

By Moe Yousuf, Artistic Producer, Target Margin Theater

*(This post is a part of series highlighting the work of recipients of TCG's Blue Star Theatres grant program. Target Margin Theater is a recipient of Blue Star Theatres grant funding to support various programs and workshops to introduce veterans to theatre.)*

For the past two seasons Target Margin Theater (TMT) has had the privilege of working with a vibrant community of veterans and military families in New York City as a part of TCG's Blue Star Theatres program. The most common reaction we get from civilians who learn of our work as a Blue Star Theatre is, "Why?" And I get it. We do not have a long history of working with military families or vets, we have never devoted a season to their issues, and service to that particular community is not a part of our core mission. But "difference" (in every conceivable way imaginable) is a core part of all that we do at TMT. We seek experiences, art forms, cultures, people, and any and all in between that challenge us to see and do things differently than we normally would. In this context, our work with the veterans is born from our mission and part of changing the culture at large—something we very much believe in.



Each of our veteran workshops over the past two years has been entirely different, with a nice rotation of new faces and a few vets we just can't shake (nor would we). We have done everything from reading and discussing plays by Eugene O'Neill such as *The Iceman Cometh* and *The Great God Brown* to learning how to make plaster masks, creating plays from existing source texts, devising small pieces of performance based on the writing of Gertrude Stein, and conducting an intensive three-day workshop on how to adapt research into theatrical works. We structure the workday, provide a space for experimentation, and suggest some options for the way one could (not should) go about things: always with an abundance of very good food. We

see performances together and have been everywhere from Broadway, Off Broadway, Off East Broadway, and even Bushwick. Over time we've come to know one another very well, shared stories, become friends, and built a small but very meaningful community. In addition to working with TMT, our vets have collaborated with guest artists such as OBIE Award-winning playwright Christina Masciotti, scenic and costume designer Karen Boyer, and, perhaps most importantly, playwright/veteran Maurice Decaul. Maurice has been an integral part of developing this program and is a national treasure. Without his generosity and support, along with Laurie Baskin, Director of Research, Policy & Collective Action at Theatre Communications Group, we simply could not do this work.

So why be a Blue Star Theatre?

When we “checked-in” at the last workshop this past June, we asked each person why they were there that day. A Vietnam veteran, who has attended every workshop since we began, said, “There is a lot in the world that confuses me right now. And I guess I come to Target Margin to get more confused.” Part of our approach is that we never feign to be teachers or provide any instruction. That is because the selfish/secret truth is we learn more working with them than they could ever learn from us. Our veterans are resilient, strong, artistically adventurous, and brave, beautiful people. At the end of the day, everything we do is really just an excuse to spend time in space with people we care about. And we care about our veterans very very much.

That's why we're a Blue Star Theatre.

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Moe Yousuf (Artistic Producer) is a curator, producer, and playwright. Previously, he worked with Henry Street Settlement / Abrons Arts Center, Signature Theatre, and The Foundry Theatre. He has presented work at PRELUDE, Dixon Place, Abrons Arts Center, SoHo Rep Walkerspace, The Bushwick Starr Reading Series, Co-Prosperity Sphere, Rubber Rep Pilot Balloon, and Title Point SALON!. Recently he produced the 150th Anniversary revival of *The Black Crook* (A NYT Critic's Pick). He is a Board Member of the Alliance of Resident Theatres / New York (ART/NY) and holds an MFA in dramatic writing from NYU Tisch School of the Arts. He plays the bagpipes and is available for weddings.

*Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national service organization for theatre, and Blue Star Families, the country's largest chapter-based military families non-profit organization, are pleased to support the third round of the Blue Star Theatres Grant Program. Through support from MetLife Foundation, the Grant Program funds efforts that deepen the relationship between participating Blue Star Theatres and their local military community: veterans, children of active*

*duty military, military spouses, and/or active duty military. Each theatre received \$5,000 to support activities that could include talkbacks, outreach programs, sponsored tickets, performances, playwriting workshops, readings, or workshops that focus on military themes and service.*



**MetLife Foundation**

