



Lonny Goldsmith

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Who The Folk?! Shari Aronson

How did a journalist become the co-founder/co-creative director of a puppetry company? Shari Aronson talks about how the writing skills that she was going to use professionally now gets used to try and get grants for her non-profit, Z Puppets Rosenschnoz. Shari talks about her and her husband started the organization, previews their next event which starts on June 1, and what's behind the name, in this week's Who The Folk?! Podcast



How did the organization get started?

My husband and I started working together in 1998. Our company has a mission to bring people into the power of playfulness through performances, workshops, and feats of imagination. Puppetry is one of our main tools that we combine that with live music. We do a lot of arts education, and we create interactive environments.

Where did the name come from?

We wanted a name that that would cause people to laugh right from hearing it. A lot of people had said that

we had kind of a European style of physical comedy that we were doing, that type of theatrical clowning. So the name came out of it. And it's sort of a faux-Yiddish for "red nose." But close to 10 years ago, I received an email from a woman in the suburbs who said our name really offended her and ask "why would you possibly use that name with the derogatory term 'schnoz' in it." I realized I couldn't take away her experience of why that offended her and that was a real learning experience for me.

What led you to performing arts?

I finished my journalism major but I started doing theater and one of the first days I was here in Minneapolis a new acquaintance led me to a florist's dumpster to dumpster-dive for flowers. And in that dumpster was Sandy Spieler, the artistic director of In the Heart of the Beast theater and she was scrounging for flowers for a production there. I struck up a conversation with her and I went over to see the production they had and I was just really astounded at what you can do with puppets. I started volunteering there and that led me to go to the University of Arizona for a graduate degree in drama education. After I finished my degree I met (my now husband) Chris Griffith who had been a street performer and juggler who was working at In The Heart of the Beast and that is where our work began of combining all these elements together.

Tell me about your upcoming show.

["Through The Narrows"](#) is going to be for limited to 15 people per event and we have five events between June 1-15 on Saturdays and Sundays. Only 15 people can attend because it's in our studio. This is not an ordinary show. People will come into our studio space at the corner 41st and Chicago in Minneapolis and we will seat them at our what we're calling our table-scape; it's a large table that seats 15 that is sculpted into a landscape. And that's the stage where the puppets or characters will perform. And we have just enough room for our musician, world music expert Greg Harrigan. And when I say just enough room, we had to build a platform. It begins with the stories that were drawing from our own ancestries. My character is a 3,500-year-old woman who was at the crossing of the Red Sea, and Chris – and an enrolled member of the Cherokee Nation – his story is of a 6-year-old boy who hops through time and was a witness to the Trail of Tears. Those two characters intersect and their stories intertwine. Then we invite the people and lead them through creating a figure, someone that they want to call upon for help when they face life's narrow passages. Then they will take that out into the world with them as they work through how they will face their life's struggles.