



The Prison Studies Group

presents:

Theater Behind Bars: A conversation with Brent Buell

Thursday, April 7 at 4:30pm – GC Room 5409



Theater producer and director Brent Buell volunteered for ten years with the non-profit organization Rehabilitation Through the Arts, directing theater in several New York medium- and maximum-security prisons. There his productions of plays, ranging from John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* to three original works by prisoners, have earned praise from critics, including from *The New York Times*. His *Breakin' the Mummy's Code* premiered at Sing Sing and was the subject of a feature article in **Esquire** by bestselling author, John Richardson. His experiences provided the basis for his chapter "Drama in the Big House" in the book *Performing New Lives, Prison Theater* by Jonathan Shailor.

A passionate prison activist, Buell has used theater to educate people about the more than 2.5 million human beings this nation has locked behind bars. He took the creative and directorial helm on *From Sing Sing to Broadway*, which premiered at Playwrights Horizons in NYC—starring eight men who had been incarcerated. He teamed with three former prisoners to write and produce *Wood Bars* for the opening of John Buffalo Mailer and Tom Kail's Back House Productions.

He is currently directing Iyaba Ibo Mandingo's *unFRAMED*. His company, Doing Life Productions is co-producing the show with Double Play Connections and TONY Award-winning executive producer, Jane Dubin. Website: <http://www.unFRAMEDthePlay.com>.

Brent will be speaking about his experiences as a prison volunteer, will show clips from some of the films he's made inside prisons, and will address current issues facing prison reform activists. He says, "I love theater. I think that it is one of the most powerful forces for social change that exists. For ten years I've witnessed how magnificently theater—just theater, no therapy, no sociodrama, no psychological agendas—can touch and renew the human spirit—even in the darkest of prisons. It's the greatest single gift my art has given me. I am sure that other approaches have their place, but for me the process of theater is all that is needed to touch and begin to transform anyone."

The Prison Studies Group is a chartered organization of the Doctoral Student Council at the CUNY Graduate Center. To join the listserv, please email prisonstudiesgroup@gmail.com.