

Rubin's Goal: To Connect Life and the Spirit by John Darling

Ashlander Peggy Nash Rubin has spent most of her life involved with the theatre. Now she helps people realize that their lives are theatre. She has developed Sacred Theatre workshops, which she has been taking around the world for the past 10 years.

Rubin believes that lives are sacred and have meaning and intention in the same way a play does. "I allow people to identify for themselves what the deeper meaning or force in their lives is," she said. "When it comes to making sense of your life, expressing yourself in dramatic form can be deeply healing, to see our lives as exciting works in progress."

Every year a theme suggests itself to her for study. This year it was the wheel.

"The way the theme of the wheel has grabbed me is that things need to move and not be static," she said. "In exploring this, I think we become more open to change."

"It's helpful to have a general theme. It gives us a place to stand. That's our stage," Rubin said. Her workshops have explored the wheels of Dharma, Fire, Yin/Yang, Fortune and Fate.

"We work with our life stories as performance art," said Trish Broersma who helps Rubin organize her local events. "It's a way of exploring our own life. We also work with other plays that we see together. Sometimes we'd take a scene and rework it for our own sakes."

To Rubin, all theatre also is sacred. "It began in sacrality. It came out of the temples as the celebration of the gods and the eternal renewal of life. Sacred Theatre is where the divine and the human assemble and perform. I believe theatre is a primary metaphor for life on Earth."

"Because I also believe that life is sacred, it makes me happy to put theatre, this metaphor that expresses major aspects of life, into a context that recognizes its playful, profound sacrality." Rubin has a list she calls the Nine Powers of sacred theatre which she drew from

aspects of traditional theatre. When individuals apply them to life, it provides a rich reflective device, she said.

They are:

- Story means creating worlds where you're the star.
- Place, stage, platform, place to stand.
- Now, there is no "once upon a time."
- Incarnation, the story becomes flesh.
- Expression, spoken words and music.
- Point of View, holding and shifting many points.
- Conflict, the essential element of theatre.
- Audience, those who see and hear the action.
- Celebration, saying yes! to all of life.

In New Zealand and Australia there were 50 or more participants in Rubin's workshops. The classes in Ashland are smaller, usually 10-15 people. This allows more interaction as participants create plays together. Everybody gets to act out their play. But it's not about performing, as people who come are not necessarily actors.

"The only thing that is allowed are what I call bouquets," Rubin explained. "We're allowed to throw flowers. It's wonderful to see how people respond to what moved them. It's wonderful when what we call healing happens, but the intention is simply to remind people how precious life is, how sacred life is and how powerful the images of theatre can be in framing a life."

It's not psychotherapy. It's not even psychodrama. It's more of an offering than a presentation. "Throw a little make up at people, have them put on costumes they love it," said Rubin. "Something gets heightened, something shifts. I am stunned at the creativity that comes rolling out when you're working with the big themes from the Greeks and Shakespeare."

Rubin grew up on a farm in the little Texas town

of West Columbia. She went to high school in San Antonio where she got involved in theatre. "I was taking physics and my teacher said, 'Peggy, you should be taking drama.'"

She went to the University of Texas where she received a degree in directing. There she met drama teacher B. Iden Payne, who had also taught Angus Bowmer in Washington. Payne encouraged Bowmer to start the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and later came to the Festival occasionally to direct.

Rubin came to OSF in 1957. She was in a company that performed on the outdoor stage for one month during the summers of 1957, 58 and 59. She "did life on the wicked stage in New York" for two years, she said, then went to Los Angeles where she did editing and PR. After her husband died, she returned to OSF where she was on the staff for 14 years until 1987.

That same year, Rubin first went to work for Jean Houston, director of the Foundation for Mind Research. Houston told her she would be speaking at a conference in the Netherlands on sacred matter and that Rubin was going to do a presentation on Sacred Theatre.

"That's when I began thinking about the powers of theatre relating to our lives. Jean was doing a three-year training program and she asked me to do workshops in Sacred Theatre to use theatrical devices to find their way to new places in their lives," she said.

Rubin participates in Houston's world-wide multicultural transformational work as her principal associate. "I have rarely seen people so moved and so exhilarated as they are from experiencing Rubin's Sacred Theatre seminars," said Houston.

Rubin has also studied with Elaine de Beauport, leading teacher of humanistic and behavioral applications of current brain/mind research and William Emerson, pioneer in using birth refacilitation techniques for infants and children as well as adults.

"I first met Peggy in 1958 in my first season at OSF," said OSF actress Shirley Patton. "I had the privi-

lege of playing Nerissa to her Portia in "The Merchant of Venice." She was a very generous and exciting performer." Patton observed that while the work Rubin is doing now seems to be extremely fulfilling for her, it was such a gift to the people who have a chance to share it with her.

"She has such a loving way with people," Patton said. "She affirms the individuality in such an authentic way that people feel inspired and empowered to do really creative things spontaneously from places deep inside them. "She is a powerful encourager of other people. She doesn't have to be in the limelight. She shines on other people. We're all the star of our own movie, the leading character of our own novel. Peggy makes people believe that." Hilary Tate, director of publications at OSF and teacher at the Festival Institute was Rubin's assistant, helping her with publications for at least five years.

"Peggy is a really remarkable broadcaster of emotions," Tate said. "She is sending at a place where people are receiving. It makes her a very powerful actor."

Several years ago, Tate led a trip with Rubin to Greece titled "At Play with the Gods of Theatre in Greece." In some of the great theaters and in some of the places in the stories, Rubin enacted plays and involved participants in the chorus." The trip is a horizontal activity. Peggy opens up the vertical," Tate said. "I learned directly from Peggy that if anyone asks you to do something, say 'yes,' then figure out how to do it. If it has to be done, I can do it. I learned that from watching her."

"I have been attending Sacred Theatre for seven years and have found it to be one of the most valuable experiences of my life," said Joy Craddick, physician at Partners for Health. "Peggy Rubin has that rare combination of genius, wit and loving kindness that inspires all of us who study with her. Sacred Theatre is about perceiving one's life as a work of art. Peggy is a master teacher in this medium."