



An MFA Thesis Project written by
Jennifer Bateman Grace

Live stage readings performed:
April 5 (6:30pm), April 6 and 7 (5:30pm)

UCDAVIS

COLLEGE OF LETTERS AND SCIENCE

UC DAVIS

**DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE
AND DANCE**

Presents

Joy, Unboxed

An MFA Project

Written by

Jennifer Bateman Grace

Directed By

Halena Kays

Featuring

**Jess Diaz, Jennifer Grace, Lucas Hatton, Erolina
Kamburova, Danielle Levin, and Tyler Pruyn**

Projections and Video Design

Jennifer Grace

Scenic Design

Jennifer Grace

Sound Design

Jennifer Grace

Technical Supervisor

Patrick O'Reilly

Costume Design

Jennifer Grace

Original Music

Tom Bateman*

Stage Manager

Corinne Balmain

Trigger warning: Adult language and references to violence and self-harm

*"I Don't Wanna Grow Up" written by Tom Waits, performed by Tom Bateman

Playwright's Notes

Late summer, 2014: the best/worst year of my life began. It was just before my infant son had his first birthday, and it was when my husband discovered a mysterious black bruise on his leg that wouldn't go away. For one full year, my heart was pulled in two directions - toward my giggling, happy baby in our Brooklyn apartment, and toward my husband quarantined in the oncology ward of Mount Sinai Hospital on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Always, I was in motion, on the subway, on the sidewalk, in my heart, toward one of them and away from the other. Never in the same place with them both at the same time.

It was during this time that my son became interested in watching a particular genre of videos online called "unboxing" videos. Specifically, he had great enthusiasm for videos where an unseen adult-seeming person played with children's toys while describing the action from offscreen. In particular, there was a video of various figures riding on a school bus that lit up and played music that my son adored. We watched it countless times together. And, as one does when they are exhausted, worn thin, and emotionally spent, my mind would wander with each viewing to the same question: "Who chooses to anonymously record and share videos of an adult playing with toys?"

That question stuck with me for a while.

Late summer, 2015: My husband, died in the hospital on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Exactly two weeks later, our son turned two, and I held a bus themed birthday party for him in Brooklyn.

As a means of coping with my grief, I began writing relentlessly. Not just the heartbreaking stuff, but also the surreal, mundane and sometimes very funny stuff. My experience with grief was much more multilayered than I had expected. I approached the work as if I were an observer and the person informed by my grief was a character to be studied.

Eventually, I returned to the idea of the anonymous unboxing video maker. Slowly, I began to think about ways to incorporate my own experiences with trauma and grief into a story that is absolutely a

work of fiction. I'm interested in how we, in the analog world, engage and interact in the cyber world. Further, I am fascinated by the ways in which living in an era of constant digital documentation can affect a person's ability to grieve.

This play is a lot of things for me.

It's a fairy tale for grown ups at its core. Do you remember reading or hearing the story of Hansel & Gretel when you were little? The moral of the story seemed that bad things happen to children who wander off in the woods alone. Maybe the tale didn't terrify you so much because there's probably not a witch in a candy house in the forest waiting to shove you in the oven. Even though terrible, unspeakable things do happen to children all the time. It feels removed (safer?) when it's told in the form of a fairy tale. I approached this play in that way; perhaps it touches on fears that parents in the 21st century might have...but hopefully with Captain, Tiger, and Pig as our narrators, it will feel slightly less upsetting.

The character of Joy is an accumulation of my reflections and memories related to grief and PTSD. But she's not only that. Joy is not me, and I am not her. We do overlap in the areas where I lent her some of my history in order to tell her story, though.

This play is also about the search for joy, even in unimaginable sadness. For me, I think, that involves a return to the innocence of childhood. Maybe it does for you, too.

This play is a product of my desire to give my brilliantly talented late husband, who like me was an actor, and who unlike me was a songwriter, another chance to take the stage. He plays all the music in this piece. You'll even catch glimpses of him in the projections. My grief demands that I continue to try to dance with him artistically from beyond the ether.

This is a play about ghosts, both digital and analog. Ghosts are a manifestation of the memories we hold of people we've lost. It's about the desire to continue dancing with a partner who no longer exists. It's about conjuring the ghosts of those you love by accessing your hard drive. It's about love and absence and courage and good versus evil.

You know, fairy tale stuff.

Thanks for watching this staged reading. Please know that what you see in this is by no means the finished product. Like all of us, it's a work in progress.

Warmest wishes for a world in which live theater can once again thrive,

Jennifer Bateman Grace

(she/her/they/them)

Creative Team

Corinne Balmain (Stage Manager) is a recent graduate of UC Davis (B.A., theatre and dance, '20) and is the current production manager for Veterans Memorial Theatre. Previously she has stage managed *A Marvelous Parody* (Little Tree Productions), **Ranked, A New Musical** (Ground & Field Theatre Festival), *The Threepenny Opera*, *{LOVE/Logic}*, and *Flora the Red Menace* with UC Davis along with *West Side Story*, *Peter Pan*, and *Lend Me a Tenor* at American River College.

Jess Diaz (Bek Cruz) is a fourth year psychology/theatre and dance double major at UC Davis. "I will be graduating in the spring and will be going back home to L.A. During my time in Davis I have been part of a Studio 301 production *The Addams Family* and a virtual performance *Qui No Mi Toca*. It has been a pleasure to be part of this piece and I felt I learned so much during the process."

Jennifer Grace (Playwright/Joy) Her New York theatre credits include *Nikolai And The Others* (Lincoln Center Theatre, world premiere), *Our Town* (directed by Tony winner David Cromer, Barrow Street Theatre, Theatre World Award Recipient, Outstanding Off-Broadway debut) and *The 4th Graders Present An Unnamed Love Suicide* (59E59). Selected regional credits include *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Time & The Conways*, *4.48 Psychosis*, *Balm In Gilead*, *Arcadia*, *Jack or The Submission*, *The Sea Gull*, *Marat/Sade*, *Dead End*, *Blood Wedding*, *Angels In America*. Film credits include *I SEE YOU* (w/Helen Hunt), *THE CASSEROLE CLUB* (w/ Susan Traylor, Jane Wiedlin), *Kelly & Cal* (with Juliette Lewis). Grace's television include *Inside Amy Schumer*, *VEEP*, *Billions*, *Chicago P.D.*, and *The Red Line*. She is also an audiobook narrator, voice over artist, and a writer. This play could not have been written or realized in any capacity without the love and support of her late husband, Tom

Bateman, or her son and her sun, Emmett Grace Bateman. Grace will receive her MFA from UC Davis in spring 2021.

Lucas Hatton (Captain) has performed on myriad regional stages in Chicago and the Bay Area. He also appears in several 2K video games. Currently, Lucas teaches performance studies and social justice at San Jose State University and is a co-founder of Davis Repertory Theatre. He is a UC Davis alumnus (M.F.A., dramatic art, '17).

Erolina Kamburova (Pig) is a multidisciplinary performer trained at the Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Recent (in person) credits include UC Davis' *Peter and the Starcatcher*, Catalyst Theatre's *Ranked, a New Musical*, the world premiere of *Iron Shoes* at Shotgun Players, and understudying for *Watch on the Rhine* at Berkeley Repertory Theatre. Erolina was also the 2019 Make A Difference (MAD) Marketing & Communications Fellow at Shotgun Players. UC Davis, class of 2023

Halena Kays (Director) is a founding member of the artistic collaborative, The Ruffians, former member of the Big Apple Circus Clown Care unit, past artistic director of The Hypocrites, former co-artistic curator for Theater on the Lake, and co-founder and former artistic director of Barrel of Monkeys. Kays is an artistic associate with the Neo-Futurists where she directed *Comfortable Shoes*, *Pop/Waits*, *44 Plays for 44 Presidents*, *Burning Bluebeard*, *Daredevils*, *Daredevils Hamlet* and *Fake Lake*. Selected Chicago directing credits: *Endgame*, *Ivywild*, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (The Hypocrites); *The Magic Play* (The Goodman), *Lord of the Flies* (Steppenwolf); *How a Boy Falls* (Northlight Theatre); *On Clover Road* (American Blues Theater); *Feast* (part of a collaborative directing effort) with *The Albany Park Theatre Project* (The Goodman). Regionally Kays has directed *The Magic Play* (The Olney Theater Center, The Actor's Theater of Louisville, Portland Center Stage and Syracuse Stage), *Love Song* (Nashville Story Garden), and *Secretary* (Nashville Rep's Ingram New Works Festival). Kays has been nominated for Jefferson awards for Best Supporting Actress, Best Direction, Best New Work, and Best Production, named one of the top 50 "players" in Chicago theater by NewCity, is a recipient of the prestigious 3Arts award and received a signed letter from Mr. Rogers saying she was "special" in 1978. She is a UT-Austin and Northwestern grad, and assistant professor of acting and directing at Northwestern University. Proud member, SDC.

Danielle Levin (Tiger) is an actor and dialect coach, and has been seen at a number of Bay Area companies from Marin Theatre Company, to

TheatreWorks, Shotgun Players to Crowded Fire. Levin is an associate artist with TheatreFIRST, Symmetry Theatre Company, and PlayGround SF. Her interests lie in devised performances that communicate by employing surprising visual elements and unusual use of language. She is a graduate of the University of Chicago. UC Davis MFA, class of 2021

Tyler Justin Pruyn (Stage Directions) is an aspiring writer, director, and hairstylist. He's excited to be reading stage directions for his near and dear pal Jennifer Grace Bateman. Pruyn is a UC Davis alumnus (B.A., English, '20).

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The Marks Family
James V. Meredith

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Richard & Pamela Dalton

UC Davis Department of Theatre and Dance Staff
Production Manager **Susie Owens**
Asst. Technical Director **Myke Kunkel**
Facility Manager/Audio Specialist **Megan Kimura**
Master Electrician **Patrick O'Reilly**
Costume Shop Foreman **McKayla Butym**

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Mindy Cooper, Acting, Musical Theatre
David Grenke, Dance
Lynette Hunter, Performance Studies
Margaret Laurena Kemp, Acting
Maggie Morgan, Costume Design
Jon D. Rossini, Performance Studies

Lecturers
Stuart Carroll, Ballet
Mary Beth Cavanaugh, Movement
Paul Gordon, Granada Artist-in-Residence
Pamila Z. Gray, Lighting
Michele Aprña Leavy, Acting
Curtis Moore, Granada Artist-in-Residence
Steven Schmidt, Instructor, Production Management
Ian Wallace, Visual Design

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DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND DANCE UPCOMING VIRTUAL EVENTS

OJOXOJO (An Eye for an Eye)

An MFA Project by Verónica Díaz-Muñiz

April 10-12 at 6 p.m. PDT

Whole Cloth

An MFA Project by Danielle Levin

April 15-17 at 6:30 p.m. PDT

When It Works, where are you? Invitations and shared practices

An MFA Project by Barnaby O'Rorke

April 19, 21 & 23 at 5 p.m. PDT

Juliet and Romeo

A New Musical

Book by Paul Gordon

Music and lyrics by Paul Gordon and Curtis Moore

Directed by Mindy Cooper and Lisa Quoresimo

June 3-5 at 6 p.m. PDT