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# Back to black: An exploration of Amy Winehouse's music and addiction

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Back to Black: An Exploration of  
Amy Winehouse's Music and Addiction

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An Honors Program Project Presented to  
The Faculty of the Undergraduate  
College of Visual and Performing Arts  
James Madison University

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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by Courtney Alexandra Dalton Jamison

May 2015

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Accepted by the faculty of the Department of Theatre and Dance, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at Wayland Hall on April 11, 2015 at 8:30 pm.

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DEDICATION PAGE

I dedicate this work to my loving and supportive family and friends, the professors who guided me through this process, and Amy Winehouse, whose music served as the inspiration for this creative work.

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	5
Abstract.....	6
Introduction.....	7
Literature and Performance Review.....	9
Project Design.....	15
Discussion and Analysis of Findings.....	16
Conclusion.....	23
Appendix A: <i>Back to Black</i> .....	25
Appendix B: Theatrical Reading Program.....	69
Works Cited.....	70
Works Consulted.....	72

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## **I. Abstract**

### **Back to Black: An Exploration of Amy Winehouse's Music and Addiction**

Amy Winehouse tragically died on July 23, 2011 as a result of years of alcoholism and drug abuse. Her beautiful jazz infused poetic music and her struggle with addiction created a juxtaposition of extremes that led to the foundational question of this creative project: "How can Winehouse's music serve as the catalyst for a musical theatre piece that explores the impact of addiction on the human experience?" Extensive research was conducted on the themes of drug abuse, alcoholism, attachment in adult life, and domestic violence. The project culminated with a staged reading of a jukebox musical consisting of Winehouse's music and an original script. The story addresses addiction but provides an uplifting and positive outlook for those seeking help. It revolves around a female songwriter in her twenties who seeks help after being abused by her significant other. During her quest for guidance and help, she encounters two other characters dealing with addictions of their own. The musical follows the characters through their trials and tribulations as they struggle to maintain their sobriety. A poignant and reflective storyline, infused with the beautiful music of Amy Winehouse, this creative project aims to provide insight and life affirming reflection.

## II. Introduction

Amy Winehouse tragically died on July 23, 2011 as a result of alcoholism and years of drug abuse. According to the Journal Article “Rock and Roll or Rock and Fall,” the media “was quick to blame her death on her inability to manage a self-chosen rock and roll lifestyle.” *The Independent*, a UK newspaper, stated that “there’s no point seeking someone to blame—Winehouse’s insecurity lay at the heart of her troubles.” As someone who has been a fan of Amy Winehouse’s jazz-infused poetic music since freshman year of high school, her death hit me hard. After listening to her song “Love Is A Losing Game,” I was inspired to focus this project on Winehouse’s music. This led me to the fundamental question of my honors project: “How can Amy Winehouse’s music serve as the catalyst for a creative project that explores the impact of addiction on the human experience?”

As a theatre and dance major here at James Madison University, I have participated in all facets of performance. In this project, I sought to combine my interests in performance, directing, and playwriting with my interest in Amy Winehouse’s life and her music. My performance as Lorraine in *All Shook Up*, a jukebox musical based on the music of Elvis Presley, sparked my interest in producing a similar creative project. A jukebox musical is a production that has no original musical score, but instead infuses existing well-known music into a show. The musical I thus created had no original score, instead used Winehouse’s music as the foundation for an original storyline.

I completed extensive research on the themes of drug abuse, domestic violence, suicide, and alcoholism as well as research on what it takes to create and direct a musical. Through this research, I was able to create a story about the lives of recovering addicts who frequent a sober bar. My goal was to address issues that were prevalent during the time Winehouse wrote her



music and relate them to issues prevalent in 2014-2015. The plot addresses addiction but provides an uplifting and positive outlook to those seeking help. I held readings for the musical with a cast of 8 theatre and dance students and used notes from these readings to revise the script. This workshop and revision process was integral in creating a work that culminated in a staged reading. The staged reading took place in the Wayland Performance Hall on April 11, 2015 at 8:30pm.

### III. Literature or Performance Review

I broke my research down in to three categories: Amy Winehouse’s life and music; substance abuse and treatment; and finally attachment in adult life. Fortunately, there are quite a bit of articles, books, and scholarly research on substance abuse, treatment, and attachment in adult life. For my research into Winehouse’s life, I looked to mostly interviews, biographies, and journal articles. Then in order to contextualize this information for a creative work, I pursued research in to various performance forms and work being done by contemporary female playwrights. All of these facets of research were integral in supporting a cohesive well-informed creative work.

Amy Winehouse was born September 14, 1983 to Janis, a pharmacist, and Mitch, a taxi driver and semi-professional singer. According to the PBS online article: “Conversation: Amy Winehouse,” she grew up listening to her father’s jazz records but also loved the girl bands from the 1960s as well as contemporary rap music. Winehouse is quoted in a guardian article entitled: “Amy Winehouse: In Her Own Words,” stating that she also loved gospel music “because gospel is so truthful. You know, I’m not religious but there is nothing more pure than the relationship you have with your God— there is nothing stronger than that apart from your love of music.” In order to understand the complexity of her artistry, I spent hours listening to her music, watching videos of her performing, and listening to artist such as Frank Sinatra, Aretha Franklin, and Ella Fitzgerald, all of whom served as her musical inspirations.

Sophie Heawood, a featured writer for The Times of London is quoted saying Winehouse “was sharp; had a way with words, as well as song. And, oh boy, the songs— the accolades, the awards and the artistic attention was all justified too. *Back to Black*, her second album, with its six Grammy nominations and five wins when she was only 24, changed the music scene forever,

with its lyrical musings on cold, dead broken hearts, illicit sex, and chips and pita and gin.” A year after Winehouse’s untimely death, William Shaw interviewed her closest friends, family members, and colleagues to discuss the singer. This article gave insight in to the motivation behind each of her albums: “if *Frank* was about the disappointment of her relationship with Chris, *Back to Black* was all about the darkness of her relationship with Blake” (Shaw 85). The latter, her husband Blake Fielder-Civil, was the individual who introduced Winehouse to drugs. This illicit drug use coupled with years of alcoholism ultimately led to her death. Salaam Remi, Winehouse’s music producer and closer friend states: “Amy loved hard. She was willing to go all the way through it. Unfortunately. That’s how hard she loved. You know, if she had met a lover who had been a carpenter she’d be building chairs” (Shaw 85). Winehouse poured her soul, emotions, and experiences in to both of her albums. The research in to Amy Winehouse’s life provided the foundation on which the main character of this creative project was built.

In the second area of research, I was able to delve into the physiological factors that draw individuals to addictive behavior and explore various forms of treatment for substance abuse. I found myself rummaging through multiple scholarly articles, journals, and books attempting to uncover what was useful and necessary to understand substance abuse for this particular creative project. The books that I found most informative were those that broke down substance abuse in to categories, explained symptoms of each form of abuse, and explored the physiological responses to withdrawal from said substances. In Sandra Rasmussen’s *Addiction Treatment: Theory and Practice*, addiction is defined as a “broad term that embraces both substance-related and behavioral problems. Addictive disorders include 1. Substance use disorders, more specifically substance dependence and substance abuse, and 2. Substance-induced disorders, such as intoxication, withdrawal, and flashbacks. Because non-chemical disorders such as

pathological gambling, compulsive shopping, sex and love addictions, and eating disorders resemble substance-related disorders in etiology, expression, and treatment, it is useful to include these problems in addiction practice” (Rasmussen 7). This definition served as the foundation of my research in to addictive behavior. The creative project surrounds characters dealing with alcoholism, sex addiction, and illicit drug abuse and their treatment.

Alcoholism is characterized by continuous or periodic “impaired control over drinking, preoccupation with the drug alcohol, use of alcohol despite adverse consequences, and distortions in thinking, most notably denial” (Rasmussen 8). *Alcohol: It’s History, Pharmacology, and Treatment*, written by Cheryl J. Cherpitel and Mark Edmund Rose served as a cover all for my research in to Alcohol abuse, giving insights in to the demographics of alcohol abuse, alcohol withdrawal and its management. Alcohol is considered a Central Nervous System depressant, which means that it inhibits or decreases function in the Central Nervous System. Addicts participate in heavy drinking which is defined as “five or more drinks in a day at least once a week for males, and four or more for females” (Rose 42).

Sex Addiction manifests itself in the obsessive-compulsive sexual behavior that causes severe stress for the individual and may victimize others. “Sexual addiction is similar to alcohol and other drug dependencies in that the sexual behavior controls the individual and his or her life becomes unmanageable. Severe mood shifts accompany sexual acting out. Tolerance develops that is, the previous level of sexual activity is no longer satisfying and the individual must initiate and pursue new and riskier sexual behavior, possibly that is illicit, immoral, and violent” (Rasmussen 76). I also explored the difference between “healthy love” and “addictive love.”

According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration website, in 2012 “an estimated 23.9 million Americans aged 12 or older were current illicit drug users,

meaning they had used an illicit drug during the month prior to the survey interview. This estimate represents 9.2 percent of the population aged 12 or older.” In *Substance Abuse Treatment for Youth and Adults* edited by David Springer and Allen Rubin, cognitive behavior coping skills therapy for adults is discussed. This information on coping skills provided useful information in to the type of setting to be used in my creative project. Cognitive Behavioral Coping Skills (CBST) consists of two kinds of coping skills training— interpersonal and intrapersonal. “Interpersonal skills, also referred to as communication skills, are focused on helping clients develop more adaptive ways of dealing with high-risk relapse situations and obtaining and maintaining social support that is important for successful sobriety” (Springer 271). Intrapersonal involves “coping with specific, interpersonal drinking triggers and incorporating new general lifestyle coping strategies” (Springer 271-272). I was sure to include knowledge of both interpersonal and intrapersonal coping skills for treatment throughout the script.

Rasmussen’s *Addiction Treatment: Theory and Practice*, also served as a resource of exploring various treatment options for substance abuse. Some of the treatment methodology I found useful for this creative project was that of the: Twelve-Step Recovery; Motivational Enhancement Therapy; Stages-of-Change Model; Group Therapy; and Community as Treatment. The belief of the Twelve-Step Recovery Process is that “recovery is possible through active participation in the fellowship, steps, and traditions of the relevant 12-step program” (Rasmussen 109). Motivational Enhancement Therapy is “based on the principles of motivational psychology, motivational enhancement therapy aims to produce prompt, internally motivated client change” (Rasmussen 117) with underlying principles of expressing empathy, avoiding argumentation, and supporting self-efficacy. The Stages-of-Change Model created by James

Prochaska and his colleagues claims that “an individual moves through a series of five stages of change as her or she arrests an addiction and recovers: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination” (Rasmussen 118). Individuals who “accept their addiction, commit to recovery, have stable biopsychosocial systems, and accept personal responsibility for their treatment and recover” (Rasmussen 123) do well in Group Therapy. Finally, Community as Treatment entails that “clients live at home or in the community during initial treatment, continuing care, remission, and recovery” (Rasmussen 128). There is much debate as to which methods work best for addicts; however, I chose to focus the energy of this area of research on “Community as Treatment” as well as “Group Therapy” because I felt that they best served the plot of my creative project.

My third category of research explored attachment in adult life, relationships, and abusive behavior. In Colin Murray Parkes and Joan Stevenson-Hinde’s *The Place of Attachment in Human Behavior*, they break down the criteria for attachment in adults and how it differs from attachment in infants. The first criteria is that attachment in adults usually appears in relationships with peers who are felt to be of unique importance. The second is that adults can “attend to other relationships and other concerns despite threats to attachment” (Parkes 173). The third criteria differentiating attachment in adults from children, “arises from the fact that in adults it is often directed toward a figure with whom a sexual relationship also exists” (Parkes 173). I used this criteria to further investigate what falling in love entails: “There is some evidence that the heightened emotional state of fear facilitates ‘falling in love’ so also we might suppose, does the heightened emotional state of sexual transport” (Parkes 179). This research led me to investigate attachment that leads to romantic love. In the book *Romantic Relationships*, written by Paul R. Robbins, romantic love is described as having three major components:

intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. Robbins goes on to further discuss when this romantic love turns in to an unhealthy attachment that leads to domestic abuse. An American Psychologist article written by Lenore Walker, who has interviewed hundreds of battered women, provided insight in to the three phase cycle of violence which consists of tension building, the domestic situation deteriorates, and a period of remission. Walker believes that “many women develop a sense of helplessness in the situation. They become fearful of doing anything that might irritate their partners. Some women lapse into what would appear to an outsider observer to be a kind of paralysis. Even the idea of escape arouses anxiety” (Robbins 124).

Fortunately, this abundance of scholarly research on substance abuse, treatment, and attachment provided a strong foundation upon which I could build the world of this musical. However, before moving on to the creative writing process itself, it was integral that I also review scholarly research on women playwrights and theatre artists. Before officially deciding on creating a jukebox musical, I explored research on cabarets, revues, women’s performance art and female playwrights. The idea of women in the theatre struck as an area of research that is still continuing to be expanded upon. A 2002 New York State Council of the Arts research initiative reports: “there is a consistently low main stage participation of women playwrights and directors, particularly among theatres with higher budgets” (Pressley 340). With performance artists like Anna Deavere Smith and contemporary female playwrights Paula Vogel, Suzan-Lori Parks, and Maria Irene Fornes, amongst many others, the impact of women in the contemporary theatre community is on the rise. The challenge now is for women theatre artist to continue storytelling, sharing the human experience through the lens of the female, and taking charge of our own creative artistic expression.

#### **IV. Project Design**

My creative research question as stated previously in the introduction was: “How can Amy Winehouse’s music serve as the catalyst for a musical theatre piece that explores the impact of addiction on the human experience?” I broke this down in to the following questions that ultimately directed the creative process:

1. What type of theatrical piece would best serve the music of Amy Winehouse?
2. How should we address the issue of rights in regards to Winehouse’s music?
3. How collaborative should this process be?
4. Who do I need for my cast and collaborative team?
5. How can research on addiction, substance abuse, treatment, relationships and domestic violence inform the choices made in this creative process?

In the following section, I will address each of these questions and how they fueled this creative project process.



## V. Discussion and Analysis of Findings

### 1. What type of theatrical piece would best serve the music of Amy Winehouse?

The project began with Amy Winehouse's music as the skeletal base. I started by researching the various musical theatre forms that would best work with her musical repertoire. I looked in to performance art, cabarets, contemporary vaudeville, book musicals, plays with music, and finally jukebox musicals.

Because her music had such a strong personal reflection (she wrote or co-wrote most of her songs, from her personal experiences), these songs provided a strong starting point from which to move forward thematically. With the help of my musical director, I narrowed down the songs so that there was a rough arc covering the themes of addiction, love, heartbreak and self-empowerment. There was a clear point of view that Amy brought to her art, and it was important that I tried to do that justice, while also offering my own spin and commentary on the subject.

After starring in *All Shook Up*, a musical based around Elvis Presley music and studying this style in a musical theatre history class, I was familiar with the concept of the jukebox musical. It thus became the most logical way to go about creating a musical with Winehouse's music. In a scholarly journal article written by Olga-Lisa Monde, she states: "Jukebox musicals of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century primarily focused on the small audience and were intimate by nature.... In a way they were intimate musical essays" (Monde 1277). This idea of an "intimate musical essay" form of the jukebox musical became the groundwork upon we built our script. We allowed this intimacy and simplicity to fuel the creative writing process and complement Winehouse's music.

2. How should we address the issue of rights in regards to Winehouse's music?

From the beginning, I conceived of this project to be the beginning to a larger piece of work, a foundation upon which I would build a full musical down the line. The plan is to approach the Winehouse estate and attempt to get permission to use her music. If they say no, we would create our own songs to work with the original story we have crafted. For the purposes of this project, however, we went about adapting Amy Winehouse's catalogue under Education, Fair Use copyright laws, and had a private, invite only performance wherein we did not charge/or make any money.

3. How collaborative should this process be?

I worked with my brother, Jai Jamison, on crafting the script for the play. I put together an outline based on the songs chosen, and the ways those songs could reveal character and advance the story. Jai's background is primarily in screenwriting, so I gave him some of the information mentioned above regarding various musical styles and techniques. We began by discussing characters and ways we could use those characters to re-contextualize the songs. From the beginning, there were key concepts that I knew I wanted in the musical. These were the songs and ideas that inspired the project to begin with. For "Back to Black", I knew I wanted a duet between an ex-girlfriend's ghost and the current girlfriend struggling to reach her distant boyfriend. "Rehab" was originally billed as the opening number, and the introduction to all of the characters, while "Know you now" was always going to be the lament of a spurned gay lover. In the original collection of songs, "Tears Dry On Their Own," the final triumph songs, was not included. Finally, the selection that made me want to make this musical, and look into the stories before, after and during the songs, was "Love is a

Losing Game.” That was the song that spoke to me, and really made me look deeper into what Amy was saying in her music.

As the process continued, Ingrid Desanctis served in supervisory role similar to that of a creative producer. She provided valuable insights from an outside point of view that helped to focus the story and clarify the characters. One particular note changed the whole shape of the play. In an earlier draft, Annie’s brother, Frank, appeared much earlier. However, his appearance did not work for the pacing and arc of the story, nor for the believability of the relationship between the siblings. Ingrid suggested we move Frank’s appearance towards the end of the show, and replace him with Valerie earlier in the show. A light bulb went off. With that change, many of the other issues we had with the script starting ironing themselves out.

As far as the music, I enlisted the guidance of Andrew Morrissey early on in the process to narrow down the song choices. Then when he became unable to work as a music director due to his own creative project, I contacted Mark Thress. Together, Mark and I met with the cast, worked with them on style, and prepared them for the staged reading.

#### 4. Who do I need for my cast and collaborative team?

As we traded outlines, and later drafts, back and forth, Jai and I began to clarify and hone in on the themes we wanted to explore. We found that one of the most difficult obstacles we faced was getting the right tone. From the outset, the plan was to cut some of the more serious subject matter with humor. In fact many of Amy’s songs are darkly funny. But, we were aware that we would have to strike a solid balance with the earnest attempts of the characters to see their way through their issues. The tone was not really crystalized until we

had our first read through and rehearsal, and we could hear the script on its feet, and the characters come to life. In that space we began to massage what felt right and what did not. The actors I cast to work with helped tremendously, making choices for their characters that clarified what we were trying to accomplish, and provided insight into the next round of revisions. Through these sessions I truly began to recognize and appreciate the importance of the process. There was a moment in one of the readings when Jimmy came to life. That point, Connor brought something to the table neither Jai nor I thought of, but was an extension of what we had brainstormed and written. The collaboration began to provide results that were better than the sum of its parts. Those rehearsals were invaluable to the final success of the project.

5. How can research on addiction, substance abuse, treatment, relationships and domestic violence inform the choices made in the writing process?

After fully immersing myself in the abundance of research, it was time to decide what was useful, important, and necessary for our script. We decided to simplify and let the music along with the research inform the process. Although a lot of decisions that were made based on research, there were a few that were pivotal.

The first decision that needed to be made was specifying location. The National Institute on Drug Abuse website states that “in 2013, 24.6 percent of people ages 18 or older reported that they engaged in binge drinking in the past month, 6.8 percent reported that they engaged in heavy drinking in the past month.” Coupling the need to address alcoholism and excessive drinking with the circumstances of Winehouse’s death, we decided to place our characters in

a “bar of sobriety.” This created an interesting location for the addicts to develop a community.

When developing these characters, I took a two handed approach. The first involved creating a skeleton based upon Amy Winehouse’s music. I brainstormed who the character could be in relation to the songs chosen, and the themes I was exploring. Was the character singing the song? Was the song about the character? If the song became a duet, how could the various characters represent different points of view within the music? Once the creative skeleton had been built, I then used the research I had done to flesh out some of the specifics of the characters, their interactions and their arcs.

The relationship between Annie, and her boyfriend David, is largely shaped by domestic violence. In her article, “Dealing with the Effects of Domestic Violence,” Lynda Gibbons discusses how serious this issue is for young women. “Domestic Violence can involve slapping, kicking, hitting, punching, burning or scalding, use of weapons or destruction of property” and it is ubiquitous as “a global health issue and a leading cause of death for females aged 10-44” (Gibbons 12, 15). In Annie’s early scenes, she hides the serious event that eventually made her seek out her brother for help. The patrons of the bar, her new support group and family, sensing that something is amiss, encourages Annie to share her experiences, but on her own terms. They recognize that it’s important to “Be sensitive to, discuss their concerns, and give support” (Gibbons 15).

As the relationship between David and Annie was fleshed out, it became increasingly informed by the Denmark Psychology of women handbook of issues and theories. Of particular influence was the emotional aspects of abuse. “Other research perspectives emphasize the emotional bonds that battered women have with their abusers” (Denmark

570). This research formed the basis for what became the scene: Annie's confrontation with David. In the outline, David was going to be a fully fleshed out character that Annie would have to interact with. Over the first few drafts, David's role increasingly diminished as he became less of a character and more of a looming presence in Annie's life. But, in reworking the ending, it became apparent that the confrontation with David was a necessary movement into Annie's final song "Tears Dry on Their Own." Harkening back to the emotional connection that forms between the abusers and the abused, I decided to reintroduce David as a ghost like character that would mirror the other apparition seen earlier in the show (Diana). In this instance, the research truly helped guide and shape the direction of the storyline, and resulted in a much more powerful climax.

Many of the characters in the bar suffer from some form of substance abuse to various degrees. The concept of the sober bar, puts a spin on the methods of treatment available. Sandra Rasmussen outlines the criteria for judging the effectiveness of substance abuse treatments: "1. A reduction in substance use, 2. Improvement in personal health and social function, and 3. Reduction in public health and safety risks" (Rasmussen 6). The characters at the sober bar represent multiple stages of the substance abuse spectrum. Jimmy has been sober for almost two years, whereas Sheridan has just experienced a slight backslide into her destructive behavior. In both of these cases, the effectiveness of the sober bar is shown through the first two criteria: reduction of use and improvement in health and social function. The fact that Jimmy knows he needs the social support of the bar everyday, and the fact that Sheridan, upon slipping up, returns to the bar for help, highlights these examples.

"Individuals who accept their addiction, commit to recovery, have stable biopsychosocial

systems, and accept personal responsibility for their treatment and recover do well in group therapy” (Rasmussen 123).

Jimmy’s character arc is one of acceptance. The decision to make his character Irish is because that culture has a vast history of homosexuality and shame. Jimmy’s need to be liked is seen through his constant storytelling and over-compensatory confidence. The shame and rejection of his upbringing is the subtext for the cheery, comedic character that appears in the play. Sally Munt writes of the issue: “Discursively connected histories of queerness, sodomy, shame, Catholicism, Irishness, and class transgression have a pedigree stretching, at least, right back into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Shame has been central in the making of the modern homosexual” (Munt 31).

Finally, the specter hanging over everyone’s heads for the show is the ghost of Diana. There are elements of Amy Winehouse that appear in all of the characters, but Diana’s tragic death as a result of addiction is perhaps the most stark simulacrum of the singer. Her death is the impetus that sets the whole story in motion: Frank decides to open the sober bar in her honor and Annie runs away, where she meets David. In exploring the character of Diana, we are introduced to the worst case scenario of substance abuse. Diana becomes the symbol of what these bar patrons are fighting against. “It is important to emphasize that during the transition to addiction, drug intake first changes principally quantitatively (from recreational to sustained) and then qualitatively (from sustained to loss of control)” (Piazza 392).

## VI. Conclusion

“Ultimately what interests me about art is the fact that really great art causes you to think about who you are and what you are, what the world is and what everything is. And that’s very important.” –Mac Wellman (Herrington 91).

This entire creative project process taught me about my capabilities within this art form. Above I mentioned the contribution of contemporary female playwrights and how important it is that we continue to share our own versions of storytelling. I found myself discovering my voice as a playwright/director, honoring my perspective on the world, and feeling enriched with a set of collaborative skills to carry on in to the future.

After losing the majority of my project over spring break, I did not believe that I would be able to accomplish what I had set out to do a year ago. However, the passion I developed for this story combined with the support of this community, I was able to create a piece of art that I am unbelievably proud of.

Writing about addiction and substance abuse is by no means a new topic on the stage and screen: “Hollywood’s serious look at alcoholism as a social problem was first approached in Billy Wilder’s Oscar winner *The Lost Weekend*” (Gerald 132). Some of the most revered playwrights such as Eugene O’Neill and Tennessee Williams both struggled with substance abuse and used that to create the voices of their characters also struggling. In these works “the tortuous path from alcoholism to recovery is rarely simple and direct and is often interrupted by repeat backsliding” (Gerald 133). My work through this creative process afforded me the opportunity to shape my voice as a playwright; and after thorough amounts of research, mold this voice in to a distinct perspective on addiction. This perspective, infused with Winehouse’s music, encourages storytelling as a means of overcoming addiction, it supports community as



treatment, and it empowers women who have been battered and abused to take their future in to their own hands.

“The mind, once stretched by a new idea, never returns to its original dimensions.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson. This creative project pushed the boundaries of my artistry beyond simply being an actor who may dabble in other areas. *Back to Black* pulled me out of my comfort zone and challenged me. Yet, the resulting product was so rewarding, I now crave the full process of collaboration, the creation of art from the inception of a basic idea. In many ways, this project has set me on a new track of work that I look forward to continuing in my graduate studies at Yale University.

**VII. Appendix A: *Back to Black***

Back to Black

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A musical

By Courtney Jamison

And

Jai Jamison

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

Frank: 30s. Bar Owner

Annie: 25. Franks Sister. Traveling Artist. Jimmy: 30-40s. Irish. Gay. Storyteller. Sheridan: Late  
20s. Bar fly.

Valerie: Early 30s. Frank's Girlfriend.

Diana: Frank and Annie's Childhood

friend. David: Annie's Boyfriend

## SETTINGS

A Bar (Kind of)

Scene 1

We're in a bar. Exposed brick walls. Stools. A pool table. A Jukebox in the corner.

VALERIE opens the door, carrying a box balanced against her hip.

VALERIE  
(Entering, she sings)

THIS FACE IN MY DREAM  
SEIZES MY GUTS

(Descends into humming)

(She moves behind the bar and starts preparing for the day.)

VALERIE  
(Singing)

THE SECOND I STOP  
THE SLEEP CATCHES UP  
AND I'M BREATHLESS

(She pauses, stares off)

THIS ACHE IN MY CHEST...

(Another pause)

AS I WAKE UP ALONE...  
AND I WAKE UP ALONE.

(JIMMY, a patron, saunters in and sits down. The stool is still warm from where he was sitting in it the night before.)

Morning Jimmy.

VALERIE

G'morning Val.

JIMMY

How're you feeling?

VALERIE

Another day. JIMMY

How many days? VALERIE

Five hundred sixty three. JIMMY

So not just another day. Your five hundred sixty third day. VALERIE

That's right. JIMMY

(Valerie rubs her eyes. )  
Bad night?

Yeah. He's not sleeping. Which means I'm not sleeping. Because...I worry. What'll it be? VALERIE

Irish Coffee... Slightly JIMMY  
(Beat. Valerie Stares at him)  
Irish... Okay... Virgin Irish  
(Beat)  
Coffee.

Right. VALERIE  
(Beat)  
Coffee.

Cream and sugar. JIMMY

(Valerie Goes to make the coffee.)

Did I ever tell you the story of the Irish Virgin? JIMMY (CONT'D)

Yes. VALERIE

JIMMY

Great. There was an old woman, lived in a small sea town on the coast of Ireland. She was a virgin and proud of it. As her time was coming to an end, she went to the local mortician, who also happened to be the post master, bar keep, blacksmith and podiatrist, to make her final arrangements. As a last wish, she informed the undertaker that she wanted the following inscription engraved on her tombstone: "Born a Virgin, Lived as a Virgin, Died a Virgin." Not long after her meeting with the undertaker, the old maid died peacefully. A few days after the funeral, as the undertaker slash postal clerk went to prepare the tombstone for the lady, it became quite apparent that the tombstone she bought was too small for the wording she chose. Quite a predicament right?

VALERIE

(Not paying attention)

Huh? Oh, right yeah...

JIMMY

He thought long and hard about how he could fulfill the old maid's final request, considering the very limited space available on the small piece of stone. For days, he agonized over the dilemma. Finally his experience as a postal worker allowed him to come up with what he thought was the appropriate solution to the problem. The virgin's tombstone was completed and duly engraved. You wanna know what it said?

(Beat)

"Returned Unopened"

(Jimmy slaps his knee in laughter.)

VALERIE

Out of the five hundred sixty three times I've heard that joke, I definitely think that was the best. Where is the frick to your frack?

(Valerie hands Jimmy the coffee.)

JIMMY

Sheridan? She went home with Blake last night.

VALERIE

You were supposed to be with her. So she wouldn't do something stupid.

JIMMY

I mean she's a grown woman. She can do what she-

VALERIE

Jimmy...

JIMMY

I got distracted! The bartender was really cute. You know how I am about racially ambiguous men.

VALERIE

Jimmy!

JIMMY

I wasn't drinking. I was just flirting.

VALERIE

Well, hopefully everything worked out okay with Sheridan.

SHERIDAN

If hopes and dreams were dollars and cents, I'd be richer than the Queen of England.

(Sheridan enters, removing the sunglasses that engulf her face.)

JIMMY

Speak thy name...Good morning Sheri, I see you haven't made it home yet.

(Valerie looks at Sheridan. She looks like she's just left a salon; fresh and perfectly put together.)

VALERIE

This is your walk of shame?

SHERIDAN

Yeah, I don't do those.

JIMMY

Because you have no shame.

(Sheridan shrugs her agreement.)

VALERIE

Did you walk here?

SHERIDAN

God no.



JIMMY

Sheridan? Walk? Have you met her?  
Val-Valerie, meet Sheridan. Sheridan this is Valerie.

VALERIE

I heard you ran into Blake last night.

JIMMY

Well I'd say she did more than "run into him."

VALERIE

And you were supposed to prevent said running, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Valerie, the bartender looked like Duane The Rock Johnson. I'm not superman.

SHERIDAN

I broke up with him.

JIMMY

Say what now?

SHERIDAN

I broke up with Blake.

VALERIE

What happened?

SHERIDAN

MEET YOU DOWNSTAIRS IN THE BAR AND HURT,  
YOUR ROLLED UP SLEEVES IN YOUR SKULL T-  
SHIRT.  
YOU SAY "WHAT DID YOU DO WITH HIM TODAY?"  
AND SNIFFED ME OUT LIKE I WAS TANQUERAY.  
'CAUSE YOU'RE MY FELLA, MY GUY,  
HAND ME YOUR STELLA AND FLY,  
BY THE TIME, I'M OUT THE DOOR,  
YOU TEAR MEN DOWN LIKE ROGER MOORE  
  
I CHEATED MYSELF, LIKE I KNEW I WOULD  
  
I TOLD YOU I WAS TROUBLE  
YOU KNOW THAT I'M NO GOOD

UPSTAIRS IN BED WITH MY EX BOY

HE'S IN THE PLACE, BUT I CAN'T GET JOY.  
THINKING ON YOU IN THE FINAL THROES,  
THIS IS WHEN MY BUZZER GOES  
RUN OUT TO MEET YOU, CHIPS AND PITA,  
YOU SAY

JIMMY

“WHEN WE MARRIED”

SHERIDAN

‘CAUSE YOU’RE NOT BITTER,

JIMMY

“THERE'LL BE NONE OF HIM NO MORE,”

I CRIED FOR YOU ON THE KITCHEN FLOOR

ALL

I CHEATED MYSELF, LIKE I KNEW I WOULD

I TOLD YOU I WAS TROUBLE  
YOU KNOW THAT I'M NO GOOD

VALERIE

This whole thing seems...I don't know... kinda of fucked up.

SHERIDAN

I'm passionate.

VALERIE

Maybe *too* passionate.

JIMMY

(Puts arm around Sheridan)

We are passionate creatures Valerie.

SHERIDAN

I can't help it, if I can't help myself.

VALERIE

So what happened last night?

JIMMY

SWEET REUNION, JAMAICA AND SPAIN

SHERIDAN

WE'RE LIKE HOW WE WERE AGAIN

I'M IN THE TUB, YOU ON THE SEAT, LICK  
YOUR LIPS AS I SOAP MY FEET THEN  
YOU NOTICE LITTLE CARPET BURN  
MY STOMACH DROP AND MY GUTS CHURN  
YOU SHRUG AND IT'S THE WORST,

JIMMY

WHO TRULY STUCK THE KNIFE IN FIRST?

ALL

I CHEATED MYSELF, LIKE I KNEW I WOULD

I TOLD YOU I WAS TROUBLE  
YOU KNOW THAT I'M NO GOOD

I CHEATED MYSELF, LIKE I KNEW I WOULD

I TOLD YOU I WAS TROUBLE  
YOU KNOW THAT I'M NO GOOD

(Sheridan sits next to Jimmy.)

JIMMY

Aw honey....you didn't deserve him anyway.

VALERIE

Jimmy!

SHERIDAN

No, he's right. I need a drink.

VALERIE

What'll you have?

SHERIDAN

Wounded Mary. Extra spicy.

(Valerie takes out a can of tomato juice, pours it in a glass with a celery stick. Starts shaking hot sauce into it)

JIMMY

Do you remember a few years back there was that series of bank robberies in Indiana?

SHERIDAN

Where is this going?

JIMMY

It went on for years. This guy was really good. Basically a ghost. Local police, special investigators, the feds, no one could catch him. Until he got caught. You see, he started getting sloppy. Leaving clues. They figured out the next place he was going to strike, and they were waiting for him.

(Valerie hands Sheridan the drink.)

(Sheridan takes a sip, gestures for Valerie to give her the hot sauce. Sheridan takes the top off and pours the entire bottle into her drink.)

SHERIDAN

So what's the point?

JIMMY

That bank robber stole millions before he was caught. More than he could ever spend. He could've retired to an island and lived a life of luxury. That wasn't enough for him. You see, the bank robber didn't actually get sloppy, he started leaving clues on purpose. He wanted people to know what he had done.

SHERIDAN

You're saying I cheated on purpose?

JIMMY

I'm saying you got caught on purpose.

SHERIDAN

Why would I want to get caught?

(Valerie and Jimmy share a meaningful look.)

VALERIE

You tend to invite a certain amount of... conflict into your life.

SHERIDAN

Are you saying I'm a drama queen?

JIMMY

No, honey. No.

(Beat)

You're a drama empress.

(Sheridan swings at Jimmy with the stalk of celery.)

SHERIDAN

I wish you were wrong. It's like I sabotage myself whenever things get too good. As if I want the...the chaos more than I want...

JIMMY

Right. You don't sound too sure of what it is you want.

SHERIDAN

Happiness? Contentment? What do those things even mean? Cheating on Blake didn't make me happy. I did it anyway. I couldn't help myself.

JIMMY

(Wistfully)

I know the feeling.

(Jimmy stares at his decidedly alcohol free mug)

VALERIE

Well that's what this place is for.

(Jimmy raises his mug in a toast)

JIMMY

Self discovery through Zen.

VALERIE

That's why we're here...

Peaceful musings. JIMMY

Defining and pursuing happiness. VALERIE

Quiet conversations. Serenity. JIMMY

(Beat)

(Annie bursts through the door.)

ANNIE  
(She sings)

THEY TRIED TO MAKE ME GO TO REHAB BUT I SAID  
NO, NO, NO  
YES I'VE BEEN BLACK BUT WHEN I COME BACK,  
NO, NO, NO

VALERIE

I AIN'T GOT THE TIME

ANNIE

AND IF MY DADDY THINKS I'M FINE,  
THEY TRIED TO MAKE ME GO TO REHAB, BUT I  
WON'T GO, GO, GO  
I'D RATHER BE AT HOME WITH RAY,  
I AIN'T GOT SEVENTY DAYS.  
CAUSE THERE'S NOTHING, THERE'S NOTHING YOU  
CAN TEACH ME,  
THAT I CAN'T LEARN FROM MISTER HATHAWAY.  
DIDN'T GET A LOT IN CLASS,  
BUT I KNOW IT DON'T COME IN A SHOT GLASS.

ALL

THEY TRIED TO MAKE ME GO TO REHAB BUT I SAID  
NO, NO, NO  
YES I'VE BEEN BLACK BUT WHEN I COME BACK, NO,  
NO, NO, NO  
I AIN'T GOT THE TIME, AND IF MY DADDY THINKS  
I'M FINE,  
THEY TRIED TO MAKE ME GO TO REHAB, BUT I  
WON'T GO, GO, GO

VALERIE

THE MAN SAID, "WHY YOU THINK YOU HERE?"  
I SAID I GOT NO IDEA.  
I'M GONNA, I'M GONNA LOSE MY BABY,

JIMMY

SO I ALWAYS KEEP A BOTTLE NEAR

ANNIE

HE SAID, "I JUST THINK YOU'RE DEPRESSED."  
THIS ME, "YEA BABY, AND THE REST."

ALL

THEY TRIED TO MAKE ME GO TO REHAB BUT I SAID  
NO, NO, NO

ANNIE

YES I'VE BEEN BLACK BUT WHEN I COME BACK, NO,  
NO, NO, NO

JIMMY

I DON'T NEVER WANT TO DRINK AGAIN,  
I JUST, OOH I JUST NEED A FRIEND,

SHERIDAN

I'M NOT GONNA SPEND TEN WEEKS,  
HAVE EVERYONE THINK I'M ON THE MEND.

VALERIE

IT'S NOT JUST MY PRIDE,  
IT'S JUST TIL THESE TEARS HAVE DRIED.

ALL

THEY TRIED TO MAKE ME GO TO REHAB BUT I SAID  
NO, NO, NO  
YES I'VE BEEN BLACK BUT WHEN I COME BACK, NO,  
NO, NO  
I AIN'T GOT THE TIME, AND IF MY DADDY THINKS  
I'M FINE,  
THEY TRIED TO MAKE ME GO TO REHAB, BUT I  
WON'T GO, GO, GO

(ANNIE sidles up to the bar. She parks a suitcase by  
her feet)

JIMMY

Well this is a lively one...

VALERIE

What can I get you?

ANNIE

Something strong.

VALERIE

We don't serve alcohol here.

ANNIE

But it's a bar.

VALERIE

A sober Bar.

JIMMY

A bar for addicts and alcoholics.

SHERIDAN

A safe haven for outcasts.

ANNIE

So what are you two drinking?



A Wounded Mary.

SHERIDAN

Virgin Irish Coffee.

JIMMY

So...tomato juice and coffee?

ANNIE

(Sheridan and Jimmy nod while taking satisfying sips. Annie looks to Valerie.)

What'll it be?

VALERIE

Orange Juice?

ANNIE

Good choice. Valerie makes a fantastic Virgin Screwdriver.

JIMMY

(Valerie reaches under the bar, pulls out a travel sized bottle of Orange juice, shakes it, twists the top off and hands it to Annie.)

See? The best in town.

JIMMY

Thanks?

ANNIE

Sure thing.

VALERIE

(Valerie moves to the other side of the bar to serve a new patron. Jimmy and Sheridan surround Annie, their new toy)

So who broke your heart?

SHERIDAN

What?

ANNIE

JIMMY

Child, those are the bags of a broken heart.

ANNIE

My American Touristers?

JIMMY

Not those bags.

(Gestures to her eyes)

These bags.

ANNIE

I just met you-

JIMMY

Hi, I'm Jimmy. I was born on a rainy Saturday in the Irish country side. When I was younger I wanted to be Billy Elliot. Well, I still want to be Billy Elliot. I'm an alcoholic. My favorite color is beige. And my favorite movie is Vin Diesel.

(Beat)

And this is Sheridan.

SHERIDAN

Pleasure.

JIMMY

Now we're all old friends.

(Jimmy and Sheridan start inspecting Annie)

SHERIDAN

You think it's drugs?

JIMMY

I don't see any track marks. Nothing up the nose. Gambling?

SHERIDAN

She would've pawned that watch. (short beat) I don't think it's an eating thing...

JIMMY

No! It's a man.

SHERIDAN

Yeah! You're right. And he's in a band.

ANNIE

How did you-

(Sheridan takes Annie's hand, turns her wrist over to reveal a stamp)

SHERIDAN

You still have the VIP stamp on your wrist.

JIMMY

So you were following him on tour...

(Annie yanks her arm back)

ANNIE

This is really none of your business

JIMMY

Look, I've been the boy in the band, and I've loved the boy in the band. I've seen both sides of the coin. Believe it or not, underneath this exquisite, manly figure is a vulnerable, heart broken little bird.

SHERIDAN

A talkative little bird.

ANNIE

I just came here looking for my brother. I don't need whatever....*this* is you're trying to do.

JIMMY

Let me spin a tale for you.

ANNIE

I'm good-

JIMMY

A few years ago, I was the lead singer in a band of...moderate success. Our music was terrible, but this was a time when terrible music was popular. We rented a van- there were five of us- and we played small venues up and down the coast. It wasn't long before I fell in love with Patrick, the guitarist.

SHERIDAN

It's always the guitar player.

JIMMY

Isn't it though? It's because they have nimble fingers. So I fell in love with Patrick, and he fell in love with me. We made beautiful, terrible music, together. But, as the tour neared its end, I could sense so too was our relationship. And every time I tried to talk to him about it, he would shut me out.

So I dealt with it the only way I knew how, I wrote my first, and last, good song.  
(He sings)

YOU'RE JUST A LITTLE BOY, UNDERNEATH THAT  
HAT.  
YOU NEED THE NERVE TO HIDE YOUR EGO,  
DON'T COME WITH THAT.  
YOU THINK EVERYTHING GETS HANDED TO YOU  
FREE.  
BUT IT'S NOT THAT EASY.

I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW.  
WE MAY NEVER MEET AGAIN.  
I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW AND THEN.

MY GIRL SAYS I'M TOO SENSITIVE, TO RUN WITH  
YOU.  
BUT I'M NOT LISTENING TO HER.  
YES I'M PERCEPTIVE.  
SO WHEN I'M DONE WITH YOU  
YOU'LL WISH YOUR HEAD BACK THE WAY IT WERE.

SHERIDAN

I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW

JIMMY

WE MAY NEVER MEET AGAIN

BOTH

I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW AND THEN

JIMMY

Annie, have you ever seen a man play guitar shirtless in the rain?

ANNIE

Um, no...

JIMMY

Honey you haven't lived.

(Beat)

I've never wanted to be a guitar more in my entire life.

JIMMY

I'M NOT RULING YOU OUT, I'M JUST IN DOUBT.  
AS TO WHAT YOU SAY YOU'RE ALL ABOUT.

BOTH

I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW.  
WE MAY NEVER MEET AGAIN.  
I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW AND THEN.

I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW.  
WE MAY NEVER MEET AGAIN.

I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW.  
WE MAY NEVER MEET AGAIN.

I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW.  
WE MAY NEVER MEET AGAIN.

I GOTTA KNOW YOU NOW AND THEN.

ANNIE

Wow. Do you know where he is now?

JIMMY

Patrick? He's married with two kids. Sells insurance. Lives in the suburbs. Drives a mini van.

ANNIE

That must be hard for you.

JIMMY

Sometimes. But at the end of the day, I don't miss him. The person that he was, the person I was, are different from the people we are today. We were kids.

(Beat)

No, I stopped missing him a long time ago.

(Beat)

I'll tell you what I miss. I miss the connection we had when we got lost in a Clapton cover. I could tell by the way he held his guitar what he was thinking. That intimacy. Having someone who knew me, really knew me. Someone who was on the same wavelength and evened me out. I miss his cologne.

ANNIE

But what about all that time though? Wasted.

(Beat, then, almost to herself...)

Thrown away.

JIMMY

When I first found myself here almost a year and a half ago, I felt very much the same as you. Heartbroken. Blacking out every night to forget the pain.

SHERIDAN

Tell me about it.

JIMMY

The owner of this place, a wise young man, said to me: If you work too hard to numb yourself to the pain, you also make it more difficult to feel joy. Pain-

VALERIE

-is how we learn and grow.

(Valerie rejoins this side of the bar.)

ANNIE

That all sounds really familiar...

VALERIE

Jimmy, I hope you're not bothering this poor girl.

JIMMY

I'm just trying to share my wisdom.

(Valerie scoffs.)

ANNIE

No, he wasn't bothering me at all.

JIMMY

See, some people like my stories.

VALERIE

We all like your stories, Jimmy. At least the first few times we hear them.

JIMMY

I'm a people pleaser. I like to-

VALERIE  
-play the classics.

JIMMY  
-Play the classics.

VALERIE

(To Annie)

So what brings you into our establishment?

SHERIDAN

A man.

ANNIE

Well, yes. That and I'm looking for someone specifically. Do you guys know Frank?

(Valerie looks sharply at Annie.)

VALERIE

Why are you looking for Frank?

ANNIE

He's my- wait. Why are you so concerned with why I'm looking for Frank?

(Jimmy looks back and forth at the tension.)

JIMMY

Yes Jesus? You'd like to have a word with me by the jukebox? Sheridan. Jesus has requested us to the jukebox.

(Jimmy and Sheridan move to a different side of the stage, but watch intently.)

ANNIE

Who are you? Do you know where he is?

VALERIE

I'm Frank's girlfriend. Who are you?

(Annie stares at Valerie for a second.)

ANNIE

(Starts Laughing)

VALERIE

I really don't see what's funny.

ANNIE

(Annie is still laughing.)

VALERIE

Is he- are you- are you seeing him?

ANNIE

No! Oh my gosh no! I'm his sister, Annie.

(A burden lifts from Valerie's shoulders.)

ANNIE

(Laughter slowly subsiding)

I'm sorry. It's just- you thought-

(Wipes her eyes)

You were so jealous.

(Beat.)

Why were you so jealous?

VALERIE

Frank comes in this afternoon. He didn't tell me you were coming.

ANNIE

He didn't know I was coming in. This is kind of a, surprise visit.

(Beat)

Do you think my brother is cheating on you?

VALERIE

I- no. Of course not...

ANNIE

Because that doesn't sound like my brother at all.

VALERIE

No, he's just- it's....

(Beat)

ANNIE

How long have you two been-

VALERIE

(Already knows the question)

It'll be seven months in...two weeks.

ANNIE

Cool



VALERIE

Yea.

(It's really, really awkward. Like... super awkward)

ANNIE

So this place is basically a coffee shop?

VALERIE

Yeah, I guess so. Your brother likes to call it a bar though. Coffee shops aren't as social as bars.

ANNIE

Because booze makes you social.

VALERIE

True. But do you *need* it to be social?

ANNIE

I don't know...maybe?

VALERIE

(After a beat)

What was Frank like when he was younger?

ANNIE

What do you mean.

VALERIE

I guess...it's hard for me to imagine him as a kid. I feel like he came out of the womb channeling Ernest Hemingway.

ANNIE

My brother once used Sprite to lubricate a slip and slide.

VALERIE

(Utter Disbelief)

No...Frank?

ANNIE

He charged five dollars a kid for goggles so they wouldn't burn their eyes.

VALERIE

Seriously?

ANNIE

Then donated the money to the Boys and Girls club.

VALERIE

Ahh... see that's the Frank I know.

ANNIE

He always takes care of those who need it.

(Valerie quietly scrubs at an invisible spot on the bar  
for a few moments.)

VALERIE

I'm losing him.

(Beat)

He's been...distant. He tries to hide it, but I can see. When he speaks to me, it's like he's  
going through the motions. When he looks in my eyes, it's like he's looking passed me and  
seeing someone else. He's not sleeping, and when he does-

(A long pause)

Do you know someone named Diana?

(Annie looks up sharply.)

ANNIE

Diana?

VALERIE

He said her name in his sleep. Who actually does that? Like, in real life say someone's  
name in their sleep.

(Beat)

You know her?

ANNIE

I do... Did.

VALERIE

Who was she?

(Beat)

Did he love her?

(Annie looks at Valerie a long while. It's the pain in  
Valerie's eyes that prompts Annie to speak.)

ANNIE

(Measured tones)

Diana was my best friend growing up.

(Beat)

Di was something else. A free spirit. So talented that half the time you wondered if she was just channeling some higher power. Life seemed so easy for her. And she made life better for us.

ANNIE

She had an easy smile and an infectious laugh. She wanted to feel, do and experience everything.

(DIANA enters.)

DIANA

HE LEFT NO TIME TO REGRET,  
KEPT HIS LIPS WET, WITH HIS SAME OLD SAFE BET  
ME AND MY HEAD HIGH, AND MY TEARS DRY,  
GET ON WITHOUT MY GUY.  
YOU WENT BACK TO WHAT YOU KNEW,  
SO FAR REMOVED FROM ALL THAT WE WENT  
THROUGH.  
AND I TREAD A TROUBLED TRACK,  
MY ODDS ARE STACKED,  
AND I'LL GO BACK TO BLACK

WE ONLY SAID GOODBYE WITH WORDS,  
I DIED A HUNDRED TIMES,

VALERIE

YOU GO BACK TO HER

BOTH

AND I GO BACK TO

VALERIE

US  
I LOVED YOU MUCH  
IT'S NOT ENOUGH

DIANA

YOU LOVE BLOW AND I LOVE PUFF

VALERIE

AND LIFE IS LIKE A PIPE  
AND I'M A TINY PENNY ROLLING UP THE WALLS  
INSIDE

Both

WE ONLY SAID GOODBYE WITH WORDS,  
I DIED A HUNDRED TIMES,  
YOU GO BACK TO HER, AND I GO BACK TO,

BLACK  
BLACK  
BLACK  
BLACK  
BLACK  
BLACK

I GO BACK TO  
I GO BACK TO

AIL

WE ONLY SAID GOODBYE WITH WORDS,  
I DIED A HUNDRED TIMES,  
YOU GO BACK TO HER, AND I GO BACK TO,

WE ONLY SAID GOODBYE WITH WORDS,  
I DIED A HUNDRED TIMES,  
YOU GO BACK TO HER, AND I GO BACK TO BLACK.

ANNIE

I don't know when she first started using, but it didn't take long before she was gone. It was her voice.... Her voice was so pure. We would sing together, the three of us. Put music to the poetry that Frank wrote. That's how they first fell in love: Between the notes of a song.

(Beat)

But the thing about passionate people...they are prone to addiction. And Diana was the most passionate person I knew.

ANNIE

She died around this time. Three weeks from yesterday. That's probably why Frank is thinking about her.

VALERIE

I had no idea.

ANNIE

Frank is great at getting other people to open up. But sometimes it seems he has a hard time taking his own advice.

(Valerie squeezes Annie's hand.)

VALERIE

I'm going to try to call him. (beat) He should know you're here.

(Valerie moves to the other side of the bar. Sheridan saunters over. Followed by Jimmy.)

SHERIDAN

So we've been eavesdropping from over there.

JIMMY

And we weren't discussing you and your issues at all.

(Beat)

Okay. We were discussing you and your issues.

SHERIDAN

Why haven't you talked to your brother in seven months?

JIMMY

At least.

SHERIDAN

We did the math. If you didn't know about Valerie, then that means you haven't seen or talked to Frank since before they started dating.

JIMMY

Which is seven months ago. At least.

SHERIDAN

So we want to know what happened that made you lose contact for almost a year.

(Jimmy and Sheridan stare. And wait)

ANNIE

So I assume you heard about Diana?

(Jimmy and Sheridan nod vigorously)

ANNIE

When she died, I couldn't deal. I got scared-- and-- left. Then I met a boy and-

JIMMY

This boy, he's the one responsible for the crying and the puffy eyes?

SHERIDAN

Not the best look for you, by the way.

ANNIE

(Nods)

Yeah. The one and same. He made me feel alive.

JIMMY

Nothing like death to motivate terrible decisions.

SHERIDAN

Listen...I've dated a lot of men.

JIMMY

A lot...

SHERIDAN

(Giving Jimmy the hand)

I had a very simple strategy. I refused to shed tears. I would simply cut them off and move on. Whatever they dished out, I would return, two fold. I would fight fire with fire.

JIMMY

Which is why you're on probation for burning Ricky's house down.

SHERIDAN

Allegedly.

JIMMY  
(To Annie)

"Allegedly"

ANNIE

That doesn't seem very healthy.

SHERIDAN

It wasn't. It made me cold. But it was how I survived. And I was fine with that, until recently. I broke a good man's heart because somewhere in my past, a bad man broke mine. And instead of letting myself heal, I built walls and defense mechanisms designed to prevent me from being hurt. But in reality, they just prevented me from being happy.

ANNIE

Why are you telling me this?

SHERIDAN

Because you're Frank's sister. And because I see a lot of myself in you. I don't want you to...wind up-- listen, you've had your heart broken. Don't hold it in. Feel that pain. Cry those tears. Tell your story.

JIMMY

When you learn to tell your own story, you can change the ending.

(Valerie watches them from the other side of the bar. She's heard those words before, but they resonate with her this time. Annie, Jimmy and Sheridan fade away as Valerie slips into her own world. Alone, wiping up the bar.)

VALERIE

How do I compete with a ghost?

(Beat)

Frank, I'm giving you everything, and you're shutting me out.

(To herself)

God, what am I doing? Am I losing it?

(Sings)

FOR YOU I WAS A FLAME,  
LOVE IS A LOSING GAME  
FIVE STORY FIRE AS YOU CAME,  
LOVE IS A LOSING GAME

ONE I WISH I NEVER PLAYED,  
OH WHAT A MESS WE MADE,  
AND NOW THE FINAL FRAME  
LOVE IS A LOSING GAME

PLAYED OUT BY THE BAND  
LOVE IS A LOSING HAND  
MORE THAN I COULD STAND  
LOVE IS A LOSING HAND

SELF PROFESSED, PROFOUND,  
'TIL THE TIPS WERE DOWN  
THOUGH YOU'RE A GAMBLING MAN,  
LOVE IS A LOSING HAND

THOUGH I BATTLE BLIND,  
LOVE IS A FATE RESIGNED,  
MEMORIES MAR MY MIND

LOVE, IT IS A FATE RESIGNED

OVER FUTILE ODDS,  
AND LAUGHED AT BY THE GODS  
AND NOW THE FINAL FRAME  
LOVE IS A LOSING GAME

(Valerie's tears fall to the bar. She wipes them away with a rag. Gathers herself. Slowly the bar comes back into focus.)

Frank enters. He walks behind the bar and takes off his bag and his coat, but his shoulders stay slumped. Valerie sees him and walks over.)

VALERIE

God I could use a drink.

FRANK

Might have a hard time finding one here.

VALERIE

Frank.

(Taking him in)

Where have you been?



FRANK

Just out. Thinking.

VALERIE

I called you.

FRANK

You know I always forget my charger.

(Frank plugs his phone into the dock behind the bar.)

What's going on?

VALERIE

Your sister is here to see you.

(Valerie points to the table where Annie speaks to Jimmy and Sheridan.)

FRANK

Annie? Annie!

(Frank comes around the bar as Annie turns to see Frank. She smiles, stands up and they embrace).

ANNIE

Frank!

JIMMY

Yes Jesus? You think Sheridan and I should give these two a moment?

(Frank and Annie sit at the table as Jimmy and Sheridan move to the bar.)

FRANK

That face.

ANNIE

Those greys.

FRANK

You look like a young woman.

ANNIE

You should maybe think about color.

FRANK

What are you doing here?

ANNIE

On second thought, maybe not. You kind of look more distinguished.

FRANK

I've always looked distinguished. What-

ANNIE

Are you taking care of yourself?

FRANK

Valerie talked to you.

ANNIE

She says you're not sleeping.

FRANK

Did she...?

(Frank looks over his shoulder at the bar, where Jimmy, Sheridan and Valerie try their best to look inconspicuous)

FRANK

Who are you?

ANNIE

What do you mean?

FRANK

Making friends was never your strong suit.

ANNIE

You always made enough for the both of us.

FRANK

And you always made sure I kept them.

ANNIE

You're thinking about her, aren't you?

(There's a long, pregnant pause.)

Frank? Come back. Talk to me.

FRANK

So much can change in a year.

ANNIE

Hard to believe it's been that long.

FRANK

Sometimes it seems like it's been a lifetime. And then there are moments where it feels like it's happening right this second.

ANNIE

What does it feel like right now?

(Frank stares at his hands. That's Annie's answer.)

ANNIE

I know you're in the valley. Because I'm there too. But you have people trying to be there for you, and you won't let them.

FRANK

You literally ran away.

ANNIE

I get that.

FRANK

When Diana died, it was like the color drained from the world. Sounds weren't as vibrant. Nights lasted a little longer. Sunrises weren't as bright.

ANNIE

I had to go.

FRANK

I needed you.

ANNIE

I needed *you*.

FRANK

She was my fiance.

ANNIE

She was my best friend.

FRANK

(After a long beat)

I...know. I was so wrapped up in my own shit...

ANNIE

I shouldn't have left.

FRANK

Thank God for this bar. Something to focus on...

ANNIE

And Valerie?

FRANK

Yeah her too.

ANNIE

You never told her about Di?

FRANK

How do you bring up something like that?

ANNIE

I don't know.

(She sings)

WHEN I WALK, IN YOUR SHOES,  
I UNDERSTAND A MAN CONFUSED.

THEY MUCH TOO BIG, BUT I DON'T CARE  
I FEEL THE WEIGHT, YOUR SHOULDERS BEAR.  
NOW I REALLY EMPATHIZE,  
LOOKING THROUGH YOUR BLOOD-SHOT EYES.  
AND I KNOW YOU, YOU SO FRUSTRATED.  
BUT WE ALL BECOME WHAT WE ONCE HATED.  
BESIDES, NOBODY CAN BE THAT WISE.

I CAN'T HELP YOU, IF YOU WON'T HELP YOURSELF.

IF YOU WON'T HELP YOURSELF, HELP YOURSELF.

NO I CAN'T HELP YOU, IF YOU DON'T HELP  
YOURSELF.  
HELP YOURSELF.

YOU CAN ONLY GET SO MUCH FROM SOMEONE  
ELSE, YEAH.

OH, YEA. I CAN'T HELP YOU, IF YOU WON'T HELP  
YOURSELF

FRANK

YOU GOT A DEGREE, IN PHILOSOPHY.  
SO YOU THINK YOU CLEVERER THAN ME.  
BUT I'M NOT JUST, SOME DRAMA QUEEN

ANNIE

'CAUSE IT'S WHERE YOU AT, NOT WHERE YOU BEEN

FRANK

SO WHAT DO YOU EXPECT FROM ME?

ANNIE

TO HOLD YOUR HEAD, ABOVE THE SEA.  
AND CARRY YOU EVEN THOUGH YOU BIGGER,  
'CAUSE DON'T YOU KNOW YOU CRUSH MY TINY  
FIGURE?  
AND ANYWAY WE'RE STILL SO YOUNG

FRANK

AND THIS ISN'T YESTERDAY

BOTH

I CAN'T HELP YOU, IF YOU WON'T HELP YOURSELF.  
IF YOU WON'T HELP YOURSELF, HELP YOURSELF.  
NO I CAN'T HELP YOU, IF YOU DON'T HELP  
YOURSELF.  
HELP YOURSELF.  
YOU CAN ONLY GET SO MUCH FROM SOMEONE  
ELSE, YEAH.  
OH, YEA. I CAN'T HELP YOU, IF YOU WON'T HELP  
YOURSELF

FRANK

YOU MIGHT BE TWENTY-FIVE BUT IN MY MIND,  
I SEE YOU AT SIXTEEN YEARS OLD MOST THE TIME.

ANNIE

AND I'M, I'M JUST A CHILD AND YOU FULL GROWN.  
AND NO ELSE LIKE NOTHING THAT I'VE EVER  
KNOWN.

BOTH

YEA, UNLIKE NOTHING THAT I EVER KNOWN

FRANK

What are you doing here Annie?

ANNIE

You sound like you aren't happy to see me.

FRANK

I just want to know why you're here, now.

ANNIE

I'm fine, Frank.

FRANK

You're not, Annie. Look at who you're talking to.

ANNIE

Are you going to psycho analyze me now?

FRANK

I've been here since before you were born. I don't have to psycho analyze anything.

ANNIE

You don't know everything.

FRANK

I know you.

ANNIE

Don't pull this big brother shit on me right now.

FRANK

That's why I'm here. To pull big brother shit. It's part of the job description.

ANNIE

Just...leave it Frank.

FRANK

So you can run away again for another year?

ANNIE

You think I'm a child.

FRANK

I think you need to take your own damn advice.

(Behind Annie, DAVID appears. He hovers a few feet away.)

FRANK

I hate him.

ANNIE

You never met him.

FRANK

I know exactly who he is. I know a million of him. I could pick him out of a lineup. Shit, I could probably draw him.

(Beat)

What's his name?

(Beat)

Annie, there's no point saying anything but the truth because at the end of the day you don't have to answer to anyone but yourself.

(Annie looks up at Frank...)

ANNIE

David.

DAVID

You are the most beautiful thing I have ever seen.

ANNIE

When Di died, it scared the shit out of me. I needed to get clean. I met him at a meeting, picking himself up from rock bottom.

DAVID

Hi, I'm David.

(David takes a step closer to Annie)

ANNIE

He was magnetic. He would say things that would make me forget myself.

DAVID

I want you.

ANNIE

And that's all I wanted to do. Forget everything. Diana. You. It was freedom.

(Beat)

Until it wasn't.

(David steps behind Annie and puts his hands on her shoulders.)

DAVID

I want you.

ANNIE

Why did I let him-(rope me in). I wish it was anything else. Anyone else.

DAVID

I need you, Annie. Come with me.

ANNIE

I knew- The road is difficult for an addict. But he said that's why he needed me. We were going to lean on each other. Make each other whole.

DAVID

I need you.

ANNIE

You can only say no so many times. And when you say yes once, it becomes easier to say yes twice. Three times. Seven times.

DAVID

I need you.

ANNIE

Twelve times.

DAVID

I'm sorry.

(David has his hands in Annie's hair)



ANNIE

He kicked me twelve times while I lay on the ground begging him to stop. I counted every one until I passed out.

FRANK

Oh my God. Annie.

ANNIE

He was drunk. And I had the nerve to question him. To yell at him. To be disappointed in him. So he hit me until I wasn't.

DAVID

I'm sorry.

ANNIE

How could I be so weak? How could I let this happen?

FRANK

You didn't let anything happen. I'm here. We're here.

DAVID

I want all of you.

DIANA

You're going to be alright.

ANNIE

ALL I CAN EVER BE TO YOU, IS THE DARKNESS  
THAT WE KNEW,

AND THIS REGRET I GOT ACCUSTOMED TO.

ONCE IT WAS SO RIGHT, WHEN WE WERE AT OUR  
HIGH,

WAITING FOR YOU IN THE HOTEL AT NIGHT.

I KNEW I HADN'T MET MY MATCH,

BUT EVERY MOMENT WE COULD SNATCH,

I DON'T KNOW WHY I GOT SO ATTACHED.

IT'S MY RESPONSIBILITY,

YOU DON'T OWE NOTHING TO ME,

BUT TO WALK AWAY I HAVE NO CAPACITY.

HE WALKS AWAY,

THE SUN GOES DOWN,

HE TAKES THE DAY,  
BUT I'M GROWN,  
AND IN YOUR GREY,  
IN THIS BLUE SHADE,  
MY TEARS DRY ON THEIR OWN.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND, WHY DO I STRESS A MAN,  
WHEN THERE'S SO MANY BETTER THINGS AT HAND?

WE COULD HAVE NEVER HAD IT ALL,

WE HAD TO HIT A WALL,

SO THIS IS INEVITABLE WITHDRAWAL.

EVEN IF I STOP WANTING YOU,  
AND PERSPECTIVE PUSHES THRU,

I'LL BE SOME NEXT MAN'S OTHER WOMAN SOON.

I SHOULDN'T PLAY MYSELF AGAIN,

I SHOULD BE MY OWN BEST FRIEND,  
NOT FUCK MYSELF IN THE HEAD WITH STUPID MEN.

HE WALKS AWAY,

THE SUN GOES DOWN,

HE TAKES THE DAY,  
BUT I'M GROWN,  
AND IN YOUR GREY,  
IN THIS BLUE SHADE,  
MY TEARS DRY ON THEIR OWN.

SO WE ARE HISTORY, YOUR SHADOW COVERS ME,

THE SKY ABOVE A BLAZE.

HE WALKS AWAY,

THE SUN GOES DOWN,

HE TAKES THE DAY,  
BUT I'M GROWN,  
AND IN YOUR GREY,  
IN THIS BLUE SHADE,  
MY TEARS DRY ON THEIR OWN.

I WISH I COULD SAY NO REGRETS,

AND NO EMOTIONAL DEBTS,

AND AS WE KISS GOODBYE THE SUN SETS.  
SO WE ARE HISTORY,  
THE SHADOW COVERS ME,  
THE SKY ABOVE A BLAZE THAT ONLY LOVERS SEE.

HE WALKS AWAY,

THE SUN GOES DOWN,

HE TAKES THE DAY,  
BUT I'M GROWN,  
AND IN YOUR GREY,  
IN THIS BLUE SHADE,  
MY TEARS DRY ON THEIR OWN.

(She's surrounded by Frank, Jimmy, Valerie and  
Sheridan: her family, old and new. She smiles  
through her tears.)

ANNIE

I could use a drink.

SHERIDAN

Maybe some Champagne?

FRANK

Sparkling grape juice?

ANNIE

Perfect.

JIMMY

Did I ever tell you about my trip to France?

VALERIE

Yes, Jimmy.

JIMMY

Great. I was young and handsome. Well slightly younger, but not as handsome as I am today. Anyway, my journey began in the south of France....

FADE OUT.

VIII. Appendix B: Theatrical Reading Program

# BACK TO BLACK

A One-Act Jukebox Musical  
Written by  
Courtney and Jai Jamison  
HON 499 Creative Thesis Project  
Wayland Hall—April 11, 2015

Directed by  
Courtney Jamison  
Accompanist/Music Director: Mark Thress

CAST (In Order of Appearance)

Valerie: Maddie White  
Jimmy: Connor Riley  
Sheridan: Lina Lee  
Annie: Rachel Mahar  
Diana: Courtney Jamison  
Frank: Richard Yingling  
David: Brendan Gaffey

Stage Directions: Christy Fischer

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\*This play is very much a still work in progress. There will be a brief talkback afterwards and your feedback is greatly appreciated!

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