

Artists, activists call for peace at Santa Rosa march

PD pressdemocrat.com/article/20130928/articles/130929513



Isaac Wan with the U.N.I.T. Dance Crew parades down Fourth Street in Santa Rosa with other artists during Saturday's 100 Thousand Poets for Change march. (Conner Jay / PD)

It was a noisy crew trying to make something happen on the streets of central Santa Rosa on Saturday as about 120 people paraded through town with a vision of better world.

Part of a global movement that began in Sonoma County three years ago and called 100 Thousand Poets for Change, the Santa Rosa march was mostly a parade of musicians, dancers, drummers and, yes, a few more traditional poets.

Their common mission was to use the intersection of art and activism to promote peace and sustainability around the world in alliance with poets and other artists in more than 100 countries, where nearly 550 poetry readings and other public events were planned this weekend.

"We feel that positive change will come through the artists," said Abraham Entin, a member of Sebastopol's Love Choir. "Culture is what raises people's consciousness."

Participants — a combination of organized groups like the Windsor Bloco youth drumming and dance troupe, Danza Azteca Coyolxauqui and the Hubbub Club street band — also included small clusters espousing everything from fluoride-free water to public access TV, as well as representatives from the Green Party, Occupy, and the Peace and Justice Center of Sonoma County.

Guerneville poet Michael Rothenberg said he and his partner, poet and artist Terri Carrion, launched the movement via social media because he just couldn't take watching the world waste itself with war and environmental degradation anymore without doing something about it.

"It was like, 'Enough already,'" said Rothenberg, 62. "I said, 'There ought to be 100,000 poets for change.' It was like my last gasp. It was like (throwing down) a gauntlet, and they answered."

That first year, participants staged more than 650 events in 95 countries, all organized at the grassroots level and focused on mobilizing people to work on local issues related to social and economic justice, freedom from violence and other social problems that manifest themselves differently in different places.

(page 2 of 2)

The march, new to Santa Rosa this year, was designed to bring exposure to the campaign.

"We think it's going to grow, and we're trying to move it along," said Ron Woodman, 47, of Santa Rosa.

Rothenberg has collected scores of posters advertising similar events around the United States and in countries of the Middle East, eastern Europe, South America, India — with some of the groups billed as Musicians, Photographers, even Mimes for Change.

Many of the posters have been displayed this weekend at the Arlene Francis Center for Spirit, Art and Politics on Sixth Street, which hosted six hours of Musicians for Change on Friday night, plus a dance performance and a huge party on Saturday. A poetry marathon involving dozens of poets is part of Sunday's festivities, which run from noon to 8 p.m. at the center.

"We have a lot of really liberal people here," Woodman said, but they need to "learn to march and protest in their own backyard. We have a lot of heavy duty social issues here."

You can reach Staff Writer Mary Callahan at 521-5249 or mary.callahan@pressdemocrat.com.

It was a noisy crew trying to make something happen on the streets of central Santa Rosa on Saturday as about 120 people paraded through town with a vision of better world.

Part of a global movement that began in Sonoma County three years ago and called 100 Thousand Poets for Change, the Santa Rosa march was mostly a parade of musicians, dancers, drummers and, yes, a few more traditional poets.

Their common mission was to use the intersection of art and activism to promote peace and sustainability around the world in alliance with poets and other artists in more than 100 countries, where nearly 550 poetry readings and other public events were planned this weekend.

"We feel that positive change will come through the artists," said Abraham Entin, a member of Sebastopol's Love Choir. "Culture is what raises people's consciousness."

Participants — a combination of organized groups like the Windsor Bloco youth drumming and dance troupe, Danza Azteca Coyolxauqui and the Hubbub Club street band — also included small clusters espousing everything from fluoride-free water to public access TV, as well as representatives from the Green Party, Occupy, and the Peace and Justice Center of Sonoma County.

Guerneville poet Michael Rothenberg said he and his partner, poet and artist Terri Carrion, launched the movement via social media because he just couldn't take watching the world waste itself with war and environmental degradation anymore without doing something about it.

"It was like, 'Enough already,'" said Rothenberg, 62. "I said, 'There ought to be 100,000 poets for change.' It was like my last gasp. It was like (throwing down) a gauntlet, and they answered."

That first year, participants staged more than 650 events in 95 countries, all organized at the grassroots level and focused on mobilizing people to work on local issues related to social and economic justice, freedom from violence and other social problems that manifest themselves differently in different places.

The march, new to Santa Rosa this year, was designed to bring exposure to the campaign.

"We think it's going to grow, and we're trying to move it along," said Ron Woodman, 47, of Santa Rosa.

Rothenberg has collected scores of posters advertising similar events around the United States and in countries of the Middle East, eastern Europe, South America, India — with some of the groups billed as Musicians, Photographers, even Mimes for Change.

Many of the posters have been displayed this weekend at the Arlene Francis Center for Spirit, Art and Politics on Sixth Street, which hosted six hours of Musicians for Change on Friday night, plus a dance performance and a huge party on Saturday. A poetry marathon involving dozens of poets is part of Sunday's festivities, which run from noon to 8 p.m. at the center.

“We have a lot of really liberal people here,” Woodman said, but they need to “learn to march and protest in their own backyard. We have a lot of heavy duty social issues here.”

You can reach Staff Writer Mary Callahan at 521-5249 or mary.callahan@pressdemocrat.com.