

2019

Where Do We Go From Here? A Semi-Autobiographical Performance Exploration into the Therapeutic Benefits of Theatre

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Recommended Citation

Elliott, Emma, "Where Do We Go From Here? A Semi-Autobiographical Performance Exploration into the Therapeutic Benefits of Theatre" (2019). *Scripps Senior Theses*. 1366.
https://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/1366

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**Where Do We Go From Here?
A Semi-Autobiographical Performance Exploration
into the Therapeutic Benefits of Theatre**

By

Emma M. Elliott

**Submitted to Scripps College in Partial Fulfillment of
Bachelor of Arts in Theatre**

**Professor Ortega
Professor Hurtado-Pierson
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April 26, 2019

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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Pomona College Theatre Department for helping me put on the final performance. Thank you to Christina Hurtado-Pierson and Ronnie Brosterman for their guidance in crafting my thesis, Janice for her music and positivity, and Janelle for the lighting and encouragement. Thank you to Giovanni Ortega for supporting me from my freshmen year to my first solo performance. Lots of love and gratitude to my Mom and Dad and my family for their endless love and support and to all my friends for helping me through this emotional journey.

Performance Featuring

“Calm” Music and lyrics by Adam Gwon, from *Ordinary Days*

Monologue from *People, Places and Things*, by Duncan Macmillan

“I Miss the Mountains” Lyrics by Bryan Yorkey, music by Thomas Kitt, from *Next to Normal*

Monologue from *Pretty Theft*, by Adam Szymkowitz

“Michael in the Bathroom” Music and lyrics by Joe Iconis from, *Be More Chill*

“Lifeboat” Music and lyrics by Laurence O’Keefe and Kevin Murphy, from *Heathers*

“Don’t Do Sadness/Blue Wind” Music and lyrics by Duncan Sheik, from *Spring Awakening*

Monologue from *Things I Know To Be True*, by Andrew Bovell

“How to Return Home” Music and lyrics by Kerrigan-Lowdermilk

All scenes written by Emma Elliott

Abstract

My intention in this performance is to create a therapeutic theatrical process for myself and engage the audience with intense emotional vulnerability regarding the combination and validation of the *nobody* and *performative self*. I utilized both my vocal and acting training to work through emotional trauma that I have experienced and created a musical performance to demonstrate my journey of therapy and emotional reconciliation within myself and my family. I focused my research on using autobiographical performances to solidify and validate the identity of the performer to an audience. In doing so, this allows the performers to become the narrator and take control of their life story. Self-reflection can provide clarity and insight into one's mental state and understanding of how certain events have impacted them mentally and/or physically.

Critical Exploration

Performance has always been a reflection of life and a commentary on societal interactions. It helps people understand and discuss issues that may otherwise remain in the dark. Bringing light to stigmatized issues such as mental health is the first step towards normalizing these discussions and decreasing the stigma so that people who are dealing with these issues can unlearn shame and repression to get the help they need. Using theatre as a medium is a valuable way to bring these conversations to the attention of audiences and present different storylines and characters that stimulate conversations surrounding certain stigmas about mental health. I want to explore how internal struggles are represented in performance and how actors allow themselves to be vulnerable with themselves and with the character to analyze how humans expose themselves to tell stories. Specifically, I will be analyzing how self-referential theatre can aid the therapeutic process for performers as it allows them to explore their own narrative and reconcile with the reality of living with a mental illness or certain traumatic events in their lives.

Self-referential theatre, or personal theatre, is theatre that is comprised of material from the lives of the performers themselves.¹ Within this, there are two forms: therapeutic and non-therapeutic. Non-therapeutic theatre is primarily artistic, whereas in therapeutic theatre the aim is personal growth.¹ Therapeutic theatre focuses its aim on personal growth and allows the performer to recount

¹ Pendzik, Susana, et al. *The Self in Performance: Autobiographical, Self-Revelatory, and Autoethnographic Forms of Therapeutic Theatre*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

their own story as a liberating experience as opposed to getting overwhelmed in their pain and trauma.¹ Auto-biographical performance is fueled by the need for agency by the performers: they are driven to write their own narrative and validate their life by storying it themselves, not allowing others to dictate their experiences for them.¹ In autobiographical therapeutic performance, the performer takes on the role of the hero's journey.¹ The hero's journey in this form of theatre depicts the performer as being reborn into their new life post therapeutic process by challenging their past and using that to move forward into their new life.¹ The performer confronts the unknown of their emotional and mental journey and returns to their new self with a deeper sense of self-understanding.¹ In the case of therapeutic theatre, the unknown can be the mental health struggles or lack of a self-identity that needs to be worked through in order to allow the performer to understand themselves fully within their own identity.

Sheila Rubin explores the role of self-revelatory performance in transforming shame into empowerment and self-identity. Rubin describes how the process of unpacking life stories can be extremely healing, with the audience serving to bring the storyteller from self-isolation back into community.¹ The role of the director serves to assist the performer in telling their story, witnessing them telling their story and helping them process it.¹ They find the deeper story within the performers' experiences, seeing the connections between different events and prompting them to unpack how it all connects. Rubin describes seven levels of witnessing self-revelatory performances: "I see you", "I hear you", "I feel you", "I understand you", "Tell me more", "Is this too much?", and "I'm curious about __".¹

These levels serve to work through the trauma or pain that may be brought up in self-revelatory performances in a way that eases the performer into it. We start with simply witnessing the experiences and having the performer allow us to enter their world and memories. We move through acknowledging this pain to sharing in the emotional pain and trauma to allow some of the burden to be lifted from the performer: it can be therapeutic to share your story and not have it locked inside of you anymore. From there, the director can encourage the performer to dive deeper into certain areas and prompt realizations or connections that the performer may not have been able to see before. This is part of the liberating and clarifying process that comes from bringing the performer's story into an external space: it allows the performer to witness their own story through other's eyes and gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, thereby allowing them to process what they have been through. This process can begin with therapy: the therapist prompts the individual to open up and begin sharing their experiences, offering them an external perspective that can help them navigate the internal emotional or mental struggles that provides clarity and helps the individual to be able to understand the root of their issues to begin to work through them. From there, the individual can move to the performance space and utilize theatre to continue to work through these issues in a way that helps to validate their sense of self and their experiences.

Irene Vanburgh discusses the presentation and reconciliation of the dual consciousness in actors through performance. She labels these two selves as the

private and performed self: the actor and the role.² This first private self is the “nobody”, the one who is overtaken by the performed self when an actor is embracing a role.² The performance of auto-biographical narrative, while recounting both the nobody and performed self, takes on another character entirely. This character is a representative figure of the author’s idea of self, in a way that can present both the private and performed self without the latter overtaking the narrative as it does in performances. The *performative self* is the portion of the actor’s personality that drives them to the stage and embody new and exciting roles to escape their fear of their *nobody self*: in the case of my auto-biographical performance, the nobody self is the one working through the mental health and traumatic family events and the performative one is the one desperately masking the former and ensuring that no one is able to see the shame that is hidden. I am working with the auto-biographical narrative to create a new, third character in order to combine my nobody and performative self. I am exposing my nobody self to an audience that usually sees my performative self in a way that does not gloss over my struggles or invalidate my performative self. Rather, I am exploring the balance between the two to create a narrative that is more honest and vulnerable, but stronger than either of my two selves.

² Gardner, Viv. “The Three Nobodies: Autobiographical Strategies in the Work of Alma Ellerslie, Kitty Marion, and Ina Rozant.” *Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance*, Manchester University Press, 2009, pp. 10–38.

Bella Merlin, in her essay “Tilly Wedekind and Lulu: the Role of her Life or the Role in her Life?” explores the life and work of Austrian actress Tilly Wedekind and her use of autobiography to work through her depression and reconcile her identity with the major theatrical roles she undertook. Tilly Wedekind in her autobiography described how she could trace the roots of her battle with depression to playing Lulu in her husband Frank Wedekind’s play: this realization was key in her recovering from her depression.³ Wedekind’s autobiographical narrative was a therapeutic means to present and structure the events in her life in order to sort out the part they played in contributing later to her struggles with mental illness. Estelle C. Jelinek explains that, “What [women’s] life stories reveal is a self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding.” (Merlin, pg. 129)³ The autobiographical narrative works to connect the self and the self-image: Wedekind struggled to authenticate her own self-image outside of the role of Lulu, and her exploration into her life events gave her a sense of authenticity within her own self-image as the actress rather than just the roles she was playing. Merlin writes that, “the autobiographical intention is often powered by the motive to convince the [readers or audience] of their self-worth, to clarify, to affirm, and to authenticate their self-image” (Merlin, pg. 129).³ Wedekind explores how her conflicting identities – the conflicting labels from her husband as both redeemer and destroyer – led to the desire to authenticate her self-image personally and professionally in a way that Wedekind could control how herself and

³ Merlin, Bella. “Tilly Wedekind and Lulu: The Role of Her Life or the Role in Her Life? .” *Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance*, Manchester University Press, 2009, pp. 126-152.

other perceived her.³ Wedekind's autobiographical novel was a precursor to a German cultural surge of writers utilizing autobiographies to break down their own isolation and demonstrate personal and political transformation.³ The autobiographical format is an expository one that can demonstrate extreme vulnerability, but also requires confidence and strength of self in order to communicate to your audience your authentic self and self-image that may be different than what they had previously been seeing of you. The reconciliation of self and self-image is an integral portion of creating an autobiographical narrative and serves to reinforce the creator's authentic self that they want to present to the audience in order to prove their self-worth in regards to their identity.

Auto-biographical performance utilizes external platforms to navigate and sift through internal struggles in order to provide clarity and understanding to the performer as to how their mental process or past events have been linked to their current mental health. Speaking from my personal process in dealing with mental health and emotional trauma, therapy provided the opportunity to work through these issues internally and help me get back to a place of emotional stability and acceptance with what had happened with my family. However, I still felt a sense of isolation and shame that kept me from sharing my experiences with those closest to me: I was not ready for others to see every part of my experiences because I myself had not healed internally from what had happened. As I continued therapy, I found that theatre and singing provided a more external opportunity to work through my emotional trauma and how it had physically affected my body. I began exploring different vocal and acting techniques to help myself unlock those emotions and

begin to work through them externally. Working on reconnecting my breath to my voice allowed me to work through the physical effect that emotional trauma had had on my body, and taking on emotional roles prompted me to unlock the internal barrier that the emotional trauma had caused.

Before attempting an auto-biographical performance, it is important to familiarize yourself with the acting techniques that can allow you to reach those emotional limits when taking on characters and their stories. A huge component of performance is the ability to be vulnerable onstage in front of people. This is never easy, but after undergoing emotional trauma I found that I was emotionally closed off from my performances and could not reach the place that allowed me to fully embody the performances. There are many different techniques that actors use in order to best embody the character they are playing. The technique that I will focus on for my research is the Meisner technique. The Meisner technique aims to take the actor out of the socially trained reactions in their head and return them to instinctive emotional impulses.⁴ Sanford Meisner began his work as an acting teacher in the Group Theater of the 1930's alongside other great acting instructors such as Strasberg and Adler.⁵ These individuals were emulating Stanislavsky's model of the Moscow Art Theater and focused on his method of "emotional memory".⁴ However, he lost faith in Method acting, believing it negatively

⁴ "SANFORD MEISNER TECHNIQUE." *About the Meisner Acting Technique - Sanford Meisner*, John DeSotelle Studio, www.desotellestudio.com/sanford-meisner-technique.html

⁵ Flint, Peter B. "Sanford Meisner, a Mentor Who Guided Actors and Directors Toward Truth, Dies at 91." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 4 Feb. 1997, www.nytimes.com/1997/02/04/theater/sanford-meisner-a-mentor-who-guided-actors-and-directors-toward-truth-dies-at-91.html

manipulated the actor's emotions in an unhealthy manner in order to produce performance. He instead focused his teaching on the internal emotional rhythm and reacting truthfully off of the fellow actors in a scene. The mantra of this training is "to live truthfully under imaginary circumstances".⁴ It works to allow the actor to bypass critical thought and instead draw on raw emotional reactions and experiences and use those to respond to the events surrounding them. By reducing reactions to emotional instinct, these actors put their emotions on display and do not "act" per se, but live as the character in that world. One exercise is the repetition exercise, where you repeat statements, observations, and reactions back and forth with a partner to ensure that you are fully listening and freeing yourself to be able to respond without thinking. The focus is on the connection between the mind and body: allowing yourself to feel those emotions honestly and having instinctual physical reactions to those emotions rather than getting tripped up by the thinking process. The actor finds events in their life that had emotional journeys parallel to the characters, and uses that in their depiction of the character in order to fully embody the character.

Theatre, whether autobiographical or fiction, creates a vital platform that brings certain previously stigmatized conversations to light and stimulates conversation that can begin to help normalize these topics. One show that demonstrates the value of theatre to teach compassion and understanding towards mental health issues is *Next to Normal*. *Next to Normal* follows the story of a family where the mother, Diana, lives with bipolar disorder and psychosis, daughter Natalie is anxious, and the father Dan is depressed, each illness feeding into the

cycle of the other. What is most compelling about Diana's journey dealing with her mental illness is how it impacts her relationships. She is brutally honest about wanting to return to a time where she did not feel this way, and how her mental state has isolated her from her family. This show was released in 2008 and was a groundbreaking show in its honest portrayal of the realities of both living with mental illness and how it affects their relationships with loved ones. While it was certainly not the first show to tackle issues of mental health, it presented its demons in the guise of a normal family, completely tearing down this picturesque image of a normal family and sparked conversations about the unseen and unheard struggles of those living with mental illness. And its success on Broadway and at the Tony's gave it the platform to reach millions and spark conversations nationwide. Yorkey and Kitt, the musical creators of the show, discussed how they had discovered in their research and writing of this show that many families had at least one member who took up more time and space due to mental health challenges they had to navigate. One of the most unique facets of the presentation of this situation is that the creators intended to write it in a way that the diagnosis of bipolar could be replaced by other mental illnesses such as addiction, depression, and others, and the show would still play out in a very similar fashion.⁶ While this is not to say that each diagnosis of mental illnesses are the exact same and have the same impact on those around them, many people experience similar impacts when their loved ones suffer from a mental illness: it takes more time and energy to take care of that person, and this can negatively impact their relationships because of the often misunderstood

⁶ "Next to Normal." *PCH Blog*, PCH Treatment Center, 11 Apr. 2011, www.pchtreatment.com/next-to-normal/.

nature of mental illness. Witnessing this honest portrayal of therapy, medication, mental health, and family issues is a liberating experience: the audience feels that this performance validates their own experience and may even help to begin the process of working through the shame of hiding such issues from their social surroundings. In my journey with mental health, emotionally traumatic family events, and therapy, I found that this show really resonated with my experiences and provided a strong emotional connection within the songs, even though the storyline and characters differed vastly from my own life experience. This show helped inspire me to dive into my own experiences and create an autobiographical narrative that demonstrated my story in a way that gave me control over the narrative and allowed me to continue my therapeutic process within the performance space.

However, these raw emotional journeys do not always leave the actor as soon as the performance is over. Dredging up emotional memories can severely affect the actor, and almost everyone who has studied Meisner at some point has probably cried during a class. So how do we allow ourselves to reach that vulnerable point while still being able to back down and resume normal life once the moment is over? Maintaining balance and a “cool down” after a performance is very important. When the lines between yourself and your character are blurred, that is when the vulnerability of the performance can affect the actor’s mental health. An example of a cool down exercise is “Acknowledge and Appreciate”, which grounds the performers and focuses on the positive emotions and community building that theatre provides. Allowing yourself time after a performance to slowly come down

off of your emotions and return to yourself can help maintain an actor's resilience in emotional performances. This is especially important when taking on an autobiographical performance: unlike most storylines, this draws directly from the life of the performer. In these cases, the performer has a direct and personal connection to the material and cannot leave it in the theatre once the show is over. Practicing boundaries and managing your own emotional limits while taking on a deeply personal journey is vital in order to maintain your mental health during this process.

Performing is a career or even hobby where you put your body and mind on display and in a position of vulnerability. Even without having to deal with mental illness, this can be a terrifying thought. Having anxiety as a performer can be debilitating, because it makes it a struggle to do the thing you love most. I personally have struggled with anxiety that caused severe stage fright that really impacted my ability to perform. During a period of time in high school when my anxiety was at its highest, I could not perform without having a panic attack and this devastated me. It took a long time to work through to get to a place where I could function normally on a day-to-day basis, but even longer to get to a place where I could perform. Even after I was able to get to a place where my anxiety was manageable to perform, I underwent a traumatic family event that affected my physical body so much that I was unable to sing despite years of training: my diaphragm felt disconnected from the rest of my body. It destroyed the connection between my mind and body needed for performance and created a buildup of emotion inside of me that I was unable to work through and inhibited my ability to perform. It was debilitating to be barred

from one of the passions of my life, and made me determined to work through my anxiety. Being cast in *Cabaret* gave me the opportunity to begin the process of working through my emotional buildup and regaining the connection between my mind and body. The emotional work from the complex character of Fraulein Schneider prompted me to understand the impact that the emotional trauma had had on me, and taught me how to harness those emotions in performance in a healthy way. Actors choose to work through this because the emotional fulfillment they gain from performance far outweighs the emotional cost of anxiety.⁷ While I was also seeking professional therapeutic help, my performance journey in *Cabaret* provided a creative therapeutic outlet that helped me unlock the barrier that I had repressed my emotions behind.

A pattern that I have noticed in different plays that I have seen or read that deal with mental health is that often the main character who is dealing with these issues does not exist in a vacuum, but their struggles severely impact those around them, mainly their relationships with their family. When dealing with mental health are very important to people's journeys for many reasons: they can offer support, or on the other hand drag you down. They can even partially be the cause of one's struggle with mental illness (such is the case with genetic components and toxic relationships). Relationships with family members, friends, significant others, therapists, doctors, and more all play a role in how one navigates mental health issues. In my performance, I drew upon scenes, songs, and monologues from plays

⁷ Roccaforte, Cinzia. "How Actors Overcome Performance Anxiety And Stage Fright." *Anxiety.org*, 1 Mar. 2017, www.anxiety.org/how-actors-overcome-performance-anxiety-and-stage-fright.

and musicals that deal with mental health and familial relationships that emotionally resonated with my experiences in dealing with mental health and changing family structures. My performance focuses on creating a semi-autobiographical narrative that prompts emotional vulnerability and clarity surrounding my personal experiences by examining them through the lenses of monologues and songs from various plays and characters.

Self-Evaluation

I started the process of creating my show in January. I had been putting together a list of potential songs for a few months, and I sat down and went through my options to find the ones that would best represent the journey I was trying to re-create. For me, the songs were the emotional crux of the show so it was most important to have those create a strong foundation and then structure the songs and monologues upon it. I formed the initial structure of the piece and then drew inspiration from both my own experiences and the experiences described in the monologues to create a character that lived somewhere between myself and an imaginary other.

Originally, I was looking at fourteen songs to potentially include in my performance. I knew that this was far too many, and so I narrowed them down based on ones that I felt a true emotional connection to that resonated with my own experiences. One song that I knew I would include was “Calm” from *Ordinary Days*, written by Adam Gwon. This song really resonated with my experience of having anxiety in everyday life: it is the underlying panic that is always there. It is just barely keeping it together and then losing it when something falls apart. It is proving to others that you can handle things and maintaining control of your emotions but struggling to figure out how to do that. This song provided a strong introduction to my world by bringing the audience into my mindset and thought process as I go through my life. From there, I brought in “I Miss the Mountains” from *Next to Normal*, written by Bryan Yorkey and Thomas Kitt, as a reflection of who you are now as opposed to who you were before the therapy and medication. This song

deals with understanding how medicine and therapy has changed you, and coming to terms with dealing with this when remembering who you used to be. One of the strongest emotional connections I had with a song that I knew I wanted to include was “How to Return Home”, by Kerrigan-Lowdermilk. This song explicitly mirrored my experience of working through the traumatic family event and trying to find my way back home knowing how much everything has changed. You are never able to return to the home you knew, even though the physical home and people are still there. This song required belting, which is something I’ve worked on during my years of studying musical theatre. Belting is a vocal performance technique in which the singer uses the power of the chest voice in a slightly higher register. It often is found in the passagio range, which is the break between head and chest voice. It can be very tricky to balance this technique without doing so in an unhealthy manner, but I found that the emotional release of this song and the monologue leading up to helped to open up my chest and voice along with establishing the strong core support that is required to belt in a healthy manner. This song was instrumental in finding my emotional connection within the music in this performance.

Once I began to rehearse these songs, I took notes of my emotional and mental process during these rehearsals. Below are some of the immediate thoughts I had after the first two musical rehearsals:

1.30.19

These two songs are very different. Calm is very quick and slightly manic and looks into that overwhelming, in the moment panic. I miss the mountains is more of a reflection on what has happened, and how you got from where you were to how you are because of your mental health. Calm reminds me of how I feel when

my brain starts moving too fast, when I have so many things going on and I am just keeping it together but then one thing falls out of place and I completely spiral.

Anxiety is a weird thing. It's kind of in the moment, but the more I think about it, it seems more pervasive than I think it is. It is the tightness in my chest, stopping me from talking in class, or that dead feeling when I do something wrong. It is pulling my hair out and giving myself stomachaches over making decisions. It is those little blue pills that sit on my nightstand that I don't think really do anything anymore, but deep down I know that they're part of the chemicals in my brain and that it actually would really impact my life.

Singing for me happens in two stages. There is just singing, working on the words or notes, and just going through the motions. But when I open up and allow the emotional parts to take hold, then I find myself singing differently. I think that it helps with the support too.

I still get a little tripped up with words and rhythm, and it's a lot to sing all at once. I sang through all of the songs in my repertoire, and I found that by the end my voice was really tired and it was difficult to sing "How to Return Home" full out as I really wanted to. I need to do more vocal exercises and work up my stamina. I also started working through monologues and scenes to string the songs together, and nail down the story I am trying to tell.

I found that I need to work on opening up my throat more when I sing. It feels as though my breath is disconnected from my core. My support is slightly off, and it makes it more difficult to access my full head voice. I need to rehearse more and work on breath support to build up my stamina. In addition, I want to work on accessing the emotions in the song.

"Michael in the Bathroom"

The actual panic. The pulling hair out, the isolation, the hyperventilating, the internal screaming, the anger, the frustration at yourself for being this way.

"Don't Do Sadness/Blue Wind"

The fear of letting others in. Not wanting other people to see your weaknesses, not wanting to admit that you need help. Gradually beginning to think that opening up with people could do something for you and help potentially.

The initial focus on my rehearsal process was building up my vocal and emotional stamina for the songs. I've taken vocal lessons weekly for the past few years with Professor Harley at Scripps College, and it has been an impactful part of my studies at school and as a performer. I found that working through vocal techniques helped me reconnect my breath and body after undergoing emotional trauma as it had severely impacted my singing. After the traumatic event, in my vocal lessons I could sing one song that I had mastered before the event, but all the songs I was working on after were flat and unsupported in my diaphragm. I realized that my body had lost the strength that it needed to provide breath support while singing. Even though I had not undergone physical trauma, the emotional trauma left me feeling disconnected from my body. Singing technique requires core support and opening the chest and back so that the core support can release the air: this way, the singing comes from your core and not pushing from your vocal cords. I utilized Meisner repetition exercises to unlock the emotional buildup and say what I was holding back so that I could begin to process to emotions that I was repressing during this time. Regaining the ability to sing properly was a big part of my physical work in working through the traumatic event, and I was able to find coherence within my body again in a way that supported my singing and emotional release. From there, I found monologues that I found resonated with my personal experiences and wove them within the songs to build the storyline. I have attached scanned images of my rehearsal journal that demonstrates my monologue analysis in preparation for the performance.

As I began to run through the songs in order one after the other, I found that my voice would tire too quickly. Part of my rehearsal process was continuing to build my vocal stamina so that I could successfully sustain a half hour performance of entirely singing and speaking without tiring or straining my voice. As soon as I had all of the songs I wanted to include in the piece – six total – I began running the songs consecutively with Janice Rodgers Wainwright, my accompanist, to build up the vocal stamina I would need. I had a bit of difficulty in crafting the dialogue in between. Originally, I had anticipated taking scenes from plays as well as monologues, but I struggled with finding scenes that fit into the narrative I was looking for without being too specific to the storyline of its play. As I worked with the songs and monologues and began to craft a storyline, I realized that this emotional process reflected my therapy sessions. I decided to write scenes to fill in the emotional processing of talking with my therapist and how those led to various emotional breakthroughs, represented in each of the songs and monologues. Once these all came together, I became fully immersed in the emotional journey and was able to really develop my acting and vocal technique by unlocking those emotional blocks that I have previously encountered in performance.

Working with Janice Rodgers Wainwright was not only beneficial for my vocal technique, but she played a vital role in helping me to access the emotional journey of the pieces. We focused at first on the vocal quality of the pieces, and she reminded me not to rush the songs and fully enunciate the lyrics. From there, she encouraged me to think through all the songs and really take on the emotional experiences that they were telling. We talked through what each song meant and she helped me bring

out the emotions in the songs while maintaining a strong vocal performance. From there, we incorporated the scenes and monologues. Because it was a one-woman show, I had to make sure my blocking was not stagnant or remained in just one section of the stage. I mapped out the stage and created a blocking layout that allowed each scene and monologue to have its own section of the stage to create a more dynamic performance. I worked with Giovanni Ortega to not only ground the monologues in my own emotional experiences, but to physicalize the imagined scenery and world that I was building in my performance. Each monologue had a specific experience and world that it took place in, and I had to envision those surroundings in my mind to fully immerse myself in the world of the monologue.

The two performances were drastically different. Opening night was filled with nerves and all of my friends were there. I felt free and relaxed and finally able to let go and allow the emotions to carry the performance. The second night, my whole family was there. I did not realize the emotional impact that having them witness my performance would have, and it was overwhelming. I was almost terrified for them to see what I was going through, when these were the people I often tried to cover my true emotions with so that they knew I was okay. I was finally being honest and vulnerable and let them see the process that I had been going through, and how it had affected me. While the emotion carried me through the first performance, my emotions seemed to take over the second performance. The lines between the imaginary character I had created and myself became more blurred and I felt as though this performance really was an auto-biographical retelling of my emotional experiences in the months after a traumatic family event. I

knew that my family was watching in support of me and that they knew that this performance was a culmination of my work in therapy and emotionally processing all that had happened. This performance provided a cathartic experience that was crucial to working through my experience with therapy, mental health, and navigating traumatic family events.

Monologue Analysis

Elliott

What does this mean?

When you're in a character, you can make real, bold choices and do things you never could. You allow yourself to feel things. Outside, you're not grounded, you don't know how to make decisions or really feel things because you don't fully know who you are yet.

you act to make feel like you pretend you really have

all the actual real things you've been avoiding

same energy as "Calm, into a music rhythm"

this has happened too many times to be sad about anymore

this is why

With a play you get instructions. Stage directions. Dialogue. Someone clothes you. Tells you where to be and when. You get to live out the most intense moments of a life over and over again, with all the boring bits left out. And you get to practice. For weeks. And then you're applauded. Then you get changed. Leave through the stage door. Bus home. Back to real life. All the boring stuff left in. waiting. Temping. Answering phones and serving canapés. Nothing permanent. Can't plan. Can't get a mortgage or pay for a car. Audition comes in. try to look right. Sit in a room surrounded by people who look just like you, all after the same part. Never hear back. Or if you get the part it'll be sitting around in rehearsal and backstage making less than you did temping. Make these friendships with people, a little family, fall in love onstage and off and then it's over and you don't see them again. You try not to take it personally when people who aren't as good as you get the parts. When you go from being the sexy ingénue to the tired mother of three.

almost self-discovery

But you keep going because sometimes if you're really lucky, you get to be onstage and say things that are absolutely true, even if they're made up. You get to do things that are more real to you, more authentic, more meaningful than anything in your own life. You get to speak poetry, words you would never think to say but become yours as you speak them.

Zoe and Kat

numbness, a shell

relinquish not about nothing why?

this do my God, body shut me out, who am I? nothing?

When he shall die

Take him and cut him out in little stars

And he will make the face of heaven so fine

That all the world will be in love with the night

And pay no worship to the garish sun

think, back to reality

why isn't it there?

It feels like Lydia wants me to acknowledge some buried trauma that isn't there. I played Antigone and every night my heart broke about her dead brother. Then my own brother died and I didn't feel anything. I missed the funeral, because I had a matinee. I'm not avoiding talking to the Group because I've got something to hide

It's the opposite. If I'm not in character, I'm not sure I'm really there. I'm already dead. I'm nothing. I want to live a hundred lives and be everywhere and fight against the infinitesimal time we have on this planet.

coming back to the group explaining. Acting gives me the same things I get from drugs and alcohol. Good parts are just harder to come by.

trying to get back to that 12/14

afraid of reaction
 near parking
 more convincing
 yourself that this
 is what she wants,
 afraid of getting
 close
 live immersed
 my life so
 many
 ways
 more to
 yourself,
 trying to wake
 yourself before you
 can do it

I know you're probably mad at me for leaving before the funeral, but I just can't do it. My whole body itches and it won't stop until I get in a car and can't see this house or this town or this state from the rearview window.

This way is better. This way I'll come back from my trip and go straight to school and ^{I don't want her to do this} you won't have to look at me or think about me. You can tell people you have a daughter but you won't have to talk to me on the phone or see me on the couch. I'll be a no-maintenance daughter just like you always wanted.

I'm going to go now. I ^{decisive. Finally} know someday you'll want to talk to me again. Maybe after I graduate and get a job and get married and buy a house and have my own daughter. Then you can talk to her and be her favorite and then we can pretend you were a ^{something less to do this} really great mother. She won't know and I don't have to tell her.

But now I'm going to get on the road and push you out of my mind and I probably won't think of you until I get to the grand canyon or some other fairly good canyon and maybe I'll cry in front of the mammoth orange hole in the ground or maybe I'll smile because it's so beautiful and I'm free and windswept.

But first I'm going to get into Suzy's mom's car and we'll drive till there's just drops left in the tank and as we cross the border into Massachusetts, we'll roll into the first gas station where I'll get some Ding Dongs and some orange soda and I'll bite into the first one sitting on the hood, watching the car slurp up gas. Then I'll get in the driver's seat and put my foot on the accelerator until I can't keep my eyes open anymore. So I pull over and we both close our eyes and sleep until we're awoken at three am by separate but equally terrible nightmares.

embarrassed
 that you made the
 wrong
 choice
 admitting this out loud for
 the first time
 fighting
 the spiral

I Skype home once a week and tell Mom and Dad what an amazing time I've been having. I tell them I'm having the best time because I can't bear the thought of them ^{overcompensating your experiences} being disappointed for me. And when I Skype my brother, I pretend the camera on my phone is broken because he knows me and ^{vulnerable} he will see it in my face. He'll see that it's all a mess and he'll tell me to come home but I can't go home, not yet, I mean then, I couldn't go home because it would be such a...defeat, ^{trying to be strong put on a facade}

I feel small. I feel like I'm twelve years old, I feel ridiculous. I want to cry but I won't. Well, I do, a bit. But not as much as I want to. I want my dad, I want my mom. I want my brothers and my sister. I want to hear them laugh and argue and fight and tease me. But I can't think of them much because if I do my chest will explode. I feel like I'm going to literally fall to ^{the dead, empty feeling} pieces. That my arms are going to drop off and then my legs and then my head. And so to ^{focused, determined} stop myself coming apart I make a list of all the thing I know...I mean actually know for certain to be true and the really frightening thing is...it's a very short list, I don't know much at all.

And the biggest thing I thought I knew, that life at home would stay the same forever after I left, was the biggest lie of all.

But I know that I have to go home eventually.



Script*Where Do We Go From Here?*

Scene 1

SOUND CUE – SKYPE

LIGHTS COME UP

SOUND CUE – VOICE OVER

B

Hi, Emma, how're you doing?

E

Pretty good, yeah, how are you?

B

Not too bad. So, how's your week been?

E

Umm, a little crazy honestly.

B

Oh, yeah? What's been going on?

E

Things are just kind of speeding up, my internship is two days a week in LA which is a lot, but it's really good experience so it's worth it. And then I've been trying to work on my media studies thesis, which has been kind of a lot because it's, you know, pretty personal.

B

Yeah, that must be difficult. How have you been handling that?

E

Umm, it kinda comes and goes. I kinda push it to the back of my mind a lot. But then there are times when it gets brought up, and it's kind of overwhelming.

B

Have there been times when it's, kind of, bubbled over, for lack of a better term?

E

Yeah, a little.

B

Can you tell me about one of those times?

E

I was going to a meeting with my advisor, and thinking about my paper and just, kind of started freaking out.

LIGHT CHANGE (MUSIC)

Calm

So

I am on the 6th train heading uptown to my lit. Professors office
 It's like light years off of campus, don't ask me why
 I'm sandwiched in-between this guy who's literally drooling
 And this European hipster who, well lets be honest, smells
 Wood Allen heard Gershwin in the air when he thought Manhattan
 Well I'm not so impressed, I hear like Philip Glass best
 I wish I could take a second to get

Calm
 But it's not working
 Cause like clearly I'm a magnet for a special breed of psycho who think being weird is a
 valuable use of time
 And my notebook likes to wander on its own across the city taking with it my whole thesis
 which I need to write like, now
 I don't remember the Muppets getting hives
 When they took Manhattan
 But my own diagnosis says I'm creeping toward psychosis
 Cause I cannot find a place to get
 Calm
 It's really hard
 You know I tried to take up yoga
 But you'll be surprised how many folks don't think deodorant is Zen
 I even saw a life coach who told me I should breathe
 Just breathe
 But every time I took in a breathe
 I visualize that life coach's death
 She's having brunch at cafe Pierre
 And she's choking
 And choking
 And choking
 And choking
 Till finally she's calm
 I'm sorry
 Anyway, I get to my professor's and he sits me down and tells me that my thesis on Virginia
 Woolf feels somehow false
 I tell him what I'm working from is not so much a thesis
 As the fact that she went crazy
 And that seems, well, apropos
 My professor just tosses back his head and a dry Manhattan
 I'm wondering which will him quicker
 The big apple or the liquor
 When suddenly I panic
 And I tell myself I must get someplace calm
 I up and run toward Penn station like I swear my head was ready to blow
 And I hop a train to Jersey
 Just as fast as any person can go
 Then 90 minutes out
 I get off at some provincial hamlet I've never heard of
 There's a real state office right on the block
 I can afford a two bedroom, I go into shock
 I think, what the heck. I write a check
 Cause there's sunlight, and closets, and laundry
 But mostly it's calm
 Calm
 Calm
 Calm
 Calm
 Really calm

Strangely calm
 Like time square at five A. M. Calm
 Like totally freak me out calm
 Like I'm gonna slowly go crazy and throw myself over the balcony calm
 Damn it. So
 I tear up my deposit
 And I head back to Penn station
 Of course the subway's broken
 So I walk four miles home
 And like 14 hours later
 I get back to my apartment
 With my crazy spastic roommates
 And a room, well, of my own
 I've got this black and white poster on my wall
 That says "my Manhattan"
 And I give it the finger
 But I let my gaze linger
 And I notice how the people look like tiny specks of grey
 All haphazardly arranged like they were in that Monet
 And suddenly I'm stuck with this bizarro revelation that Warren's whacked-out theory
 might deserve some exploration
 I sit on my bed
 And I realize I'm finally
 Calm

LIGHT CHANGE (REALITY)

Scene 2

With a play you get instructions. Stage directions. Dialogue. Someone clothes you. Tells you where to be and when. You get to live out the most intense moments of a life over and over again, with all the boring bits left out. And you get to *practice*. For weeks. And then you're *applauded*. Then you get changed. Leave through the stage door. Bus home. Back to real life. All the boring stuff left in. waiting. Temping. Answering phones and serving canapés. Nothing permanent. Can't plan. Can't get a mortgage or pay for a car. Audition comes in. try to look right. Sit in a room surrounded by people who look just like you, all after the same part. Never hear back. Or if you get the part it'll be sitting around in rehearsal and backstage making less than you did temping. Make these friendships with people, a little family, fall in love onstage and off and then it's over and you don't see them again. You try not to take it personally when people who aren't as good as you get the parts. When you go from being the sexy ingénue to the tired mother of three.

But you keep going because sometimes if you're really lucky , you get to be onstage and sat things that are absolutely true, even if they're made up. You get to do things that gee more real to you, more authentic, more meaningful than anything in your own life. You get to speak poetry, words you would never think to say but become yours as you speak them.

*When he shall die
 Take him and cut him out in little stars
 And he will make the face of heaven so fine
 That all the world will be in lo0e with the night
 And pay no worship to the garish sun*

It feels like she wants me to acknowledge some buried trauma that isn't there. I played Rosie and every night my heart broke as her family fell apart. Then my own family broke and I didn't feel anything. I didn't call home for weeks, I talked to my cast more than my own parents. I'm not avoiding talking to the Group because I've got something to hide It's the opposite, If I'm not in character, I'm not sure I'm really there. I'm already dead. I'm nothing. I want to live a hundred lives and be everywhere and fight against the infinitesimal time we have on this planet.

Acting gives me the same things I get from drugs and alcohol. Good parts are just harder to come by.

LIGHT CHANGE (MUSIC)

I miss the mountains

There was a time when I flew higher,
Was a time the wild girl running free
Would be me.

Now I see her feel the fire,
Now I know she needs me
There to share—I'm nowhere.
All these blank and tranquil years—
Seems they've dried up all my tears.
And while she runs free and fast,
Seems my wild days are past.

But I miss the mountains.
I miss the dizzy heights.
All the manic, magic days,
And the dark, depressing nights.

I miss the mountains,
I miss the highs and lows,
All the climbing, all the falling,
All the while the wild wind blows,
Stinging you with snow
And soaking you with rain—

I miss the mountains,
I miss the pain.
Mountains make you crazy—
Here it's safe and sound.
My mind is somewhere hazy—
My feet are on the ground.
Everything is balanced here
And on an even keel.

Everything is perfect—
Nothing's real...
Nothing's real.
And I miss the mountains.
I, I miss the lonely climb.
Wandering through the wilderness.
And spending all my time
Where the air is clear

And cuts you like a knife—
I miss the mountains...
I miss the mountains...
I miss my life.
I miss my life.

LIGHT CHANGE (REALITY)

Scene 3

SOUND CUE – VOICE OVER

B

Have you been able to express these emotions to anyone else? Your mom, dad, friends?

E

Not really, I'm still kind of in that place where I'm almost ashamed to tell anyone. Like rationally, I know that this isn't a big deal and that my friends are super supportive, but I can't bring myself to talk to them about it.

B

What about your parents?

E

I talk to my mom some, and my dad, but sometimes I just don't talk to people.

B

It can be hard to express those emotions to the people most closely connected to them for you. Why do you think you have trouble opening up to your friends? You know they will be supportive.

E

Sometimes – sometimes, my brain can't work fast enough for my body to keep up. It's like my head is spinning, And I can't put my finger on it exactly, but sometimes there will just be this break in my chest and I stop feeling things. Or I feel too much. It's always in my chest, like I'm disconnected from my body and my head can't grab onto anything to bring it back down to reality. And then I feel even worse because usually this happens when I'm around my friends, and so I think I'm being a buzz kill for them and I get even more upset, and they try to comfort me which sometimes makes it worse? Cause I know I just need this time to let myself slightly implode and then it'll probably be fine the next day. And it's this downward spiral of emotional insanity.

LIGHT CHANGE (MUSIC)

Michael in the Bathroom

I am hanging in the bathroom at the biggest party of the fall
I could stay right here or disappear
and nobody's even notice at all
I'm a creeper in a bathroom cause my buddy kinda left me alone
but I'd rather fake pee than stand awkwardly
and pretend to check a text on my phone
Everything felt fine when I was half of a pair
and through no fault of mine
there's no other half there
Now I'm just
Michael in the bathroom

Michael in the bathroom at a party
 Forget how long its been
 I'm just Michael in the bathroom
 Michael in the bathroom at a party
 No, you can't come in
 I'm waiting it out 'til it's time to leave
 and picking at grout as I softly grieve
 I'm just Michael who you don't know
 Michael flying solo
 Michael in the bathroom by himself
 All by himself
 I am hiding, but he's out there
 Just ignoring all our history
 Memories get erased
 And I'll get replaced
 with a newer cooler version of me
 And I hear a drunk girl
 Singing along to Whitney through the door
 "I wanna dance with somebody!"
 And my feelings sink
 Cause it makes me think
 Now there's no one to make fun of drunk girls with anymore now it's just
 Michael in the bathroom
 Michael in the bathroom at a party
 I half regret the beers
 Michael in the bathroom
 Michael in the bathroom at a party
 As I choke back the tears
 I'll wait as long as I need
 'Til my face is dry
 Or I'll just blame it on weed
 Or something in my eye
 I'm just Michael who you don't know
 Michael flyin' solo
 Michael in the bathroom by himself
 Knock, knock, knock, knock
 They're gonna start to shout soon
 Knock, knock, knock, knock
 Ah hell yeah I'll be out soon
 Knock, knock, knock, knock
 It sucks he left me here alone
 Knock, knock, knock, knock
 Here in this teenage battlezone
 Clang, clang, clang, clang
 I feel the pressure blowing up
 Bang, bang, bang, bang
 My big mistake was showing up
 Splash, splash, splash, splash
 I throw some water in my face
 And I am in a better place

I go to open up the door
 But I can't hear knocking anymore
 And I can't help but yearn
 For a different time
 And then I look in the mirror
 And the present is clear
 And there's no denying
 I'm just... at a party
 Is there a sadder sight
 Mmmmmmmmm
 Michael in the bathroom at a party
 This is a heinous night
 I wish I stayed at home instead
 Watching cable porn
 Or wish I offed myself instead
 Wish I was never born
 I'm just Michael who's a loner
 So he must be a stoner
 Rides a PT Cruiser
 God, he's such a loser
 Michael flying solo
 Who you think that you know
 Michael in the bathroom by himself
 All by himself
 All by himself
 When all you know about me is my name
 Awesome party
 I'm so glad I came

LIGHT CHANGE (REALITY)

Scene 4

I know you're probably mad at me for leaving before the funeral, but I just can't do it. My whole body itches and it won't stop until I get in a car and can't see this house or this town or this state from the rearview window.

This way is better. This way I'll come back from my trip and go straight to school and you won't have to look at me or think about me. You can tell people you have a daughter but you won't have to talk to me on the phone or see me on the couch. I'll be a no-maintenance daughter just like you always wanted.

I'm going to go now. I know someday you'll want to talk to me again. Maybe after I graduate and get a job and get married and buy a house and have my own daughter. Then you can talk to her and be her favorite and then we can pretend you were a really great mother. She won't know and I don't have to tell her.

But now I'm going to get on the road and push you out of my mind and I probably won't think of you until I get to the grand canyon or some other fairly good canyon and maybe I'll cry in front of the mammoth orange hole in the ground or maybe I'll smile because it's so beautiful and I'm free and windswept.

But first I'm going to get into Suzy's mom's car and we'll drive till there's just drops left in the tank and as we cross the border into Massachusetts, we'll roll into the first gas station where I'll get some Ding Dongs and some orange soda and I'll bite into the first one sitting on the hood, watching the car slurp up gas. Then I'll get in the driver's seat and put my foot

on the accelerator until I can't keep my eyes open anymore. So I pull over and we both close our eyes and sleep until we're awoken at three am by separate but equally terrible nightmares.

LIGHT CHANGE (MUSIC)

Lifeboat

I float in a boat
In a raging black ocean
Low in the water
With no where to go
The tiniest lifeboat
With people I know
Cold, clammy, and crowded
The people smell desperate
We'll sink any minute
So someone must go
The tiniest lifeboat
With the people I know
Everyone's pushing
Everyone's fighting
Storms are approaching
There's nowhere to hide
If I say the wrong thing
Or I wear the wrong outfit
They'll throw me right over the side
I'm hugging my knees
And the captain is pointing
Well who made her captain?
Still, the weakest must go
The tiniest lifeboat
Full of people I know
The tiniest lifeboat
Full of people I know

LIGHT CHANGE (REALITY)

SCENE 5

MIA enters, approaches Emma.

MIA

Maybe talking about it more will help.

EMMA

I avoided telling my friends I was seeing a therapist for the longest time. There were times in high school where my friends literally told me that I should go to therapy, because they saw how messed up I was and they didn't know how to help me but they knew I needed help. And the weird thing is I lied. Whenever they recommended I talk to a therapist, I would say, "oh, no way. It's not that bad, I'm not going to see a therapist." I was still so ashamed to admit to my friends that I was seeking help even when that was exactly what they knew I needed, and recommended to me.

MIA

No, I get it. No matter how rational your thinking about it is, there's always that level of personal fear that's associated with it.

EMMA

Yeah. But once I got to college, people were openly talking about therapists and mental health all the time. Even though my friends in high school were supportive, this was the first time where I didn't feel like there was stigma around it, but instead there was a support network. And I was better in college, my anxiety was under control for the first time. And then, my life as I had known it for 19 years was shattered. And then suddenly I was right back in high school, only this time it wasn't that I was hiding the fact that I was in therapy, I was terrified of people finding out why, what I was going through.

MIA

Maybe it's time to talk about it.

LIGHT CHANGE (MUSIC)

Don't do sadness/blue wind

(Awful sweet to be a little butterfly
Just swinging over things and nothing deep inside
Nothing going, going wild in you, you know
You're slowing by the riverside, a-floating high and blue)
(Or maybe cool to be a little summer wind
Like once through everything and then away again
With the taste of dust in your mouth all day
But no need to know
Like sadness, you just sail away)
'Cuz you know
I don't do sadness
Not even a little bit
Just don't need it in my life
Don't want any part of it
I don't do sadness
Hey, I've done my time
Lookin' back on it all, man, it blows my mind
I don't do sadness
So been there
Don't do sadness
Just don't care
Spring and summer
Every other day
Blue wind gets so sad
Blowing through the thick corn
Through the bales of hay
Through the open books on the grass
Spring and summer
Sure when its autumn
Wind always wants to
Creep up and haunt you
When silence got you

If it's heartache well, it's sorrow
 Winter wind sings under cries
 Spring and summer
 Every other day
 Blue wind gets so pained
 Blowing through the thick corn
 Through the bales of hay
 Through the sudden drift of the rain
 Spring and summer
 So maybe I should be some kind of laundry line
 Hang their things on me, and I will swing 'em dry
 You just wave in the sun through the afternoon and then see
 They come to set you free beneath the rising moon
 'Cuz you know
 Spring and summer
 I don't do sadness
 Every other day
 Not even a little bit
 Blue wind gets so lost
 Just don't need it in my life
 Goin' through the big corn and bales of hay
 Don't want any part of it
 Spring and summer
 I don't do sadness
 Every other day
 Hey, I've done my time
 Blue wind gets so lost
 Lookin' back on it all and it blows my mind
 Goin' through the big corn and bales of hay
 I don't do sadness
 The wandering clouds of the dust
 So been there, don't do sadness
 Spring and summer
 Just don't care

LIGHT CHANGE (REALITY)

SCENE 6

I Skype home once a week and tell Mom and Dad what an amazing time I've been having. I tell them I'm having the best time because I can't bear the thought of them being disappointed for me. And when I Skype my brother, I pretend the camera on my phone is broken because he knows me and he will see it in my face. He'll see that it's all a mess and he'll tell me to come home but I can't go home, not yet, I mean then, I couldn't go home because it would be such a...defeat.

I feel small. I feel like I'm twelve years old, I feel ridiculous. I want to cry but I won't. Well, I do, a bit. But not as much as I want to. I want my dad. I want my mom. I want my brothers and my sister. I want to hear them laugh and argue and fight and tease me. But I can't think of them much because if I do my chest will explode. I feel like I'm going to literally fall to pieces. That my arms are going to drop off and then my legs and then my head. And so to stop myself coming apart I make a list of all the thing I know...I mean actually know for

certain to be true and the really frightening thing is...it's a very short list. I don't know much at all.

And the biggest thing I thought I knew, that life at home would stay the same forever after I left, was the biggest lie of all.

But I know that I have to go home eventually.

How to Return Home

Your bare feet sliding on the old wooden floorboards,
Home just as you left it but still you're shaken,
Like walking into a museum somehow out of time.
It's all the same except the girl in the hallway,
Where she's been and who she will ripen into,
Your childhood's on the other side of a sprawling divide... too wide.
Take a silent breath. Hold in the change.
Tell yourself you still live here.
Take your bags upstairs.
It's the only way you'll get through today.
Count the hours. Take a shower.
Wash yourself away.
The house is pulsing with an alien heartbeat,
Was it always here but you never listened?
It's calling you to be the girl that you were way back then... again.
Take a silent breath. Hold in the change.
Tell yourself you still live here.
Take your bags upstairs.
Put away your clothes, take it nice and slow.
Be their daughter. Nothing's harder
When nobody knows how to return home.
How to return home
And how to survive,
There's no written guidelines.
How to go back,
How to show up and unpack.
How to show up, how to grow up.
How to take a breath.
Take a silent breath.
Hold in the change.
Tell yourself you still live here.
Take your bags upstairs.
You still share a name, but you're not the same.
You don't fight it. You don't hide it.
It's a whole new game of how to return home.
How to return home.
How to return home.
How to return home

Performance Documentation



Figure 1: Still from duet "Don't Do Sadness/Blue Wind" with Mia Kania



Figure 2: Facing the uncertain future



Figure 3: Still from "I Miss the Mountains"



Figure 5: Contemplating environmental anxiety factors in "Calm"



Figure 6: Realizing the need to return home



Figure 7: Taking the first steps towards reconciliation

Figure 4: Moment of panic in "Michael in the Bathroom"



Figure 8: The desire to return to the way things were, but being unable to do so



Figure 9: Grappling with the anxieties that creep up in the back of your mind

Bibliography

Flint, Peter B. "Sanford Meisner, a Mentor Who Guided Actors and Directors Toward Truth, Dies at 91." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 4 Feb. 1997, www.nytimes.com/1997/02/04/theater/sanford-meisner-a-mentor-who-guided-actors-and-directors-toward-truth-dies-at-91.html

This article details the life and work of Sanford Meisner. Beginning in the Group Theater in the 1930's with such acting teachers as Strasberg and Adler, Meisner focused his work on emotional memory and connecting the mind to the body. He worked extensively with students, usually in pairs, to best create realistic scenes and relationships onstage. He worked

on Broadway, at 20th Century-Fox, the American Musical Theater Academy, and more. In 1987, he wrote a book with Dennis Longwell titled "Sanford Meisner on Acting".

Gardner, Viv. "The Three Nobodies: Autobiographical Strategies in the Work of Alma Ellerslie, Kitty Marion, and Ina Rozant." *Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance*, Manchester University Press, 2009, pp. 10–38.

This essay discussed the contrasting identities of the performer and how autobiographical narrative can reconcile those two. The autobiographical narrative is a chance to allow the performer to create a combined, renewed self-image that consists of both

the performance and nobody self. It also tells the stories of three actresses who utilized autobiographical narrative forms to reclaim their self-identity through the lens of their time in the theatrical world.

Merlin, Bella. "Tilly Wedekind and Lulu: The Role of Her Life or the Role in Her Life? ." *Auto/Biography and Identity: Women, Theatre and Performance*, Manchester University Press, 2009, pp. 126–152.

This essay explores the life of Tilly Wedekind and her use of autobiographical narrative to work through her depression stemming from a psychologically intense role written for her by her husband. Wedekind traced her struggles with mental health back to the role of Lulu. Her autobiographical narrative allows herself to reclaim her identity and work through the labels her husband put upon her of both redeemer and destroyer as his muse.

"Next to Normal." *PCH Blog*, PCH Treatment Center, 11 Apr. 2011, www.pchtreatment.com/next-to-normal/.

This blog is part of the Psychological Care and Healing Center. This particular entry focuses on the presentation of mental illness in the musical *Next to Normal*. It interviews Brian Yorkey and Tom Kitt, the musical creators of the show, and discusses their intent behind creating this particular musical.

Pendzik, Susana, et al. *The Self in Performance: Autobiographical, Self-Revelatory, and Autoethnographic Forms of Therapeutic Theatre*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

This book explores the format of autobiographical theatre, its history, and its therapeutic benefits. It discusses how the creation of an autobiographical performance can provide clarity and a sense of self-identity by reflecting on one's past and utilizing their performance to validate their newfound identity to the audience witnessing it.

Roccaforte, Cinzia. "How Actors Overcome Performance Anxiety And Stage Fright." *Anxiety.org*, 1 Mar. 2017, www.anxiety.org/how-actors-overcome-performance-anxiety-and-stage-fright.

Roccaforte examines how performers are impacted and deal with mental illness, focusing on anxiety. She explores how dealing with anxiety in performance can seriously impact their

relationship to other actors, especially onstage with characters. Many actors choose coping mechanisms that include cognitive behavioral therapy or sometimes substance use/abuse.

“SANFORD MEISNER TECHNIQUE.” *About the Meisner Acting Technique - Sanford Meisner*, John DeSotelle Studio, www.desotellestudio.com/sanford-meisner-technique.html

This website gives an overview of the Meisner technique and how it can emotionally unlock actors in order to enhance their performance. The actors uses different improvisational exercises to break down their socially constructed reactions and instead focus on their emotional instincts.