

First Hand Theatrical presents

Interrupting the Sermon

A play using stories, poems and a sermon
by Dr. Wayne C. Olson
Created by Kevin Olson



*Woodstock, New York
Dutch Reformed Church, 1959*

*West Newbury Vermont
United Church of Christ, 2010*

September 4-7, 2014
95 Empire Black Box at AS220
Providence, Rhode Island

Company of Artists

Sermon Wayne..... Don Therrien
Memoir Wayne #1.....Justin Paige
Memoir Wayne #2.....Mary-E Godfrey

Director.....Kevin Olson
Assistant Director & Stage Manager.....Vanessa Blanchette
Lighting Designer.....Greg Mancusi-Ungaro
Production Manager.....Rachel Lewallen

Special Thanks

Todd Cerveris, Justin Carroll, Elizabeth English, Rev. James M. DiLuzio,
Ernie Drown, Terry Kelleher, Brian Mattias, Amy Olson, Kendra Olson,
Stephen Peabody (Peabo), Ric Royer, Ann Silverberg, Bert Silverberg

AS220 and 95Empire; Bradford Congregational Church, Bradford, Vermont;
Community College of Rhode Island; Our Lady of Czenstochowa, Coventry, R.I.;
Potter-Rathbun Organ Company, Cranston, R.I.; Temple Beth Elohim, Brooklyn;
The Church of Christ at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire

First Hand Theatrical

Inspired by primary sources, First Hand Theatrical creates original theatre pieces drawing from diverse personal, cultural and social histories. In May of 2013, a staged reading of *This Is My Story: Mayses, 1938-1948* was held at Artists' Exchange in Cranston featuring Ted Clement and Libby Skala. A full production of that play will be presented next year.

***Interrupting The Sermon* runs approximately 65 minutes
and is performed without an Intermission.**

We are pleased to offer today's performance at no charge.
Please consider a donation to support this production by
placing whatever amount you can in the basket as you exit.
Checks should be payable to "First Hand Theatrical."
Thank you!

About the play

Can religion be taken seriously on stage? Is there a place for it in today's theater? Why are so many of us intimidated by clergy? Why do fewer and fewer of us (me too) rarely if ever attend a worship service? Are we willing to re-consider how religion, spirituality, sacred text, and the Divine affect each of us beyond the ideas we already hold about them? What prevents us from doing so?

My late father, Dr. Wayne C. Olson whose words make up the text of this play, "converted" to New England Transcendentalism inspired by his dissertation on the moral imperatives of Thoreau, Emerson and Fuller – a long way from his studies at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan and initial ordination in the Dutch Reformed Church. He left the Dutch Reformed Church in the early 1970s and after finishing his Doctorate, he was ordained in the United Church of Christ. He retired to the mountains of Vermont where he guest preached from time to time and where he was able to think and to write in the spirit of the Transcendentalists.

In October of 2010, I was visiting my parents in rural Vermont. As it happened, my father was guest preaching at a church on a hilltop looking out towards the Connecticut River and White Mountains. It was a stunning Fall Day with striking colors. He delivered a deeply moving sermon he had written the week before titled *My Bible: Then and Now*. The sermon struck me as his version of Randy Pausch's *The Last Lecture*.

Driving back to my home in Rhode Island, I considered if I could somehow create a theatrical piece anchored by that sermon. He sent me a copy of it and the two of us exchanged many emails over the next several weeks working together on this piece. Concurrently, he was in the midst of writing vignettes about his years as a pastor and college professor. I decided to search this collection of vignettes titled *Pastoral Stories* for ones that might thematically connect to the sermon. I found several and began creating this script, using words that are primarily his.

While he was still alive, we presented two readings of the play using members of two U.C.C. churches and our family as readers. Following those readings, we tweaked the play some more. He passed away in July, 2013.

Earlier this year, I pulled out the work we had done together and got busy preparing for this production. I gathered some actor friends of mine in

New York City for another reading of the piece. As a result, I decided to structure the piece as a church service of sorts. I also added some of the beautiful poems that are part of my Dad's poetry collection *Seventy Secular Psalms* as well as excerpts from an essay he wrote titled *Job and Me* that is included in the recently published book *Befriending Death* edited by Michael Vocino and Alfred G. Killilea.

My hope is that you are inspired by this production to ask new, probing and challenging questions in your own life's journey.

My gratitude is eternal to this company of artists who took a chance with me on this project, to my family and friends near and far and to all of you for attending. Thanks.

Kevin Olson, September 2014

We are grateful to the following donors who have helped significantly to make this production possible:

Robert Bertsche
Anonymous
Michael & Paula Goldberg
Rabbi Leslie & Janet Engelhart Gutterman
Richard Keitel
Terrence Kelleher
David Leach
Amy Olson
Daniel Olson
Kevin Olson
Potter-Rathbun Organ Company
Rosemary Olson
Shira Olson
Bert Silverberg
Dorothy Vanderwerf
Anonymous

Order of Performance

Audience participation is invited during
the Responsive Reading and singing of the Hymn

Prelude: *Lobe Den Herren*

from the *Straslund Gesanbuch* (Hymnal of Gesanbuch, Germany)

Invocation: *God Is a Metaphor*

Written by Dr. Wayne C. Olson

Responsive Reading:

Written by Dr. Wayne C. Olson

By creating religions, we have lost religion.

Who are we anyway that we can program God?

What audacity, what insolence, what stupidity!

The God of this world will not be so limited.

God will speak from some piece of music, some painting,
some theater presentation.

God will not be limited to Sabbath morning pulpit rantings.

And it is up to you, my friend, there in your seat to discover
God for yourself.

No one can tell me the full truth about God.

No one can have your religious encounter for you.

**No one can dictate to me how or where or when I am to
experience this God.**

Sermon: *My Bible Then and Now*

Written by Dr. Wayne C. Olson

Biblical text: II Timothy, Chapter 3, verses 14-17* trans. Willis Barnstone.

Hymn: *O God, Our Help In Ages Past*

Words by Isaac Watts; melody - *St. Anne*

Please rise

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home.

A thousand ages, in thy sight,
are like an evening gone;
short as the watch that ends the night,
before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever rolling stream,
bears all who breathe away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come;
be thou our guide while life shall last,
and our eternal home.

Benediction: created for *Interrupting The Sermon*

Written by Dr. Wayne C. Olson

Recessional: *Sine Nomine*

Composed by Ralph Vaughn Williams

^{*14} *But for you, stay with what you have learned and came to believe, knowing from whom you learned it;* ¹⁵ *And that from childhood you knew the sacred scriptures of Torah that can make you wise in salvation through faith in the Mashiah Yeshua.* ¹⁶ *All scripture is God-inspired and useful for teaching, for argument, for correction, for education in the good,* ¹⁷ *so that the man of God may be proficient and prepared for every good work."*

Vanessa Blanchette (Assistant Director and Stage Manager) recently graduated from Rhode Island College with a B.A. in Theatre Performance. This is Vanessa's first experience being on the other side of the spectrum stage managing and assistant directing; usually she is performing on the stage. Her latest shows were *That's the Spirit*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Mr. Marmalade*. Vanessa states, "This show has been a very exciting learning experience for me and I can't wait to see it come to life!"

Justin Paige (Memoir Wayne #1) recently graduated Rhode Island College with a B.A. in Theater and Communications. Justin performed in several shows at Rhode Island College including *Seven Keys to Baldpate*, *Prelude to a Kiss*, and *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Thank you, Kevin for allowing me to help tell these inspirational stories about your father... "on this ordinary Sunday."

Mary-E Godfrey (Memoir Wayne #2) is thrilled to be a part of the inaugural production of First Hand Theatricals! A recent MFA Performing Arts recipient from the Savannah College of Art and Design, Mary-E's passion lies with developing new works and enriching the lives of young people through the experience of theatre. maryegodfrey.com

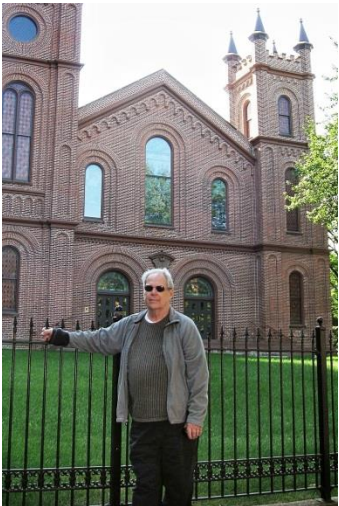
Rachel Lewallen (Production Manager) is a performance artist, writer, and musician living in Providence, RI. She is a working member of The Dirt Palace Feminist Arts collective in Olneyville Square and would like to thank Ric, Justin, Kevin, Greg, and Vanessa for all of their help over the last few weeks.

Greg Mancusi-Ungaro (Lighting Designer) A resident of Marblehead, MA, Greg is a prolific lighting designer, collaborating with Massachusetts community and regional theatres for over a decade. Additionally, for the past four years, he has served as the resident lighting designer at the Salem Theatre Company in Salem, Mass. Recent designs (at STC, unless noted) have included *Blood Brothers* (Marblehead Little Theatre) *Molly Sweeney* (Mugford Street Players), *The Visit* (MSP), *On Golden Pond* (MLT), *Once on this Island* (Shore Country Day School), *The Real Thing*, *Swimming in the Shallows*, *A Trip to Bountiful* (MSP), *A Delicate Balance*, *The Crucible*, *Harry* (MSP), *The Elephant Man*, and *Heroes*. Greg is an alumnus of the Williamstown Theatre Festival where he served as master electrician. His ballet and dance lighting credits include productions for the Syracuse Ballet, the Frederick Ballet and Nina Weiner Dance, plus individual dance designs for Tony Salatino, Lisa Lawer and Mara Solomon.

Kevin Olson (Director and Play Creator) established First Hand Theatrical in 2013 and has created two new scripts for the company – *Interrupting The Sermon* and *This Is My Story: Mayses, 1938-1948*. He holds a M.F.A. in Theater Directing from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities and received a Twin Cities Drama Critics Circle KUDOS Award for his production of Brian Friel’s *Translations*. Currently, he serves as Adjunct Faculty at the University of Rhode Island, Community College of Rhode Island and New England Institute of Technology teaching courses in Theater, Dramatic Literature, Film and Communication.

Wayne Olson (Author) received a Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) from Teacher’s College, Columbia University as well as a Masters of Divinity (M.Div.) from Western Theological Seminary. He was a noted scholar of the New England Transcendentalists including Emerson, Thoreau and Margaret Fuller. He was an Instructor of Speech at Butler University and Indiana-Purdue University at Indianapolis. He served congregations in Woodstock, N.Y., Jamaica, N.Y., Passaic, N.J. and Staten Island, N.Y. He moved to Indianapolis in 1981 where he worked as the Director of Metropolitan Indianapolis Campus Ministry and served several congregations in the area. In 2007, he retired to Bradford, Vermont.

Don Therrien (Sermon Wayne) is excited to return to the stage after many years away. Don has performed in many venues across Southern New England.



Dr. Wayne C. Olson in 2009 standing outside what used to be the First Dutch Reformed Church of Jamaica, Queens and is now the beautiful home of the Jamaica Performing Arts Center. This building is the setting for the play’s “Ordinary Sunday” story.