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## Two Rooms in the Valley

(Actors Forum Theater; 55 seats; \$15 top) Actors Forum Theater presents a play in one act, written and performed by Don Scribner, directed by Audrey M. Singer.

By J ULIO MARTINEZ

**There is nothing dramatically compelling about a middle-aged man relating how he left a teaching job in Wisconsin to become an actor in Hollywood. What makes Don Scribner's biographical sojourn rewarding are the small, tantalizing moments sprinkled throughout his narrative, occasionally punctuated by the thesp's simple country-tinged musical offerings. Helmer Audrey M. Singer's understated staging allows Scribner to roam about the Actors Forum's minuscule stage with ingratiating nonchalance, as if he were truly puttering about his own "Two Rooms in the Valley."**

Scribner's narrative follows varied meandering paths, and he's not in any hurry to get to the end of any of them. His well-muscled, wind-blown, unrefined persona is a perfect setup for his implausible tale of how a "cardboard-in-the-shoes" poor, underachieving redneck country boy, who was twice put on probation, managed to receive bachelor's and master's degrees in education. Even he is incredulous that a school board actually made him a school principal.

To set the record straight about how he never pulled himself up by the sociointellectual bootstraps, he relates the hilarious incident of how this inebriated educator and two drinking buddies almost died of hypothermia while attempting to fish on a Wisconsin lake in November.

Scribner also reminisces about love found and love lost. When a woman he meets is intrigued that he was featured in Alec Baldwin-William H. Macy feature "The Cooler," she readily comes to his abode to see the film and investigate other possibilities. But when she realizes his life's assets are confined within two small rooms, she politely exits after the screening.

Scribner reveals his journey to an acting career in slivers of recollections buried within narratives of his family, permanently buried under the poverty line. Beginning with a Catholic school teacher's insistence that 8-year-old Donny get up in front of the class and tell the story he was secretly whispering to a classmate, Scribner convincingly conveys the sense of wonder and magic that occurs within him when he's performing. He seems to take special pride in his star turn in the 1987 low-budget "Slave Girls From Beyond Infinity."

Scribner's acoustic guitar is never far from his reach. His vocal ability and guitar technique are modest. To his credit, the snatches of original tunes, some not fully realized, serve as musical accents to Scribner's poignant, unsentimental but humorous reflection on the life he has led.

Sets, Scribner; lights, John Grant. Opened Sept. 8, 2006; reviewed Sept. 9; runs through Sept. 24. Running time: 1 HOUR, 10 MIN.

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