

Seattle

by Kate Danley

As immigration fills the news and Seattle's designation as a "sanctuary city" stirs a national conversation, Dramatists Guild member and attorney Margaret O'Donnell (Global Law Advocates) used her background to create an immersive theatrical experience to educate the public on the realities of the immigration courtroom in a project called *The Detention Lottery*.

Margaret O'Donnell has represented undocumented immigrants since 1985 and many more in family-based, asylum, and crime victim petitions. She stated that the vast majority of those in removal proceedings are there not because they've committed a crime, but simply because they've come to the attention of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

For years, Margaret explained immigration law and the need for reform to community and church groups through PowerPoint presentations, weekly blogs, radio shows, panel discussions, and more. She wryly noted that rather than spur listeners to action, the labyrinth of procedures, statistics, and numbers often overwhelmed her audiences into



ICE agent distributing roles

a stupor.

In 2011, she created a set of instructions and materials for a church immigrant justice group in Seattle. This unscripted event was called *The Detention Game*. But in 2014, she took a playwriting class and discovered her love for the written art form. She decided to formalize *The Detention Game* and make it more accessible. She invited several other Seattle immigration attorneys to join her in writing detailed legal profiles for eight specific kinds of cases and immigrants and scripted

The Detention Lottery around the arrest and court procedures for each. She then recruited six more attorneys to perform in the pilot presentation at St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle. Social service, church, community, government, and education leaders were invited to this fateful Friday afternoon in June 2018.

Eight audience members were randomly detained upon trying to gain entry to the theatre, while the rest of the audience became the courtroom observers. Identities were assigned to the "detainees" and they had to defend themselves against deportation as best they could before a judge in a mock court. Margaret was clear that the enforcement and court system details in the play were accurate and reflected current law and practice.

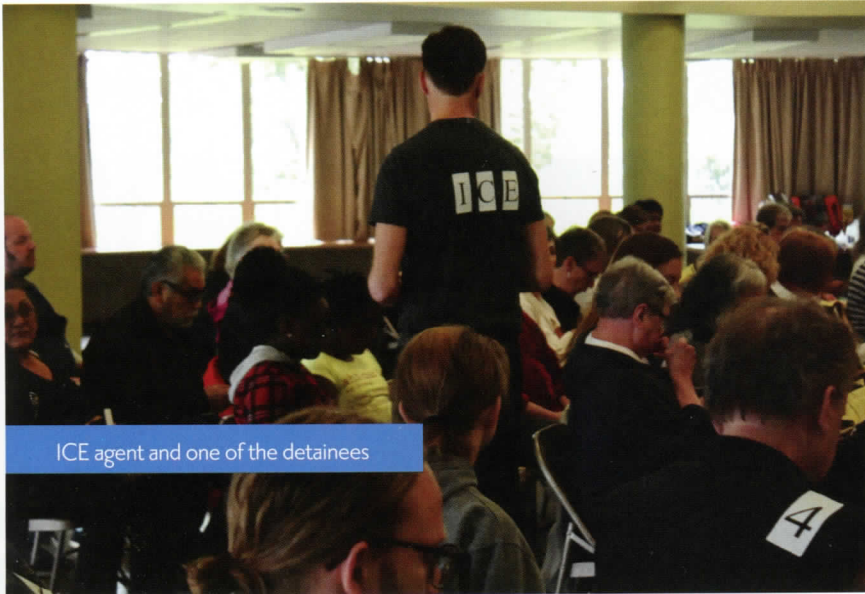
If you're reading this and a gnawing anxiety has engaged itself in the pit of your stomach over what you would say if you were picked, even that visceral confusion is accurate. Public defenders are not available to undocumented immigrants and over 84 percent of those detained do not have lawyers to represent them or even explain the process (although in this show, attorneys counseled four of the "detained" audience members. The other four were left to struggle through).

At the end of the performance, audience members were given a one-page list of all the ways they could get involved. Margaret noted that people were fired up to take action in a way she never saw after her PowerPoint pre-

JESUS HIDALGO



Margaret O'Donnell



ICE agent and one of the detainees

sentations.

“The audiences, seated in the courtroom, have an emotional reaction to seeing a confused detainee try to represent themselves in immigration proceedings. Theatre knocks down the barriers we think we have between us and those depicted on stage. It’s no longer theoretical,” Margaret stated.

The show was such a success, it has already been produced two more times. An expanded version, which completely immerses the audience in both the courtroom and the detention center, is being workshopped in May 2019 with a professional production slated for the fall.

So often, complex issues can overwhelm people. But as playwrights, we have the unique ability to open doors to complicated worlds and make them accessible. Margaret hopes that attorneys and actors nationwide will host *The Detention Lottery* in their city, and use theatre as an educational tool to inform, inspire, and engage. She has made the script and all production materials available for free non-commercial use with a Creative Commons license. Materials and more information can be found at <http://global-awadvocates.com/immigration-in-the-arts/the-detention-lottery-2/>.

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Tennessee

by Arabelle Pollick

Strolling down Broadway and honky-tonkin’ may be the thing to do in Nashville, but it is certainly not the only thing. Catching a hockey game with the Predators, visiting the Country Music Hall of Fame, or writing a play with the Tennessee Playwrights Studio. Yes, write a play. Nashville has become a city for artists to thrive, and not just in music. It’s no surprise that it has been ranked #4 for “Most Vibrant Arts Community” (<http://mcs.smu.edu/arts-research2014/arts-vibrancy-2018>). Like any large city in America, Nashville’s population is diverse: a meeting point of various races, nationalities, and orientations, from this country and beyond. A developmental lab for writers, Tennessee Playwrights Studio, or TPS, is a distinctive group that focuses on the work of those who have a deeply rooted connection with this state. Although centrally located in Nashville, this group is unique in that it is open to playwrights state-wide. In 2018, the studio wrapped up its inaugural season, which was comprised of members hailing from the suburbs of Nashville, to rural Tullahoma, and all the way to the rolling hills of Chattanooga.

Led by Artistic Director Kenley Smith, and Program Coordinator Molly Breen, the duo has set out to feature the Southern voice

in an inclusive environment, making room for the stories of Tennesseans. When asking Smith about the origins and intent of TPS, his answer was quick, “[to] represent the voices in Tennessee,” and more specifically, “fresh voices and new interpretations” of our current political climate. As per the Tennessee Playwrights Studio website, “No one can deny that we live in a pivotal moment in this country’s history. When historians look back at the early 21st century, they’ll examine our art, our music, our STORIES.”

As Smith and I chatted on the phone, discussing the importance of the South, he remarked “every region’s voice is important,” he continued, “[but] let’s not forget what is in our back yard.”

The Studio accepts five Fellows and two Associate Artists each year. TPS Fellows develop their play proposal and deepen their perspective in the lab, while Associate artists actively participate in the feedback. TPS Associates are invited to work with Kenley Smith in one-on-one sessions; their participation in the lab sessions guarantees Fellowship for the following season. In the room where it happens, the process consists of the area’s finest actors reading the Fellows’ fresh pages, followed by feedback from participants, modeling the Liz Lerman Critical Response process. This year, TPS has partnered with long-time local professional theatre company Actors Bridge Ensemble, a Nashville staple. The cohort will meet at ABE’s studio space at the Darkhorse Chapel. Applications open in December and labs begin in February, meeting monthly throughout the year and culminating in a presentation of the Fellows’ first drafts. For more information on Tennessee Playwrights Studio, visit <https://tnplaywrights.org>.

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