

KINGDOM COME

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UPSTAGE GUIDE

A publication of **EDUCATION AT
ROUNDAABOUT**

UPSTAGE CALLBOARD

Kingdom Come

By **Jenny Rachel Weiner**
Directed by **Kip Fagan**

Samantha is lonely and confined to her bed. Layne is shy and too afraid of the world to journey into it. But when these two thirtysomethings connect through an online dating site, they fall for each other fast and hard. What could go wrong? Considering that they're both pretending to be someone else, the short answer is: everything. When people are free to project any version of themselves they wish, who knows where reality ends and fantasy begins?

a note from Artistic Director Todd Haines

In *Kingdom Come*, Jenny takes us on a deep dive into online relationships and the ways in which our screens allow us to grow close to people while keeping reality at a distance. There are two fascinating women at the center of this play, and each of them has reasons to hide behind a false identity in the online world. Despite the artifice at the heart of this play, *Kingdom Come* feels anything but artificial. Jenny writes all of her characters with both humor and heart, and she shines a spotlight on people of great complexity who deserve to have their stories told.

when

Present Day

where

*a city about 30 miles south of Las Vegas-
Carson City, Nevada.
Then later, Los Angeles*

who

Samantha Carlin

Delores Aquendo

Layne Falcone

Suz Miller

Domnick Aquendo

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UPSTAGE CONTRIBUTORS

MANAGING EDITORS:

Kim Oria, *Senior Manager of Education Programs*
Jill Rafson, *Director of New Play Development*

WRITERS:

Jason Jacobs, *Teaching Artist*
Leah Reddy, *Teaching Artist*
Olivia O'Connor, *Artistic Associate*
Ali Leskowitz, *Marketing Promotions Associate*
Gracie Meier, *Education Intern*
Nick Mecikalski, *Artistic Intern*
Ashley Thomas, *Education Apprentice*

INTERVIEWS:

Ted Sod, *Education Dramaturg*

GRAPHIC DESIGNER: Darren Melchiorre

EDUCATION STAFF:

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Teaching and Learning*
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Katlyn Rapini, *Education Assistant*
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INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT JENNY RACHEL WEINER



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with *Kingdom Come* playwright Jenny Rachel Weiner about her work.

Ted Sod: Please give us some background information on yourself: Where were you born? Where were you educated? When did you decide to become a playwright and why?

Jenny Rachel Weiner: I was born in Boston, MA but was raised in South Florida. The part of Florida I grew up in was filled with Jewish grandparents (including my own) who migrated south from New York, and because of this I always felt like a New Yorker in my soul. When I moved to NYC to attend the Fordham University/Primary Stages MFA in Playwriting program in 2012, I felt like I was truly returning home. Before that, I lived in Chicago, where I spent my time devising documentary theatre, teaching, and writing; before that, I studied at Wits University in Johannesburg, South Africa focusing on mask work, clowning, and site-specific theatre; before that, I attended Boston University, where I received my BFA in Theatre Arts. My parents actually met at BU, so beginning my artistic path there must have been destined from the beginning. I also became a playwright at Boston University. I began there as an actor and, as an eighteen-year-old, was steadfast and determined to remain one. During my sophomore year in a class called Theatre Ensemble, led by the inimitable Lydia R. Diamond, I wrote and performed a monologue from the perspective of a window that had shattered in my childhood home, a product of Hurricane Wilma that, in 2005, wreaked havoc on Florida. After that class, Lydia pulled me aside. She looked me straight in the eye, and she said, "I don't know if you know this, Jenny, but you're a writer. You may not be able to see it yet, you may not be able to acknowledge it now, but I want you to know that you are a writer." Lydia saw something in me that day, and although it did take me a couple of years to allow that path to unfold, I think that was the day that the beast was unleashed.

TS: What inspired you to write *Kingdom Come*? What do you feel the play is about? Does the play have personal resonance for you, and if so, how?

JRW: I wrote the first draft of *Kingdom Come* in a three day bootcamp at Primary Stages led by the brilliant Cusi Cram. She came to the room with leading questions, exercises to get our creative juices flowing, and in-depth opportunities to allow the inmost recesses of our imaginations and curiosities to be lured to the surface, giving us access to laden ideas and questions we had about the world, ourselves, and the people we dream about. I walked into that boot camp convinced I had nothing to say and nothing to write about. Once Cusi started asking us questions about the world of our play, the people who live inside of it, and what their greatest wishes, longings, and fears were, I tapped into the stories of Samantha, Layne, Delores, Dom, and Suz. I saw Carson City, Nevada clearly in my mind, I saw Samantha trapped in her body, Layne trapped in her mind, and the two of them finding genuine connection in each other. In my work, I am always aiming at finding the two-sided coin of humor and pain that lives in our deepest truths, and this story became a vehicle for me to explore modern day loneliness, the ways in which we hide in order to be seen, and how social media has created a platform for us to curate the image in which we wish to be received. At the time, I had been going on endless Internet dates, constantly disappointed, as a stranger could never realistically come close to the perfect person in my mind. I witnessed firsthand the power




of our imagination, of our greatest longing, and of the complicated, nuanced, and detailed projections we place onto other people. My best friend was also "catfished" the week before, which was simultaneously hysterically funny, deeply embarrassing, and painfully sad. This is a combo platter for me in terms of what kinds of stories inspire me to write.

TS: What kind of research did you have to do in order to write it? What was the most challenging part of writing your play?

JRW: Once I did the first fast and dirty draft in the bootcamp, which has interestingly enough remained the spine of the play, I did actual research on the path, realities, and inevitabilities of life as a person who weighs 600 lbs, I went down the rabbit hole of others who had been "catfished," and I spent some quality time on visitcarsoncity.com. I also listened to a lot of Billy Joel as I wrote the play, and one day just kept the TV on while I worked to get a sense of the daytime TV line-up. The most challenging part of writing this play has been trusting in my instincts that I know these characters intimately enough to let them fly. I think that's the hardest part of writing any play for me: doing the research, laying the groundwork, setting myself up for success (enough sleep, water, light, and a great playlist) and then trusting in myself enough to be the vessel for the story to come through. That kind of trust comes with age and experience, and the more I write the more I feel myself tapping into the well of stories I desperately need to tell, allowing them to flow through me freely. The sneaky little roadblocks of fear and doubt like to rear their heads every once in a while, but I've learned to just let them hang out with me and show them that everything's cool and thanks for their concern!

TS: Can you give us a sense of your process as a writer? How do you go about working on a play once you have an idea? Was there a formal development process for this play?



JRW: My process as a writer shifts and morphs all the time, but the constant for me is letting an idea, characters, and a world incubate for a while before I actually sit down to write. This seems to contradict how I wrote *Kingdom Come*, but I think that story was actually present in me all along, I just wasn't cognizant of it until I was prompted. Usually, I'll wake up in the middle of the night with an idea, with characters, with a question that's been scratching at my heart. I'll have a basic idea of what the play might be, I write that down, and then I let it have its way with me. I'll spend months dreaming of the people in this world, I'll find myself engaging in conversations and activities that take me closer to these themes (usually this is subconscious and I only realize after the fact), and I'll jot down notes that feel pertinent or relevant to the questions I'm asking. Sometimes I read books that are connected to the topic. Sometimes I'll go down an Internet rabbit hole of personal forums and user generated discussions to see how those are manifesting. Sometimes I just go deeper in my own psyche to investigate why I am so fascinated by this story. Once I feel like I've incubated enough, I'll usually set myself up in a bootcamp or intensive, since I've found I get my best work done in a pressure cooker. Once I get a first draft done in that setting, then I spend months rewriting, tinkering, and continuing to explore, but this time moving forward from the play itself.

TS: Many of our Roundabout Underground audience members are millennials and have grown up with the digital age. What is it about this generation that intrigues you?

JRW: My interest is two-fold: I have always been interested in liminal spaces, in the moments between the moments, and that's where the connection between Layne and Samantha lives—in the spaces between the reality of their lives, where they get to be their best selves, their most excited, brave, emotional, inspired, and loving selves, without fear of rejection or consequence. I am also interested in the millennial generation (of which I am a part) and our relationship to perceived connection vs. actual connection. So much of our connection is falsely presented and superficially touched on because so much of our time is behind the privacy of a screen. I think the back half of our generation had the opportunity to lay the foundation for genuine connection because we didn't have cell phones or email as kids, so during our formative years we were forced to interact in real life. I do, however, think that in the digital world we live in now, we are just as subjected to the beauty and benefits of a hyper-connected online world as well as the disconnection it can create. It's in our makeup as human beings to want to connect to other people, and though we get the initial benefits online, that kind of interaction is lacking a fundamental depth. Currently in my work, and specifically in this play, I am exploring the relationship between our desire for connection and our fear of vulnerability.

TS: Can you describe what you look for in a director? In casting actors for this particular play?

JRW: I have been incredibly lucky so far in my career to have worked with generous, loving, resourceful directors, who put the needs of the play above anything else. The most important thing I look for is a person who implicitly understands and accepts the play, a person who seems to inherently recognize the truths I am looking to unpack, the questions I am striving to ask, and is perhaps also asking those questions of themselves and their own work. I am also always looking for a director who has a facility with language, tempo, and humor

since my plays tow the line between what's funny about being a person and what's heartbreaking about it. Similarly that's what I look for in an actor: an ability to seamlessly move between lightness and buoyancy and the deep emotional stakes of being human.

TS: Who are your favorite playwrights? How are you inspired as an artist?

JRW: My favorite playwrights range from Wendy Wasserstein to Sheila Callaghan, from Tennessee Williams to Tony Kushner, from Sarah Ruhl to Chuck Mee. I am drawn to writers who ask questions of us we never tire of asking, who make me belly laugh with their perceptive portraits of families, communities, isolation, matters of the heart. I am drawn to theatricality and moments of poetry amidst very real and very grounded circumstances, because I think life is full of those, and if we blink we might miss them. I am drawn to the people I see on the street and the lives I imagine they lead. I am drawn to personal life or death stakes that take us to exciting and dangerous places (and how there is a huge amount of humor in those moments). I am drawn to stories of complicated women, of Jewish families, of the millennial pace jutting up against our pre-programmed need to slow down and experience human connection. Since accepting my fate as a writer, I have become porous to the vast moments of inspiration that happen around me every day, and I have started writing down the things I see.

TS: What advice would you give to a young person who wants to write for the theatre?

JRW: Stay open, curious, and excited about getting it wrong. Lydia R. Diamond, my first playwriting teacher, told me once that we are writing the same play over and over again until we're not. When she first told me that, I didn't understand what she meant because my plays were so different from each other! How could a play about a lonely woman in St. Augustine searching for her daughter in her dreams and a cave full of people who are lost and looking for a way out possibly be the same? And how can the first two plays I ever wrote, worlds away from where I am now, be cosmically linked to *Kingdom Come*? Your plays are extensions of you, and they live and breathe and pulse to the unique rhythm of your soul. Nobody else in the entire world has the same perspective, questions, viewpoint, and voice as you do. So, go have fun! I'm giving you permission. Don't worry about writing the "right" play. Don't worry about your plays being bad. As long as you stay tapped into your personal vantage point and continue to be curious about all of the questions tugging at your hem, you will succeed. You will succeed in being you.

TS: What else are you working on now?

JRW: Almost all of the things I am working on are in the incubation period, so they would kill me if I talked too much about them. There are about four plays having their way with me as we speak, and I can tell you they range from beauty pageants to Nazi Germany to the politics of theatre sleep-a-way camp. I have just begun my first year at the Lila Acheson American Playwrights Program at The Juilliard School, and will be working on three new full length plays this year. This kind of opportunity provides me not only with hard deadlines, but with an advanced level workshop setting under the brilliant mentorship of Marsha Norman and David Lindsay-Abaire. For more info, you can check out my goings-on at www.jennyrachelweiner.com.

CATFISH ORIGINS



CATFISHING: FROM INDIE DOC TO MTV

cat-fish [kat-fish] noun—a person who pretends to be someone they're not, using social media to create a false identity, particularly to pursue deceitful online romances.

—Nev Schulman's website

catfish [kat-fish] verb—to pretend to be someone you're not online by posting false information, such as someone else's pictures, on social media sites usually with the intention of getting someone to fall in love with you. —MTV website

In 2010, a widely released documentary redefined the term “catfish” and cast it into the zeitgeist. *Catfish* features New York photographer Yaniv “Nev” Schulman, who gets involved in a long-distance romance with Megan, an 18-year-old girl he meets on Facebook. Nev becomes suspicious when Megan claims that a recording taken from YouTube is her own singing. Followed by his filmmaker brother Ariel and their friend Henry, Nev investigates Megan online, travels to Michigan to find Megan and her family, and ultimately discovers that she doesn't exist.

All this time, Nev has actually been talking to Angela, a depressed 40-year-old housewife who lives with her husband and takes care of two highly disabled stepsons. He learns that Angela has multiple Facebook personalities, and “Megan” is a completely fictional construct whose photos belong to a stranger. Although it's not the romantic union he hoped for, Nev and Angela form a kind of friendship. Angela finds a happy ending in her painting career, which has been enhanced by her connection to Nev and the film's success.

Meanwhile, Nev and friends emerged from the affair with a major film deal. *Catfish* made a sensation at the Sundance Film Festival and was released by Universal Studios in September 2010. It grossed over \$30 million in its theatrical release and garnered many strong reviews. Some critics



doubted the coincidence of the filmmakers capturing so much footage of Nev's chatting with “Megan” and questioned the ethics of filming Angela

and her family without their initial consent. Nevertheless, *Catfish* struck a collective nerve, probing the complicated ways we present ourselves and interact with others online. These questions are especially relevant for Millennials, 25% of whom admit to dating online.

In 2012, MTV premiered its “Catfish” show, featuring Nev and his filmmaking pal, Max Joseph. Following a formula close to the film, each episode consists of Nev and Max meeting a new hopeful romantic who has fallen for someone they've met online. Nev stages a face-to-face, where—surprise!—the mystery lover is not who they claimed to be. MTV's marketing captures the show's wide appeal: “When that fateful knock on the front door finally comes—only one thing is certain—that these incredible voyages will be filled with mystery, uncertainty, forgiveness, joy, and sometimes, even shocking revelations.” The sixth season began airing in August 2016.

CATFISHING IN THE HEADLINES

In 2013, Notre Dame's star quarterback, Manti Te'o, made news in a highly publicized catfishing scandal. After announcing that his girlfriend Lennay Kekua had died of leukemia, an online blog revealed that Kekua had not died—because she had never lived. Te'o admitted that he had lied to his family and had never met Kekua, but claimed to have been completely innocent about the hoax. Over a series of press stories and interviews, it emerged that Te'o had been “catfished” by a male acquaintance who invented Kekua. Te'o weathered the scandal, went on to play for the San Diego Chargers and, according to reports, has found an actual, in-the-flesh, girlfriend. •

WHY CALL IT “CATFISHING?”

Towards the end of the documentary, Angela’s husband Vince relays a bit of folklore that inspired the film’s title:

“They used to tank cod from Alaska all the way to China. They’d keep them in vats in the ship. By the time the codfish reached China, the flesh was mush and tasteless. So this guy came up with the idea that if you put these cods in these big vats, put some catfish in with them and the catfish will keep the cod agile. And there are those people who are catfish in life. And they keep you on your toes. They keep you guessing, they keep you thinking, they keep you fresh. And I thank god for the catfish because we would be droll, boring, and dull if we didn’t have somebody nipping at our fin.”

The image of the catfish and the cod—though scientifically incorrect—has been around for over a century. In a 1913 essay called “The Catfish,” religious writer Henry W. Nevinson used the parable to argue that Christianity was a catfish that had kept Europe’s collective soul awake. Christian writers later in the 20th century used the catfish image to similar purpose. Whether the modern definitions of “catfishing” align with theological meanings of the past is up for debate. But the events of *Kingdom Come* do suggest that deceptive online behaviors can have the benefit of reawakening and sharpening our non-virtual lives.

BEFORE CATFISH, THERE WAS:

- *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare: A group of tricksters write a fake love letter to gloomy Malvolio, pretending to be from the fair Olivia and instructing him how to dress and behave. It leads to much ridicule at Malvolio’s expense and, unlike Nev, he’s not a good sport.
- *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand: Large-nosed Cyrano writes letters for handsome Christian and even lends his own voice to woo their beloved Roxanne. Just before his death, Cyrano reveals to Roxanne that it’s been his words she loved all along.
- *Closer* by Patrick Marber: Dan and Larry “meet” in a dirty internet chatroom, where Dan pretends to be a woman named Anna. The online encounter sets up the intertwining of four people in a stinging look at modern love and betrayal.
- *Two Boys*, an opera with music by Nico Muhly, libretto by Craig Lucas and *6969*, a play by Jordan Seavey: Both are based on the same real-life crime, in which a young man in Manchester, England created a group of fake profiles, not only to lure the boy he loves, but to incite his own killing.



Advertisement for *Two Boys*

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR KIP FAGAN



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with *Kingdom Come* director Kip Fagan about his work.

Ted Sod: Where were you born and educated? When and how did you realize you wanted to become a theatre director? Did you have any teachers who had a profound influence on you?

Kip Fagan: I was born and raised in Omaha, Nebraska. Theatre was never something that interested me very much—actually, whenever I was forced as a kid to see a play I'd be like, "Why would anyone want to voluntarily do something this corny?" Then when I was a sophomore in high school, my actor friends dragged me to see a play in the mildewy attic space of an old downtown warehouse building. A theatre company called the Blue Barn had just been started by a group of recent SUNY Purchase grads who found free space in Omaha, and they were doing Sam Shepard's *Action*. I sat in the front row (of three) with my mouth agape the entire time. Around the time the actor playing Jeep pulled the real fish out of an ice-water-filled bucket and gutted it with a bowie knife about six inches from my face, I was hooked. I swear that pun was not intended.

That's when I started acting in school plays. Then after my senior year in high school, I somehow procured a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (then run by Lynne Cheney!) to study Brecht for the summer. With that dough I went to New York and bought a bunch of books and had a terrible time understanding the *verfremdungseffekt* or anything else Brecht was writing about, so I decided to direct his adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* with a group of high school and early college students in Omaha. No one had any ego involved, none of us knew what we were doing, and I'm sure it was consequently the best work I've ever done.

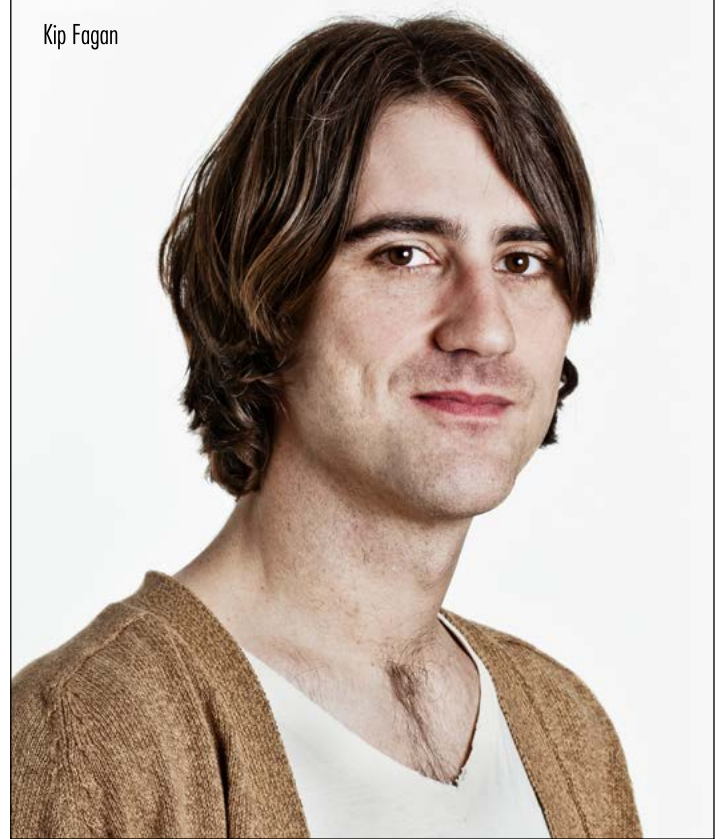
After dropping out of Oberlin College (couldn't afford it), I moved to Seattle, where I started a small theatre company called Printer's Devil. We produced new play after new play, experimented wildly, made lots of mistakes, and did some interesting and fulfilling work. That ended up being my higher education.

In high school I had a teacher named Alfred DiMauro who was enormously important to me. He took me seriously, asked hard questions, didn't settle for lazy answers. My senior year I navigated my schedule so he taught six out of my nine classes. He snuck me the audio recording of Peter Brook's production of *Marat/Sade* and let me stay after school to watch the laser disc of David Bowie doing Brecht's *Baal*. He anticipated my interests before I had any idea what they were, and I'm in profound debt to him.

TS: Why did you choose to direct *Kingdom Come*? How will you collaborate with playwright Jenny Rachel Weiner on this world premiere?

KF: The first thing that attracted me to Jenny's play was the crackling comedy of it. Sometimes buoyant and sparkly, sometimes biting and dark, the humor in the script keeps the play afloat amidst the pretty severe darkness and loneliness of the characters. It's a humane kind of comedy. The second thing that really compelled me, both in content and in form, were the scenes that take place inside the Internet, the chat scenes between Sam and Layne. Content-wise, Jenny has done such a

Kip Fagan



remarkable job developing the relationship between these two women as they communicate under the guise of their fake identities—we see the bond being created, deepening, and splintering in startlingly intimate fashion, without them being in the same room. And formally, how does one stage online messaging? I didn't know, and it's exciting to not know things. The third attraction was the ending of the play, which I find so smart and ambiguous. It's open-ended and doesn't let you leave the play settled. So, come for the comedy, stay for the intimacy, leave with some disturbing ambiguity—that's a good recipe for a night at the theatre.

Jenny's and my collaboration has so far been very harmonious. We did the Roundabout reading last year and a weeklong workshop early this year, and we've been seeing pretty eye to eye on changes that need to be made, the tone that needs to be struck, the way things should look, sound, and feel. As a big believer in the fortifying effects of disagreement and argument, I'm gonna have to inject some disharmony soon. I'm sure that will take care of itself once we start rehearsals.

TS: What do you think *Kingdom Come* is about? Does the play have personal resonance for you and, if so, how? How do you understand the psyche of the character of Samantha?

KF: To me, *Kingdom Come* is about connection being forged through the murk of loneliness and despair. There are of course issues of fantasy and reality, artifice and actuality, that pervade the play. But at its core I think it's a desperate attempt to make a bond with another person

through intense obstacles, both internal and external. It's kind of hard to be a human and not have personal resonance with that type of story.

I can't readily put myself in the psychological position of a person who is 600 pounds. But I understand self-loathing, and I understand self-destructiveness. Most of us do. And really I'm not sure it's my job to "understand the psyche" of a character, but rather to have empathy for and curiosity about that character, which will hopefully spur the kinds of questions in rehearsal that will help an actor toward such understanding.

TS: Can you share a bit about your process? How do you like to conduct rehearsals? What research did you do about the world of the play?

KF: I like a fun room, a room where jokes come easily, tangential stories are permitted, where people feel excited to be there and have the permission to make fools of themselves, to take chances and be creative. Knock on wood I'll be able to provide that.

There's some obvious research to be done on this play, which I did. Episodes of "My 600-lb Life," the *Catfish* documentary. As a football fan, I was very fascinated a few years ago about by the Manti Te'o situation, and I did a lot more reading about that in preparation for these rehearsals. I also did a little reading about psychological disorders like maladaptive daydreaming, though that kind of clinical analysis can sometimes freeze the imagination.

The online component of the play, as I said earlier, is a fun theatrical challenge. I'm interested in the moment when you become fully immersed in an online world, when it's no longer about pixels on a screen but about your fantasy life. How does one inhabit that brain space onstage? We have some thoughts, and I'm looking forward to finding out.

TS: What did you look for in casting the actors? What traits did you need?

KF: We needed actors with great comic instincts and timing combined with an intense vulnerability and emotionality. That's pretty much true for plays in general, but in a play like this that walks a tightrope line between comedy and darkness, it's essential. We have an awesome group.

TS: How will the play manifest itself visually? How are you collaborating with your design team?

KF: The interplay between the mundanity of the suburban Nevada landscape and the richness of the fantasy-driven Internet world was our primary design concern. There are a few different locations and we wanted to transition from place to place instantaneously without moving set pieces on and off, so Samantha's very stark beige living room is basically our blank canvas, and all the other locations use that backdrop. And the depressing sparseness of her apartment becomes an ideal floor-to-ceiling projection screen for the online sections.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?

KF: Being a director is terrific because you're able to experience the world through so many different lenses—a different way of looking

at the world through each new script you work on. So I find continual inspiration through each new collaborator. And exposure to new places and people is essential. A few months ago I worked on a new play at the Sundance Theatre Lab, which this year took place in Marrakech, Morocco. Four American projects were developed alongside four Middle Eastern/North African projects, and getting the chance to meet and hang out with artists from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestine, and other places all over the European and African continents was incredibly invigorating and inspiring. And I'm continually inspired by my wife Heidi Schreck, an amazing actor, writer, and all-around brilliant creature.

TS: What other projects are you working on besides *Kingdom Come*?

KF: The next project I'm directing in New York is my friend Zayd Dohrn's remarkable play *The Profane* at Playwrights Horizons. It's about two Middle Eastern immigrant families, one aggressively secular and westernized, the other very observant and conservative. The son of the observant family and the daughter of the secular one have fallen in love, and the coming together of the two clans pushes their values of tolerance and understanding to the brink.

TS: Do you have any advice for young people who want to be stage directors?

KF: Be curious. Go see things: plays, art exhibits, rock shows, baseball games, street fairs, esoteric art-house films, blockbuster movies, competitive eating contests, whatever. Be small-c catholic in your tastes; always try to be expanding your range of interests. Become easily obsessed with people and things. Ask lots of questions. Cultivate your talent for listening. Always be working. It's just as valuable to be picking apart a Chekhov play with a bunch of friends in your apartment as it is to be directing a production at a theatre. Be perfectly willing to say you don't know the answer to a question. •



CATFISHING AND ONLINE DISINHIBITION

In *Kingdom Come*, characters Samantha and Layne entangle themselves in a complicated instance of classic online *catfishing*, the term used to describe a relationship in which at least one party dishonestly pretends to be somebody they are not. Online identity alteration also takes many forms beyond romantic deception, including trolls (deliberately upsetting or offensive online personalities) in virtual chat communities, avatars (humanlike cartoon figures) in role-playing games, profiles on social media, and voyeurs on pornographic websites. Many times, online users engaging in identity deception end up doing or saying heightened or even drastic things—sometimes cruel and disrespectful, sometimes generous and empowering—that they might never do or say offline, a behavioral tendency known as the online disinhibition effect. Contributing to this disinhibition are six psychological “factors” which are thought to stem from the ways in which the Internet, in just a couple of decades, has subverted those natural, evolutionary means of communication that our species has been learning for millennia.

So much of our everyday communication takes the form of nonverbal cues—body language, physical presence, eye contact—yet online communication is largely devoid of any information but text. This faceless medium allows Internet users to suddenly feel a sense of *invisibility* and *anonymity*, as though their actions are untraceable and disconnected from the rest of their lives. Combined with a sense of *minimized authority*, in which an online environment “equalizes” its members regardless of real-world power, wealth, or class status, these phenomena allow users to feel less self-conscious or responsible for their online contributions, and they may therefore do or say something out of character without feeling any ownership of it. Web users may even rationalize certain uncharacteristic actions online with the thought that their Internet activity is “not really me.” The Internet also allows users to post or

send a message and then escape the immediate reactions of its readers. In face-to-face communication, we must deal with the instantaneous impacts that our words have on another person, which has a large effect on what we choose to reveal in any given moment. The Web, however, provides an *asynchronicity* that allows us to distribute a potentially hard-hitting message and return to it when we are ready to deal with the response—if we return to it at all.

Further disconnecting our online actions from our sense of actual self is the somewhat less obvious phenomenon of *solipsistic introjection*. *Solipsism* is the theory that one’s own mind is the only existing entity in the universe, and that every other person and object around it is only an extension of that mind’s imagination. Solipsistic introjection, then, describes a phenomenon of perception that arises in long-term chat conversations when Person B’s entire existence, from Person A’s perspective, simply takes the form of a series of messages or images. In this circumstance, Person A’s brain can, even unconsciously, fill in the gaps about how Person B sounds or looks. As Person A constructs Person B’s existence in their mind, they may confuse the fictional personality they are creating with the person with whom they are actually communicating, and, without knowing it, Person A may feel as though they are speaking

with an entity that they “solipsistically introjected.” In other words, Person A may unconsciously forget that the messages are in fact being sent by another real person and not the fictional character in their head. The massive, interactive virtual world of the Internet can lead to a similar, though perhaps more intense, phenomenon called *dissociative imagination*, in which, also perhaps unconsciously, all of one’s online actions can feel like a game, wholly separate from everyday life and without any real consequences. A person with this mindset may feel little or no responsibility at all for their online actions.





These psychological factors that contribute to online disinhibition can help explain a good deal about why somebody may catfish—or why they might fall victim to catfishing. When asked why they engage in online deception, participants in studies on catfishing have exhibited telltale signs of the effects of “invisibility” and “dissociative imagination.” They cite as explanation their desire to present an “ideal” or “improved” version of themselves to appear more attractive to their online peers, and some have cited the notion that the Internet is mutually understood as a world of fantasy and deception—in other words, they claim, “everyone lies online.” Those on the receiving end of the catfishing, meanwhile, can grow incredibly attached to their unmet partner as their imagination fills in the gaps in their knowledge of their romantic interest with idealized details; they may begin to “solipsistically introject” a perfect romantic match in their heads. Furthermore, while the Internet does allow for a large degree of asynchronicity, it also accustoms our brains to the instant gratification of a “New Message” or an “Achievement Unlocked.” In a romantic situation, this kind of correspondence has been shown to result in heightened emotional experiences and more intense feelings of attachment.

While catfishing often results in harmful, unhealthy relationships, not all online identity play is negative. Interactive online communities—including multi-user domains (MUDs), virtual worlds like Second Life, and massively multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) like World of Warcraft—can serve as platforms for people to explore sides of their identity that they may feel insecure or

even unsafe expressing in the real world. These so-called “identity workshops” may allow an online user to exhibit facets of their “true self” that they perhaps hide in everyday life, or even create a version of themselves which they hope to attain offline. These “ideal” versions of one’s identity created online can in fact lead to real-world self-improvement and empowerment. One such documented case involved a Second Life user who in her real life had been stuck in an abusive relationship for years. She created a Second Life personality named Nina whose self-confident and independent personality met a great deal of validation and encouragement from other avatars in the virtual world, and, one day, Nina “took over” the user’s real-world presence. Confident and energized, the user adopted facets of Nina’s behavior and personality in her face-to-face interactions, enabling her to abandon her real-life abusive relationship and lead a happier life. This kind of story happens over and over again in online support groups, where the disinhibition effect can also account for generous, altruistic actions that certain web users might otherwise be too shy or nervous to carry out in person. Online disinhibition, therefore, is by no means always toxic.

Certain cases of catfishing or other abnormal online behavior may seem outrageous or unlikely from an outside perspective, but even the most outlandish interactions in cyberspace often stem simply from the ways our brains interpret and are shaped by a mode of communication to which our species is still, actually, very new. The Internet itself, after all, has only existed for the last 25 of humanity’s 200,000 years on Earth. Our brains are still “figuring out” how to behave online...and nobody who uses the Internet should assume that they are immune to online disinhibition. •

INTERVIEW WITH ACTOR CARMEN M. HERLIHY



Education Dramaturg Ted Sod spoke with *Kingdom Come* actress Carmen M. Herlihy about her role as Samantha Carlin.

Ted Sod: Where were you born?

Carmen M. Herlihy: I am from Maui, Hawaii.

TS: What made you decide to become an actor?

CMH: I don't remember a specific moment I decided to be an actor, but my mother used to tell this story about how when I was really, really young, like 3 or 4 years old, I would stand in front of the mirror and "act," making myself cry, and then laugh and then cry again—as if I were already studying how to do that. So I think perhaps I wanted to be an actor even before I made the decision to try and be one. It was the only thing I ever wanted to do. When I got accepted into theatre school, I made a commitment to pursue acting as a profession.

TS: Where did you get your training?

CMH: I received my BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. I also trained at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) in London, as well as the ETW Program in Amsterdam and the Public Theater's Shakespeare Lab.

TS: Did you have any teachers who profoundly influenced you?

CMH: Geoff Bullen was a teacher I had when I studied at RADA who profoundly changed my approach to acting. He was able to do what no other teacher had been able to do up until that point, which was to get me out of my own way. He has this method called "The Red Mist" which is basically a little trick you do to "disappear into the role" or rather, "enter into the world of the play." It's basically letting go of all those actor neuroses to just listen to the play, the character you play, the other characters around you and to silence out the white noise of doubt and fear and those other bits that cling to actors when we work. It's such a small, kind of silly little thing (if you aren't an actor or can sympathize with actors), but I believe in it and I still do it before every performance.

TS: Why did you choose to do the role of Samantha in Jenny Rachel Weiner's *Kingdom Come*?

CMH: It's a character that you don't often see on stage. Deeply flawed and struggling with physical as well as emotional limitations. I knew it would be a part that would require a great amount of physical as well as emotional work, and to have an opportunity to be challenged by that is something I couldn't pass up. I believe an actor never stops learning, and if we are lucky, the role we play is an opportunity to learn. I knew it was going to be a tremendous amount of work, but instead of dreading that, I really hoped I would be given a chance to do that work. It's also a play I would want to see, and that's usually an indication that I feel it's something special.

TS: What kind of preparation or research do you have to do before rehearsals begin in order to play Samantha?

CMH: I actually spend a great deal of time gathering intel. I don't work on the script before we start rehearsal. I don't like setting in stone the character. I have a good solid idea of the play and the character, but I feel setting something in stone makes it difficult to work in notes and suggestions from the director and playwright, as well as the other

Carmen M. Herlihy



actors. I like having a strong idea of my character but remaining open to whatever is discovered in the rehearsal room. I really appreciate notes and thoughts from the creative team as well as listening to what my fellow actors are doing in the room. So I make sure the prep I do before rehearsal equips me with as much information that could be helpful to the play, regardless of whether it ends up being used or not, but not so much work that it makes me feel like "I've got it." That's what rehearsal is for, To Find IT.

Before I start rehearsing for anything, I enjoy researching the thematic elements of the play. For me, *Kingdom Come* is a play about loneliness and the desire for connection, as well as the need to matter to someone. So I've been reading quite a bit about loneliness. Three books in particular have been incredibly helpful: *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* by John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick; *Alone: Finding Connection in a Lonely World* by Andy Braner; and re-reading one of the greatest books ever written, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

I also start compiling a playlist. Music has always been a huge part of my day to day relationship with the world. And I find it helps so much with setting the tone and mood of a play as well as relaxing or energizing me, depending on what I need for it to do at any given time.

I also start keeping a lookout for images, photos that correlate with the

story of the play, or the mood of the character or a particular scene. Sometimes I come away with a binder of an image book and other times just a few, and once I came away with just one single photo.

TS: I realize the rehearsal process hasn't begun yet, but can you share some of your initial thoughts about Samantha with us?

CMH: I like to think of Samantha as the sort of person who would not make a great first impression. She's definitely someone you have to spend some time getting to know. She hides. She feels safest in isolation. Although she craves connection, she also fears it. The internet provides both isolation and connection. She can project whatever she wants to that world and retain complete control of how she is perceived. Face to face connection doesn't have that guarantee. She's bolder when she's alone. The internet allows you to remain alone, even while interacting with someone.

TS: What do you find most challenging/exciting about this role?

CMH: Exploring the physical life of Samantha is something that excites me so much. At theatre school, you are trained to utilize your entire body in your work: physicality, vocal work, along with the emotional and intellectual life of the character. This role requires all those elements that I went to school for. It's going to be fun to figure out how she maneuvers in that body, what she sounds like, how she breathes, as well as all the acting stuff; it's really building this character from the outside in. The idea of transforming completely is exciting. And the challenge to keep this person grounded in truthfulness is going to be work. I love that kind of work.

TS: Can you talk about the relationship between Samantha and her caregiver, Delores, as you currently perceive it?

CMH: Right now, I think Samantha wishes Delores would take care of her even if she weren't being paid to do it. I think she would like to be chosen by someone as opposed to being burdened to them. Delores is a paid caregiver, and I think Samantha at times has to make a conscious effort to remind herself that Delores isn't a friend, and most definitely not her mother, and she feels she's a job to Delores and nothing else. But that doesn't stop her from wishing that weren't the case.

TS: What do you look for from a director when working a new play?

CMH: I really love it when a director loves the play. They approach rehearsals differently when they have a personal investment in the play. They care more when it isn't just a job. I like directors who care about the details and never stop trying to figure it out. I like collaborators rather than dictators. Directors who are eager to work with an actor as opposed to just working the actor. I worked with a director very early

on in my professional career that called actors "props that can move themselves." Needless to say that director didn't have much respect for the actor's process or contribution and in turn the cast had a difficult time trusting the director. If I feel safe with a director, I have no fear in rehearsal. If I feel supported and encouraged to fail, I put everything I have to give into that room. I like directors who are respectful and kind enough to tell me if something isn't working. I really respond to directors who give clear, active notes. Who allow actors to work through a scene without manhandling us when we are still trying to stumble our way through. I am not the kind of actor who likes to over-talk through things; I prefer to just try and then let's see. I really appreciate a director who allows us the time to explore early on and isn't so preoccupied with the end product from the first day of rehearsal. And directors with a good sense of humor are always fun to work with.

TS: What do you look for from the playwright?

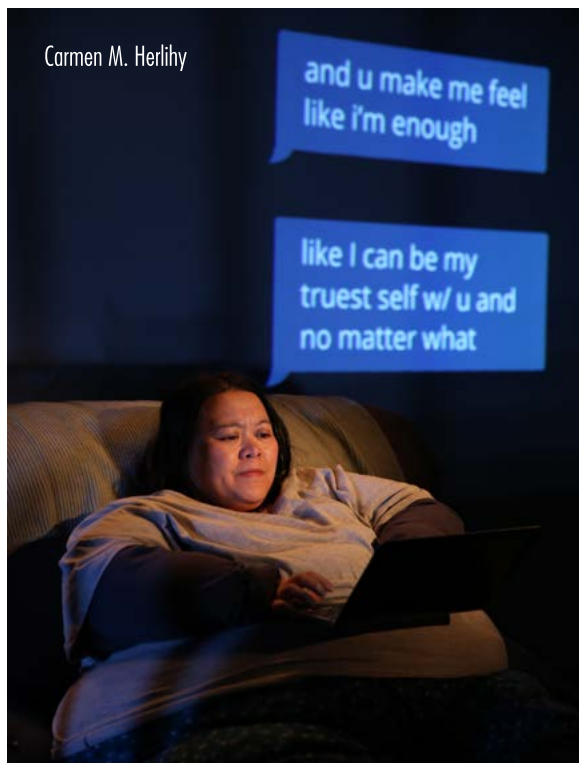
CMH: I love playwrights who write about the world and not just their world. I love funny writers who still manage to make us feel. I love being surprised by a play. I love meeting characters I have never met before. I also really love it when a playwright loves their characters and fights for them. I like knowing I have an ally. I have a deep respect for writers. Without them there would be nothing. I like hearing their suggestions, their ideas, and I find even small little bits of what inspired the play to be useful. And I am always grateful when they are ready to hand over the play to actors. I never take that trust for granted.

TS: How do you keep yourself inspired as an artist?

CMH: I listen to a lot of music. I read a lot of books. I watch a lot of movies. Late night walks through my neighborhood. Talking to other artists. Talking to people who aren't artists. Looking at an endless number of tumblr sites and blogs. COFFEE. I still write letters. I watch every Mets and Warriors game I can (there are very few things more dramatic than a sports game). I try to keep up with current events and the world around me, from pop culture gossip to the political landscape. I people-watch. I binge-watch TV shows. I stay interested.

TS: Students reading this interview will want to know what it takes to be a successful actor—what advice can you give young people who say they want to act?

CMH: Be kind. To yourself and the people you work with. Enjoy what you do and love it. The minute you stop loving it, it's time to move on. Also, be GRATEFUL for every opportunity you are given and know that because you got that opportunity someone else lost out. Have fun even when it seems impossible to have fun. Enjoy yourself. And remember TO PLAY. •



CARSON CITY



Population: 54,521 Footprint: 145 square miles
Elevation: 4,672 feet above sea level
Median Household Income: \$50,108

Demographics: 68.1% white, 23.4% Hispanic or Latino,
2.2% African American, 2.8% American Indian and Alaska Native,
2.5% Asian

Carson City, Nevada's capital, is nestled right in the crook of the state's elbow, about a 25-mile drive to the California state line. In a valley surrounded by mountains, the city is neighbor to Lake Tahoe, the Carson River, and the Sierra Nevadas.

In *Kingdom Come*, Suz, screams, "GOD GET ME OUT OF THIS HELL HOLE!" But in fact, though Carson has its share of strip-mall standards (the script mentions that Layne and Delores shop, respectively, at Ross Dress for Less and Dollar Tree), it's also a diverse city with a unique Western history, beautiful scenery, and a plethora of outdoor sports.

Carson residents take great pride in the city's history. The birth of the city as we know it dates back to 1844, when explorer John C. Frémont and frontiersman Christopher "Kit" Carson wandered off-trail on a mapping expedition. They'd been on their second trip on the Oregon Trail, but a southern detour led them to Lake Tahoe and the valley (and farmable land) that would later become Carson City. It wasn't until 1858 that construction began in earnest, but when it did, town-builders Abraham Curry, John. J. Musser, Franklin

Proctor, and Benjamin F. Green dreamed big, setting aside ten acres of land for what they imagined would be a capitol building and grounds. Their hopes were proven sound in 1861, when Carson City was named the territorial capital, and cemented in 1864, when the city became Nevada's state capital. Throughout the latter half of the 19th century, the city benefitted from the wealth boom of the nearby Comstock Lode. The 1859 lode was the first major discovery of silver ore in the US, and it brought major money to the region. Carson City itself *made* some of that money—a branch of the US Mint opened in the city in 1870, and the Capitol Building was constructed the same year. By the 1880s, the mines were in decline, but the Virginia and Truckee Railroad, built to support the mining industry, kept Carson on the map as a freight and timber center. Today, Carson commemorates its history in museums (it's home to the Nevada State Museum and the Nevada State Railroad Museum, and you can still visit the now-defunct Mint) and local events, including a "Kit Carson Ghost Walk" and the annual Nevada Day, which celebrates the state's admission to the Union with parades, 1800s-style balls, and even a beard contest. •

ANXIETY DISORDER

Anxiety disorders are mental health conditions characterized by excessive fear, worry, panic, or apprehension. Anxiety disorders, like obesity, are connected to human evolution. To survive a dangerous world we developed a fight-or-flight response to danger. When we perceive something potentially harmful, our nervous system releases hormones that cause an immediate physical reaction: our heart rate and breathing speed up, our muscles tense, and we become hyper-aware of the world around us. We're ready for combat or escape.

Anxiety disorders aren't a modern problem; they go back to ancient Greece and Egypt. The Greeks used the term "hysteria" to describe something akin to modern anxiety. Their choice of words, from the Greek word for uterus, *hysteron*, shows that the disorder was seen as gender-specific. The concept was tied to female sexuality: hysteria was first thought to be caused by a lack of sex and childbearing, but later tied to exhaustion due to childbearing. This understanding of hysteria lived on through the Victorian era, when anxious women were treated with vibrators and electroshock therapy.

In the 1920s Sigmund Freud described a mental state of "expectant fear" or "anxious expectation," in which a person was ready to attach fear to any circumstance or incident—a good description of our modern understanding of anxiety disorders.

Today it's estimated that between 2-5% of the population suffers from an anxiety disorder. An imbalance of neurotransmitters, chemicals that transmit messages in the brain, may predispose individuals to anxiety. There are many ideas about the environmental factors that influence the development of anxiety disorders. Is anxiety caused by past trauma? Because we no longer have to fight for our everyday survival, and thus have the luxury of worrying more? Are our nervous systems overstimulated by the pace and technology of our modern world? Is it connected to the ubiquity of media delivering the details of frightening news events from around the globe?

Anxiety disorders can be treated with medication, psychotherapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, changes in diet and lifestyle, and/or relaxation therapy. •

MORBID OBESITY

Kingdom Come centers on the life of Samantha, a 600-pound woman largely confined to her bed. Audiences see her struggle to stand, suffer heart palpitations, and lose her hair—all complications of *morbid obesity*. Both words have Latin roots: morbid comes from the Latin *morbus*, which means “sickness, disease, ailment, illness,” and obesity from *obesus*, “that has eaten itself fat.”

Over the past 35 years, obesity rates in the United States have doubled. Today, almost 36% of American adults are obese, defined as having a body mass index over 30. For most of human history, food was scarce, and evolution favored those whose genes allowed them to store fat. Changes in the food system, lifestyle, and activity levels in the developed world have led to many of us carrying around extra pounds. But a small portion of the population, just over 6%, is classified as morbidly or severely obese, with a body mass index over 40, indicating that they weigh at least twice what a person of their height should weigh.

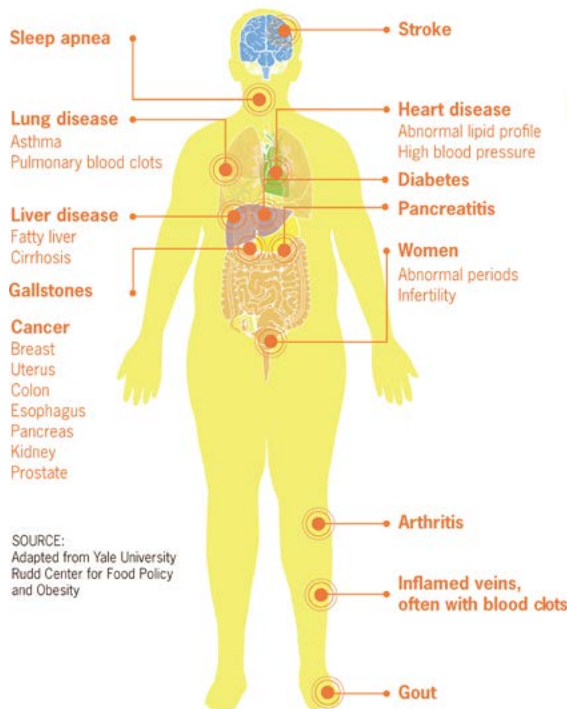
On the basic level, morbid obesity is caused by an individual taking in more calories than they expend. The factors that drive someone to eat much more than they physically need are often psychological. Studies show that

there is a bi-directional relationship between obesity and mood disorders such as depression and anxiety: those with these disorders are more likely to develop obesity, but obesity can also cause these conditions. Someone who is depressed, for example, may turn to emotional eating and have little motivation to exercise, leading to weight gain, which reinforces poor self-esteem. Conversely, an obese person may face workplace discrimination or become physically unable to participate in events, leading to depression.

Morbid obesity raises an individual’s risk for many diseases, including the two biggest causes of death in the United States, heart disease and cancer, as well as respiratory disease, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, and many more. It also causes reproductive disorders: in Samantha’s case, her hair loss is likely caused by high levels of insulin triggering her reproductive system to produce excess testosterone and androgens.

Successful treatment of obesity requires a combination of dieting, behavior modification therapy, and exercise. Only about 5% of morbidly obese people achieve a healthy weight through these measures alone. Many also require bariatric surgery, in which the digestive system is surgically altered to be able to absorb or process less food, in order to lose weight. •

Medical Complications of Obesity



SOURCE:
Adapted from Yale University
Rudd Center for Food Policy
and Obesity

BMI

The medical establishment in the United States uses *body mass index*, or BMI, to assess an individual’s risk for weight-related diseases. BMI is calculated by dividing an individual’s weight by his or her height squared, and it was developed by a Belgian mathematician named Adolphe Jacques Quetelet in 1835. Quetelet—who developed the concept that the statistics from a small sample of a population could be used to extrapolate information about the entire population—was trying to define the “normal man” in order to work out the distribution of weight and height across the country.

In 1972, American researcher Ancel Keys found a correlation between “Quetelet’s index,” as it was then known, and mortality. Keys coined the term body mass index. Interestingly, Keys was instrumental in the development of WWII’s K-Ration (which may be named for him) and the Mediterranean diet.

In recent years, BMI’s usefulness as a tool for assessing an individual’s health has been questioned, as it does not take into account body fat percentage, age, or build.

AN ACTOR AND A SUIT

Samantha's weight is integral to her character—it has isolated her, making the thrill of online connection that much more potent—but it isn't the plot of *Kingdom Come*. It's each character's desire to connect, to stave off loneliness, that actually drives the play forward. To that end, costume designer Tilly Grimes has been conscious of creating a suit that supports, rather than merely signifies, Samantha's character. At the beginning of the play, when the audience steps into the Black Box and comes face to face with Samantha (she begins the show onstage), the suit is, Grimes explains, "a spectacle." But as the audience dives into the narrative, the spectacle "fades away."

Creating a suit that can fade away is a feat of engineering and artistry, the result of much research, testing, trial, and error. Once actor Carmen M. Herlihy was cast in the role of Samantha, Grimes and director Kip Fagan discussed how best to create a suit that would look organic on her 5'2" frame—especially in the intimate 62-seat space of the Underground.

Grimes and Herlihy had worked together on a previous show; using photos from that production's costume fittings, Grimes began the rendering process. She drew on top of the photographs, sketching out where she could build on Herlihy's own shape in a believable way, "scaling up" Herlihy's own body rather than simply putting weight on top of it.

To figure out how exactly to scale up, Grimes and Fagan did visual research and watched many episodes of "My 600-Pound Life," a TLC network show that follows real people preparing for gastric bypass surgery. In watching the show, Grimes was struck by the many ways that different people hold weight; some store fat in their bellies, others in their legs or thighs. Grimes and Fagan narrowed their focus down to a single woman who shared Herlihy's small frame and began to model the suit off of her example. At

each step, they had to consider not just whether Samantha could look a certain way (i.e., whether a 5'2" woman could weigh 600 pounds), but whether an audience would believe her appearance onstage. At the full 600 pounds described by the script, Herlihy's head would be dwarfed by the rest of her body. With the budget constraints and up-close-and-personal space of the Underground, a face prosthetic wasn't an option. Plus, Fagan and Grimes didn't want to cover every inch of Herlihy's skin; they wanted the audience to see her own face, her own neck, her own hands.

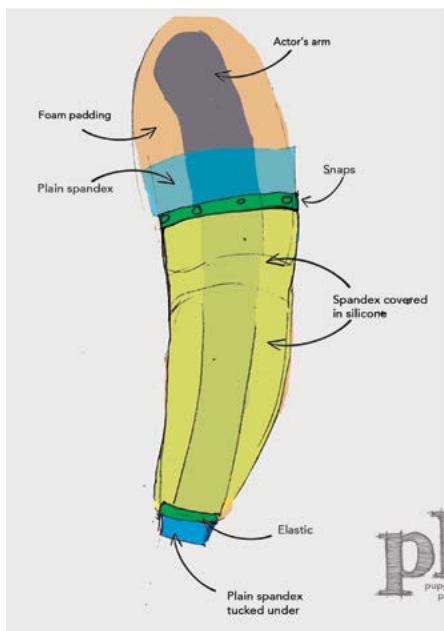
Ultimately, the suit's representative weight is between 490-510 pounds; a more manageable scale on Herlihy's small frame. To show the team what the character would look like onstage, Grimes drew a 360-degree rendering of Samantha's body, unclothed. She was conscious to include asymmetry, considering Herlihy's own dominant side and how that would affect muscle growth and fat distribution on Samantha. Once Fagan and playwright Jenny

Rachel Weiner signed off on the look, Grimes got to work on constructing the suit itself.

The first step was the underlying structure of the suit. Grimes brought New York-based Puppet Kitchen Productions onboard to help architect the scaffolding of the suit. The first layer of the suit, a bodysuit, is like a second skin. On top of that is a layer of articulated foam with a poly filling (like what you'd find in a support pillow). That articulated foam keeps the shape of the suit but must be able to condense when Samantha sits and collapse when she stands, with the plaster-like effect of real body fat. To help achieve this movement, the foam is covered in muscle-shaped areas that are filled with tiny (one millimeter in width) polyurethane balls. The pockets of balls (which Grimes affectionately calls "wobble bags") move with Samantha and give the



Original sketch of the suit



Puppet Kitchen Productions's detailed structure of the suit

appearance of cellulite. The bags are placed along muscle lines to help define where fat actually sits on a body: along the lower part of the stomach, along hips, below arms, etc. The entire suit (which is actually four separate parts: a t-shirt-like top, a pair of leggings, and two arms) is covered in another layer

of spandex. And it's all washable—to accommodate 12-16 weeks of wear and tear through rehearsals and performance, the suit has been built for easy (or as easy as possible) maintenance. Though it's machine-washable, it will likely be cleaned through submersion in a bathtub; it's too large to wash in a regular machine. Over time, the poly beads will settle, so the suit will need to be massaged and refilled throughout the run to keep its original dimensions.

Grimes and her team will continue work on the suit throughout rehearsals, and they're still testing a silicone treatment for Herlihy's skin, to better integrate the suit and her own limbs. But right now, the bulk of the work has been passed on to Herlihy. The suit comes with two challenges: it's light (only about 30 pounds), so Herlihy has to create the appearance of heaviness herself. And it's hot. The character of Samantha is onstage for the entire play, so Herlihy will have to get used to spending long stretches of time in the suit without a break. To help with the heat, which will be amplified with stage lights, Grimes and set designer Arnulfo Maldonado have built a fan above Samantha's onstage bed, and the suit includes pockets that can fit cooling packs. Some of Herlihy's fittings have been two full hours—longer than the performance itself—so she already has a sense of the demands the suit will place on her body. And she'll be rehearsing with the suit almost as soon as rehearsals begin, developing body and character as one. •



Suit construction

DESIGNER STATEMENTS

ARNULFO MALDONADO—SET DESIGNER

Kingdom Come to me is very much a rollercoaster of emotions—one minute you're laughing, the next you are struck by the severity of both Sam and Layne's loneliness and need to connect on an emotional level with someone, anyone. The dialogue is so fluid and natural, it grounds both of these women so vividly in their own worlds—you wholly connect with them even though you might not understand their motives at the onset of their interactions online. In designing the set, it was important for me to understand the architecture/styles of homes found in Carson City, Nevada and how the design of such houses would work with and against Sam's bedridden state. Since this woman is confined to her bed, it made sense to Kip Fagan, the director, and me to place her bed in the most communal space found in these homes, the living room (versus a bedroom). That led me to look at hundreds of real estate listings from Carson City, and with many of these listings, the homes are not furnished—bare homes with little in them. This seemed key in terms of Sam's world: Her surroundings are purposely stark and minimal. A very large part of both Sam and Layne's worlds is found online, and it was clear that these sparse rooms would also help in creating clean canvases for their online personas to come to life.

This play has a particular pace in which transitions need to move quickly and seamlessly—a challenge, given the space and the numerous locations that *Kingdom Come* traverses. That said, Sam and her bed needed to feel grounded and permanent, so we decided early on to make the home be the basis for all these different locales, utilizing the various entrances/exits found in the home. The furniture of Sam's home could also then be reconfigured/rethought so as to guide the audience through the office at Layne's work, the café, etc. The Black Box Theatre is an intimate space, and by continuing the carpet of the home under the theatre seats, we hope to allow the play to breathe a bit more and to get that much closer to the audience. The advantage of a small space, coupled with the online world coming to life, is that

it completely immerses one into the rabbit hole that is their online personas/lives.

TILLY GRIMES—COSTUME DESIGNER

The goal for me was to take the humanity and beauty of Jenny's text and help lift it off the page, underlining it while still making all the characters look and feel very real in their clothes. Our first costume challenge was how to make Sam, an obese, housebound 30-something's weight feel real in the intimate space of the Roundabout Underground. After watching copious videos, and diving into the anatomical study of obesity, we were able to learn how various women "wear" their weight. We ended up modeling off of a woman named Bettie-Joe, whose 567 lbs. rested on a petite frame, and who had a comparable height to actress Carmen Herlihy. From there I started to draw a 360-degree sketch of Sam's body as the body suit's basis. As Sam is seated through the play, the way the suit moves presented a challenge. We brought the artists at Puppet Kitchen on board to help fabricate and finesse how the movement of the suit would shift from a seated



to a standing position. We also brought makeup artist Dave Bova on board to finesse the edges of the suit so that we could blur the transition from the suit to the actress's own skin. The insecurity of all the characters in Jenny's play presents an interesting scale from a clothes perspective. The difference between the "peacocking" characters who parade their bodies around with "confidence" versus the quietness of those hiding in their body or clothes. I wanted to help us meet the characters of Suz, Dom, and Delores, who social butterfly in with chatter and energy, while aligning Sam and Layne as the quiet centers of the world. For example, Layne and Sam are less clothing conscious. They are hiding: Sam in her weight, and Layne in her self-consciousness. Their shyness or resignation seems to want less saturated color. An invisibility. Dom, Suz, and Dolores, by contrast, all like to pay attention to how they look. They hustle and bustle in and out with confidence, implying a boldness. By using more color and graphic prints when they each arrive, they bring

an energy to both Layne and Sam. This energy is echoed in Layne and Sam’s alter egos when they fantasize about who they could be. The intimacy of the Underground presents specific parameters. It was clear we had to approach both the body suit and clothes with the level of detail for film—making sure everything feels very lived in and real to honor and not crowd the rich characters Jenny has written.

THOM WEAVER—LIGHTING DESIGNER

When I first read *Kingdom Come*, I found it truly surprising. There’s so much talk these days about our generational struggle with communication technology, but what’s lost in the hand-wringing is that we’re not less connected, we’re more connected than ever. That’s what we’re trying to figure out. I think this play explores the virtual world of relationships without the assumption that it’s always a bad thing. I didn’t have to do a lot of visual research for this production...I rarely do. That’s not typically my approach. A lot of my research was into the story surrounding Manti Te’o. Prior to that research, I’d never heard of “catfishing.” Looking back at the coverage of that story, I’m amazed at the tone of it—the notion that what he did was stupid or gullible. I think what’s lost in that appraisal is that he actually loved this person, he actually felt a connection. It led me to ask this question: Perhaps the fact that the premise of the relationship was fraudulent doesn’t negate the connection itself? The technical challenge of this show is telling a big story in a tiny space. The other challenge is finding a visual language for a digital realm. It is not often we explore the physical space that our virtual lives inhabit. In working on this design, I have had to consider: what does that look and feel like?

DARREL MALONEY—PROJECTION DESIGNER

The projection design for *Kingdom Come* explores how the internet both connects and isolates, creating realities that can evaporate in a moment of doubt. When the play starts, the projections exist as two very separate and isolated images of two people’s computer screens. As the human connection grows, the images and ideas they are chatting about spread across the space and are no longer two separate ideas, but one singular image that takes us into a fantasy world. When the relationship becomes more intimate, the quality of the text we see projected subtly transforms and softens to simulate the psychological intimacy these two are developing. These glowing words on a screen become more human as the fantasy of each other begins to take shape. The animation of the words they are typing out

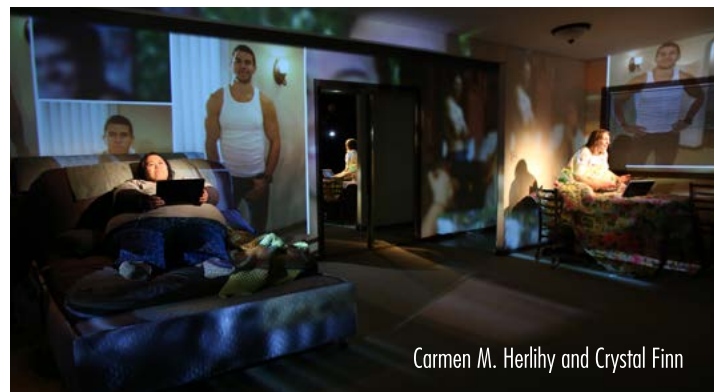
wants to visually convey the emotional value they each put on them as they read these words, alone. The presentation of the text takes on a much more emotive quality than simply subtitling their words. When they are confronted with the reality of the relationship, the projections return to two separate and very isolated worlds, leaving them once again isolated from each other, the human connection broken.

DANIEL PERELSTEIN—SOUND DESIGNER

The sound design of *Kingdom Come* has two main responsibilities. The first is to work with the scenic and lighting designs to help establish location; the second is to work with the video design to create a vivid world of the Internet. In some ways, these two responsibilities represent opposite extremes of the spectrum: one is a world of entirely literal sounds, and the other is a world of complete abstraction.

Because the scenic design for this production is a single set that needs to work for multiple locations, the sound design becomes a streamlined way of helping the audience identify each new location very quickly. The director, Kip Fagan, has created instantaneous shifts between locations, so the sound design involves a number of crisp signifiers to aid these shifts.

In *Kingdom Come*, the Internet is an imagined reality that the characters can escape to. The sound and video designs work together to color this space vividly and support the fantasies that they find in cyberspace. To create the world of the Internet, nothing is off-limits—musical textures, and any sounds we can imagine, become part of the palette. In this day and age, we all know the feeling of losing track of time, and losing yourself, in technology. It was important to me that sound capture this feeling and transport us, rather than being overly concerned with the specific, literal significance of any individual sound. •



Carmen M. Herlihy and Crystal Finn

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

FOR
EDUCATORS

HOW DO ACTORS, DIRECTORS, AND DESIGNERS STAGE AN ONLINE CHAT SCENE IN A LIVE PRODUCTION?

(Common core code: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3.0)

MATERIALS: Script PDF. Optional design elements, such as hand-held lights, sound/music players, available furniture.

DISCUSS Discuss how online communications and chat differ from face-to-face exchanges. Explain that *Kingdom Come* follows an online relationship between two characters who haven't met in person. Discuss the staging challenges of representing an online discussion in a live production. (Note: for a deeper dive, read and discuss the psychology of catfishing on pages 10-11 of this UPSTAGE guide.)

CREATE Students work in groups with at least 2 actors. They may also add a Director and/or a Designer, based on students' interests. Each team takes one of the short sections of online chat dialogue from *Kingdom Come*, provided on this [PDF](#). Explain that these dialogues are intended to represent online chats between two characters who are not in the same place and have never met. Ask students to imagine how they would stage the scene, then rehearse the scene and perform it. (Optional: if you wish to use specific design elements, provide these to the students.)

SHARE & REFLECT Allow a few groups to perform their scenes for the classes. Ask students to discuss how they chose to represent the online world. What are the challenges of staging an online chat scene in a live production?

HOW DOES A PLAYWRIGHT CREATE A CHARACTER DESCRIPTION?

(Common Core Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.D)

READ Read *Morbid Obesity* and/or *Social Anxiety* from pages 14-15 of this guide.

WRITE Ask students to imagine that they are either Samantha, who lives with morbid obesity, or Layne, who has an anxiety disorder. Next, ask them to create a 140-character social media bio for their chosen character.

SHARE & REFLECT Host a gallery walk or reading of selected bios. What was included in the bio? What was left out? Why did you make that choice? How do you think each character sees herself, and how is that different from how others see them?

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

HOW CAN PLAYWRIGHTS WRITE DIALOGUE TO DEVELOP THE CENTRAL RELATIONSHIP OF *KINGDOM COME*?

(Common Core Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3.B)

DISCUSS Lead a discussion about the ending of the play. What happens in the last scenes? How do Samantha and Layne meet? How do they react to their face-to-face meeting? How do we interpret their last chat? How did the events of the play change Samantha and Layne from the beginning to the end? What do you think might happen next?

WRITE Challenge students to write dialogue for the NEXT conversation that Layne and Samantha could have. Students may decide if this is an online chat or a live meeting. Students may work independently or in pairs, with each partner writing the dialogue for one of the characters.

SHARE Ask a few of the students to read their dialogue aloud. Listen for students' ideas about how the characters have changed. Are they stronger/wiser/happier than they were in the beginning? Why do they believe this?

HOW DOES AN ASPIRING PROFESSIONAL CREATE AN ENGAGING SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE?

(Common Core Standards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6)

SHARE Ask students to share, either in small groups or to the class, their career aspirations. You may wish to require students to connect those careers to a Bachelor's degree, or ask students not to choose certain careers.

BRAINSTORM Have students make individual lists of 5-10 qualities and/or skills they will need for their chosen career. For example, an aspiring makeup artist might include creativity, an understanding of color theory, ability to communicate with clients, etc.

STORYBOARD Using smartphones, tablets, computers, or magazines, glue, and paper, have students curate Instagram accounts for their future professional selves. What four images would they share, and why? What do these images reveal about their personal qualities, skills, and aspirations?

REFLECT How were the images you selected different from what you post now? How can social media help—or hurt—you in the professional world?

GLOSSARY

- ALZHEIMER'S:** a progressive disease that destroys memory and other vital mental functions
Delores constantly reminds Samantha about where her son lives as if she has Alzheimer's.
- BUMBLE:** a dating application (app) that only allows women to message men first
Suz claims that being on apps similar to Bumble is the only way to date now.
- THE CHEW:** a panel talk show for food and home entertaining lifestyle
Samantha suggests that she and Dom watch "The Chew" as they flip through channels.
- THE CLOUD:** Internet based computing that allows users to store files, photos, and more
Suz claims that nothing is private anymore since a majority of people's information is stored in the cloud.
- DEEPAK CHOPRA:** American Indian author and alternative medicine advocate; prominent figure in the New Age movement
When Layne feels anxious, she listens to meditation talks from Deepak Chopra to relax.
- EXPAT:** an abbreviation for expatriate; someone who is temporarily residing in another country—an immigrant
Layne claims that Courtney went to museums and smoked cigarettes with an expat.
- GOOP:** a weekly lifestyle publication by Gwyneth Paltrow
Suz follows the lifestyle advice on GOOP religiously.
- HAPPN:** a dating application that notifies you when other uses are within range of GPS location
Suz says that everyone she knows is dating online on through an application such as happn.
- OKCUPID:** a dating application that pairs users based on similar interests and responses to questions
Samantha logs onto her OKCupid account to check to see if she has any matches.
- RUGGELACH:** a pastry made with cream cheese dough and different fillings
Dominick serves people ruggelach at the bakery where he works.
- SCRATCHIES:** scratch-off lottery tickets
Samantha asks Delores how much money she won in scratchies last week.
- SNAPCHAT:** a social media instant photo and video media messaging application
Suz uses Snapchat to take a picture of herself.
- TINDER:** a dating application that allows users to 'swipe' left or right based on one's profile
One of Suz's friends met her husband on Tinder.
- VINE:** a social media application that allows users to share short six second videos on loop
Layne was recorded dancing in a Vine that was sent to the whole office.

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ABOUT ROUNDABOUT

ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY - 50TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

Roundabout Theatre Company (Todd Haimes, Artistic Director) is committed to producing the highest-quality theatre with the finest artists, sharing stories that endure and providing accessibility to all audiences. A not-for-profit company founded in 1965 and now celebrating its 50th anniversary, Roundabout fulfills its mission each season through the production of classic plays and musicals; development and production of new works by established and emerging writers; educational initiatives that enrich the lives of children and adults; and a subscription model and audience outreach programs that cultivate and engage all audiences. Roundabout presents this work on its five stages and across the country through national tours. Roundabout has been recognized with 36 Tonys®, 51 Drama Desks, 62 Outer Critics Circle, 12 Obie and 18 Lucille Lortel Awards. More information on Roundabout's mission, history and programs can be found by visiting roundabouttheatre.org.

2016-2017 SEASON



STAFF SPOTLIGHT: INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIA O'CONNOR, ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE AT ROUNDABOUT THEATRE COMPANY

Ted Sod: Tell us about yourself. Where were you born and educated? How and when did you become Artistic Associate?

Olivia O'Connor: I was born in Pittsburgh, PA, and grew up in a rural town about an hour north of Pittsburgh. I'm a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University's dramaturgy program. While in school, I interned with a couple of New York companies, including Roundabout. After graduation, I came back as an Apprentice (thanks, Education!) and have been with Roundabout ever since, first as the Artistic/Literary Assistant and then as the Artistic Associate.

TS: Describe your job at RTC. What are your responsibilities?

OO: I work with the rest of the Artistic and Literary team to vet script submissions, readings, and productions for inclusion in Roundabout's season. Once a script is picked up by Roundabout for development (in the Underground Reading Series, for instance), I work with the Director of New Play Development, Jill Rafson, and the Manager of Play Development, Nicole Tingir, on any developmental readings or workshops and share notes once a show is in rehearsal/production. I'm the Assistant to Roundabout's Artistic Director, Todd Haimes, and do scheduling and call-juggling on his behalf. My work at Roundabout also involves speaking—hosting occasional post-show talkbacks and

panel discussions on our new plays—and lots and lots of writing, for everything from these UPSTAGE guides to our Playbills.

TS: What is the best part of your job? What is the hardest part?

OO: The best part of my job is reading plays and taking part in their developmental journey. Every part of that process has its perks. I love sitting around the table at a Literary Meeting, hearing what some seriously smart colleagues think about a script; watching multiple readings of a play over the course of months or years; and sharing a note on a preview performance that is later incorporated into the production. Some of the benefits are instantaneous and some are long-term, like watching *The Humans* go from a commission reading to a Tony-Award® winning play. The hardest part of my job is dealing with the disappointment that comes with a very competitive submissions process.

TS: Why do you choose to work at Roundabout?

OO: Because we have one of the most innovative new play development models in the industry, because we produce fantastic and incredibly varied work on all of our stages, and because we know how to throw a really great Opening Night party. •

Learn more at roundabouttheatre.org. Find us on:



WHEN YOU GET TO THE THEATRE

FOR
EDUCATORS

TICKET POLICY

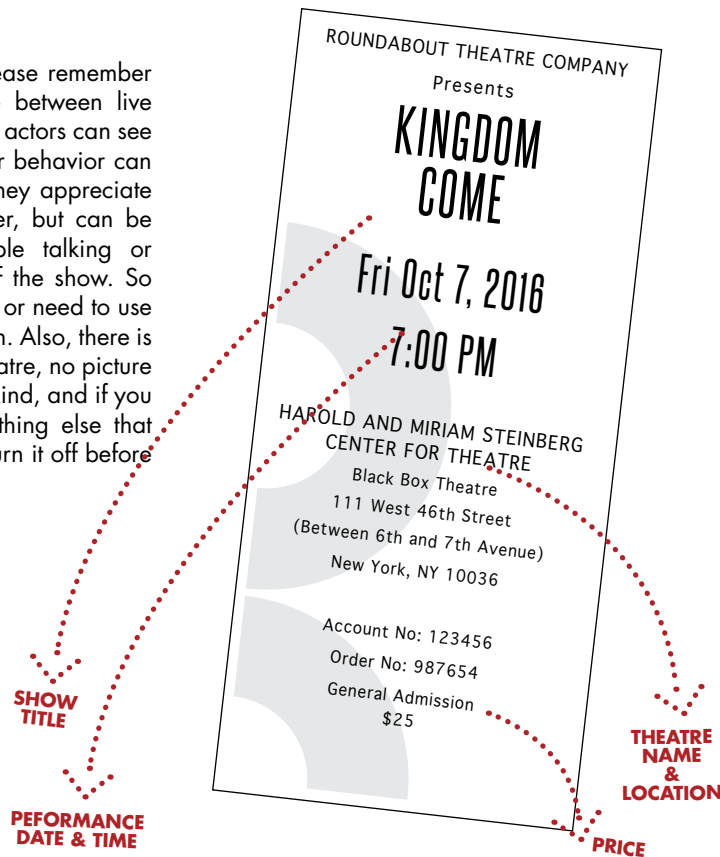
As a student participant in an Education at Roundabout program, you will receive a discounted ticket to the show from your teacher on the day of the performance. You will notice that the ticket indicates the section, row and number of your assigned seat. When you show your ticket to the usher inside the theatre, he or she will show you where your seat is located. These tickets are not transferable and you must sit in the seat assigned to you.

PROGRAMS

All the theatre patrons are provided with a program that includes information about the people who put the production together. In the "Who's Who" section, for example, you can read about the actors' roles in other plays and films, perhaps some you have already seen.

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

As you watch the show please remember that the biggest difference between live theatre and a film is that the actors can see you and hear you and your behavior can affect their performance. They appreciate your applause and laughter, but can be easily distracted by people talking or getting up in the middle of the show. So please save your comments or need to use the rest room for intermission. Also, there is no food permitted in the theatre, no picture taking or recording of any kind, and if you have a cell phone or anything else that might make noise, please turn it off before the show begins.



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Jenny Rachel Weiner is the 2016-17 Tow Foundation Playwright in Residence

Roundabout's work with new and emerging playwrights and directors, as well as development of new work, is made possible by Kathryn Patterson and Tom Kempner.

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