



UNIVERSALLY ACCESSIBLE MEDIA

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WEIGHTS — One Blind Man’s Journey Introduces Accessible Media Packaging

By Patricia-Maria Young

The CD jacket for the audio version of the play “WEIGHTS: One Blind Man’s Journey” measures a typical 5 inches by 5 1/2 inches, is made of lightweight cardboard and carries one compact disc. But don’t let its small stature fool you; like the story contained inside, the “WEIGHTS” jacket itself delivers a heavy message. It is the first CD package made fully accessible for both sighted and visually impaired audiences.

“WEIGHTS: One Blind Man’s Journey,” the autobiographical one-man show by Lynn Manning, begins with the night he was blinded by a bullet to the head during a Hollywood bar fight. On the front of the CD jacket is a photo of Manning. You can see his face, close up. You

can sort of make out that his eyes are blind. You can feel Lynn Manning— literally—because over the eyes of his black and white photograph is a clear strip of plastic with raised dots that spell out, “WEIGHTS by Lynn Manning,” in Braille. The cover is black, green, and white but the message is clear: Accessibility = Independence.

The accessibility of the “WEIGHTS” CD is more than Braille labeling on the jacket and top of the disc. The CD also offers two tracks containing more than six minutes of narrated liner notes and track listings. This information is also available at www.WeightsOneBlindMansJourney.com, the play’s companion website that meets federal accessibility standards for electronic media.

The ability to independently access the content of a CD jacket as part of the CD- using experience is often taken for granted by the sighted. But for 13 million Americans who are blind or have low vision, the notion that there is great cultural collateral in liner notes, cover photos and track listings couldn’t be clearer. “As a kid,” explains Greg Lukens, fan of WEIGHTS and a leader in the audio recording industry, “I always felt out of step because I didn’t know the same things about popular groups and jazz artists that my friends

knew because I couldn't access the liner notes." With the additional tracks and online content of "WEIGHTS," Lukens not only has access, he has options that, for the first time, don't involve a friend or family member reading to him from the CD package.

In his story, Manning recounts the excitement and challenges of adapting to life without vision. From learning to walk with a cane to learning to pee in the can; from his first experience feeling sounds to the first time seeing a woman by touch—it was independence and discovery that were Manning's true rewards. It is with this desire for independence and the inequality of inaccessibility in mind that the WEIGHTS packaging was conceived. "This is not only my first play recorded and adapted for CD," says Manning, "this is the first CD where I can know the information from its package on my own, and not just because I wrote the play."

The translation of the visual to the audio as seen in the accessibility of "WEIGHTS" makes its debut fittingly with the art of Lynn Manning. Before Manning was known for his spoken word craft and performance, he was an aspiring painter. After losing his eyesight, he chose to adapt his art and himself to become the poet, playwright and actor he is today. As an artist, Manning has lived what

the “WEIGHTS” package represents: an integration of the visual into written, spoken, and now recorded, words.

The synthesis of audio, print, and online information in the “WEIGHTS” CD package is the first of its kind, but members of the blind audience hope that it will not be the last. Adrian Spratt, author and supporter of artists with disabilities said, "Perhaps the WEIGHTS CD will create a standard for other artists and the recording industry. The technological capabilities are available and affordable."

Although, most CD packages are meant to label and protect the compact disc held inside, the “WEIGHTS” package has a heavier responsibility. In delivering the story of “WEIGHTS”, it too has a chance to enlighten. With its Braille labels, narrated liner notes, and accessible website, the “WEIGHTS” CD package illustrates accessibility and independence and that is an illustration that can be experienced by everyone—blind and sighted alike.

“WEIGHTS—One Blind Man’s Journey” was co-produced by Remote Recording and Bridge Multimedia. For more information about “WEIGHTS” and Lynn Manning, visit:

www.WeightsOneBlindMansJourney.com