

The Organic Truth, From Trayvon To “Tray”

by BRIAN SLATTERY | Mar 10, 2015 1:04 pm

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BRIAN SLATTERY PHOTO

“I saw that he was laying in the doorway with a bullet wound in his head. Then he went into convulsions. and then he was out.”

So New Haven poet and Organic Truth Collective member J-Sun began a poem about a friend of his, caught in the gunfire of a convenience store robbery.

J-Sun’s friend survived. Far too many haven’t been as lucky. Which was the subject of “What’s Good? (from Trayvon to the Tray in your neighborhood),” an event held at the Wilson Branch Library on Saturday by [Long Wharf Theater](#) and Organic Truth Collective in the run-up to Long Wharf’s next play, [brownsville song \(b-side for tray\)](#).

“It’s a blessing to be able to merge the two,” J-Sun, who acted as emcee for the event, said of the partnership.

The play will run from Mar. 25 to Apr. 19. At the event, Long Wharf handed out coupons for \$5 tickets to the production.

After a reading from the play by Anthony Martinez-Briggs, the Organic Truth Collective brought out its heavy hitters. J-Sun, who has also appeared at [Free 2 Spit](#) and represented New Haven in the [Peabody's annual MLK poetry slam](#), performed a couple powerful pieces.



As did Royce, another poet who has appeared at Free 2 Spit.

Kevin, another member of Organic Truth Collective, first talked about his days as a young criminal in New Haven — a life that led to three stints behind bars, the last in 1997. While serving that final sentence, he fought with another prisoner and ended up in “what they call segregation,” Kevin said. “And it was there that my past started talking to me.”

He heard the voices of his parents. He also heard the voice of one of his teachers, who'd always said he told such great stories. “I was such a good liar,” he said. But when he got out, he wanted to reform; as he put it, he “started to exact that change.”





He started working with youth himself and joined up with J-Sun in the Organic Truth Collective, because for both of them, “the arts had saved us,” he said. Though he was worried. From what he could tell, from the days of his youth to today, “nothing’s really changed.”

After a reading of a short scene from an Organic Truth Collective play, performed by Martinez-Briggs and three members of the audience, the event somehow turned naturally, and with J-Sun’s blessing, into an open mic.



The audience, now numbering about 30, got a taste of Monica’s poetry.



And Free 2 Spit host Baub Bidon riveted with a searing piece that ended in weeping and the sound of a harmonica. He explained later that he doesn't like performing the piece. He wrote it years ago, but as he's gotten older, more and more people he knows — or their children — have been victims of gun violence, so the piece gets harder and harder to do.

“But it was the only one I had that was right for this,” he said.

Still, J-Sun said, “I’m feeling optimistic.” He was more and more delighted as more people got up to perform their own pieces, some of them seasoned poets, some of them doing it for the first time in their lives, with the support of everyone in the room.

“You know how we’re Organic Truth Collective?” J-Sun said. “We just had an organic open mic.”

Previous coverage related to “brownsville song (b-side for tray)”:

- [Eyeing Breakthrough, He Explores City’s “B Side”](#)
- [Can “Second-Chance Society” Compete With Big \(Prison\) Business?](#)

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