



STAND UP IF YOU'RE HERE TONIGHT

BY JOHN KOLVENBACH



BACKSTAGE GUIDE

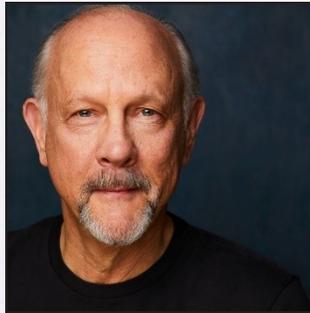
A publication of **COMMUNITY SERVICE** at
AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

BACKSTAGE CALLBOARD

STAND UP IF YOU'RE HERE TONIGHT

written & directed by
John Kolvenbach

FEATURING



Jim Ortlieb*

"You've tried everything. Yoga. Acupuncture. Therapy. You floated in salt water in the pitch black dark. You juiced, you cleansed, you journaled, you cut, you volunteered. You got a mattress that fitted itself to your fetal form. You ate only RINDS for three days and nights. You reached out, you looked within. You have tried. And yet here you are."

So begins a new play by Olivier-nominated playwright John Kolvenbach in its Chicago premiere. Broadway's Jim Ortlieb* delivers a tour-de-force performance as a man desperate for connection, bent by isolation, and deeply in love with the audience itself.

**Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater*

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

American Blues Theater is located in Chicago, the traditional homelands of the Council of the Three Fires: the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations. City of Chicago was founded by the son of an enslaved African woman who was regarded as the first non-Indigenous settler. His name was Jean Baptiste Point du Sable.

Many other nations including the Myaamia, Wea, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Thakiwaki, Meskwaki, Kiikaapoi, and Mascouten peoples also call this region home. This land has long been a center for Indigenous people to gather, trade, and maintain kinship ties.

Today, Chicago is home to one of the largest urban American Indian communities in the United States, and the country's oldest urban-based Native membership community center, the American Indian Center Chicago.

American Blues Theater makes this acknowledgment as part of our commitment to dismantling the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism.

To learn more about land acknowledgements visit nativegov.org.

To learn more about & engage with the American Indian Center Chicago (AIC), visit aicchicago.org.

NOTE FROM ARTISTIC DIRECTOR **GWENDOLYN WHITESIDE**

Somatic psychologists study the science of trauma getting stuck in our bodies. As we head into our 3rd year of this pandemic, you must have secret caverns of mourning. Perhaps you store plump pockets of self-soothing. You have places deep inside you've retreated / walls you've constructed to fortify yourself in these destabilizing times.

There is a reduction of resilience in us all. Like Samuel Beckett opined, "You must go on; I can't go on; I'll go on", and you do.

Attending a live performance can light up your shadowy parts so the bats can empty. Oh, I see, you like your bats? For you dear reader, attending a live performance reminds you how to love your cavernous self. To acknowledge the way you move, breathe, and blink outside a safe, dark theater. To honor that you *are* going on. You take up space.

Artistic Affiliate Jim Ortlieb sent us this fantastic script as we grappled with our return. We couldn't think of a better way to ease into this new reality of living with our collective trauma.

We're thrilled to present the Chicago premiere of John Kolvenbach's *Stand Up If You're Here Tonight* and work with such exceptional artists.

May your grief loosen.

May you feel a little less stuck.

- Gwendolyn Whiteside



Artistic Director Gwendolyn Whiteside addresses the crowd at the 2015 Ripped Festival

INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT & DIRECTOR **JOHN KOLVENBACH**



WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO WRITE *STAND UP IF YOU'RE HERE TONIGHT*?

I wrote this one in the Spring of 2021, when vaccines were just becoming available and it looked, then, like the pandemic was soon to be over. After a year without live performance, a year with the theatres shuttered and many of the actors I knew talking about how they'd rediscovered their love for the theatre in its absence, I wanted to write about Return. about liveness. a play that could not be performed on Zoom. and to look at the audience, to consider why they came and what we owed them. When I come to a show, I'm full of an irrational hope. I hope to lose myself to the play, to get gone. I want to fall in love. and so it's kind of a relationship play, between the play itself and the people who show up that night.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES OF WRITING & DIRECTING A SOLO SHOW?

Here's how I see it: the danger with a one person show is that it can be full of prose. It may read well on the page, but it won't play. The writing is descriptive, novelistic, static. The challenge is to make the show active. The actor isn't just talking, they're doing something. That's what separates a play from a lecture, or a recitation. We have the great advantage of Jim Ortlieb. He's a master. He makes us all look good.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE AUDIENCES WILL TAKE AWAY FROM THE SHOW?

What do I really hope? I hope that the show will restore their faith in living. More realistically, I hope they have a good time and that they feel like they got their money's worth.

WHAT ARE YOU WORKING ON NEXT?

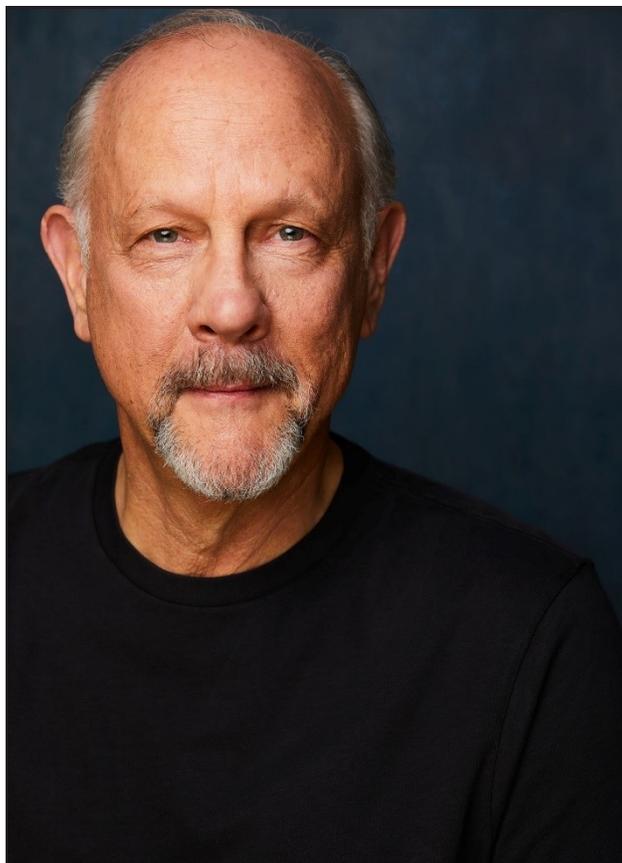
I'm writing a new play. I don't yet know what happens, or who peoples it. I have only the vaguest intention for it. My experience in writing is that for a long time you have nothing and then all of a sudden you have the whole thing at

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT & DIRECTOR

JOHN KOLVENBACH he/him (*playwright / director*) On the West End: *Love Song* (Olivier nomination, Best New Comedy, directed by John Crowley) and *On an Average Day* (with Woody Harrelson and Kyle MacLachlan, also directed by Mr. Crowley.) *Love Song* premiered at Steppenwolf in 2006, directed by Austin Pendelton. It has been produced in New York, Zurich, Melbourne, Sydney, Wellington, Seoul and Rome. There have been over fifty productions in the U.S. *Average Day* was produced in Los Angeles by VS. (with Johnny Clark and Stef Tovar) and in Chicago by VS. and Route 66. *Average Day* has been produced in Tel Aviv, Buenos Aires, and Libson. *Goldfish* premiered at South Coast Repertory, then at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco, directed by Loretta Greco. The play was done in repertory with *Mrs. Whitney*, which was directed by the author. Most recently, *Reel to Reel* received its premiere at the Magic. *Sister Play* received its premier at The Harbor Stage Company and at the Magic, both productions directed by the author. *Stand Up If You're Here Tonight* opened in the summer of 2021 at The Harbor Stage and, simultaneously, in Los Angeles with VS. and Circle X. Other plays include: *Fabuloso*, (Premiered at WHAT, subsequent productions in San Juan and Zurich, in Spanish and Swiss German) *Bank Job* (Amphibian Stages) and *Marriage Play or Half 'n Half 'n Half* (Merrimack Rep.) Film: *Clear Winter Noon*, an original screenplay, was selected for the Blacklist in 2008.

ABOUT THE **PERFORMER**

JIM ORTLIEB he/him (*Man*) is a proud Artistic Affiliate of American Blues Theater and a member of the rare breed of middle-class actors. After studying with William Esper and Kathryn Gately at Rutgers University, Jim was invited by Lois Hall to teach in Chicago at Lois Hall Studio, a mainstay of professional studios in the 1980's. It was because of Lois that Jim Ortlieb was welcomed into the Chicago theater community. When she retired, Jim renamed the school, Chicago Actors Project, which remained vibrant until 1989. During the 80's and onward, Jim acted with many Chicago theaters, including The Goodman (*Candide*), Pheasant Run (*Sorrows of Stephen*), Organic (*M the Murderer*), Wisdom Bridge (*Only Kidding*), Northlight (*All in the Timing*), and Steppenwolf (*Picasso at the Lapine Agile*, *The Man Who Came to Dinner*), Touchstone (*Racing Demon*, *Indiscretions*), Gare St. Lazare Players (*Hughie*), Bailiwick (*An Uncertain Hour* by Nick Patricca) and as a member of American Blues Theater he played the title role in *Scapin*. Ortlieb's new found family of Chicago artists lead him all over the world. When Bob Meyer of the Gare St. Lazare Players moved to Europe to spend more time with his son, Charlie, Jim traveled there to collaborate on numerous productions with Bob and the extensive group of expatriated English speaking artists in Paris, Ireland, and England such as *Hughie*, *The Homecoming*, *Faith Healer*, and *Requiem for a Heavyweight*. Malcolm Ewen brought Jim to the Weston Playhouse in Vermont where he did *Guys and Dolls*, *The Mikado*, *Candide*, and *Tartuffe*. In the midst of the IATSE strike in 1999, Jim, his wife and two children moved to Los Angeles where they have lived ever since. Other acting credits include on Broadway in Aaron Sorkin's *The Farnsworth Invention*, *Of Mice and Men* with James Franco and Chris O'Dowd directed by Anna Shapiro, and *Guys and Dolls* with Lauren Graham and Oliver Platt. The 1st National Tour of *Billy Elliot the musical* for two years in Chicago and in Toronto. In 2012 Ortlieb was nominated for an IRNE award for his lead performance in *Half 'n Half 'n Half* (now titled *The Marriage Play*) by John Kolvenbach. That relationship continues through today with *Stand Up If You're Here Tonight!* His film and TV credits include: *Drunkboat* with John Malkovich and John Goodman and directed by Bob Meyer, *Flatliners*, *Home Alone*, *A Mighty Wind*, *Contagion*, *Chain Reaction*, *The Onion Movie*, *Latter Days*, *Bug*, and *Magnolia*. His television credits include *Station 19*, *American Horror Story*, *911: Lone Star*, *How to Get Away With Murder*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *West Wing*, *The Closer*, *Roswell*, *Six Feet Under*, *Gabriel's Fire*, and *The Shield*. Jim has done more than 75 commercials and voiceovers in his 45 years as an actor all of which has helped pay the bills. Both of Jim's daughter returned to Chicago where they both graduated from DePaul University. Grainne (grahn-yah) Ortlieb, a Theatre School grad, remains in Chicago with the community the whole family calls home.



[VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO READ ABOUT THE REST OF THE CREATIVE TEAM](#)

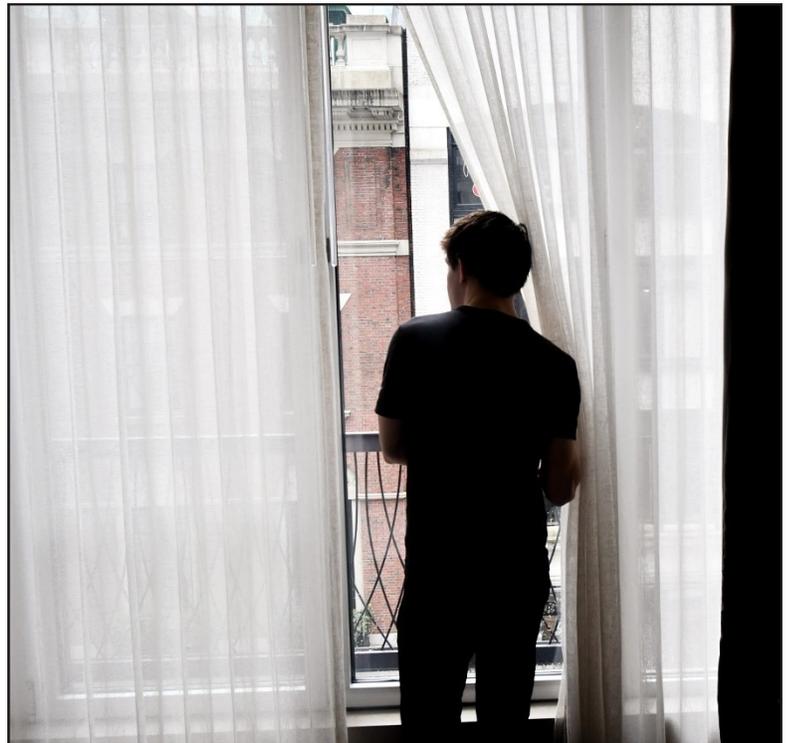
STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH ISOLATION & LONELINESS

The COVID-19 pandemic has left many struggling with isolation and loneliness. Below and on the next page are strategies from Counseling@Northwestern for coping with these feelings. It has been edited here for length. You can read the full article [here](#).

People respond to a world crisis in different ways. Some, including first responders, doctors, sanitation workers, and those in food preparation, must continue going to work to maintain essential functions in our communities. Others who are under stay-at-home orders have responded with stress, anxiety, and despair; they likely feel lonely and isolated. However, some people see a silver lining, have faith in humanity, and believe that, together, we can do our part to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

The coronavirus pandemic has worried many people who already are anxious. We live in the Age of Anxiety. For those who experience the turbulence of anxiety, loneliness, panic, or existential angst in the best of times, a global pandemic may further trigger the underlying sense of existing uncertainty.

There are three types of isolation: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential:



INTERPERSONAL ISOLATION

Interpersonal isolation is akin to loneliness. The often-repeated phrase that “it’s not the quantity of your relationships that matter, it’s the quality,” is relevant here. Certain personality styles may crave interactions with people more than other styles. Group identity is also relevant, including whether you belong to a group that society has traditionally shunned or oppressed.

INTRAPERSONAL ISOLATION

Intrapersonal isolation is to disavow of part of the self. Have you ever said, “A part of me has died?” Do you recall a time you felt whole, but after a traumatic event, you felt fragmented? Maybe you have felt fragmented ever since. Or, did parts of you never have a chance to develop, maybe due to dysfunction in the home during your upbringing? If so, you know intrapersonal isolation.

EXISTENTIAL ISOLATION

Existential isolation, as described by Yalom, is “a vale of loneliness which has many approaches. A confrontation with death and with freedom will inevitably lead the individual into that vale.” The existential form of isolation refers to the inherent gap that exists between people, no matter how close the bond. For example, your experience about an event—like the coronavirus scare—is unique to you, and your feelings about it, perceptions toward it, and exact encounters you have because of it will live only within you. Other people may have similar attitudes and experiences, but the unbridgeable gap remains.

STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH **ISOLATION & LONELINESS**

EIGHT TIPS FOR MANAGING AND THRIVING IN ISOLATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC:

- 1** Accept the reality of the situation. Acknowledging an unpleasant reality may help to reduce stress and enable you to think through the best way to move forward.
- 2** Embrace your feelings. Acknowledging uncomfortable feelings can give you power over those emotions. Tend to feelings of danger and insecurity.
- 3** Don't think about feelings as positive or negative. Feelings can represent how you connect to your environment and signal what actions you should take to make yourself comfortable.
- 4** Be mindful of how loneliness can manifest in physiological sensations like elevated heartbeat. Recognizing alarming sensations in the moment and allowing them to pass may help neutralize them.
- 5** Use isolation as an opportunity to better get to know and understand yourself outside of who you are when interacting with other people. Rediscover your uniqueness.
- 6** Focus on the opportunities isolation provides, rather than the things you have lost. Take advantage of extra time to make positive changes or pursue goals you may have put off.
- 7** Find ways to stay relaxed and connect to your social networks. Maintaining pre-pandemic routines as much as possible can help, but give yourself leeway to make adjustments.
- 8** Practice self-care. Receiving constant news updates can create more stress. Plan how you want to receive important information and take mental and physical breaks.

INCREASED ALCOHOL USE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Many have turned to alcohol and drugs amid the uncertainty and stress of the pandemic. The below article from *USA TODAY* shines a light on some of these trends. It has been edited here for length. You can read the full article [here](#).

More than 18 months into the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S., nearly 1 in 5 Americans is consuming an unhealthy amount of alcohol, a new survey suggests.

About 17% of respondents reported "heavy drinking" in the past 30 days, according to the survey conducted by analytics firm The Harris Poll and commissioned by Alkermes, an Ireland-based biopharmaceutical company. The survey was conducted online from March 30 to April 7 among 6,006 U.S. adults ages 21 and older. Of those, 1,003 adults reported "heavy drinking."

"Heavy drinking" was defined as having had two heavy drinking days in a single week at least twice in the previous 30 days. A "heavy drinking day" was defined as four or more drinks containing alcohol for women and five or more drinks containing alcohol for men.

Dr. Neeraj Gandotra, chief medical officer at the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, said the study's findings were "not surprising." Almost 90% of individuals with substance use disorder are not in treatment, and alcohol and drug use typically worsen with isolation, Gandotra said.

Several studies have suggested Americans are buying more alcohol and drinking more frequently during the coronavirus pandemic.

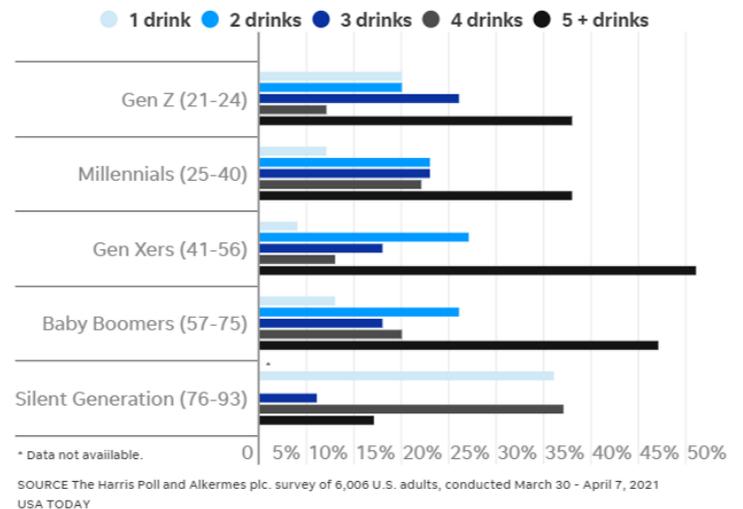
A study by the Rand Corp. last fall found the frequency of alcohol consumption in the U.S. rose 14% compared with before the pandemic. Women, in particular, increased heavy drinking days by 41%, according to the study.

Another study by researchers at the University of Arizona found "dramatic increases in harmful alcohol consumption" over the first six months of the pandemic. Greater alcohol consumption was most associated with job loss because of COVID-19, according to the study.

"While we are still learning how the COVID pandemic is impacting alcohol use, it seems clear that some people are drinking more while others are drinking less. In many studies, increases in consumption during the pandemic were linked to increases in stress," NIAAA Director Dr. George Koob told *USA TODAY*.

Heavy drinking habits during COVID-19 pandemic

Number of drinks heavy drinkers consumed per day in past week, by generation:



According to the new Harris Poll survey, many respondents who reported heavy drinking said that, over the past 12 months, they experienced negative mental, physical and psychosocial impacts. Three in 10 said they continued to drink despite it making them feel depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem. About 1 in 4 reported they continued to drink after experiencing a memory blackout. More than 1 in 5 experienced withdrawal symptoms when the effects of alcohol were wearing off. And 23% gave up or cut back on activities that were important or interesting to them in order to drink.

The survey found more than half of respondents who reported heavy drinking were aware of treatment options for alcohol dependence, such as support groups and residential rehabilitation treatment options. But 87% were not undergoing treatment at the time of the survey.

"Be honest with yourself if you are making decisions that are not in your best interest," Gandotra said. "You can seek help anonymously or with friends and family who may also be affected by your drinking. Treatment is available and effective. You do not have to struggle alone."

THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARING EXPERIENCES

Stand Up If You're Here Tonight is about a man desperate for connection. The below article from *The Atlantic* highlights two studies that reinforce the value of sharing experiences with others. You can read the original article on *The Atlantic* website [here](#).

Given the choice between going to a bar with Jessica Alba and going to a bar with our same group of friends, most of us would probably pick the date with the onetime “Sexiest Woman in the World” and impresario of eco-friendly baby-products. But perhaps we should rethink that choice and opt for another night of beers with the gang.

A recent study in *Psychological Science* suggests that unusual experiences have a social cost, in that they alienate us from our peers. “Extraordinary experiences are both different from and better than the experiences that most other people have,” the authors note, “and being both alien and enviable is an unlikely recipe for popularity.”

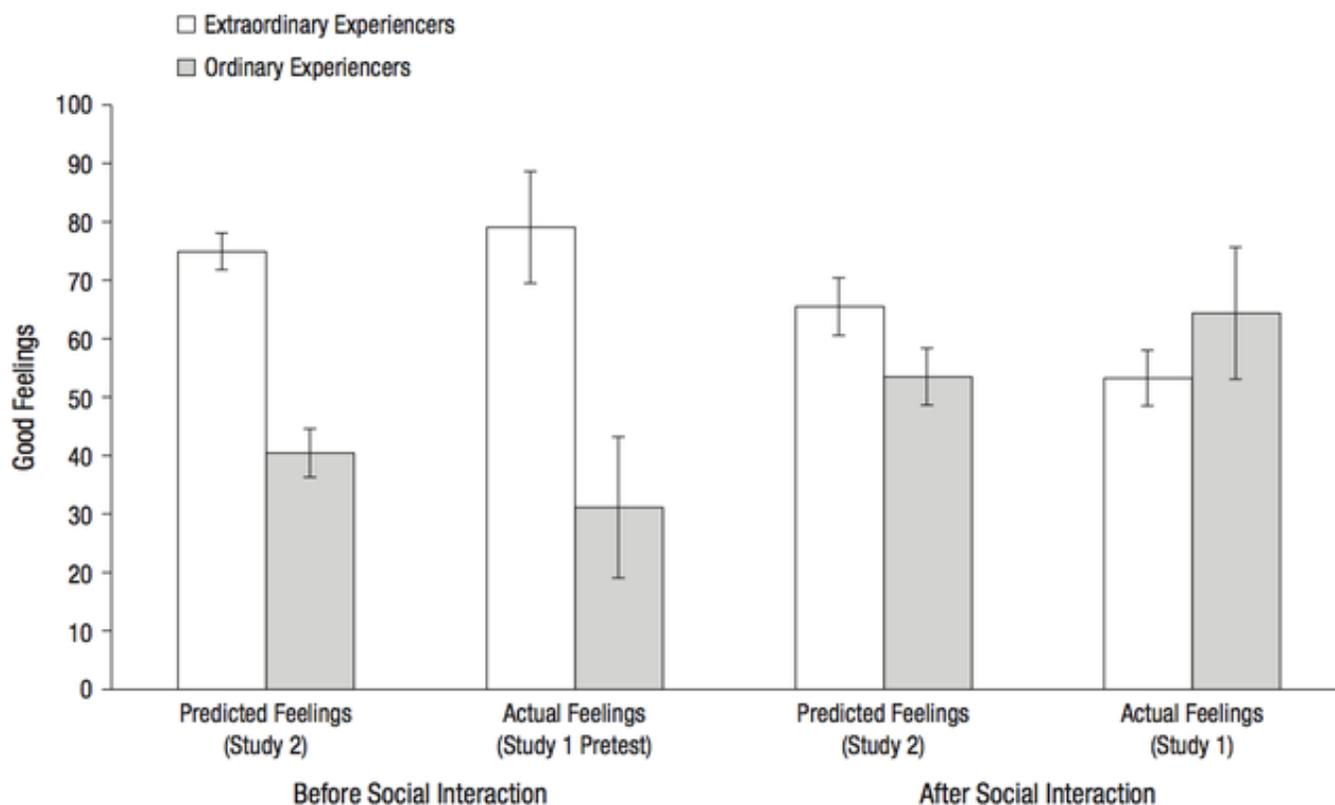
To test this hypothesis, the researchers treated a group of university students to a movie screening. The 68 participants each reported to the Harvard Decision Science Laboratory and were broken into groups of four. One

person from each group was sent to a cubicle to watch an interesting video of a talented street magician performing tricks for an appreciative crowd. The other three were assigned to watch a mundane clip of a low-budget cartoon. Everyone was told whether they were assigned to watch the boring video or the interesting one.

Afterward, each foursome was led to a room and told, to quote Coffee Talk, to “talk amongst yourselves.” The researcher left the room, and he returned five minutes later.

He gave the subjects another survey, this one consisting of two questions: “How do you feel right now?” on the same 100-point scale, as well as “How did you feel during the interaction that took place?” on a scale of 100 between “excluded” and “included.”

Surprisingly, people who watched the “extraordinary” video felt worse than those who watched the “ordinary”



THE IMPORTANCE OF SHARING EXPERIENCES

one by about 10 points. They also felt more excluded by 30 points on average.

“Conversations thrive on ordinary topics,” Gus Cooney, a Harvard Ph.D. student and the study’s lead author, told me. “The guy who had the extraordinary experience had a harder time fitting in.”

So why, then, would we ever choose to go sky-diving or Icelandic volcano-spelunking? Why would anyone pursue unusual encounters if banal ones make for better chit-chat? The authors performed another experiment in which they asked a new group of participants to picture themselves going through the two different conditions—watching either the magician video or the cartoon one and then talking with others. They were asked to score how they thought they would feel during the conversation.

“Participants expected an extraordinary experience to leave them feeling better than an ordinary experience at all points in time,” the authors wrote. In other words, we think seeing or doing amazing things will make us feel better than people who haven’t; it actually makes us feel worse.

The authors speculate that this might be because the joy from an unusual experience fades quickly, but the sting of not fitting in because we didn’t share an experience with our peers—even a crappy one—lingers.

“A hallmark of the nonsocial pleasures—whether the cool tingle of Dom Pérignon or the hot snarl of a new Maserati—is that people adapt to them quickly, which is why such experiences are typically best when they are novel or rare,” Cooney and his co-authors, Harvard’s Daniel Gilbert and University of Virginia’s Timothy Wilson, write. “The social pleasures have a different appeal. People crave acceptance, belonging, and camaraderie, and the hallmark of these pleasures is that they come more readily to those who fit in than to those who stand out.”

People who had extraordinary experiences, meanwhile, had “little in common” with those who had run-of-the-mill experiences, and the resulting combination of

strangeness, jealousy, and abnormality caused the extraordinary people to feel left out. In other words, you had to be there. Apparently, though, we don’t anticipate the social rejection that might ensue when we try to regale our acquaintances with stories from our trek across New Zealand.

So how does this jive with past research showing that we should spend our money on experiences, not things? It doesn’t exactly mean that we shouldn’t seek novelty. Cooney suggests the study should just encourage “people to look before they leap. When we’re choosing what experiences we have, [this shows] we’re only thinking about the benefits, not the social costs.”

The study could also be read not as a criticism of adventures, but as a defense of celebrating the mundane.

The findings are echoed in another recent *Psychological Science* study that found that sharing experiences—even with a complete stranger—makes people rate those experiences as more intense than people who underwent them alone. In that experiment, students reported liking a square of 70-percent dark chocolate more when they ate it at the same time as another study participant. They said the chocolate was more “flavorful” than those who ate it alone. This holds for negative experiences, too: Those who ate a square of 90-percent dark chocolate—shown in pre-tests to be unpleasant—rated it as less tasty when they ate it at the same time as someone else.

“When people think of shared experience, what usually comes to mind is being with close others, such as friends or family, and talking with them,” study author Erica Boothby said in a statement. “We don’t realize the extent to which we are influenced by people around us.”

Together, the studies show why people bond over first-date horror stories or awkward middle-school memories. Or why, upon returning from a great vacation, we’re often more likely to dish to friends about the inept tour guide or inedible hotel breakfast, rather than the mesmerizing sights. In social interactions, people aim for relatability, not impressiveness. More important than having undergone something, it seems, is having someone understand.

WHY THEATER MAKES US BETTER PEOPLE

John Kolvenbach wrote *Stand Up If You're Here Tonight* about the return to live theater and the unique connection between performer and audience. In the below op-ed for the *Los Angeles Times*, Steve Rathje, Leor Hackel, and Jamil Zaki share their research about why theater makes us better people. You can read the original article on the *Los Angeles Times* website [here](#).

Fourteen months into the pandemic, countless aspects of what was once everyday life have grown foreign. Near the top of the list is live theater. Sitting in a dark room with hundreds or thousands of strangers, watching dozens more strangers on stage, a story unfolding in the collective space — all feels hard to remember.

That's not good for theaters, many of which will not survive the pandemic. To some, this is a sad but negligible loss. Performing arts are often dismissed as a luxury, and even in better times arts funding or arts education in schools is regularly threatened.

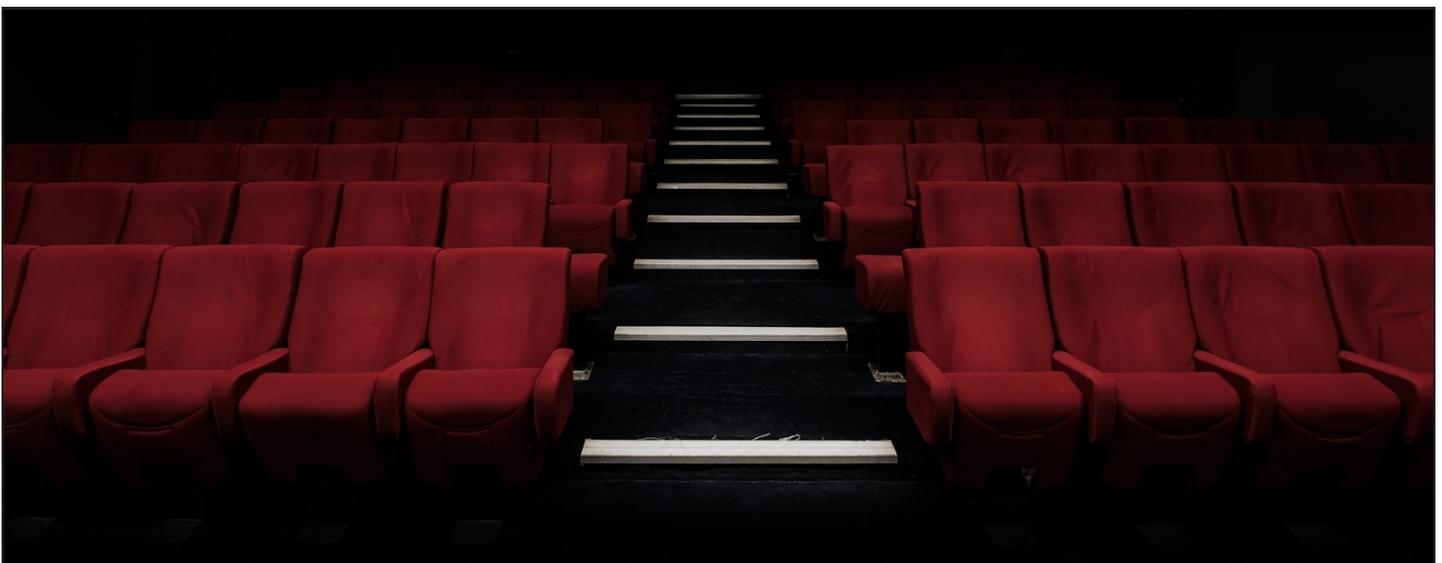
But for others, theater is more than entertainment; it is a vital way to build psychological skills — especially empathy, or our ability to share, understand and care about others' emotions. A plaque above the entrance of the San Francisco Playhouse reads, "Our theater is an empathy gym." Oskar Eustis, artistic director of the Public Theater, says theater is essential for democracy, in part because it helps us build the "emotional muscle of empathy."

Can watching theater actually build people's capacity to care? In research done before the COVID-19 pandemic and published this month, our lab explored this idea.

We partnered with two theater companies — the Public Theater in New York and Artists Repertory Theatre in Portland, Ore. — to survey 1,622 theatergoers either before or after they attended a production of three plays. One of the plays, *Skeleton Crew*, written by Dominique Morisseau, is about autoworkers in Detroit at the start of the financial crisis; and another, *Wolf Play* by Hansol Jung, is about a lesbian couple trying to adopt a child.

We also surveyed attendees who watched a performance of *Sweat* during a free tour of that play conducted by the Public Theater across 18 cities in the Midwest in 2018. *Sweat*, by Lynn Nottage, depicts a working-class factory in Reading, Pa., and was described by the *Wall Street Journal* as a "play that helps explain Trump's win." This gave our team the chance to look at the effects of live theater on audiences in a broader swath of the country.

We handed out surveys to audience members immediately before or after seeing the plays (alternating every other night), and asked them a series of questions about their empathy for groups depicted in the plays — such as same-sex parents. We also asked about their beliefs on a number of issues related to the shows, such as inequality and racism.



WHY THEATER MAKES US BETTER PEOPLE

After seeing the plays, we found that audience members expressed more empathy for the groups depicted onstage and changed their attitudes about a wide range of political issues.

The plays also changed behavior. We gave audience members the option to donate some of their payment for completing our study to charity. The more they gave to charity, the less money they would receive as a gift card for themselves. After seeing the plays, audience members donated more money to charity — whether or not the charity was related to the topics in the plays.

The effects we found in our studies were small, but statistically significant — for instance, an 11% increase in giving. But consider the scale involved. Before the pandemic, about 44 million people per year attended theater in the United States. A regular workout at the empathy gym, when spread across tens of millions of people, could make a sizable impact toward building a more compassionate society.

Why does live theater have these effects? Sitting in the dark watching a play can make us forget our own worries and transport us into the life and mind of a different person. We found that the more people reported feeling “immersed” or “lost” in the play, the more their beliefs and behaviors were changed by it.

Being on the stage can build empathy as well. For instance,

taking acting classes can improve students’ empathy. The same is true for experiencing more solitary art forms, such as reading. Even reading *Harry Potter* has been shown to reduce prejudice toward stigmatized groups (such as the LGBTQ community or immigrants) in children. Before theaters open up, you can still expand your empathy at home by picking up a novel.

A classic finding in social psychology is that repeated, positive encounters with people unlike ourselves can build empathy and reduce prejudice. Many of us have too few experiences — or too little interest — in creating such encounters. Storytelling provides the chance to see the experiences of people who differ from us in environments unlike our own. That may be why psychologists have found that effective efforts to reduce prejudice often incorporate storytelling.

What artists intuitively understand, social scientists can now illustrate with data: The arts are essential to human flourishing. At a time when polarization and distrust are growing, our studies suggest that theater is one salve against these changes. Yet this art form has been shut down at a time when we need it most.

As we move beyond the pandemic, we will need to focus on healing collectively and connecting better. Providing greater access to the arts — and using them to share stories across cultural and social difference — will be an important part of this path to recovery.



ADDITIONAL **RESOURCES**



NAMI CHICAGO

Since 1979, NAMI Chicago has fought for families and individuals impacted by mental health conditions. We promote community wellness, break down barriers to mental health care and provide support and expertise for families, professionals and individuals in Chicago and beyond.



SAMHSA

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) is the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation. SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.



THE FAMILY INSTITUTE AT NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

The Family Institute brings together a diverse group of leading therapists to provide behavioral health care to children, adults, couples and families across the lifespan.



CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH - MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE RESOURCES

Extensive collection of Chicago-area resources compiled by the Chicago Department of Public Health, including local support groups, recovery groups, therapy, and more.

ABOUT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER

Winner of American Theatre Wing's prestigious National Theatre Company Award, American Blues Theater is a premier arts organization with an intimate environment that patrons, artists, and all Chicagoans call home. **American Blues Theater explores the American identity through the plays it produces and communities it serves.**

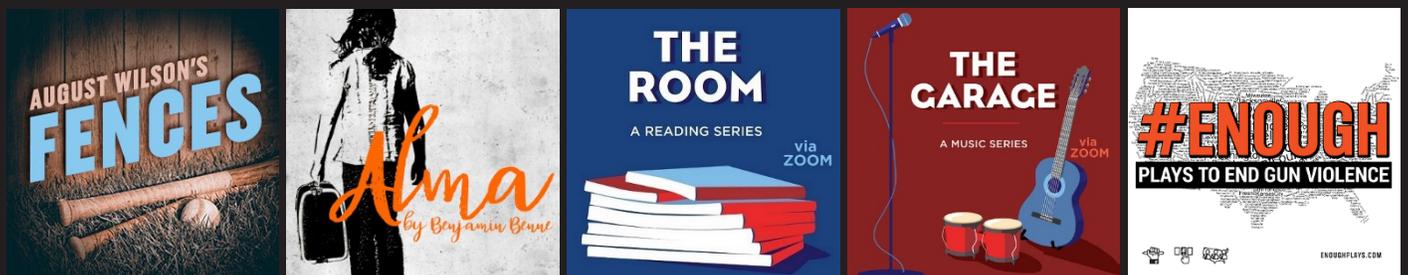
We are Chicago's **second-oldest AEA Ensemble theater**. As of 2022, our theater and artists received 221 Joseph Jefferson Awards and nominations that celebrate excellence in Chicago theater and 40 Black Theatre Alliance Awards. Our artists are honored with Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize nominations, Academy Awards, Golden Globe Awards, Emmy Awards, and numerous other accolades. Our artists work throughout the nation - including Broadway and regional theaters - and loyally return to our stage.

American Blues Theater is committed to developing the classic plays and musicals of tomorrow. More than half of our mainstage productions are world and Chicago premieres. Our new play development consists of a variety of programs – including world and Chicago premieres, the nationally-recognized *Blue Ink Award*, commissions, *The Room* staged readings, *The Garage* concerts, and annual *Ripped Festival* of new short-plays. Our Arts Education offerings includes acclaimed programming in Chicago Public School classrooms, artist-led instruction for all ages through *Classes for the Masses*, and being a Chicago-anchor for the national *#ENOUGH: Plays to End Gun Violence* program.

We believe it is an honor and duty to serve our community. We raise awareness of other non-profit organizations' commendable causes through creative collaborations. We hold food drives, distribute promotional materials, offer free post-show discussions, provide complimentary tickets, honor military personnel, hold exclusive performances for underserved communities, and raise awareness for children's surgeries. We donate proceeds from "Pediatric Previews" to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital.

American Blues Theater is your Chicago home for bold, exceptional, and relevant performances. **Your ticket purchases and donations help us make Chicago *the first city* in all our hearts.**

UPCOMING EVENTS AT AMERICAN BLUES THEATER



Visit AmericanBluesTheater.com to learn more.