

Occupy Seattle Comes to My Living Room
By Susan Noyes Platt

On a Sunday evening in early June ten people sat in a circle on chairs and sofas in my living room in the Central District of Seattle to listen to the play "Something I Can Do: Voices From Occupy Seattle." Three actors joined us, Meg Savlov, Rich Hawkins, and Christine Nyland. Ed Mast was in the background as director and co-writer with Christine Nyland.

The script lay on the floor in the center of the circle. Each actor read a page or two, a complete short narrative, and then returned it to the pile and sat down with us. As they read in the midst of us, walked around the house, into the kitchen and even up the stairs, we were totally caught up in the process.

Ed Mast describes the play "The 45 minute play is [theater] stripped down to the essentials-- three actors, no set, no props— developed by participants in the local occupy movement; it is the human experience of the difficult, messy, challenging, self-organizing movement known as Occupy Seattle. Not the statistics, not the political platforms, but the first-hand experience of the challenges, successes, failures, the many purposes and the healing process of creating a community for continuous political assembly."

We simply heard stories read by three intense performers, two women and a man, taking on the voices of some of the many participants in Occupy.

It started with a mic check and we all spontaneously responded - already we were more than an audience. Then, to give just a few examples, we listened to the story of an office worker who stopped by and stayed, a senior who hated signs but was drawn in by the issues, the single mother who came with her child, the unemployed communications employee who helped bring people together. We heard the voices of people who slept at Westlake Park in the rain, of people who cherished the opportunity to speak with other people in real conversations about what was wrong with US policies and government, people who resented those who were telling others what to do. The play followed a progression from the early to the later days of Occupy Seattle, during the time that people voluntarily slept outside and formed a model of a new community by collaborating, sharing, donating, talking, hoping, learning, complaining, caring, planning, reading, marching, and protesting.

What a great idea, to bring this narrative into a living room!

After the performance, we responded to the play. Since the audience I had gathered were all friends who cared about what is happening in the country, their responses were provocative, ranging from our own experiences with Occupy to comparisons with Vietnam. We also talked about the "black bloc" that Ed eloquently explained: since corporations are destroying the planet, the black bloc believes breaking a few of their windows is a minor response.

Ed Mast is a dynamo of political theater. He realizes that simply reading a play can have a huge impact. Only two weeks after the performance in my living room he presented Berthold Brecht's *St Joan of the Stockyards*, also read, but in this case by 5 actors. Ed threw in a few mic checks again, but the play has amazing relevance to the issues of today's Occupy movement. Capitalist greed, workers unemployed, frozen and starving, religion feeding off the rich to make the worker content with their lot, and a young "black hat" (read Salvation Army) woman (Joan Dark) who challenges the wealthy for their oppressions, sees the light, joins the workers, and dies of pneumonia. The only difficulty with this production was it is hard to convey the power of the masses with only five actors.

The Occupy play in my living room, with the voices of individuals who collectively composed Occupy was easier to bring off. Three actors read the voices of two dozen or more individuals who shared a collective experience. In the Brecht performance, five people evoking religion, capitalism and the ten thousand disaffected workers pressing at the gates of capitalism was more challenging, in spite of compelling performances by the central characters. The last time I saw this play, it was performed outdoors in the heat of the summer in Fort Worth, Texas (near the stockyards) and the masses were really there, lots of them, pressing forward.

But Brecht's concept of the power of the masses brought down by starvation to the point of simply trying to survive, while the rich wheel and deal to destroy the middle class, and preachers play for money wherever it can come from, couldn't be more resonant to our situation today.

Occupy continues to be active in Seattle, even though we no longer see people sleeping in public. In addition to preventing foreclosures and encouraging Credit Unions, protesting GMOs and corporate personhood, and student debt levels, groups across the country are advocating for justice for prisoners and immigrants. Here in Seattle, several members collaborated with the Yes Men and Greenpeace to protest Shell's slimy retrogressive plans to drill in the Arctic. Shell's antique drilling rigs (built in 1983 by the same company that built the Deepwater Horizon of the Gulf disaster), were retrofitted in our ship yard for the delicate task of drilling in one of the most sensitive ecosystems on the planet. Stay tuned for Occupy the Oil Spill.