

A detailed illustration of a theatre stage. The stage is framed by ornate blue and gold curtains. At the top center, there is a royal coat of arms featuring a lion and a unicorn supporting a shield, topped with a crown. The stage floor is a light yellow. In the foreground, a row of seven men in 18th-century attire are seated, facing the stage. They appear to be part of the production, with some holding papers or instruments. The overall style is that of a classic theatrical poster or a historical illustration.

# *Theatre Therapy*



*All the World's a Stage*  
*and all the men and women merely players*

*William Shakespeare*



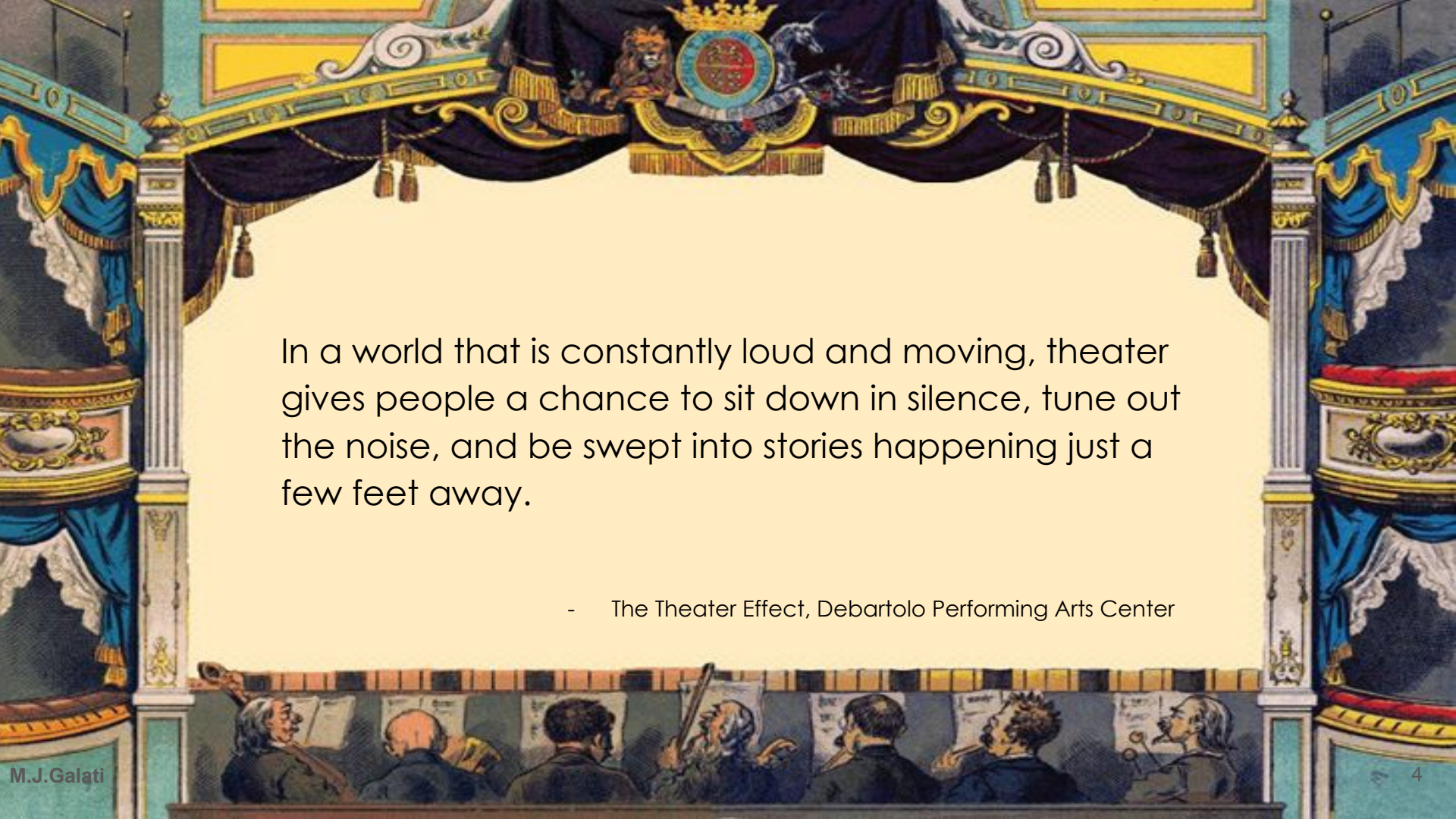


## There's something powerful about live theater

For a moment in time, it brings people together, both patrons and performers alike. No two performances are ever the same, and that unique quality is part of what makes theater so special.

- The Theater Effect, Debartolo Performing Arts Center



An illustration of a theater stage. The stage is framed by ornate, classical-style columns and a large, dark blue curtain with gold tassels. Above the stage, a large, ornate crest or coat of arms is displayed, featuring a crown, a lion, and a unicorn. The stage floor is a light yellow color. The audience is visible in the foreground, seated in rows of seats. The audience members are depicted in a stylized, almost caricatured manner, with exaggerated features and expressions. They are wearing formal attire, including hats and coats. The overall style is reminiscent of a classic illustration or a stage set design.

In a world that is constantly loud and moving, theater gives people a chance to sit down in silence, tune out the noise, and be swept into stories happening just a few feet away.

- The Theater Effect, Debartolo Performing Arts Center





<https://youtu.be/eTba8cedV-c>



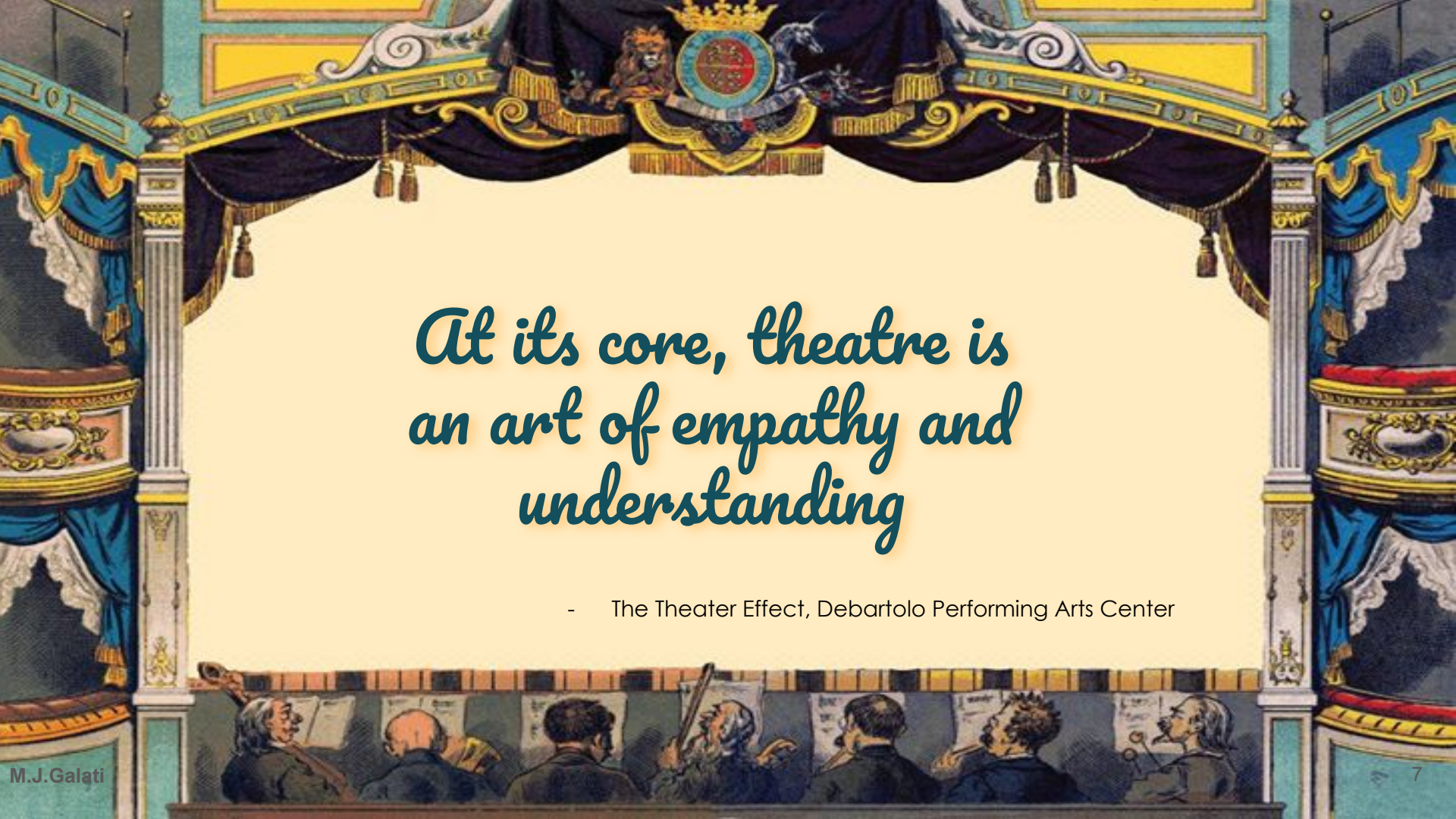
How does live theatre affect you?

Does it make you feel uncomfortable or  
enlightened?

Do you think about it after the performance?







*At its core, theatre is  
an art of empathy and  
understanding*

- The Theater Effect, Debartolo Performing Arts Center



## Theatre Teaches Empathy

Through emotional connections with others, theatre helps viewers to better understand their fellow man. Within the theatre, empathy can be learned about:

- **Plights of people** outside your own circle – through characters in a show or other real-life people in their day-to-day lives





# Theatre Teaches Empathy

Through emotional connections with others, theatre helps viewers to better understand their fellow man. Within the theatre, empathy can be learned about:

- Those in **history** - making you a more well rounded, educated citizen of the world that can empathize with those in the past, present, and future.



## Theatre Teaches Empathy

Through emotional connections with others, theatre helps viewers to better understand their fellow man. Within the theatre, empathy can be learned about:

- Your **fellow cast members** – if you're in the show itself, teamwork and compassion will combine to further your emotional intelligence and capacity for empathy





# Theatre Teaches Empathy



Theatre has the unique ability to introduce patrons to different **cultures and perspectives**, helping them to develop a better understanding of the world. Cultural awareness and education lead to greater empathy.

An illustration of a theatre stage. At the top, a dark blue curtain with gold tassels hangs over a decorative archway featuring a central crest with a crown and a lion. The stage floor is a light yellow. In the foreground, an orchestra of seven musicians is shown from behind, seated and facing the stage. They are holding various instruments like violins, cellos, and a double bass. The sides of the stage are decorated with blue and white curtains and gold trim. The title text is centered on the stage floor.

# *Theatre Encourages Community*



## Theatre Creates a Community

Perhaps the most obvious of theatre perks? The community it fosters for everyone involved.

A few ways theatre can foster a community includes:



## Theatre Creates a Community

- Creating bonds between actors, crew members, and theatre leadership, from the first audition to the close of the final curtain





## Theatre Creates a Community

- Creating bonds between audience members, who enter into a shared emotional experience as they watch a show



## Theatre Creates a Community


- Creating bonds between enthusiasts across the globe who are all enjoying the same performance. (The magic of the internet helps with this one!)







<https://youtu.be/5VPUUt0mqe4>



Have you ever participated in  
live theatre productions?

*How did you feel?*





The background of the slide is a detailed illustration of a theatre stage. At the top, a royal crest featuring a lion and a unicorn flanking a shield is centered above a dark blue, tasseled curtain. The stage is framed by ornate, light-colored columns and blue curtains with gold trim. The text is centered on a light yellow background within the stage area.

# *Theatre Helps to Establish Identity and Inclusion*



## Theatre Increases Confidence

Theatre provides a safe, supportive space for people of all ages and skill levels to explore their emotions and develop self-confidence. Taking social risks, expressing oneself freely, and connecting with others will build self-esteem.

Theatre programs, then, are crucial for promoting personal growth and preparing people for success in the future.





## Theatre Inspires Hope

It's no secret that the world can be a dark place. Theatre can often act as a safe haven, where people escape for a few hours to feel inspired.

If someone's mental health is low, stories of triumph, resilience, and perseverance can bleed over into day-to-day inspiration. The only thing more powerful than fear, after all, is hope!



## Theatre Offers Representation

Seeing oneself in a beloved character on the stage means a great deal to those that feel invisible or pushed aside in their day-to-day lives. Theatre offers a positive representation of:

- Marginalized communities, from minorities to those in poverty to those in the LGBTQ+ community
- Those with the struggles of mental health
- Those dealing with chronic or invisible illnesses
- Neurodiverse folks



Neurodiversity refers to the natural variation in human neurocognitive functioning. It recognizes that conditions like autism, ADHD, & dyslexia are not inherently “disorders” but differences that come with unique strengths & challenges.

***“Neurodiversity is not a disability to be cured; it is a difference to be understood and embraced.”*** — Judy Singer



## Theatre is Important for Neurodivergent Individuals

The benefits of theatre for neurodivergent individuals are numerous and significant, and in turn, their contributions to the world of theatre are equally valuable.

Let's investigate a few reasons why live theatre is a great activity for the mental health of everyone.



## Theatre Can Help Children on the Spectrum Socially and Emotionally

A new study published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* has found that theatre can help to build social skills. As an organized activity that brings together a large group of creative minds, everyone involved has the opportunity to learn about collaboration, delegation, and communicating with a variety of personalities.

From an emotional point of view, theatre evokes a wide range of feelings helping everyone involved develop further

- compassion,
- empathy, and
- sympathy.



Not to mention, theatre can be a great way to practice how we communicate with one another, both verbally and non-verbally.





## Theatre Provides Release

Whether it's through an emotional monologue, a silly improv game, freeing body movements, or quiet time, theatre is a release from the dredges of everyday life.

Neurodivergent individuals – and really, all people in general – need a safe space to express themselves freely, and theatre can do exactly that.

## Theatre Can Help Children in School

Having outside motivators to stay organized and prepared can help neurodivergent folks (and all students) on their way to success. For example, theatre can be viewed as an incentive: if students accomplish their commitments at home and school, they'll be able to attend rehearsals. Rules and structure are keys to success – both for neurotypical and neurodivergent students.



Additionally, theatre builds creativity, and creativity nurtures well-rounded students. By engaging students in theatre, they can expand their creativity and their knowledge!



## Representation and Inclusion *Always Matter*

In recent years, the theatre community has made significant progress towards becoming a more **inclusive** environment, welcoming individuals of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, religions, gender identities, sexual orientations, and other marginalized identities.

The same energy should be brought to the inclusion of neurodivergent people in theatre. By actively including and accommodating neurodivergent individuals in theater, the community can create a more welcoming and diverse environment, ultimately enriching the experience for everyone involved.





# *Theatre in Education*



# The Importance of Theatre in Schools





**GREEN THUMB**  
THEATRE



**If you attended school in BC in the last 49 years, chances are good Green Thumb visited your school.**

**Green Thumb Theatre** was founded in 1975 to develop original Canadian plays for young audiences. Since that time, Green Thumb has emerged as one of Canada's leading theatre companies for young people, producing excellent material for audiences and artists, and contributing to the growing body of work evolving in this field. Green Thumb demonstrates a new excitement and potential for children's theatre.

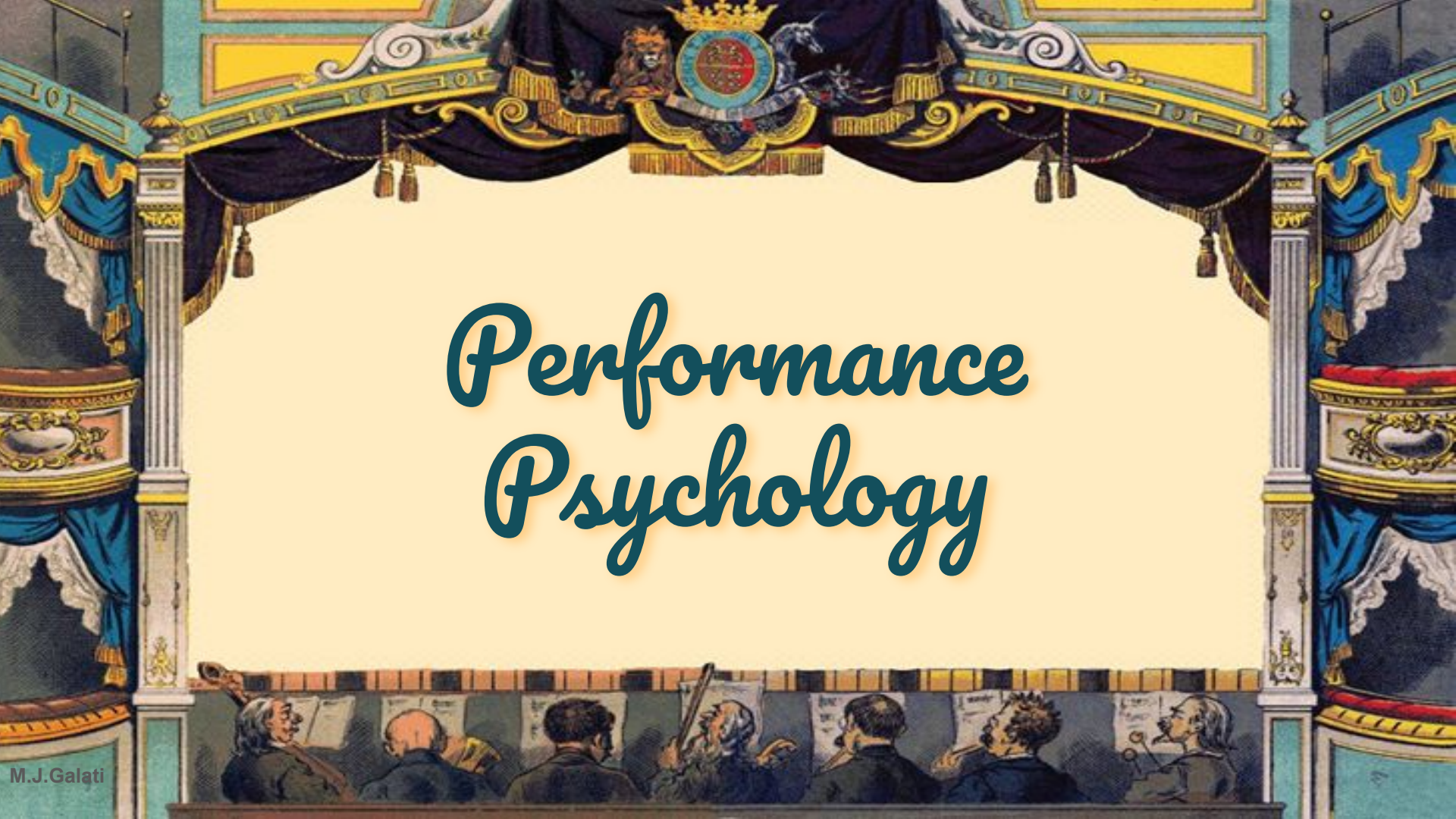




How important do you think  
theatre is in education?

Any experiences to share?



An illustration of a grand theater stage. The stage is framed by ornate, colorful curtains in shades of blue, gold, and red. At the top center, there is a large, detailed crest or coat of arms featuring a crown, a lion, and a unicorn. The stage floor is a light yellow color. In the foreground, below the stage, is an orchestra pit where several musicians are seated, viewed from behind. They are holding various instruments, including what appear to be brass instruments and a baton. The overall style is that of a classic theatrical poster or a detailed illustration from a historical document.

# Performance Psychology



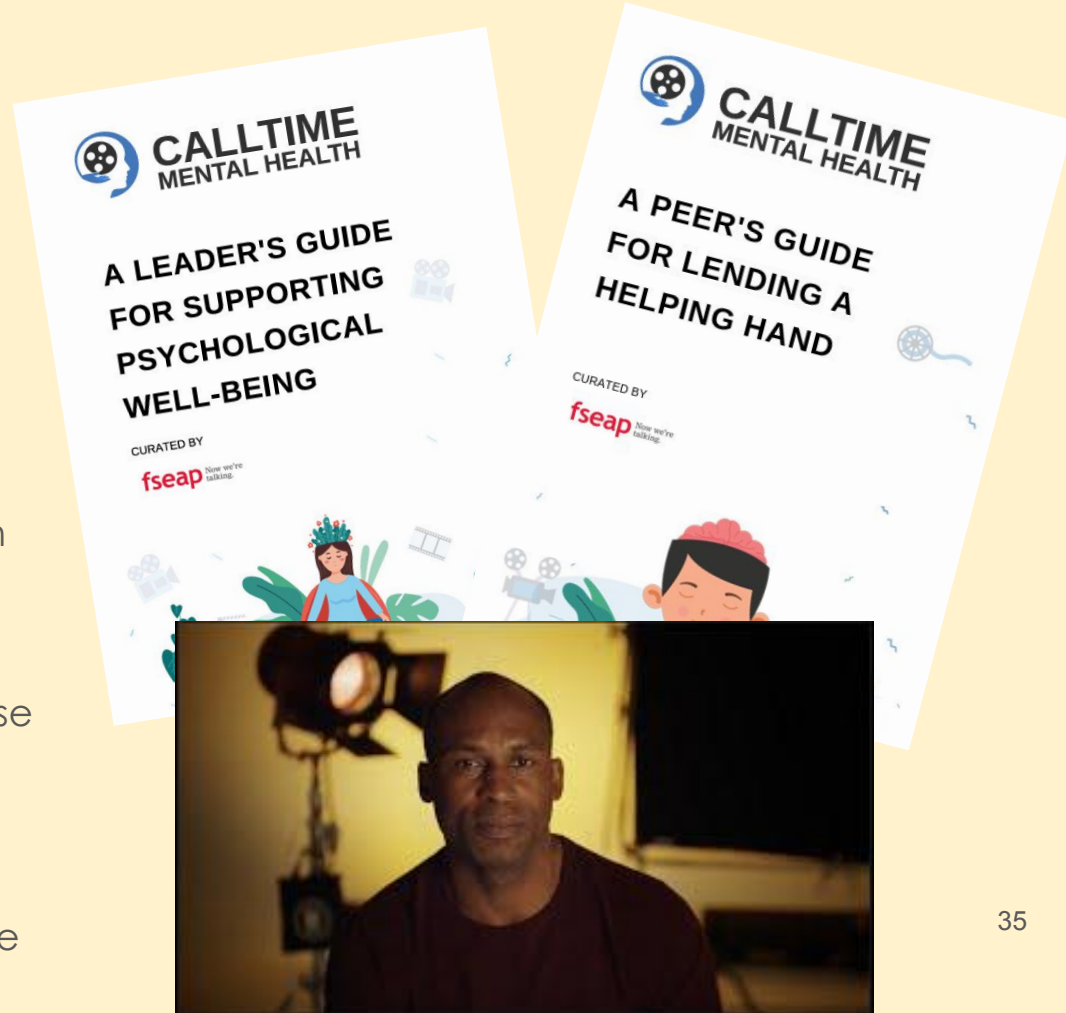




# Calltime Mental Health

is a public resource and mental health campaign for all workers in the motion picture industry and performing arts. The Calltime Mental Health campaign has been developed by British Columbia's motion picture industry unions to assist workers and employers grappling with mental health and addiction issues both in and out of the workplace.

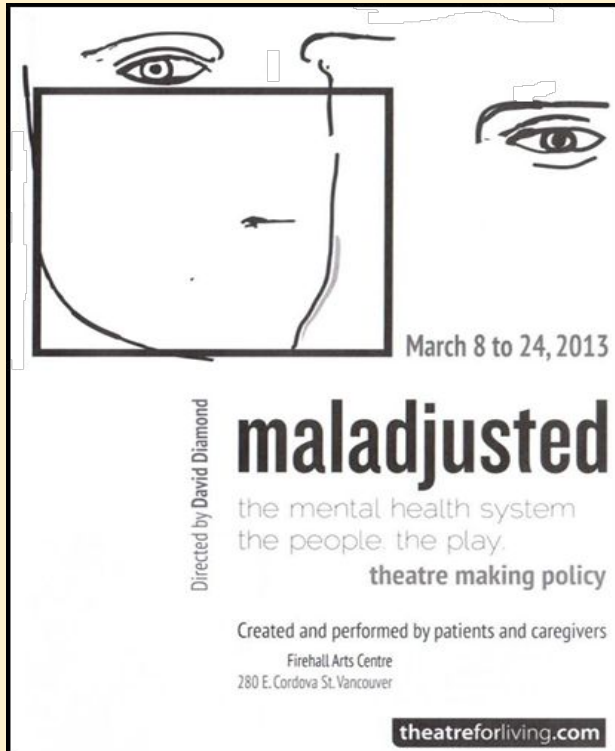
The campaign aims to reduce the stigma related to mental health and substance use concerns, and to ensure that BC motion picture workers are aware of the services and benefits available to them through their Union Health Benefit Plans and broader resources that are available to the public.





# Confronting Stigma

# Theatre actually about mental illness



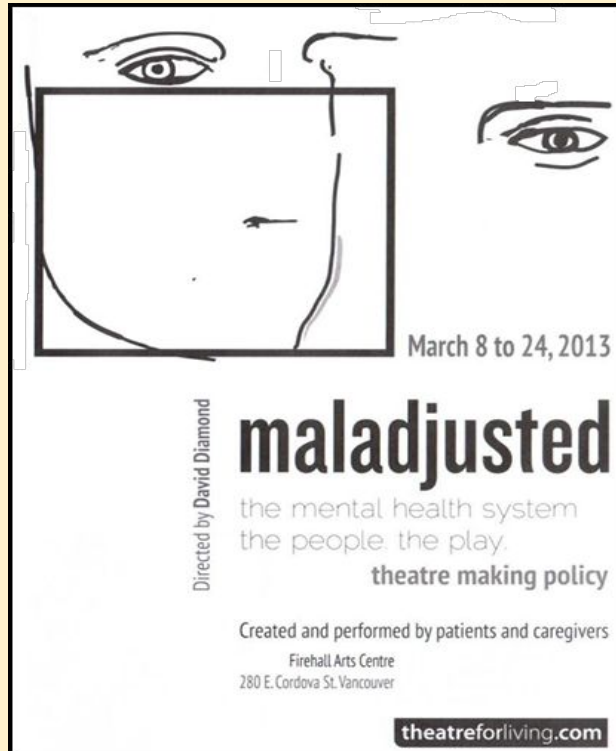
<https://theatreforliving.com/>



In March, 2013, Vancouver's [Theatre for Living](https://theatreforliving.com/) (formerly Headlines Theatre), mounted **maladjusted**, an innovative 'Forum Theatre' production that engaged audiences in the task of finding solutions to humanize the mental health system.



# Theatre actually about mental illness



The production was the result of weeks of intense creative collaboration between professional joker and director, David Diamond, and workshop participants and cast members, all of whom had experience with the mental health system, whether as “patients,” as “caregivers,” or both.

191 people applied to be part of the production, 24 were part of the 6-day workshop process to create the play and 6 were in the final cast that rehearsed for a few more weeks before beginning the two-week run of the play.

In a 2015 remount, the Theatre for Living took the production on tour to 26 BC and Alberta communities, with grassroots organizations sponsoring each of the events. Many of these shows were collaborative efforts between First Nations and non-First Nations organizations.

# Theatre actually about mental illness

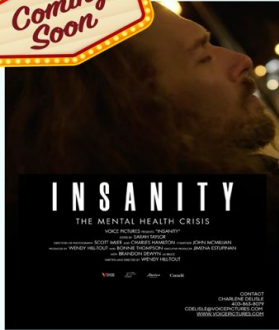



"**Certified** is about Derbyshire's journey with mental illness and mental health, but it's not one of those stories that collapse into the horrors of madness.


Derbyshire allows herself to be vulnerable, but she's also levitatingly funny. And she changed the way I see the world." — Colin Thomas



Thank you for helping to de-stigmatize mental health; inspiring and entertaining us. — Carolyne Neufeld, Health Director, Seabird Island Band




Free Admission  
Registration Required  
Donations Encouraged




**Insanity: The Mental Health Crisis**  
*Film Screening & Panel Discussion*

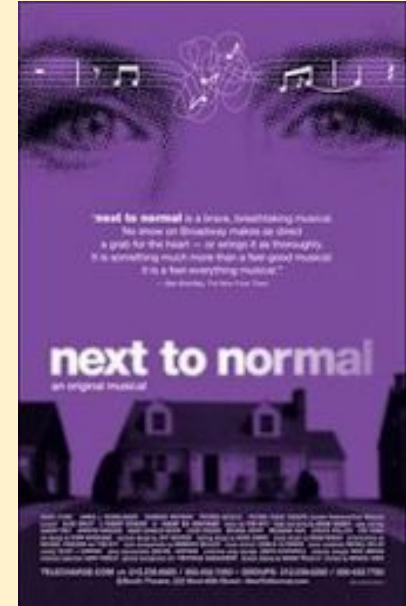
TUESDAY, SEPT 16 6:30PM  
DOORS @ 5:45PM

Red Fish Healing Centre  
Coquitlam

 **PATHWAYS** FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES  
Serious Mental Illness Society

 **Provincial Health Services Authority**

# Theatre actually about mental illness



**Next to Normal** is a 2008 American rock musical with book and lyrics by Brian Yorkey and music by Tom Kitt. The story centers on a mother who struggles with worsening bipolar disorder and the effects that managing her illness has on her family. The musical addresses grief, depression, suicide, drug abuse, ethics in modern psychiatry, and the underbelly of suburban life. [Wikipedia](#)

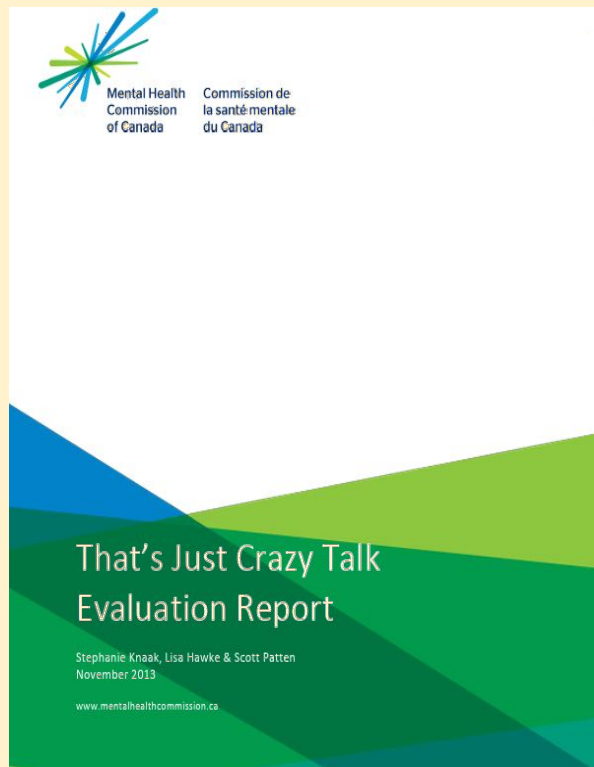


# That's Just Crazy Talk - Helping to Reduce Stigma



*That's Just Crazy Talk* is a one-hour stage play designed to address stigma toward mental illness by illustrating how internalized and public stigma manifest. The play is performed by Victoria Maxwell, a recognized educator and speaker on the lived experience of mental illness and recovery. Previous research has demonstrated that the live stage play is effective at reducing stigma, and that the recorded version may also be effective as an anti stigma tool.

# That's Just Crazy Talk - Helping to Reduce Stigma



This stage play has now been video-recorded and is available on DVD. Previous research has demonstrated that the live stage play is effective at reducing stigma, and that the recorded version may also be effective as an anti stigma tool.

**Opening Minds** was interested in learning whether the DVD performance was also effective at reducing stigma among one target group in particular – healthcare providers

Results from 2 research studies found "That's Just Crazy Talk" to be an effective means to reduce stigma and increase understanding of mental health.



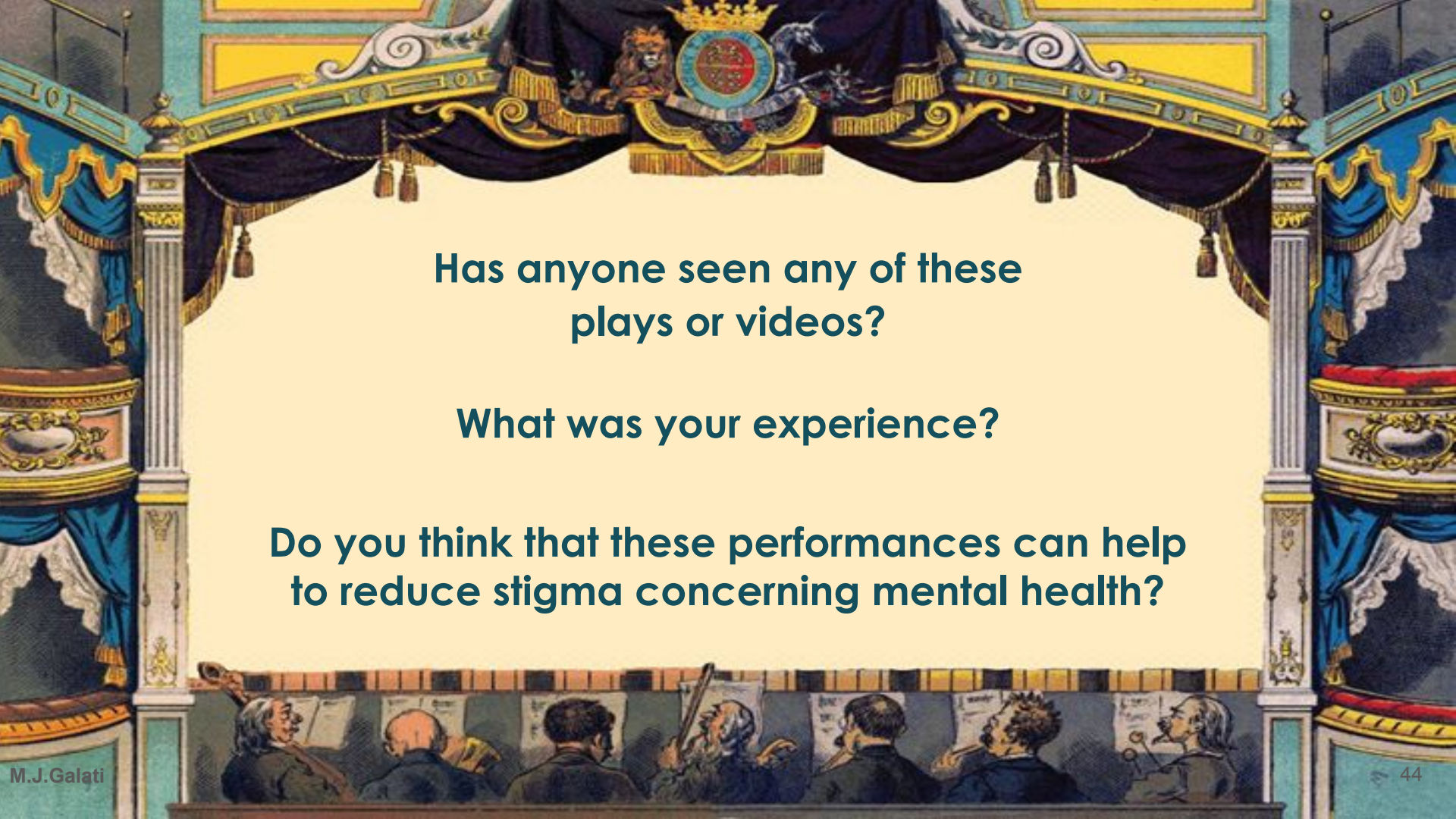
# Radical Accessibility Theatre



Video produced and edited for *The Grieving Project* by [Levan Amiranashvili](#) in conjunction with Medicinal Media.

[The Grieving Project musical](#), as described to [The Washington Post](#) by artist and playwright Lisa Sniderman, is the story of four people with disabilities, performed by artists who have real-life disabilities. The characters work to find their voices and thrive while navigating mental health challenges, relationship hurdles, and their respective conditions. Told in 14 stages with spoken word and music, the project asks: “How can we live fully and thrive if we don’t grieve?” Sniderman collaborated with Suzanne Richard, artistic director at Open Circle Theatre in Baltimore, to pioneer a radically accessible hybrid theater model. Sniderman says, “Our goal is to use technology in combination with live events to bring the full theatrical experience to as wide an audience as possible, drawing them into the story of self-discovery, acceptance, and hope.”





Has anyone seen any of these  
plays or videos?

What was your experience?

Do you think that these performances can help  
to reduce stigma concerning mental health?





# "Hollywood"





## And then there's Hollywood ...

Mental illness has long been a complex and often misunderstood topic in society, and **Hollywood** has played a significant role in shaping public perception. Through the lens of cinema, the portrayal of mental diseases has ranged from sensitive and insightful to sensational and stigmatizing.



*DEEP DIVE   POLITICS   DIVERSITY REPORT*

# HOLLYWOODLAND EXCLUSIVE NEWS

TWO CENTS

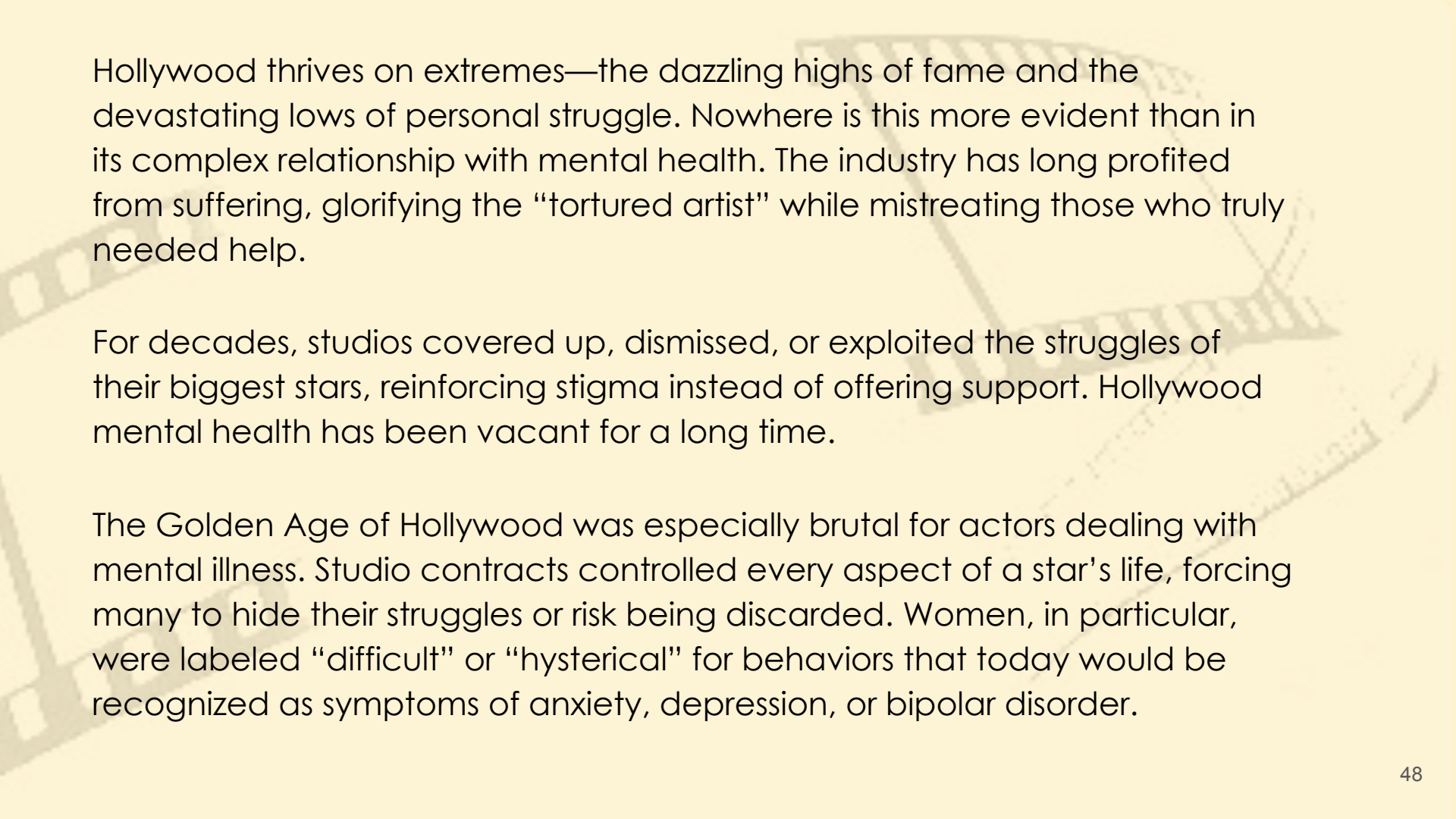
**2¢**  
EACH

DAILY

*YOUR DAILY DOSE OF OLD HOLLYWOOD & NEW PERSPECTIVES*

## THE PRICE OF FAME: HOLLYWOOD'S MENTAL HEALTH SECRETS EXPOSED

March 16, 2025



Hollywood thrives on extremes—the dazzling highs of fame and the devastating lows of personal struggle. Nowhere is this more evident than in its complex relationship with mental health. The industry has long profited from suffering, glorifying the “tortured artist” while mistreating those who truly needed help.

For decades, studios covered up, dismissed, or exploited the struggles of their biggest stars, reinforcing stigma instead of offering support. Hollywood mental health has been vacant for a long time.

The Golden Age of Hollywood was especially brutal for actors dealing with mental illness. Studio contracts controlled every aspect of a star's life, forcing many to hide their struggles or risk being discarded. Women, in particular, were labeled “difficult” or “hysterical” for behaviors that today would be recognized as symptoms of anxiety, depression, or bipolar disorder.

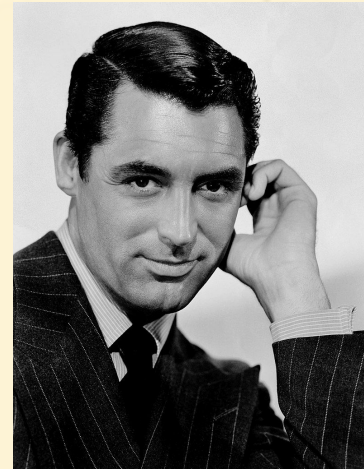


Hollywood's most dangerous woman wasn't a criminal—she was an actress who refused to conform. **Frances Farmer** was outspoken, intelligent, and independent—qualities that should have made her an industry powerhouse. In an era when actresses were expected to be compliant, glamorous, and grateful, Frances fought back—and Hollywood made her pay.

***The cost? Studio blacklisting, arrests, psychiatric institutionalization, and electroshock therapy.***



**Vivien Leigh**, widely regarded as one of the greatest actresses of her time, struggled with bipolar disorder. Instead of receiving genuine support, she was subjected to electroshock therapy and dismissed as “hysterical.”



**Cary Grant**, privately battled trauma and depression. He sought help and was treated with LSD.



While some films provide an empathetic view of mental health struggles, highlighting perseverance and the human spirit, others reinforce negative stereotypes, perpetuating harmful myths.

Hollywood's approach to mental illness has evolved over the decades, with notable films shining a light on the complexities of living with mental health conditions.

These movies often depict the personal battles of individuals grappling with their inner demons, showcasing both the harsh realities and the resilience that defines their journeys.



Illustration by Keith Negley

“a film could literally change somebody’s brain matter,” Barak Obama after watching *Just Mercy*

Did You Know Movies Can Rewire Your Brain? October 25, 2024

# The Impact of Hollywood's Portrayals

Hollywood's portrayal of mental illness can profoundly influence public perception, for better or worse.

Films like ***A Beautiful Mind*** and ***Silver Linings Playbook*** have been praised for their empathetic and accurate depictions, helping to destigmatize mental illness by humanizing the characters and their struggles.

These films highlight the perseverance of individuals living with mental health conditions, showcasing their journeys of recovery and resilience.



## The Impact of Hollywood's Portrayals

However, there are also portrayals that contribute to the stigma surrounding mental illness.

Movies like ***Black Swan*** and ***One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*** often emphasize the more dramatic and violent aspects of mental disorders, sometimes reinforcing the misconception that individuals with mental illness are dangerous or unstable.

These portrayals can lead to misunderstandings and fear, making it more difficult for those struggling with mental health issues to seek help.





## A Call for Balanced and Compassionate Portrayals

As mental health awareness continues to grow, there is a pressing need for Hollywood to depict mental illness with greater accuracy and compassion. Filmmakers have a responsibility to avoid sensationalism and instead focus on realistic portrayals that highlight the human experience of living with mental illness. By doing so, cinema can play a powerful role in breaking down stigma, promoting empathy, and encouraging open discussions about mental health.





**Any opinions on  
Hollywood's treatment of  
mental illness?**



The background of the slide is a detailed illustration of a theater stage. At the top, a royal crest featuring a lion and a unicorn is centered above a dark blue curtain with gold tassels. The stage is flanked by ornate blue and gold curtains. Below the stage, a row of six men in 18th-century attire are shown from the back, looking towards the stage. They appear to be part of an orchestra or a group of commentators.

# *Passive to Active Audience Participation*



# Audience Participation: From Passive to Active

While many audiences remain passive, there are also moments where participation becomes active and interactive. These moments are particularly evident in performances where the audience is encouraged to participate—such as in concerts, interactive theater, or even sports events.

Audience participation can take many forms, from cheering and chanting to joining in a sing-along or providing verbal feedback during a comedy show.



# Audience Participation: From Passive to Active

Active participation can deepen the emotional impact of the experience for the audience. It creates a sense of involvement, as individuals feel that they are contributing to the atmosphere and energy of the event.

In some cases, audience participation can even affect the performance itself, such as when a comedian or musician feeds off the energy of the crowd to deliver a better performance.





*Have you ever participated in  
Immersive Theatre?*





# Immersive Theatre

# Immersive Theatre

Theatre has always been an evolving art form, adapting to cultural, technological, and social changes. One of the most exciting developments in recent decades has been **immersive theatre**, a genre that transforms passive spectators into active participants.

Unlike traditional theatre, where audiences watch from a distance, immersive theatre allows them to step into the story, interact with characters, and influence the narrative. Immersive theatre is **redefining storytelling** by placing audiences at the center of the experience.

As technology continues to evolve, we can expect even more **personalized, interactive, and emotionally engaging performances**. Whether in physical spaces or the digital Metaverse, immersive theatre is shaping the future of entertainment.





# Radical Accessibility Theatre - The Grieving Process



<https://youtu.be/GBYeOXfbaeM>


*“We must all do theatre,  
to find out who we are,  
and to discover  
who we could  
become.”*

*—Augusto Boal*



Augusto Boal (1931-2009) was a Brazilian theatre practitioner, drama theorist, and political activist. He was the founder of Theatre of the Oppressed, a theatrical form originally used in radical left popular education movements.





This entire PowerPoint will be available  
to view on the Peer Support Network  
resource list.

*Thank You!*

<https://spotlightonmentalhealth.com/peer-work-network-resource-list/>