friends, peers, and collaborators get pushed to the brink, and in some cases past it. A lot of things happened: I saw my first drive-by shooting. I got arrested for filming the Oakland police flee the scene after beating my neighbor until she went into a seizure. One of the best musicians I knew started shooting amphetamines and lost his mind. America sent an army of poor people to Iraq to kill other poor people. I started to feel like I was living in a looking-glass world- as if everything was upside down, as if night had become day, and day had become night.

The show really came out of that experience, out of wandering around in a fever dream, and starting to wonder if maybe the whole thing wasn't breaking down. What if heaven and hell had been downsized? What if nothing made any more sense in death than it did in life? What if even after death the rich kept getting richer and the poor kept getting prison? I started to worry what if I had to pay rent even after I died? I started drawing diagrams of purgatory as a bus station, started mapping out the toll system on the bridge between life and death. I sat on the bus and dreamed about the afterlife. I started asking people about their own deaths. I became very unpopular at parties.

We put the show up at the Transparent Theatre in Berkeley in the spring of 2004, with a \$0 budget, and about \$5,000 in fiscal guarantees that we did not actually have. Andrew, Shyam, Jess and I wrote the score, and the words fell into place around and inside it. The folks at Epic Arts ran a production team out of a commandeered bedroom, on a shoestring and less than a prayer.

The Bright River ran for 6 weeks and sold out for the last three. Over 1600 people saw it. I'm still surprised - I never wrote anything that had such a strong response. But I guess that's the power of fairytales. Because the Bright River is after all a fairytale for people who can hardly bear to believe in fairytales anymore. It's about a boy from South Berkeley who dies in Iraq, and the girl from North Berkeley who follows after him. It's about her struggles to breathe, and his struggles to love. It's about the corrupt government that sent him to war, and the evil that sent the government. It's about a fixer, named Quick, who tries to find them, a man who can't remember his own death, and who knows every story but his own. It's about a raven born in a prison who can't get free, who falls in love with flying. And it's about the reality of their surroundings, about the cabs, buses, and subways that form the stage on which our lives and deaths are lived. It's a story about mass transit, and the people on it. I guess really, it's about what I know: Love. Death. War. Life. Transit.