

WHY I WROTE “OCCUPIED”

by David Misch

The morning of January 4, 2013 broke dark and bitter. I had just finished my usual morning repast of chocolate eggs and absinthe when two swarthy men burst into my rococo FEMA trailer, hog-tied me to my laptop (an impressive feat for burned out meth-heads), and ordered me to write a heartfelt but hilarious story of that long-ago era when the Sixties ended: the college anti-war protests of 1970.

Lucky for them, it's a subject that had long intrigued me. Even luckier, I'd written it 40 years earlier.

After graduating from Pomona College in 1972, I scribbled (this was a time before computers) (and, I believe, electricity) a screenplay loosely based on an antiwar protest I'd been in, then promptly forgot about it. When the script resurfaced decades later, it struck me as play-fodder: a bunch of kids stuck in a college president's office for a week – that, my friends, is comedy.

And more: teenage sex, drug use, loud music, violence, the specter of Vietnam – it was clearly material for a compelling evening of theater (or, minus Vietnam, Thursday at Charlie Sheen's house).

As an experienced papyrus-slinger, it was the mere work of a moment (i.e., five years) to turn it into a play.

(In readings, some of the actors had wonderful questions. My favorite: “Were there protests at other college campuses at the same time?”)

Although a defining era for many people, I feel the Sixties have actually been under-explored by movies, TV and theater. And since the only reason to write a play is to make money (Irony Alert!), it seemed felicitous that such a piece could appeal to young and old alike: Boomers revisiting their youths; young people revisiting their parents' youths and comparing it with today; both groups relishing the spectacle of a bunch of 20-year-olds frolicking across the stage in their flimsy quasi-hippie garb.

The title came to me about a year before it was stolen by those hippies' progeny, and the parallel is obvious; a time when young people recognize the imperative to step up and claim their own futures.

So I hope you'll join me (not literally – I'll be sitting with the meth-heads, who proved to be surprisingly perceptive dramaturgs) at the Skylight Theatre's workshop production of “Occupied”. (Workshop: There's a director, the actors have their lines memorized – I hope! – but there are no sets or costumes.) We're anxious to hear what you think as we gauge the possibilities for a full production but, in the meanwhile, a splendid time is guaranteed for all. (FDA warning: There is no actual guarantee.)