



Wednesday, July 3, 2013

## The Free Speech Movement



Mario Savio by Nat Farbman, Time Life Pictures, Getty Images

Our festival is proud to host the development of FSM, the libretto written by Joan Holden for a musical that will premier in 2014 (the music will be added early next year by composers Bruce Barthol and Daniel Savio) in anticipation of UC Berkeley's Free Speech Movement's 50th Anniversary. During the 1964 - 65 academic year, this grassroots movement sprang up in defense of student's rights to politically protest on campus but also ended up fostering a spirit of personal liberation in its participants that spread to change our country as a whole.

Joan Holden's reading will be directed by Erin Merritt, and produced in partnership with Stagebridge Theatre. Often a script will leave our hands completely finished, but in this case we are reading it with an ear for musicality, deciding how and where the musical numbers will be, so audiences at the readings have the unique opportunity to help the playwright hear whether the message works on its own before that other musical dimension is overlain. Joan succinctly put her driving force behind her writing. This is not a documentary play.

*What's sexy about it to me is the experience of busting out, living completely, putting your life where your heart and mind are.*

It is also an exciting novelty to work on a story with such local accountability. This story directly references the life and times of people who may be sitting next to you in the audience. As the home of the Free Speech movement, the Bay Area has a special obligation to immortalize these events, but less as a memorial to times past than as

inspiration for those on the front lines of today's struggles. In any era, when young people get political, there is a special kind of momentum. People in college don't have a reputation to protect or a family to support, and life changes are exciting rather than devastating. They're resilient in mind and body, and their conviction has not yet been eroded by time and disappointment. They believe they can change the world, and therefore they can.

Mario Savio, one of FSM's student leaders, said this in one impassioned speech which remains way too relevant:

*There's a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can't take part! You can't even passively take part! And you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus — and you've got to make it stop!*

We might as a populace be even more aware of those "machines"—big faceless corporations or intrusive government bodies—today than in 1964. The NSA, Congress, Pepsi, BART... In a life well lived, fully lived, Joan Holden and the FSMers want you to know that you have the power to organize people, galvanize them, that together we can throw our bodies on the gears, and bring those machines of injustice to a halt.

Almost 50 years ago the Free Speech Movement participants put their principles before their personal freedom and security. In the past decade people have made similar pushes — Gavin Newsom for marriage equality; Occupy and the Yes Men for people power over corporate power; Jose Antonio Vargas for immigrant rights; Wikileaks, Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden for the public's right to knowledge, to name just a few. Why do some movements work at some times? And for what values would you risk your education, security, reputation, even your life?

Posted by Amy Mueller