The curtain rose late Thursday evening on the newest—and perhaps most high-brow—spinoff of the Occupy Wall Street movement: Occupy Lincoln Center.

In a move as theatrical as it was inevitable (the opera that was "occupied": Philip Glass’ 1980 work, “Satyagraha,” about the early life of Mahatma Gandhi), more than 200 protesters -- joined by Glass himself -- gathered outside the Metropolitan Opera last night to praise the art form and its creators, but denounce the money it attracts.

The patrons leaving the powerful, final performance of Phelim McDermott’s acclaimed production were greeted with signs that read "Gandhi would be pepper sprayed," images of Gandhi donning an "OWS" sash around his dhoti and chants like "Off the stage, into the streets." Police had barricaded the plaza itself, so the group gathered on the Lincoln Center steps.

The title of Glass’ opera, “Satyagraha,” means "Truth Force" in Sanskrit and is a term Gandhi used to describe his peaceful protest movement that inspired Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jr. Many of the signs and slogans equated Gandhi’s words and tactics with the Occupy Wall Street effort. One protester called out to a group of well-dressed patrons: “What you just watched is happening now.”

One of the organizers (her nametag read "Sam") said this was the second attempt to occupy Lincoln Center and another (who declined to give his name, but was passing out Occupy Wall Street newspapers) said this was a much bigger crowd than the last time, adding: “and the police are reacting in exactly the same way.” When asked if the giant Statue of Liberty puppet was in response to the imagery in "Satyagraha" production, he said “of course, we’re anything but stupid.”

The main event—and no doubt the reason for the larger turnout—was the composer himself, who made a cameo appearance at the event after taking a bow at the evening's performance. Thanks to the widespread success of his music in films, operas and concert halls, Glass is likely in the nation’s highest tax bracket, but there was a time he drove a taxi cab to support his music career.

So it was not surprising when he posted on his website the other day: "Philip Glass will join 'Occupy Lincoln Center' on Thursday." And join he did. A few minutes after the "Satyagraha" curtain calls, Glass made his way to the center of the group and read (in the almost operatic Occupy Wall Street call-and-response style) the following text:
"When righteousness
Withers away
And evil
Rules the Land
We come into being
Age after age
And take visible shape
And Move
A man among men
For the protection
Of good
Thrusting back evil
And setting virtue
On her seat again"

By this time, a good number of opera patrons joined the crowd. Glass called for a mike check and then repeated the text (taken from the "New Castle March" section of the opera) two more times. Upon completion, the protesters—and a good portion of the onlookers—cheered and soon others took the mike to call out statements like: "Tickets are for the 1%," "Revolution for the arts" and "Opera belongs to the people!"

A few opera-goers were part of the crowd cheering, but some were defiantly not. One shouted "get a job," others questioned why the group was protesting a nonprofit organization. (A number of people got into prolonged arguments, with one person calling out: "An opera about Gandhi should inspire a debate!")

At least one person was lead away by police for breaching the police barrier, but the 30-plus New York Police Department officers were mostly trying to usher the opera-goers away from the scene. (The classical music critic for the New Yorker, Alex Ross, posted on his Twitter account that he was asked to leave the plaza by the police. He also said he saw Lou Reed in the crowd helping one opera-goer cross the police barricade.)

Luckily the event ended not with the violence of a Wagner or Verdi tragedy, but with minimalist grace befitting a Philip Glass work. The people eventually began to dissipate, the repeated chants grew fainter and the composer himself quietly shuffled onto 9th Avenue and hailed a taxi to drive him home.

-- James C. Taylor reporting from New York

Photos: Philip Glass, at left side of top photo, reads to the protesters, who used Mahatma Gandhi and Statue of Liberty imagery. Credit: James C. Taylor/For The Times.
Defund war and torture and there might be a little left over to bring art and music back into our public schools.

Marijke Hodgson
Yay philipp!!!

Rex Boone · San Diego State University
I am not an art student, and I go to MOCA.

Donald Frazell
You card and choice in effete musics say otherwise. Spoiled soft white kids who cant see beyond their own lifestyles, or lack thereof..

Jeannette Lacey · Top Commenter · Maranatha High School
Donald Frazell, I don’t understand what you are trying to say.

Rex Boone · San Diego State University
Thank you, Jeannette. I thought maybe I was the only one who could not understand Donald.

Gina Tesser Phelan
Thanks gods! I think Lincoln Center should close down just for having given David Koch a public cultural place to call his own. Jeebus.

Donald Frazell
In LA, take to MoCA and LACMA. But let people in. Not that anyone but art students go to MOCA. The New in NYC has no outside room to camp, the Geffen is perfect, raise the tents. Occupy the party sites!

Rob Malasch · Amsterdam, Netherlands · 306 subscribers
Do NOT forget that this production was really, really fabulous in any which way...

Composer Philip Glass joins Occupy Lincoln Center protest - latimes.com

http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/12/composer-philip...