

THEATRE FOR ONE™

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World's smallest theater opens its doors to public in NY

MARK KENNEDY, ASSOCIATED PRESS



FILE - In this June 7, 2011 file photo, an audience member steps out of the "Theatre for One" performance space in New York's Times Square. Theatre for One, a 4-foot-by-8 foot portable theater, allows one audience member at a time to see one short play performed by a single actor. The theater will be parked in three Manhattan locations for the next two months, offering shows for free. Which show the audience sees is largely the luck of the draw, adding to this unique theatrical event. (AP Photo/Jason DeCrow, File)(Credit: AP)

NEW YORK (AP) — Many theater owners like to say they offer an intimate show but only one really means it.

That would be Theatre for One — a 4-foot-by-8 foot portable theater that allows one audience member at a time to see one short play performed by a single actor.

“There’s definitely an immediacy that happens within this,” said Tony-winning scenic designer Christine Jones, who conceived and leads the project. “The theater acts as a kind of portal into a human being.”

The theater will be parked in three Manhattan locations for the next two months, offering shows for free. Which play the audience sees is largely the luck of the draw, adding to this unique theatrical event.

Each lucky audience member slips into a section of the theater and waits until a partition rises, revealing a performer who then begins his or her short piece.

This year, new plays were commissioned from Craig Lucas, Will Eno, Lynn Nottage, Jose Rivera, Thomas Bradshaw, Zayd Dohrn and Emily Schwend.

They were asked to write 3-minute pieces that used this phrase as a jumping-off point: “I’m not the stranger you think I am.” The works range in theme from a serial killer preying on black men to the death of a mother.

The actors will be Andrew Garman, Erin Gann, Carmen Zilles, Keith Randolph Smith, Marisol Miranda and Kevin Mambo, an actor and musician who starred in “Fela” on Broadway.

Mambo, who will be performing Dohrn’s play “Love Song,” added his own music and will play an electric guitar in the booth. He’s played audiences of 5,000 so the stripped-down nature of the new show is a challenge.

“There’s no need for theatrical accouterment. There’s no need for projection. There’s no need for any of those things,” he said. “I need to just engage with someone and tell them a story.”

The theater’s inside is very comfortable, with red-padded walls and soft lighting. It’s a lot like being in a confession booth, peep show or even an elevator. A stage manager is in charge of sound levels and lighting cues.

Zilles, who has acted in the off-Broadway plays “Chimichangas and Zoloft” and “Scenes From a Marriage,” said slipping into the booth offers a rare respite from our hectic, digital lives.

“I talk to a lot of people in a day and sometimes I’m like, ‘But I wasn’t really with anyone,’” she said. “I’m really trying to not do that and just really be with the person who I’m with and let it be whatever it is.”

Theatre for One will be parked at the Winter Garden at Brookfield Place from May 18-24, Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan from May 27-31, and Midtown’s Grace Building Plaza from June 2-6. All three sites are owned and operated by Brookfield Property Partners.

“It provides people somewhat of a mental break — it takes you someplace else,” said Debra Simon, vice president and artistic director of Arts Brookfield. “It’s art in unexpected places and we try and do unexpected things.”

THE NEW YORKER

MAY 27, 2015

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THEATRICAL KIND

BY MICHAEL SCHULMAN

We go to the theatre for communal experiences, whether with an audience of a thousand or of ninety-nine. But what if it were just you? The aptly named company (entity? singularity?) [Theatre for One](#) has reduced play-going to its least populated imaginable form: one actor, one spectator. For starters, that means no competing with other audience members over armrests.

Playwrights on the order of Lynn Nottage, Will Eno, and Craig Lucas have contributed five-minute plays to the project, which goes by the collective title “I’m Not the Stranger You Think I Am.” The venue, created with the design studio [LOT-EK](#), is a mobile four-by-eight-foot black booth that looks as if it were made of road cases. Between May 27th and 31st, it will be at Zuccotti Park, the erstwhile home of Occupy Wall Street, and then at the Grace Building plaza from June 2nd to 6th. Last week, it set up shop

in the glass-covered Winter Garden at Brookfield Place—not to be confused with Broadway’s Winter Garden Theatre, which specializes in Theatre for One Thousand Five Hundred and Twenty-Six.

Since Brookfield Place is conveniently located across the street from the New Yorker offices, I slipped out one recent afternoon to take a look. The booth sat at on the far end of the atrium, protected by velvet ropes. A handful of curious souls were waiting in line. (Admission is free.) I was greeted by the project’s creator, Christine Jones, a scenic designer whose Broadway credits include “Spring Awakening” and “American Idiot.” “The idea came to me when I was lying in bed one morning,” Jones, who has long salt-and-pepper hair and wore a tangle of silver charm necklaces, explained. This was in 2002, and she had recently been to a friend’s wedding, where a magician performed a trick for her alone. There was “something so intoxicating” about the distillation of performance to one-on-one, she said. She was reminded of peep-show booths, confessionals, therapeutic offices, and the Cone of Silence from “Get Smart.” As she developed the concept, Jones spoke to a guy who designs actual peep-show booths in Manhattan. (He donated a chair.) She envisioned the playing space as a “moon-like structure” that would literalize the phrase “black-box theatre.” In 2010 and 2011, Theatre for One materialized in Times Square. She was working on “American Idiot” at the time, and one day cajoled Billie Joe Armstrong into performing incognito. When a die-hard Green Day fan got in, Jones recalled, “The booth started shaking.”

With a woman in a red jumpsuit standing guard, I settled in for “Play No. 1.” Unlike its hardshell exterior, the inside of the booth had the red-velvet plushness of a boudoir, or the innards of a violin case. I sat and faced a partition, which peeled away to reveal a woman with long black hair and plaintive eyes sitting on a stool. “Are you lost?” she said, looking straight at me. “Or are you just waiting here for something or someone?” She waited for an answer. Was I supposed to respond? It was then that I realized that “Theatre for One” was something of a misnomer: the experience was all about two people, actor and observer—if that’s what I was. Suddenly, I became self-conscious. In an audience of many, you’re invisible. In an audience of one, you’re part of the show. I fixed my mouth into a neutral smile, stayed silent, and didn’t dare look away. The actress (Carmen Zilles, performing a monologue by Emily Schwend) went on to tell a story about getting lost on her way to her friend Maria’s house. I suddenly had the uncanny feeling of being in an audition room, sitting in judgment. A moment later, when her eyes welled up with tears, it felt like something more intimate—how often does a stranger look square at you and pour out her heart?

The next play was by Will Eno, known for his existential meta-comedies “Thom Pain (based on nothing)” and “The Realistic Joneses.” It was performed by a bearded man in a vest who was wearing a touch of eyeliner. He kept calling me “ladies and gentlemen.” At one point, he poked his head into my side of the booth—breaking whatever was left of the fourth wall. “It’s not like anyone’s keeping track of what I do in here,” he confided, a little menacingly. I was reminded of all the things that are exchanged between two people: secrets, threats, understandings. The play after that, by José Rivera, had the buffer of fiction, which was something of a relief—I felt less watched. I was at “lunch” with a woman resembling Katie Holmes, who narrated her mother’s devastating last days, spent in the hospital. Again, the dynamic shifted: I was unsure how to hold up my end of the conversation. Coos of sympathy? Smiles of appreciation? It felt like some newfound privilege, the ability to listen without the burden of response.

I saw five of the seven playlets on offer—all minor feats of characterization. The last, a stirring monologue by Lynn Nottage, was delivered by Keith Randolph Smith, a towering black actor dressed in work clothes. His character was begging me for a job; years earlier, he explained, he’d been attacked by a serial killer, and would do anything for cash. I was aware of the variety of bodies I’d seen, and of the element of surprise, and of the fact that the actors must have a similar experience as each audience member is unveiled. (To tell the truth, I had my hopes up for Billie Joe Armstrong.) Acting is often spoken of as a narcissistic pursuit, but it seemed much more humble at Theatre for One. Why crave the attention of multitudes when the most we can ask for is to be seen—fully, if momentarily—by just one person? Being an audience of one started to feel less indulgent, too. When I stepped out of the booth, the line was twenty deep.



May 24, 2015 8:22p.m.

Theater Review: Is It Smaller Than a Black Box? A Visit to I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am

By: [Jesse Green](#)



Photo: &Darial&Sneed/Copyright&2015&Darial&R& Sneed!!

From the outside, the “theater” looks like a shipping crate, the kind roadies roll around, except that it’s customized with various lights and bump-outs and a door that says AUDIENCE. Ushered inside by a guide in bright coveralls, you find yourself in a very red, very small space, perhaps four feet square; your seat is a sort of PVC throne, donated by a guy who usually makes them for peep shows. Another door, two feet in front of your face, is shut, but you know that the “stage” must be behind it because it’s surrounded by lights. Before you can really get your bearings, though, that door suddenly slides open, and a play begins. A short play, certainly; depending on which one you get (there are seven, presented in semi-random rotation) it may be anywhere from four to eight minutes. But even so — and even with just a black chair for a set — it’s a real play nonetheless, with a real character, a real theme, and a real actor. Perhaps two.

I say two because under these circumstances, you cannot help but be an actor as well. Though the project is called Theater for One — T41 — the experience of having someone talk directly to you in a small space is so intimate and so immediate that only the most steadfastly reluctant audience participant would refuse to engage. I am usually that most steadfastly reluctant audience participant, and yet, when Carmen Zilles, in Emily Schwend’s *The Way Back*, asked if I “really want to talk about this” I reflexively nodded. This was not a one-way street. My nod, which Zilles acknowledged with a look, seemed to change her performance even though it did not alter her text. Other times, I spoke because she seemed to be asking me a direct question, and, after all, she was only as far away from me as she would be if we were having lunch in a café. Eventually, as she told me about getting lost on a familiar street, tears pooled in her eyes, and soon, quite unbidden, in mine.

Christine Jones, the Broadway set designer (*Spring Awakening*, *American Idiot*) who masterminded T41 — an earlier incarnation appeared in Times Square in 2011 — later told me that most people do respond out loud to the actor, in some cases at length. (An older woman watching Thomas Bradshaw’s play, in which the actor Andrew Garman wonders whether he has enough sex with his wife, shared a complete intimate history of her marriage.) But the value of the experience is not really dependent on that sort of participation. At the simplest level, it is an opportunity to watch fine acting close up; all the actors I saw — Zilles, Garman, Marisol Miranda in a play by José Rivera, Erin Gann in a play by Will Eno, and Keith Randolph Smith in a play by Lynn Nottage — were remarkable. It’s also a chance to experience storytelling at the fullest possible intensity. Compare the cast-to-audience ratio of 1:1 to that of a typical Broadway show, which might exceed 1:250 in a currently modish four-actor comedy.

But more than that, T41 is a radical deconstruction of fourth-wall dramaturgy. Though Jones is also known for her immersive theatrical experiences (like the spectacularly enveloping *Queen of the Night*), “immersive” doesn’t begin to describe this. It’s as if you and the actor were not only alone, but alone in a space capsule, or a bathysphere. (When at one point Gann’s character — an actor who has supposedly misunderstood the nature of the gig — leaned forward, out of the frame of the playing area and into “mine,” I thought I might have to abandon ship.) And yet by embedding such meta-theatrics, which after all are not unfamiliar to followers of performance artists like Marina Abramovic, within the solid frame of dramatic narrative, Jones short-circuits the intellectual-hipster response. She reminds us that true theatricality is work for both the performer and the audience; it’s a good thing the plays are so short. Their impact is so highly concentrated you may feel too wrung out after five minutes to get back in line for another helping.

Partly, no doubt, that’s because Jones gave the playwrights, who also include Craig Lucas and Zayd Dohrn, a theme and collective title — *I’m Not the Stranger You Think I Am* — that seems to point in a dark or sad direction. Of the five responses I saw, only two had any comic element; Eno’s, of course, and Bradshaw’s. (His was the only one that toyed with the expectations of the form by offering a somewhat unlikable character.) But as with great theater of any length and in any venue, darkness and sadness are not necessarily depressing. I actually found the experience elating, a bit like getting good news from a doctor (you’re human!) and a bit like visiting a carnival. I couldn’t help wishing, though, that people who already enjoy theater, and seek it out, would not be the only ones to benefit from T41. Arts Brookfield, the cultural arm of the real estate developer that owns the venues where T41 is performing, has done a great thing in financing the project, but how much greater would it be if they took it on the road, to malls and churches and diners across America? Hey, the stage is already packed.

[*I’m Not the Stranger You Think I Am*](#) is at the Winter Garden at Brookfield Place through May 24, at Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan May 27 through 31, and at the Grace Building in Midtown June 2 through 6. Performances at all three venues begin each day at noon and continue through 7 p.m. See artsbrookfield.com/T41 for details.

The New York Times

[Theater](#)

Review: 'I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am,' Where Theater Meets Confessional

By [BEN BRANTLEY](#) MAY 22, 2015

There's no hiding in the dark this time, and none of the usual safety in numbers. It's just you and her — or him — eyeball to eyeball, in a closed, red space the size of a confessional. If you blush or yawn or wipe tears from your eyes, she sees it; that means, of course, that she feels it, too.

The responsibilities of being an audience rarely weigh as heavily as they do in "I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am," the series of short (roughly five-minute) plays that opened this week at [Brookfield Place](#) in Lower Manhattan.

The self-contained, tiny (4 feet by 8 feet), mobile structure in which these solo dramas take place resembles a confessional in more ways than one.

As this mini-theater has been created, by the inspired designer [Christine Jones](#) and the architectural firm Lotek, you find yourself in immediate proximity to someone who has every intention of confiding in you. He or she materializes when a screen slides away, revealing a person seated, as you are, and as close as the image in your bathroom mirror.



There may be a few seconds of silence, but then this person starts talking with the urgency of someone who really, really needs you to understand. Under the circumstances, you have no choice but to try to honor the request.

Such, in essence, is the contract that's forged between performers and audiences whenever the lights go down in a theater. But with Ms. Jones's [Theater for One](#), which is presented by Arts Brookfield and True Love Productions, that contract is reduced to its most basic equation.

You don't have to pay a cent to see one of the plays that make up "I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am," but you do have to invest your unconditional attention. (The production — which seats people on a first-come-first-served basis — remains at Brookfield Place through Sunday; it will be at Zuccotti Park from May 27 to 31, and at Grace Building Plaza June 2 to 6. [Earlier editions](#), with other plays, ran in 2010 and 2011.)

You should know that are you not required to say anything yourself, though several of the six plays I saw began with the performers asking me questions: "Are you lost?" and "This is kind of embarrassing, right?" A nod or a half-smile, or even a blank expression, will

But it's hard to avoid the feeling that you're contributing to a dialogue, even if you don't say a word. Me, I said exactly one word: my first name, when a particularly insistent jerk, played by Andrew Garman, kept asking what it was. This was in a play by [Thomas Bradshaw](#) ("Job," "Burning"), a writer who specializes in jerks and in making audiences uncomfortable.



The man embodied by Mr. Garman always seemed to be looking for me to agree with the annoying suppositions he was making about class and sex. The woman (Marisol Miranda) in

José Rivera's play "Lizzy" also appeared to seek validation for her feelings, in this case regarding the death of her mother. The wistful young thing played by Carmen Zilles in Emily Schwend's "The Way Back" seemed convinced that I had broken her heart.

Other plays I saw were written by Lynn Nottage ("#Five," performed by Keith Randolph Smith) and Zayd Dohrn ("Love Song," featuring music by its performer, Kevin Mambo). They were less directly confrontational, though they throbbed with the faint current of embarrassment that always accompanies deep intimacies from people you've just met.

I was reminded that theater is nearly always about creating an intense intimacy, or the illusion of it, of people revealing themselves to us in the hopes that we'll understand them. What Theater for One does is makes us acutely aware of this process, to put our relationship with those on stage under a magnifying lens of self-consciousness.

Not incidentally, a master of self-conscious theater is represented. That's Will Eno (["Thom Pain \(based on nothing\)." "The Realistic Joneses"](#)), whose offering here is titled "Late Days in the Era of Good Feelings."

Its interpreter, Erin Gann, explained that he had been under the impression that this was a project called "Theater of One." He had assumed there would be, yes, just one performer — him — but the usual sizable audience in, he hoped, a large and echoey room.

Discovering otherwise had required instant readjustments to the performance he had planned, he said, and he knew he was going to flop. Still, he asked, couldn't I look like I had a good time when I left the mobile theater?

Though I've never had an actor say that to me before quite so baldly, I've felt that hopeful plea lurking beneath many a performance.

I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am

Created by Christine Jones in collaboration with Lot-ek Architects; costumes by Kaitlin Jeffery; lighting by Austin Smith; sound by Matt O'Hare; production stage manager, Sean Brannon; technical director, Josh Higgason; produced by Arts Brookfield and True Love Productions. Presented by Theater for One, Ms. Jones, artistic director. At Brookfield Place, 230 Vesey Street, through Sunday; at Zuccotti Park, Broadway at Liberty Street, May 27 to May 31; at the Grace Building, 1114 Avenue of the Americas from June 2 to June 6; 212-417-2414; artsbrookfield.com/t41. Total running time: 45 minutes.

"The Way Back" by Emily Schwend; directed by Christine Jones; performed by Carmen Zilles.

“Late Days in the Era of Good Feelings” by Will Eno; directed by Brian Mertes; performed by Erin Gann.

“Love Song” by Zayd Dohrn, directed by Jenny Koons; music by Kevin Mambo; performed by Mr. Mambo.

“Lizzy” written and directed by José Rivera; performed by Marisol Miranda.

“Untitled” by Thomas Bradshaw; directed by Ms. Koons; performed by Andrew Garman.

“#Five” by Lynn Nottage; directed by Mr. Mertes; performed by Keith Randolph Smith.



Theatre for One is a show for a lone audience member! and a solo performer

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

Tuesday, May 26, 2015, 4:33 PM



Christine Jones came up with the idea for Theatre for One.

Sometimes it pays to think inside the box.

Welcome to Theatre for One, which turns a 4-foot by 8-foot crate into a portable theater.

There's a lone audience member and a solo performer. It's as intimate as it gets.

As conceived by set designer Christine Jones, a Tony winner for "American Idiot," the audience member enters the theater and sits down. Next, a door slides open — like a peep show or a confessional — to reveal a performer. And that's it: showtime.

Seven five-minute, one-on-one plays run in rotation under the umbrella title "I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am." Writers include Craig Lucas, Will Eno, Lynn Nottage, Thomas Bradshaw, Zayd Dohrn and Emily Schwend.

Jose Rivera's sweetly moving mini-drama "Lizzy" begins with Marisol Miranda asking if her audience really wanted to hear what she had to say.

"Well," I muttered to myself, "I'm here. I'm in this box. Alone. With you. So, um, yeah."

She continues. The conceit of this play is that Lizzy is on a lunch date that gets TMI too quickly as she reveals she has a dying mother.

“The muscles in my mind and mouth abandoned me,” she says in one of that play’s best lines.

If you’ve ever lost someone, you’ll relate. As the lone viewer, I went from fretting about sitting up straight, to trying to hold back a tear.

No such luck on the latter front. It turns out, theater is a gripping, communal experience — even when you’re by yourself.

“Theatre for One” runs in Zuccotti Park, May 27-29, and the Grace Building, 1114 Sixth Ave. at 42nd St., June 2-6, noon- 7 p.m. For info, visit theatreforone.com.

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Black Box Theater for an Audience of One

by [Allison Meier](#) on May 21, 2015



Theatre for One in Times Square (courtesy Theatre for One)

In the mobile black box of [Theatre for One](#), there is only one audience member for each of the seven rotating plays. The four-by-eight space is sparsely staged, with a built-in red velvet seat

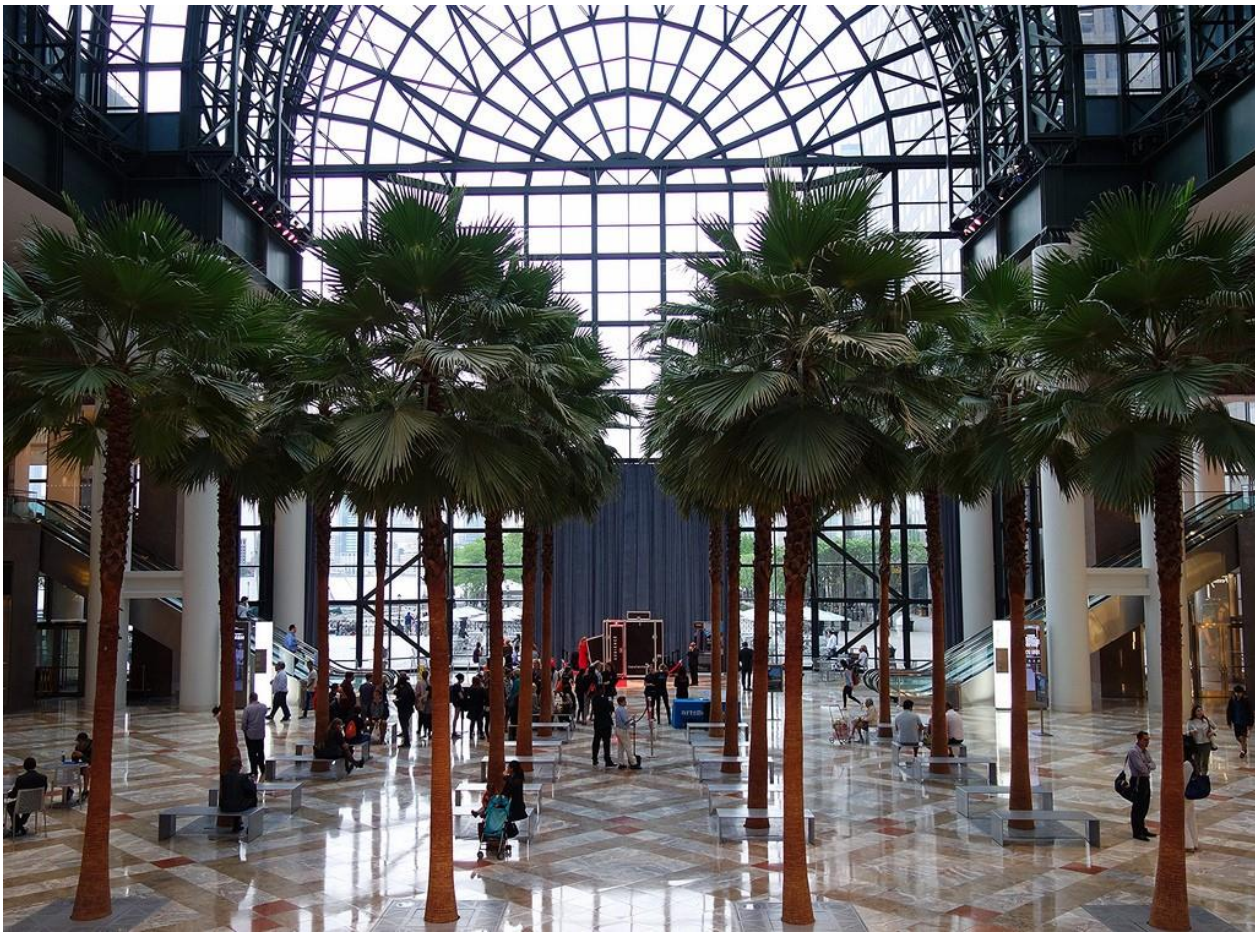
on one side and a folding chair for the performer on the other, and a wall that opens and closes between, revealing the viewer and actor to each other.



Theatre for One in the Winter Garden Atrium at Brookfield Place (photo by the author for Hyperallergic) (click to enlarge)

[I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am](#), the current cycle of performances in the mobile theater, presented by [Arts Brookfield](#), opened this week at the Winter Garden at [Brookfield Place](#) in Battery Park City. Through June 6 the performances are traveling around Manhattan, with a stop at Zuccotti Park and Midtown's Grace Building Plaza. All of the plays are free, you just have to line up and be prepared for one of the most personal theater experiences of your life.

Theatre for One evolved from an initial prototype [created in 2003](#), the vision of artistic director [Christine Jones](#), better known as a set designer for Broadway shows like [Spring Awakening](#) and [American Idiot](#). The current tiny four-by-eight theater built by [LOT-EK](#) is a sort of cross between a peep show and a confessional box. Every experience is unique, and you don't know what you are going to get when you are closed inside the box. It could be comedy, tragedy, a love story, or a self-aware monologue on the awkwardness of such a confined space.



Theatre for One in the Winter Garden Atrium at Brookfield Place (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)



Theatre for One in the Winter Garden Atrium at Brookfield Place (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

The newly commissioned pieces include some high-profile playwrights like Craig Lucas, [nominated for a Tony](#) for his American in Paris libretto, and Lynn Nottage [who received a Pulitzer for Drama](#) in 2009 for Ruined. Each play is only about five to seven minutes, and the three I saw varied from comedic to tragic. In [Zayd Dohrn's](#) "Love Song," directed by [Jenny Koons](#), actor [Kevin Mambo](#) looked into my eyes and told the story of a teenage crush that drove his character to learn the guitar, the story accompanied by Mambo's music, strummed beneath the lights of the red room.

The next play, "Lizzy," directed and written by [Josè Rivera](#), was performed by [Marisol Miranda](#) as if I were a friend with her at lunch, the ambient noise of a restaurant filtering through the speakers as she told me about the devastating terminal illness of her mother. Finally [Will Eno's](#) "Late Days in the Era of Good Feelings," directed by [Brian Mertes](#) and performed by [Erin Gann](#), brooded on the awkwardness of our shared situation and riffed a bit on the absurdities New York theater can take with its unexpected spaces, with Gann apologizing: "I thought we were going to be in a bank vault."



Erin Gann performing in Will Eno's "Late Days in the Era of Good Feelings" (photo by Darial Sneed, courtesy of Arts Brookfield)

A warning to introverts, all the plays involved intense amounts of eye contact, the lighting giving the actors' pupils a starry light, although physically neither of us crossed the dividing line between audience and stage. I've been to my fair share of offbeat theater experiences, including, um, [Sleep No More](#) over 20 times, almost each of those involving some moment

with an actor behind a closed door where briefly the performance is exclusively for a sole person. However, Theatre for One gives its power by not immersing us in the world of a narrative: you're immediately stepping out of chaotic New York into this small space where your attention is only on this person, with no transporting set or fellow audience members to ease your role. It's intimidating to suddenly be as much in the spotlight as the actor, but rewarding in offering a moment to really engage with a story and a stranger.



Theatre for One in the Winter Garden Atrium at Brookfield Place (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)



Theatre for One's traveling stage (courtesy Theatre for One)

[Theatre for One: I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am](#) continues at the Winter Garden at Brookfield Place (230 Vesey Street, Battery Park City, Manhattan) through May 24. It is then at Zuccotti Park (Broadway and Liberty Street, Financial District, Manhattan) May 27 to 31, and Grace Building Plaza (1114 Avenue of the Americas, Midtown, Manhattan).

THEATRE FOR ONE

I'm Not The Stranger You Think I Am

Press links

Theater for One 2015

[NY1: Your Weekend Starts Now 5/28/15](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 183,300)
5.29.15

[The New Yorker: Close Encounters of the Theatrical Kind](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 2.8 Million)
5.27.15

[NY Daily News: 'Theatre for One' lets the audience go it alone](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 13 Million)
5.27.15

[Vulture.com: Theater!!'m!Not!the!Stranger!You!Think!!!Am!](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 3.2 Million)
5.26.15

[NY Press: The Smallest Audience, the Tiniest Stage](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 7,500)
5.25.15

[Detroit Free Press: World's smallest theater opens its doors to public in NY](#)

((Unique monthly visitors: 2.8 Million)
5.23.15

[The New York Lantern: NYC This Weekend: Theatre for One, Russian Food, and Top Gun by Victor Arumemi](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 540)
5.22.15

[ArtsJournal: How Doing Theatre For An Audience Of One Changes The Experience](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 45,430)
5.22.15

[The New York Times: Review- 'I'm!Not!the!Stranger!You!Think!!!Am,'!Where!Theater!Meets!Confessional!](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 30.8 Million)
5.22.15

[New York Theater: Theatre for One: The Smallest and Most Unsettling Theater in the World](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 7,000)
5.22.15

[Hyperallergic: Black Box Theater for an Audience of One](#)

(Unique monthly visitors: 353,500)
5.21.15

Untapped Cities: Daily What? - The Smallest Theater in NYC Is Traveling Around Town

(Unique monthly visitors: 124,100)
5.21.15

Downtown Magazine NYC: Theatre for One

(Unique monthly visitors: 6,270)
5.20.15

TravelPulse: The NYC Theater So Small It Fits Just One Audience Member

(Unique monthly visitors: 169,500)
5.20.15

Exeunt Magazine: Review of Theatre For One

(Unique monthly visitors: 1,600)
5.19.15

CBS News: World's smallest theater opens its doors to public in NYC

(Unique monthly visitors: 11 Million)
5.19.15

theskint: MON, 5/18: FREE THEATRE FOR ONE, SUMMERSTAGE, AIR GUITAR

(Unique monthly visitors: 40,300)
5.18.15

Flavorpill: Theatre for One

(Unique monthly visitors: 72,100)
5.19.15

The Guardian: Tiny New York theatre opens its doors to audiences of one

(Unique monthly visitors: 13.1 Million)
5.19.15

This Week In New York: Theatre For One: "I'm Not The Stranger You Think I Am"

(Unique monthly visitors: 3,100)
5.18.15

Metro New York: 'Queen of the Night' director gets you intimate with theater

(Unique monthly visitors: 155,900)
5.18.15

The Associated Press: WORLD'S SMALLEST THEATER OPENS ITS DOORS TO PUBLIC IN NY

(Unique monthly visitors: 1.6 Million)
5.19.15

Playbill: See a Play by An American in Paris' Craig Lucas Inside New York's Tiniest Theatre

(Unique monthly visitors: 531,050)
5.4.15

BroadwayWorld.com: New Plays by Craig Lucas, Lynn Nottage, Jose Rivera and More to Premiere in NYC's Tiniest Venue

(Unique monthly visitors: 751,600) 5.4.15

Time Out New York: The most intimate play you'll ever see! Theatre for One returns to New York

(Unique monthly visitors: 2.7 Million)
5.1.15

Downtown NY: I'm Not the Stranger You Think I Am

(Unique monthly visitors: 12,930)
May 2015

Tribeca Citizen: Seen & Heard: Theatre for One

Cork Midsummer festival review—theatre for all...and one

Helen Meany Fri 21 Jun 2019

Various venues, Cork

Mini plays performed for solo festivalgoers are a hit – plus there’s a bluffer’s guide to the suburbs and a Tom Waits-esque concept album come to life



Playwrights (left to right) Stacey Gregg, Marina Carr, Emmet Kirwan and Enda Walsh at Theatre for One

The multi-disciplinary Cork Midsummer festival commandeers site-specific spaces all around the city, but the tiny booth in [Theatre for One](#) (★★★★★) still stands out. Created by Octopus Theatricals and [Landmark Productions](#) for one-to-one encounters with a solo actor, it was surrounded by festivalgoers queuing for the intense five-minute performances that happen within, somewhere between therapy and confession.

It is a sequence of six specially commissioned miniature plays, and the life experiences each audience-member brings to them are crucial. In fact, “audience” is not quite the right word. Emmet Kirwan’s play refers to “active listening”, but more than that is involved: the viewer has to allow themselves to be seen, at least as much as the actor.



A glimpse of the old romantic ... Ray Scannell in *The Bluffer's Guide to Suburbia*.

None of this seems contrived in the hands of writers Marina Carr, Stacey Gregg, Mark O'Rowe, [Enda Walsh](#), Louise Lowe and Kirwan, and there are performances of riveting openness from Sean McGinley, Derbhle Crotty, Eileen Walsh, Kathy Rose O'Brien, Kate Gilmore and Frank Blake. Reflecting on our interdependence with nature, the Earth and each other; on the coincidences that connect random strangers; on bereavement and lies; and on two women's profound loss of identity for different reasons— postnatal depression and the trauma of domestic violence, the six pieces become an urgent antidote to watching the world through the mediation of a small screen. Cumulatively, they create an exhilarating sense of aliveness.

Elsewhere in the festival, a returned emigrant, Finn, finds his native Dublin disorienting in [Ray Scannell's](#) show *The Bluffer's Guide to Suburbia* (★★★★☆).

The kid who wrote post-punk tracks blasting the infernal dullness of everything in the 1990s is back sleeping in his teenage bedroom. Leopold the cat is the only one who seems pleased to see Finn, and even that is not certain.

Writer, composer and performer Scannell is joined by musicians Christiane O'Mahony and Peter Power for a multimedia piece that is part ferocious standup, part electronica gig, 100% theatre. Directed by Tom Creed, it provides an unvarnished commentary on what it is like to be a 40-year-old artist who is trying to survive and put a roof over his head in Ireland right now. Scannell segues from impending midlife sourness to a moment of hope at a wittily satirized music festival on the Aran Islands. As the sun rises on yoga ravers overlooking the Atlantic, there is a glimpse of the old romantic the Bluffer always was.



Bar room blues ... Evening Train at the Everyman, Cork. Photograph: Bríd O'Donovan.

In Evening Train (★★★★☆), love is triangular and the mood is one of Tom Waits-esque melancholy. Playwright [Ursula Rani Sarma](#) gives theatrical life to a concept album by singer-songwriter Mick Flannery, with themes of money, property and small-town feuding that could be in Ireland or just as easily, as the setting suggests, somewhere in the American midwest.

While Annabelle Comyn's production for the Everyman seems a little too comfortably timeless, familiarity doesn't detract from the powerful ensemble performances. Two brothers, Frank (Ger Kelly) and Luther (Ian Lloyd Anderson), are in love with the same woman, Grace, who is played as a life force by Kate Stanley Brennan. That Luther is a chronic gambling addict and Grace and Frank are his codependents only partly explains the stasis they experience, and the first half of the show seems to stall. But as the script takes an unexpected turn, it proves worth the slow burn.

• [Cork Midsummer festival](#) continues until 23 June.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/jun/21/cork-midsummerfestival-review-ray-scannell-theatre-for-one>

Irish Examiner

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/lifestyle/culture/theatrefor-one-intimate-one-on-one-theatre-is-an-enjoyable-new-experience932165.html>

Theatre for One: Intimate one-on-one theatre is an enjoyable new experience

Theatre for One at Cork Midsummer Festival offers an enjoyable new experience.

The set-up

A booth outside Cork Opera House on Emmet Place hosts one-person plays, for an audience of one at a time. Each piece is about five-minutes long.

Admission is free, and no ticketing is required – just join the queue.

Imported to Ireland by Landmark Productions and Octopus Theatricals, the idea was originally conceived by American theatre-maker Christine Jones, who realised that this intimate one-on-one experience totally changed the dynamic from the usual public theatre performances.

Depending on your own pursuits, the booth may remind you of a confession box, or a peepshow. Jones researched both.

She finally got her Theatre For One built by Danny, the guy who had actually made many of the peepshow booths in Manhattan.

Inside the ergonomically-clever space, you're surrounded by the type of red velour fabrics Danny probably bought by the mile.

You sit in a surprisingly comfortable chair, and a partition slides back, bringing you face-to-face with the performer.

The plays

All six pieces were specially commissioned for this project. The plays are constantly rotating, so after seeing one, you exit and can queue again to see another.

Those involved include a sprinkling of Irish theatre world A-listers, with Derbhle Crotty starring in Mark O'Rowe's piece; and Sean McGinley appearing in Marina Carr's.

One of the two I saw was Bait, featuring the dream-team pairing of Eileen Walsh and Louise Lowe.

Cork native Walsh will be familiar as the mad friend Kate from Channel 4's Catastrophe, and numerous other roles.

Playwright Lowe is one of the principals of Anu in Dublin, a company renowned for their site specific tales of Magdalene Laundries and inner-city life that shed light on worlds a long way from the middle-class milieu of Irish theatre.

The partition draws back, exposing a dishevelled Walsh, who immediately asks you for help zipping up the back of her dress.

Twenty seconds in and this is already a markedly different and more intense theatre experience.

With a flawless Dublin accent, and a naggin of vodka in hand, Walsh's character could have easily staggered in from one of Anu's previous plays.

She eyeballs you as she relates her sorry tale of struggle and abuse.

It's uncomfortable and affecting. As it's designed to be.

Enda Walsh's piece, Cave, also opts for the eye-to-eye approach, as emerging actor Frank Blake is the vehicle for an exploration of dark worlds and childhood fears.

Theatre for One by [@LandmarkIreland](#) for [@CorkMidsummer](#) is an astonishing experience - from convivial conversations in the queue to the most concentrated act of viewing. I was undone by [@mumstrokesactor](#) / Louise Lowe.



Does it work?

Most definitely. The intimacy of the situation won't be everyone's cup of theatre, and not every piece can have Lowe/Walsh involved.

But even the most jaded attendees will probably emerge from the booth with that tingle of having had an experience.

This Irish – and European – debut of Theatre For One gives a sense that all concerned really are onto something.

The format obviously can't work economically on its own, and is highly dependent on grants and donations.

In terms of overall experience, however, it's a winner.

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/lifestyle/culture/theatrefor-one-intimate-one-on-one-theatre-is-an-enjoyable-new-experience932165.html>

Irish Times

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/thought-provoking-theatre-where-the-audience-is-just-you-1.3935897>

Thought-provoking theatre where the audience is just you

Review: Theatre for One's six microplays are bracing, intimate-as-a-whisper performances

[Peter Crawley](#)

Tue, Jun 25, 2019, 05:00

THEATRE FOR ONE

Outside Cork Opera House

★★★★★

[Annie Ryan](#) of Corn Exchange once described her [Car Show](#), which played to no more than three passengers at a time back in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as “the best show you never saw”. Now, conspiring to populate Octopus Theatricals’ [tiny collapsible venue](#) with microplays from the nation’s finest writers and performers, Landmark Productions has a new claim to that title. The only thing these bracing, thought-provoking and intimate-as-a-whisper five minute, one-on-one performances can’t satisfy is demand.

The structure that greets you outside Cork Opera House (which is presenting the show with Cork Midsummer Festival) is something between a giant gig case and a magician’s box. That seems appropriate. Srda Vasiljevic and [Eoghan Carrick](#), their directors, make the plays feel as immediate as a song, revealing and then concealing their performers, as a kind of conjuring act. Now you see them. Now you don’t.

In that blink of intensity neither the playwrights, the actors nor the audience ever seemed so electrically aware of each other or, for that matter, themselves.

In Cork, some queued hours for their five-minute dramas. If it ever returns, it will be worth the wait for such transfixing experiences, one at a time.

Queen of the Pyramids, Emmet Kirwan’s play, might exploit that best, subverting the snap judgment of our first impressions, subtly alluding to the workings of performance, therapy and mirroring, while an initially vulnerable [Kate Gilmore](#) gradually and wittily reveals the many faces of manipulation. Are you the watcher here, or the watched?

[Eileen Walsh](#), in Louise Lowe’s Bait, initially seems to deliver a more photorealistic, compassionate study in victimhood, yet the after effect is more complicated and unsettling. Built up through small exchanges but huge need, the piece sensitively suggests that some abusive relationships follow dreadful patterns of compatibility.

If that suggests confined performance can still plumb deep, Mark O’Rowe’s arch The Spur follows suit, layered with teasing contradictions. Derbhle Crotty’s speaker may be enthusiastically effervescent, but her speaking is marvellously, slyly circuitous. So, it seems, is her moral pathway, and you find yourself warming to someone fundamentally chilling. Who is more suggestible, then: this oblivious, self-centred character, who has decided to live out a story; or the person she is regarding, suckered by another?

Theatre for One, at Cork Midsummer Festival: Kate Gilmore (top left); Kathy Rose O'Brien; Frank Blake (bottom left) and Seán McGinley. Photographs: Jed Niezgoda/venividi.ie

Still, the most conceptually involving piece may be Stacey Gregg's *Brilliant*, a welcome addition to her droll brand of techsistentialism. Distilling ideas of philosophy, entropy, simulation and honesty into a brief run-in with a loose acquaintance, Kathy Rose O'Brien gives an almost transgressively candid bearing to her frazzled new parent. Her message is surprisingly reassuring, given the circumstances: we're not alone.

[Enda Walsh](#) recognizes something similar in *Cave*, offering an incantatory encounter with Frank Blake's mysterious figure, whose story shifts from the booth to the mind in hypnotic suggestion (and Joshua Higgason's disarming light and sound).

The mesmerizing Seán McGinley does less with more in Marina Carr's *Cygnus Canticum*, a play heavy with mythical lusion, but performed so quietly, gracefully and sparingly that the merest moment of direct eye contact feels like a jolt to the soul.

In Cork, some queued hours for their five-minute dramas. If Theatre for One ever returns, it will be worth the wait for such transfixing experiences, one at a time.

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/thought-provoking-theatre-where-the-audience-is-just-you-1.3935897>

Irish Times

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/cork-midsummer-festival-2019-daring-work-and-deliciousfood-1.3931006>

Cork Midsummer Festival 2019: Daring work and delicious food

Plays for an audience of one and a Mick Flannery musical are among this year's ambitious programme

Wed, Jun 19, 2019, 15:00 Updated: Wed, Jun 19, 2019, 17:21 [Deirdre Falvey](#)



Irish playwrights Emmet Kirwan, Marina Carr, Enda Walsh and Stacey Gregg promote Theatre For One, which is running as part of the Cork Midsummer Festival. Photograph: Clare Keogh

It's dim, dressing room lights surround the frame, and the aesthetic is theatrical red velvet. I'm alone in the single seat, hands on armrests. A screen slides sideways to reveal an actor, [Frank Blake](#), about 2ft away, meeting and holding my gaze. He starts to speak, soul to soul.

If live theatre is an intimate artform, this is like theatre distilled to its purest, most intense version, then injected directly into the vein. This is five minutes of Theatre For One – for one audience, by one actor. And there is no place to hide.

There's also no booking, and no ticket price; you just queue up outside and wait your turn. All through the first day on Tuesday a steady line awaited their shot of intensity.

There are many ways to skin a story, and this year's [Cork](#) Midsummer Festival has an eclectic bunch of transmission methods for its stories, as seen in a representative slice of the Midsummer cake this week.

After Enda Walsh's five-minute play *Cave* – about childhood fears, and by times intriguing and threatening – I lurch from the miniature performance booth, startled, into sunlight and the busy plaza outside Cork Opera House.

Anne Clarke's Landmark Theatre brought the concept of Theatre For One across the Atlantic, with [Broadway](#) designer [Christine Jones](#) designing the "venue" in the style of flight cases, and inspired by research on items as diverse as confession boxes and peepshow booths. With the support of the festival and Cork Opera House, Clarke commissioned some top theatre writers – [Marina Carr](#), [Stacey Gregg](#), [Emmet Kirwan](#), [Louise Lowe](#), Mark O'Rowe, [Enda Walsh](#) – to each write a five-minute play for one actor; the list of performers involved is also a rollcall:

Seán McGinley, Kathy Rose O'Brien, [Kate Gilmore](#), [Eileen Walsh](#), [Derbhle Crotty](#), Frank Blake.

Into the abyss

And more stories. “Are you listening, to me?” she calls – to him, or into the abyss, from the side of a mountain outside the city (or moreso, the side of a hill on the way to the old Cork Waterworks, where this play is being performed). Pauline McLynn’s character calls out, not knowing whether Peter Gowen’s character is there, or alive. They sit aloft, enthroned on opposite sides of the performance area, strongly lit in the late night darkness, the gushing of the Lee audible behind us, as they perform Enda Walsh’s 2005 play *The Small Things*. Corcadorca’s audiences come prepared, with blankets and woolly hats, for the site-responsive Cork company’s production, which creates a piece of dystopian and brutal magic that is both horrifying and humorous.

There are hints of Beckett in the set up, and touches of Murphy in the telling of a surreal and malevolent tale about a village that violently enforced silence, and a

childhood scarred by an obsession with order, routine and timetables. It's a love story of sorts too, with nuanced performances from McLynn and Gowen as broken, ageing characters retracing the tenderness of a childhood relationship amid horror. In a talk the next day at the festival, director [Pat Kiernan](#) and Walsh discuss the play, and also how Corcadorca has mapped Cork city with stories for 27 years in its site-responsive work. What started as a practical solution to having no money to hire venues became intrinsic to the company's identity and took on a life of its own, so that "you begin to see the city in that way", comments Walsh, who extols the joys of watching stories unfold in the pouring rain, as you get "soaked to your underpants". The weather had held firm this time, and in the warm, easy discussion there was a real sense from the audience that the company gives Corkonians a sense of ownership and rootedness. **Dark fairytales**

More dark fairytales feature in *A Different Wolf*, from [Junk Ensemble](#) and Belfast music-theatre company [Dumbworld](#), and featuring dancers, actors, musicians, singers and choirs from Cork School of Music and Cór Geal. The ensemble melds dance and song to explore fear, mythic and real. With a set populated by chilling rows of institutional beds, the atmospheric and evocative presentation is haunted by wolves (some in sheep's clothing), a girl in red, forests, aggression and assault. Another expansion of dance, this time spatially, featured in choreographer Luke Murphy's *Carnivore* at the Crawford Art Gallery, with sculptor Alex Pentek's giant origami-like sculptures and four dancers exploring the Renaissance Skin project. Another story, another intimacy, is shared through headphones and individual mobile phones, as a live-action piece unfolds through the audience in the cafe at the Kino. Britain's Dante or Die makes smart use of technology in the piece, titled *User Not Found*, so that the medium is in tune with the message – the grief of rejection and of death and the dilemma of how to deal with an online legacy, the digital assets, of an ex-lover who has died.

The sun came out often for Midsummer this week, and Cork was glorious, all hills and water and gorgeous views (as well as multiple roadworks).

This is Lorraine Maye's second time as director of the festival after several years managing it, and the ambitious, accomplished 11-day programme shows a Lazaruslike growth following years of severe contraction since 2013, because of a €250,000 deficit.

It's quite the turnaround, Maye acknowledges. She puts it down to "a brilliant, supportive, passionate board", which was led by [Jane Anne Rothwell](#) until her premature death last year. The city – cultural organisations, businesses and council – value the festival, says Maye. With a remit to platform Irish artists, particularly those from Cork, her approach is collaborative and allows riskier work that might not play in the city at other times. In terms of those collaborations, Cork Opera House chief executive Eibhlín Gleeson mentions the theatre's site-specific opera *The Stalls*, and its co-commission with Carnegie Hall of a new [Donnacha Dennehy](#) composition for the So Percussion ensemble, which had its European premiere this week. "In festival mode audiences are happy to take a risk," she says.

Drawing an audience

Midsummer expects about 80,000 people, mostly from Cork, to attend festival events this year. "The best arts festivals reflect and are rooted in the places and people that own them," says Maye. "There's a momentum and heart to that that audiences from elsewhere are drawn to." This year's higher-profile Cork shows include the new musical *Evening Train*, based on Mick Flannery's album, and Ray Scannell's *Bluffer's Guide to Suburbia*.

Another distinction of Midsummer is its socially engaged participative work, and storytelling of a jollier flavour figures in the festival through sociable breaking of bread at La Cocina Pública. Chilean company [Teatro Container](#) arrived in town a couple of weeks ago to work with South Parish residents sharing recipes and food stories, and to fit out a container as a mobile kitchen, with all recycled objects and busy clutter. It culminated in casual dining and story evenings outside St John's Central College on Sawmill Street.

On Monday we dined on long trestle tables as the sun set, eating ensalada chilena, bacon and cabbage, and Chilean biscuits. We wrote food memories and shared favourite recipes in "passports" salvaged from an evocative earlier performance. In an open mic, the Chileans and the Corkonians told stories and sang. The local flavour ranged from a young fella's spirited Shotgun, to acapella heavy metal, to bechained Cllr Kieran McCarthy's magnificent Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin', to a recitation of Yeats's When You Are Old. This week's La Cocina Pública will explore new Irish cooking, recovered food, and, delightfully, "holy fish". A gorgeous, warm, open-hearted, storyful evening, and fabulous festival fare.

[Cork Midsummer Festival](#) runs until June 23rd, with the weekend including the Carnival of Science, and the Crosstown Drift literary crawl. corkmidsummer.com

CRITIC'S PICK

Review: It's Just You and Me and the Modem in 'Here We Are'

Theater for One was built on the idea of face-to-face encounters. Moving it online could have been a disaster, but instead it's a heartbreaker.



She's looking at you: Regina Taylor in her "Vote! (the black album)." Credit...Cherie B. Tay



By Jesse Green

- Aug. 31, 2020

After [my first experience of Theater for One](#) — back in pre-pandemic days, when it meant sharing a small booth with an actor who performed a short play for you — I imagined it as what speed dating would be if you fell in love with everyone you met. Sitting that close to an actor's face, hearing a story I could not avoid being part of because no one else was there to hear it, I was instantly drawn into the uncanny, enraptured collaboration of theater, with its roots in campfire tales and community bonding and a parent's hushed voice at bedtime.

So when I learned that [Theater for One](#) was returning for six Thursdays this summer, in socially distanced form online, I worried that its contract with the audience would be broken. I'd attended enough Zoom meetings to know that "eye contact" had become metaphorical, a digital illusion mediated in both directions by the computer's camera. How often I'd tried to wink or wave at a colleague, only to realize I was signaling 40 people indiscriminately — and reaching none.

But Theater for One, the brainchild of the scenic designer Christine Jones, turns out to be more adaptable than I thought. In "[Here We Are](#)," its first online project, it has found workarounds for some of Zoom's most alienating aspects, in the process creating not just a substitute version of the earlier experience but, in some ways, a moving improvement on it.

Its theatrical core is unchanged. Just as in Times Square or Zuccotti Park or any other location where T41 (as it is abbreviated) used to perform in person, you begin by getting in line — only now the line is virtual. Prompts like "What space are you creating in your heart today?" open conversations among anonymous theatergoers in the queue, who type answers that show up and disappear like fireflies on the screen. (Those answers are far more revealing than they would be in real life.) After a while, when a slot opens, you are whisked into a private space, not knowing whom or what you will see there; the assignments are random.



Mahira Kakkar expresses gratitude to Representative John Lewis in “Thank You Letter,” by Jaclyn Backhaus.Credit...Cherie B. Tay

I caught four of the eight “microplays,” averaging about seven minutes each, that T41 commissioned for “Here We Are.” (The other four include works by Lynn Nottage and Carmelita Tropicana.) In honor of [the centennial of ratification of the 19th Amendment](#), and in support of Black Lives Matter, all were written, directed, designed and performed by people of color, most of them women. The monologues are variously witty, worshipful, angry and determined as they take on subjects as widespread as writer’s block, political action, foster care and suffrage itself.

If no single theme unites them, they do share, as the omnibus title suggests, an intense feeling of the immediate present. In Jaclyn Backhaus’s “Thank You Letter,” a South Asian woman played by Mahira Kakkar writes to Representative John Lewis shortly after his death in July, in gratitude for his lesser-known work on immigration. And in Regina Taylor’s “Vote! (the black album),” Taylor plays a Black woman planning to honor her forebears, who dressed in their Sunday best to cast their ballots, by putting on a mask to mail hers.

The pandemic is a given in all the plays but generally takes second place to other concerns. In Lydia R. Diamond’s “whiterly negotiations,” directed by Tiffany Nichole Greene, a “crazy-ish Black woman writer” played by Nikkole Salter vents on Zoom about a white editor’s microaggressions. But neither her dudgeon nor the Zoom itself turn out to be what they first seem; in a code-switching coda, Diamond suggests just how confusing our world’s new terrain can be.



Nikkole Salter in “whiterly negotiations” by Lydia R. Diamond, as a writer dealing with her editor’s microaggressions.Credit...Cherie B. Tay

Part of the cleverness — and effectiveness — of “whiterly negotiations” comes from not knowing who you, the viewer, alone in a virtual space with Salter, are meant to be in the story. If you are white, as I am, you might wonder whether you are standing in for the white editor, which is uncomfortable but eye-opening. If

you are Black you might think you are a friend listening for the umpteenth time to the character's spiel. One thing you can't ever feel, because Salter looks right at you, is that you are a disinterested bystander.

That dynamic more or less informs all four plays I saw. In "Vote!" I felt like both a generalized ear and, because Taylor is such a compelling actor, the specific recipient of her intended message. (She is beautifully directed by Taylor Reynolds.) In "Thank You Letter," Kakkar's character immediately enlists you in her story by thanking you for listening. "Hi I don't know you but I'm going to talk if it's okay?!" she says. "I come from a long line of nontalkers."

MORE TO SEE ONLINE

[Theater to Stream: A World of Fringe and More Apples](#)

Aug. 26, 2020

The conflict I have often felt between being an observer and a participant in the stories I go to the theater to see is intensified and finally obviated by T41's approach. You have to be both, at least in part so as not to seem rude to the actor, who is being both for you. I felt this most acutely in Stacey Rose's "Thank You for Coming. Take Care," directed (like "Thank You Letter") by Candis C. Jones. Patrice Bell plays a woman serving a long sentence in prison; I played, and you will too if you see it, a foster parent who has been raising the woman's daughter for two years and now hopes to adopt her.



Patrice Bell as an inmate whose daughter is in foster care in Stacey Rose's "Thank You for Coming. Take Care."Credit...Cherie B. Tay

“You don’t look anything like I expected,” Bell’s character says at the start. “Like your hair, I thought it’d be” — and here the script instructs her to describe a kind of hair that’s “opposite to” whatever yours is. “I thought it’d be blond” is what she said to me.

“Thank You for Coming,” so specific and evenhanded, would have been a heartbreaker in any format. But especially now, in moments like that, enhanced by terrific acting, you feel seen in a way that has been too often absent these six months — and maybe longer. Intimacy in the live theater is always touch-and-go. On display alone in our homes, we are much more seen than usual.

Seen and sometimes implicated. After all, everyone is part of everyone else’s story. In our isolation, it can be hard to remember that. From its title on, “Here We Are” is not about to let us forget.

Theater for One: Here We Are

Performances each Thursday through Sept. 24; theatreforone.com.

Jesse Green is the co-chief theater critic. Before joining The Times in 2017, he was the theater critic for New York magazine and a contributing editor. He is the author of a novel, “O Beautiful,” and a memoir, “The Velveteen Father.” [@JesseKGreen](#) · [Facebook](#)

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/31/theater/here-we-are-review.html>

Theatre for One Wants You to Sit Up Straight and Pay Attention

By [Helen Shaw](#)
[Shaw@helen_e_shaw](mailto:helen_e_shaw)



Patrice Bell in *Thank You for Coming, Take Care*. Photo: Cherie B. Tay

The online season of *Theatre for One: Here We Are* feels like a response to this year's loneliness, but it existed long before COVID-19. In 2002, artistic director Christine Jones got

the idea to design a microperformance initiative as (literal) closet drama: An audience member enters a freestanding box about the size of an elevator to experience a specially commissioned, five-minute monologue, delivered from about a foot away. By 2011, she was producing shows in Times Square. It was *amuse-bouche* theater, close-up magic, eye-contact-palooza. The purpose-built “theaters” — you may have spotted one lurking in the lobby of the Signature theater — look like bulky black phone booths. They provided, Jones said, “intimate exchanges in public spaces.” Well, these days, intimacy is out and webcams are the new phone booths, so the Theatre for One experience has gone online.

The most obvious limitation of the form is capacity. On a Monday, you need to quickly sign up for tickets for a Thursday show; they go fast. At showtime, each lucky ticket winner follows a link to the quiet digital “waiting room,” a black screen populated by texts, drifting like lightning bugs. Viewers contribute thought bubbles, typing little messages that manifest in the void. “Are you real?” one person writes. “I think so” floats by. Someone in the room is clearly from management, so bubbles ask about voting, then reassure everyone that “you’re in the right place.” We engage, but our busy, Zoom-dazzled eyes relax.

The viewer surrenders some burdens in that waiting room ... including choice. The current Theatre for One slate includes eight plays, written by Nikkole Salter, Stacey Rose, Lynn Nottage, Regina Taylor, Carmelita Tropicana, DeLanna Studi, Lydia R. Diamond, and Jaclyn Backhaus. You can sign up to participate, but you aren’t allowed to select a specific performance — it’s playlet roulette. You linger in the screensaver limbo until your performer is ready for you. Then, without warning, you’re diverted to another web interface. The waiting-room screen dissolves and an image of your own unprepared face looms out of your living room for an instant; it’s a brief reminder that management has switched on your webcam. For the duration of each one-on-one live performance, the performer can see and hear you and can probably tell if your crinkled brow goes from “listening intently” to “distracted.” (You don’t have to watch yourself for the whole thing, though, thank God.) The waiting room’s invisible restful collective vanishes and we’re plunged into the intensity of the one-on-one.

I was whisked into two performances, *Thank You for Coming, Take Care*, by Stacey Rose, and *Vote: The Black Album*, by Regina Taylor. The first is an affecting monologue performed by Patrice Bell, playing a woman named Larhonda who sits in khaki scrubs against a plain white wall. Larhonda looks at her listener hungrily. “You look like you smell like the sky / in May / after a good rain,” she says. As she speaks, the source of that hunger shifts. Her scrubs are actually a prisoner’s uniform, and what at first seems to be a deep cry for sky and freedom is actually a terrible expression of grief about her child. Why is she so simultaneously grateful and resentful toward her visitor? What exactly are we here to take away? Rose makes her character study in just a few strokes, deft in the way she sketches both Larhonda (with rushing language) and the visitor (with our silence). Mute and helpless, the watcher can’t comfort Larhonda or lie to her or assure her that her daughter won’t forget her. Rose’s sure hand with the form’s conventions — brevity, the viewer’s discomfort, even the glassy screen — combine to make a swift, sure strike at the heart.

The playwright Regina Taylor performs her own piece, which uses the opportunity to deliver a kind of lyric invective. “That which I think I know / like the lines in the palm of my right hand

/ have changed course / pointing in other directions / the world is a topsy-turvy mess,” she says, standing in front of window. Taylor speaks in her distilled lyric about her great-grandmother (“hemming the skirt of a white suffragette”) and her own mother’s injuries, scars from old civil-rights battles. Moving through her family’s generations, she ends with praise for her granddaughter, protesting in the streets where she — a 60-year-old woman — fears to go. In *Vote*, there’s less reliance on the give-and-take of the one-to-one presentation than in Rose’s show. Taylor seems more interested in delivering her message, literally. (The short sequence ends with her holding an envelope, vowing to mail her ballot.) *Vote* is what soapbox oration must have been like, passionate rhetoric on opportunity and necessity, the citizen addressing the public square. And that’s a shadow on its effectiveness: The piece, though extremely brief, seems built for a larger audience. No one goes to Speaker’s Corner hoping that people come by one at a time.

These pieces constitute further digital experiments in the piece-by-piece analysis of theater that’s taking place right now. One production deconstructs liveness, another closeness, another the primacy of the written word, the next the way the audience operates. The online embodiment of Theatre for One mainly reminds us of the value of awkward closeness. One of the best things about live performance is the abrasion of our too-frequent comfort; other entertainments are happy to let us basically slop on over in our pajamas, since nobody is watching us back. Movie theaters install giant recline-o-loungers; television screens at home are big and bright enough that we can see them even while half-snoozing. But given the intense performance of yes-I’m-listening that we each need to do, Theatre for One isn’t really *for* one, it’s theater *with* one. These shows use that frisson of visibility to give us the adrenalizing effects of live, in-person theater, even if just for five minutes. You sit up straight and lean in and listen hard. It feels difficult but good, like tensing a muscle we might not get to fully use again until sometime next year.

<https://www.vulture.com/2020/08/theatre-for-one-wants-you-to-sit-up-straight-and-focus.html>