

SQUEEZING OUT SUCCESS

Ann Randolph's show has been extended at the Marsh in San Francisco.



From women's shelter to solo spotlight

By Christina Troup
Special to The Examiner

Ann Randolph knows firsthand the power of sharing your story.

The creator of "Squeeze Box" fully believes that telling your story can help guide the direction of your life.

"What did Socrates say?"

An unexamined life is not worth living. Well, I believe that wholly," she says. "I don't want to sound hokey or new age, but it's helped me every single time and I've seen how it can be quite transformative to tell your life story and have it be witnessed."

Recently extended at The Marsh in San Francisco, "Squeeze Box," which runs weekends through Dec. 14, centers on Randolph's experiences working at a women's shelter and her pursuit of true love.

The show's run is also accompanied by "Write Your Life," a six-week course in which Randolph teaches performers the basics of how to develop a solo show.

"Whenever people tell their stories the most empowering thing they can do is have others hear them and recognize the shared humanity," she says.

Although deeply rooted in the power of faith, "Squeeze Box," Randolph admits, was spurred by a complete lack thereof. The show isn't about an artist trying to make it; it's about a caregiver who's completely burned out.

"The inspiration pretty much came from losing complete faith," she jokes.

Randolph had been working the

graveyard shift for 10 years at a shelter for mentally ill women in Santa Monica and making less than 9 bucks an hour.

During that time, she was also writing solo show after solo show hoping that she'd eventually catch a break and be able to make a living writing and performing. Naturally each time things didn't work out she found it difficult to find herself in the same position for another year.

Eventually, she decided to chronicle the experience. It paid off: Anne Bancroft and Mel Brooks produced an off-Broadway run of "Squeeze Box" in 2004.

"It was such an incredible dream come true," she says. "Financially, it took me a different place; I didn't

have to work in a shelter anymore. Even though that was something I loved, I wanted to make my living [writing and performing] rather than working a graveyard shift."

Through the course of perform-

ing "Squeeze Box," Randolph has found that audiences are left feeling inspired not only by her story, but also by their own.

"Generally what I get from the audience is that they are inspired to speak their story or are inspired to look differently at people living on the margins of society," she says. "They find that they can identify with someone that they thought they could never identify with before."



IF YOU GO
Squeeze Box

WHERE: The Marsh, 1062 Valencia St., San Francisco

WHEN: 5 p.m. Saturdays, 7 p.m. Sundays; closes Dec. 14

TICKETS: \$22 to \$25

CONTACT: (415) 826-5750, www.themarsh.org