



'Neon' on the Small Screen

by Nicole Estvanik Taylor, Senior Editor

VIRGINIA: When solo performer Slash Coleman decided to create a show about the untimely death of his best friend Mark, in a way it was to rescue a part of himself. "He knew stories about me that kind of died with him," says Coleman. The reverse was also true. Coleman wanted to create something that his friend's son - conceived just weeks before the electrical accident that claimed Mark's life in 2004 - could look to someday to learn about his dad.

His aim from the beginning was to tell the story as many times as possible. This has meant extensive touring throughout the South and Midwest, as well as an Off-Broadway stint, allowing community groups to use his tickets as a fundraiser; it has meant teaching workshops on using art to cope with bereavement, funded by the **Virginia Commission for the Arts**; and it has meant spending the last two years raising more than \$10,000 to create a PBS television version of *Neon Man*, finally taped in March. This month, TV-watchers across Virginia will see the results. (For air times check local listings.) National distribution is being negotiated.

To raise the money Coleman created a documentary about the work and showed it in

living rooms of friends and acquaintances. With his PBS special, he'll be entering many living rooms - and, he hopes, raising interest in a Broadway version of the piece, with a jazz orchestra and video projections. (He tried out an excerpt of the new format at Richmond's **Barksdale Theatre**).



Photo: Tania Barricklo

"Someone asked me, 'Why can't you just let your friend be dead?'" Coleman recalls. But he says performing *Neon* is a joy: "It was like as an artist I'd created this secret recipe to bring people back to life. Visit www.slashcoleman.com.