

Postcard: New York City.

They've played Vegas, Tokyo and Chicago. Now the Blue Man Group faces a tougher crowd. **The guys with blue heads have opened a grade school**

BY BELINDA LUSCOMBE



Time.com Video
To watch a video from the Blue School, visit time.com/blueman

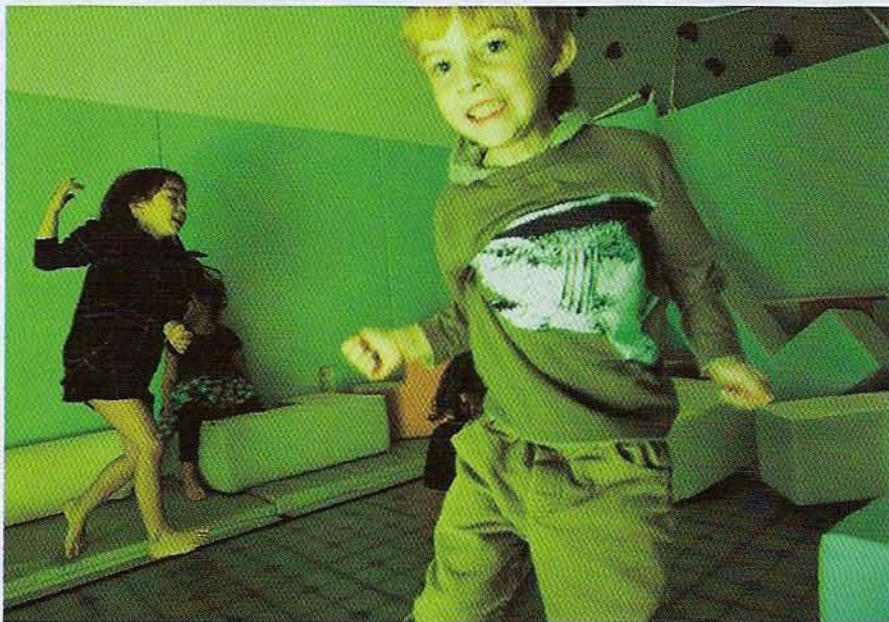
WHEN YOU'VE FOUND FAME AND fortune for having a blue head, it can be tricky to figure out your next career move. The obvious avenues—opening a chain of blue-food restaurants or being the second person of color to be elected President—present significant obstacles. And aside from Braveheart and some of Picasso's girlfriends, there just aren't that many blue role models.

So the founders of the Blue Man Group, the long-running theatrical hit that features three mute guys with earless, sticky blue heads, homemade instruments and a lot of crepe paper, chose a wholly original second act. They started a school. The Blue School, as it's known, opened its doors in September to 61 New York City kids kindergarten age or younger. It plans to offer first grade next year and grow all the way to fifth grade.

Exactly what kind of learning goes on at the Blue School? This is a show, after all, whose appeal rests on an exuberant celebration of paint volcanoes, Twinkie force-feeding, amplified Cap'n Crunch-chomping and Jell-O-encased heads. It's so universally silly that Blue Man Groups currently thrive in eight cities, from Las Vegas to Tokyo to Basel, Switzerland. But like many other enterprises that sound funny and turn out to be incredibly earnest (recent Jim Carrey movies spring to mind), the Blue School is a very serious business.

The original Blue Men—Matt Goldman, Phil Stanton, Chris Wink—came together as “sort of a support group for people whose creativity had been all but squeezed out of them by education,” says Wink. “At one point, we asked, What if there was a school you didn't have to recover from, that didn't make you question the idea of being creative?” After they had kids—with Blue Man Group revenues as their piggy bank and their wives as founding members of the school's board—they decided to find out.

Situated on Manhattan's ultra-hip



Not feeling at all blue Kids let the rumpus begin in the school's disco-like Wonder Room

Lower East Side, the school is not actually blue, although evidence of its genesis is everywhere. As in the show, there are long tubes that snake around the corridors, through which children can talk to one another. Pupils are encouraged to mess with shaving cream. There's a spectacular water table, with balls and hoses and a Medusa's head of tubes. Every school day includes half an hour of

“glow time,” in which the shades are pulled, the black lights go on, and heretofore inconspicuous paintings and sculptures come to life. And there's the Wonder Room.

The Wonder Room has a disco-like light-up floor, into which games are programmed, as well as a climbing wall and padding for the hurt-free throwing about of one's person. Children are allowed to choose which activities they want to pursue, and initially, says kindergarten teacher Nancy Simko, they all scramble for the Wonder Room. But with weekly visits from the yoga specialist, the therapeutic-ball specialist and the puppeteer, the kids are soon tempted away.

It may sound like a theme park, but the founders worked closely with education experts, including British creativity guru Sir Ken Robinson and UCLA's Daniel Siegel, to create the curriculum. Questions like HOW DO 4-YEAR-OLDS UNDERSTAND THE COLOR RED? are written on pieces of paper stuck to the classroom walls. Learning is to be provoked, not imposed. Teachers talk approvingly of “fun provocation going on in the 3s.” Simko describes her job as leading students into a series of questions that will guide the curriculum. “It doesn't suit everybody,” she says of the methodology, “but every school should have some elements of it.” And it doesn't suit every budget. Kindergarten tuition is \$27,300; it's not the costliest of Manhattan's exorbitantly priced private elementary schools, but it's up there. Even so, applications have been pouring in.

As for the kids, they're, well, kids. One boy's idea of “provocation” is to ask what kind of fart everyone is. A girl hogs the fake microphone. The founders are happy. “The test is the kids, and they're on fire,” says Wink. And then, showing his affinity with little boys everywhere, he adds, “Not literally.”

