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## Next to normal gabe songs

Brian Yorke and Tom Kitt's surreal, expressionist Next to Normal was undoubtedly the most grown-up, most mature rock musical to hit Broadway in decades when it opened, inexorably intense, a brutally honest story about a bipolar woman undergoing electroshock therapy, about the impact of her illness on her family, as well as the lack of understanding But that score wasn't Broadway pop; It was hard driving rock 'n' roll, authentic enough to match the authenticity of his emotions. It was only the second rock musical to win a Pulitzer Prize for drama, alongside Rent. Why next to normal is so powerful? Because we humans are emotional adventurers. What makes a good story in a good musical is emotion. And what makes the production of the musical truly remarkable and powerful is the honesty and authenticity of its emotions. This is one of the main priorities of musical theater, the second only perhaps to clean up the narrative. People come to see the musical specifically because it's a more emotional kind of narrative (no matter knowingly they understand that), so if the staging provides phonetic emotions, producers commit fraud just as someone sells glass diamonds. When young writers wonder whether to adapt to the story for the music scene, the answer is whether the story is primarily emotional. Because his language is music, emotions are the lingua franca of musical theater. If the story is primarily about action, the songs may well fall on the go - which is why there are very few successful musical farces or musical mysteries, because these forms are about an intricate plot rather than emotion. Many old musicals follow a similar arc - we watch Hero try to assimilate into the community, and the happy ending is one in which Hero succeeds in this assimilation, as in The Music Man, Annie Get Your Gun, Oklahoma!, or Brigadoon. In more serious musicals, the Hero is often unable to assimilate, so he is elusive, sometimes death, as in Sweeney Todd or Carousel. There are two heroes in the South Pacific (Cable and Nelly), so we get both results. You can argue the same about king and me and Man of La Mancha. But in order to have the community assimilate, the musical needs a big chorus. And starting in the mid-1960s, choirs are starting to shrink on Broadway, mostly for economic reasons. By the 70s, the presenters had become a chorus, both in the Company and choir lines. And if you don't really have a community on stage, this assimilational story loses its power. (Bat Boy seemingly mocked the problem by creating a community of several dozen characters, but all played by five actors.) For this reason , as well as through the philosophical buttons of the counterculture of the 1960s – musicals began a kind of story, a classic hero myth in which our Hero begins a journey (sometimes specific, sometimes psychological), meets a wise wizard, finds his magical amulet (ruby slippers, light saber), picks up companions, navigates various obstacles (sometimes including a trip to the underworld), battles with an ally wizard, and finally gains new wisdom, often returning home to share it with his community. It's an incredibly powerful form because the myth of the hero is just stand-up for human life. Each of us has our own way of life, full of wise and evil wizards, companions and magical charms; so we connect to this form of history in a truly powerful, personal way. The myth of the hero has become progressively more relevant in American culture, because today more people live alone than at any other time in human history - mostly just because we can, thanks to various technological and economic developments. Book Going Solo: The Extraordinary Rise and Amazing Appeal of Life Alone about this trend. An assimilational story, once very powerful for a nation of immigrants in twentieth-century America, poi has provided the way for the Hero of Myth because modern society allows us more time to look inward. Think about how many contemporary musicals follow the Hero Myth model - Bloody Andrew Jackson, American Idiot (three times!), Shrek, Billy Elliot, Passing Strange, Cry-Baby, High Fidelity, Spring Awakening, Taboo, and many others. This trend began in the 70s, with the company, Pippin, follies, Jesus Christ Superstar, then in the 80s from nine and Sunday in the park with George, among others. But it really exploded in the early 1990s, when musical theater began to eat artistically from New York's commercial theater on and off Broadway. Because these new American musicals were written with less thought about commercial potential, often without a purpose regarding Broadway, they were far more personal works that tended to guided them to the shape of the hero myth. In Next to Norma, Diana's arc follows the classic structure of the Hero Myth, even on a journey to the underworld in the form of Ect and her memory loss. As Bruno Bettelheim writes in The Use of Enchantment (the book that inspired the forest). Since ancient times, the almost impenetrable forest in which we get lost has symbolized the dark, hidden, almost impenetrable world of our unconscious. If we have lost the framework that gave structure to our past lives and now have to find our way of becoming ourselves, and entered the wilderness with an as yet undeveloped personality when we manage to find a way out, we will turn out to be with a much more highly developed humanity. Yorkey and Keith used this ancient device but removed his metaphorical cloak. Here, Diana literally travels into her own unconscious. Even more relevant for To Normal, Bettelheim also writes: From the earliest versions, fairy tales [and Myths of the Hero] emphasize that both desires reside in each of us, and that we cannot survive deprived either: a desire to remain tied to the past, and a desire to reach out to a new future. Through the unfolding of events, history most often teaches that completely cutting yourself off from the past leads to distress, but what to exist only to see in the past is a trick; although it is safe, it does not provide a life of its own. Only careful integration of these opposing trends allows for successful existence. Next to Normal is actually a double hero myth. Diana keeps an eye on her myth about the hero, and Natalie sticks to the secondary myth of the hero; and the key to Natalie's character is that the two journeys are very similar. Natalie's realization of what creates her fear that she will live life as and damaged as Diana is that her relationship with Henry will be as dre and empty as her parents. Diana is also aware of these parallels, and of Natalie's fear for these parallels. At the beginning I miss the mountains. Diana sings: It's pretty jam packed lyrics. It goes to show that Diana missed her manic past, worrying that Natalie would suffer the same fate, her shame for failing as a mother, her inability to feel anything through her medication, and even the pressing jealousy of Natalie's youth and freedom. Despite the abundance of rhyme here, the language and structure of the sentence is completely natural, and the self-awareness Diana expresses moves her character forward and propels her to action. But underneath that there is such extraordinary lyrical craft. There are wonderful, almost hidden interior rhymes, both empty and the first part of peace, a trick Yorke uses throughout the score. And there's also a ton of illumination - w's in the first three lines and the last two lines, f in the fourth and tenth rows, and n sounds in rows 4-7, especially in the fifth row. This introduction works as an important self-consciousness for Diana, but it also ensures that the audience recognizes these two parallel journeys. Just like Oklahoma! sets up a minor love triangle to reflect the basic love triangle, here bookreiter and lyricist Brian Yorkey and composer Tom Kitt do the same with the myth of the hero. But it's the messy, chaotic hero myth that satisfies Diana's state of mind. Can Gabe be both a magical talisman and an ally of a magician... and satellite...? Can Dr. Madden be both a wise wizard and an errant wizard? One of the advantages that Natalie has in her myth about the hero is self-consciousness. While Diana is desperately trying to understand herself and her journey, Natalie is very clear-on, though perhaps the touch is too pessimistic. For Natalie, every catastrophe for Diana is a future disaster for Natalie. Although the end of Diana's story is completely ambiguous – especially we see at the end that her journey was mirrored by the hidden journey Dan also took - the end of Natalie's story is more encouraging. It's still ambiguous because let's face it, life is ambiguous... One significant difference between the stories of Diana and Natalie is in their partners. In terms of Hero Myth, Dan is unable to be Diana's loyal companion, while Henry succeeds as Natalie. It seems Dan may not have been aware of Diana's problems when he married her, and to some extent he was forced into marriage, if only by his own sense of duty and decency and nothing. After all, Dan sees himself as a martyred Good Guy (which could be his great tragic flaw). On the other hand, Henry seems to know exactly how damaged Natalie is, and he chooses to be with her, without any external pressures, with eyes completely open. Natalie and Henry have a much more honest relationship than Diana and Dan, and so the younger couple are likely to have a healthier relationship. Of course, it doesn't matter that the audience deliberately recognizes all these things. The myth of the hero works because we instinctively recognize elements of history, even if only subconsciously, as elements of our own lives. As ben Kingsley once said about actors: Tribe find you to tell your story. You're a shaman/healer, that's what a storyteller is, and I think it's important for actors to appreciate that. Too often actors think it's all about them when in fact it's all about the audience being able to recognize themselves in you. We are all emotional adventurers. Like many shows today, Next to Normal was an unusually long, rocky road to Broadway. In an age of skyrocketing ticket prices and more and more non-English-speaking tourists in the audience, Broadway producers rarely seek to take on a brand new show, especially one dealing with a theme as harrowing as mental illness. The show began its life in 1998 as a ten-minute sketch workshop called Feeling Electric. Writer Brian Yorkie brought this idea to the composer Toma Kitt (High Fidelity), when both were in the workshop of Lehman Engel Musical Theater, and Kitt wrote a rock score for the piece. Both Yorkey and Kitt moved on to other projects, but they kept returning to their ten-minute piece, eventually expanding it to a feature-length musical. This version went through several workshops as the team continued to work on it. In September 2005, a shortened version of the feature film was part of the New York Music Theater Festival, where it attracted some positive attention. In 2006 and 2007, a second-stage theater in New York city found out a woman who gave a brilliant, impressive, visceral performance at the heart of the story, Alice Ripley, and with director Michael Greif (Rent, Jane Eyre, Grey Gardens) at the helm. The show moved to Broadway in 2008, now called Next to Normal ,where it ran for barely a month. However, he won the Outer Critics Circle Award for Outstanding Score, and he was nominated for two other Outer Critics Circle Awards (including Best New Musical on Broadway), three Lucille Lortel Awards, two Drama League Awards, and two Drama Desk Awards. The New York Times said: As befits what is surely New York's first major musical about manic depression, Next to Normal is apt for producing bipolar reactions in everyone who sees it. How could it be different from a show that talks about a hybrid of fractured family soaps such as Ordinary People and The Who's Tommy, rock opera disease and the inconsistencies of 1969? Watch this tale of haunted housewives (beautifully played by Alice Ripley) and the household she in turn pursues ride speeding roller coaster responses. One minute you roll your eyes. Next time, you wipe them. When the show ends, you're probably doing both at the same time. The New York Daily News said the show is cheeky, original and - like its heroine - has a problem. . . . In the end, the show is exactly like Diana – always unpredictable, never completely balanced. But if you're looking for something that will shake you, next to Normal that's exactly what the doctor ordered. Perhaps he could have stayed that way flawed but fascinating. It worked for rent. But Yorkey and Keith continued to work, focusing like a laser on the family's emotions, eventually modeling an assessment that was almost excruciatingly emotional. Another new version of the show was given a regional theatrical production at Arena Stage from November 2008 to January 2009. Greif returned to the position of director. Ripley and much of the cast outside Broadway participated, but Brian d'Arcy James stayed in New York to play the title character in Shrek the musical, and he was replaced as Dan J. Bratton. Finally, while no one might have expected it, a little six-actor rock musical that could have started previews on Broadway in March 2009. This time, the New York Times said: No show on Broadway right now does as a direct grab for the heart - or breaks it as thoroughly - as next to normal does. This brave, grisly musical focuses squarely on the pain that cripples suburban family members, and never for a minute avoids the anguish at the heart of their lives. Next to Normal, in other words, doesn't qualify as your standard musical feel good. Instead, this portrait of a manic depressive mother and people she loves and regrets is something much bigger: a musical feel of everything that asks you, with operatic power, to discover liberation, knowing where it hurts. Such emotional rigor is a point of honor for Next to Normal. . . . . . With an impressive central performance from Alice Ripley as Goodman, a housewife with bipolar disorder, this production estimates the losses that occur when injured people are anesthesia - and not just by the battery of pharmaceutical and medical procedures to which Diana is subjected, but by recreational drugs, alcohol and that old good American virtue, an objection with a smile. Rolling Stone named it best new musical of the season – by a mile. The first Broadway show to cover social media, about six weeks before Broadway's Next to Normal began publishing an adapted version of the show via Twitter. Within a month, this serialized version of the show was performed by 140 characters at a time, presented as if the characters themselves were tweeting about their activities day in and day out in real time. In between these tweets, the show periodically posts links to the song's audio file from the show to move the story forward. This Twitter feed, designed to build a community around the show, eventually gained more than a million followers. The Twitter performance culminated in a new song written by Kitt and Yorkie, based on suggestions from Twitter followers that helped address details about which characters perform the song, where it takes place in the story, as well as structure and lyrical offerings. The song was then publicly performed at a special event in New York. Producers also announced a fan mashup on YouTube in which fans of the show recorded their own interpretations of songs from the score. The show's investors worked out their initial investment of four million dollars a few days after its one-year anniversary on Broadway, proving that a new, challenging job can occasionally succeed on Broadway, but also that it rarely originates there anymore. At the end of the run, a real-life married couple and Broadway veterans Marine Mazzi and Jason Danili took on the two leaders, while Alice Ripley went on tour with the show. Production on Broadway closed in January 2011 after 754 performances. Tom Kitt's music for Next to Normal is extraordinary. It's not just great pop/rock music – driving pop anthems, muscular guitar rock, great ballads – but structurally it's a very operatic score, with arias, duets, quartets, sextets, recitants. Vocal arrangements are spectacular. But beyond that, it's bipolar assessment, following Sondheim's rule that content dictates form. Music primarily brings emotions to the story, and this story requires a special kind of emotion. So ok Kitt expressed diana's bipolar mood swinging through his music. And not just Diana. As much as they talk about Diana's mood, notice how misguided Dan is musically, from his strangely manic It Will Be Good, to the controversial emotions - and musical styles - of Dan's great solo, I Was. And notice a few musical fights in the show; On emotions get, the more rock 'n' roll music becomes. As he did with high fidelity, Keith makes as much storytelling here with his music as his colleagues do with words. Kitt and Brian Yorkey have written scenes of musical dialogue that sound quite naturalistic and also boast truly economical, well-crafted lyrics with gorgeous, original, amazing poems, including tons of interior poems, some almost hidden. Yorkey's lyrics are among the best ever written for the stage. Several times in each song, Yorkey rethinks clichés, converts a phrase, or unexpectedly returns a sentence that forces us to engage and provides important prediction or development of text themes. And sometimes dark laughter too. And there's this amazing allusion in one song. And note that in these last three lines, Yorkie's change sets overlap. We get ps hold, plates, and spinning; then U.S. spinning, smile, and yes; then Ws out, white, win, and way. And these Ws are tied back to the Ws the previous three lines, and want to erase, worry, and away. The audience deliberately does not recognize all this, but works for them, creating energy, momentum, in this context, perhaps even a kind of mad despair. It's really skillful, powerful writing. And beyond the wonderful craft here, these few lines tell us pretty much everything we need to know about this family, even if we're consciously not aware of what we've taken in all this information. Later, we may think about Dan's desire to erase his anxiety... away and realize how ironic he predicted the dark choices he makes. Following Sondheim's rule that content dictates form, Kitt and Yorkey wrote Next to Normal in a storytelling style that reflects Diana's world. The music itself, even without lyrics, could not be tuned to any other story. Keith uses a 7/8 time signature (essentially dropping half a beat from every measure of music) often throughout the score. He sometimes plays two key signings against each other. He almost always refuses to give the numbers clear buttons at the end, which deters viewers from coming out to applause, and builds up the show's increasing tension. In many ways, Kitt's music works like a horror movie, and as Sweeney Todd, who was deliberately built on Bernard Hermann's horror music (Psycho, Verigo). Dramatically, the score is just as extraordinary. He uses interior monologues for all the protagonists, a device that most people today think of as a staple of Rodgers and Hammerstein, but it really goes back to Shakespeare. I miss the mountains Diana is a close cousin of Hamlet Be or not to be soliloquy. Both are deeply felt, desperately complex, wrapped in metaphors and focused on the choices to be made. Song of Diana companion pieces in the soulful weight of Dan I was, cheeky Gabe I'm Alive, and existential Natalie Superboy and Invisible Girl. In old-school musicals, they called these songs I Want, though the device comes back much further than Rodgers and Hammerstein or Cole Porter... But Kitt and the Yorkeyes are at their dramatic best in wrestling scenes - real, visceral, whipped-up fights. The double number of You Don't Know and I Am the One is just one example among many powerful book scenes entirely artfully tuned to music and rhyming lyrics. The show is also very cinematic. Almost every scene dissolves in the next, sometimes even interrupting each other. Throughout the show, there are times when an actor in one scene just turns around and now he's in another scene, at a different time and place. There are often two scenes going on stage at once, juxtaposing the action in really interesting, revealing ways. As just one example of many, Natalie screws up her piano concerto on one side of the stage, while at the same time Diana tells her doctor about not being able to keep Natalie as a child. The two scenes slam against each other in a powerful, emotional way, but only imply the connection we have in the audience then conclude by delivering more information about character and relationships than a much longer dialogue scene can. And it happens throughout the show, often in the cinematic effect of the split screen. Next to Normal is part of the evolution of musical theatre. Many of the devices described above are also present in Naked, Passing Strange, American Idiot and Bloody Andrew Jackson. These new rock shows require a very minimalist physical approach - no time or place for traditional set changes - and a less naturalistic, more fluid, more expressionistic, more cinematic kind of staging. Michael Bennett taught us in Dreamgirls how to use movie devices on stage, close-up screen, pans, focus pulls, dissolves, split screens; and today's audience takes these devices on stage as easily as they take them on screen. No one goes to a musical today that awaits the old naturalism of Rodgers and Hammerstein. Next to Normal lives in a metaphorical world as much as in the physical world. Many of the devices used by Yorkeyes and Kitt are designed to keep audiences out of the kilometer, disorient them, keep them in suspense, not allow them time to think and judge what they testify to to get them to experience these events rather than think about them. The audience is on this roller coaster with Diana strapped right next to her. And it connects with the central point of history that human disease affects not only them, but everyone in their orbit. And because of the way Kitt and Yorkey told this story, we viewers are among those Orbit. We must live in her illness, her illusions, her twisted world, with her for two hours. When she sees a doctor as a metal rocker, we see that too. When she finds herself inside the illusion, we're there with her. This both connects the audience with Diana and gives them deeper empathy than smaller writers might have allowed. Next to Normal is very surreal, maybe even more than the original production suggests. The narrative of the story is so broken, sometimes linear, but often goes around fantasy, illusion, flashback, a lot of telescopic time. Following Sondheim's rule, Kitt and Yorkey wrote the show as disenfrote and deconstable as Diana's world, their intention to make viewers understand Diana's mental state by making them literally experience her broken perception of reality. One of the show's central points, the existential thought it shares with Passing Strange, is that everyone has their own road and their own destination - or, as Passing Strange puts it, their own Real. You can't go the other way because their Real are different from your Real. Diana has to find her way, but for most of the show, everyone else is telling her what that path should be. It's only at the end when she takes control of her own life that we think she can find her Real. Of course, like the company, the end of Next to Normal is ambiguous. Diana takes action, but we have no idea what the results of this action will be. Will it be better? Worse? These answers are not the meaning of this story. The fact is that Diana finds her way. Just like Bobby in company. It's a complicated, grown-up story. This is not an adult, because the characters say a lot of, but because this story about things is usually only an adult experience – the breakdown of marriage, unfortunately, emotional scars, fatigue, big existential issues... Next to Normal is infinitely rich and complex, as well as brutally honest. Even though small types will tell you, the audience doesn't go to the theater (or movies) to escape; We're in touch. To understand the world around us and our own lives, it should be recalled that we will all go through essentially the same challenges that we are not alone in. We all don't have bipolar disorder, but we do the whole thing, one way or another, with the same challenges and questions Diana faces. This is the same reason why people told stories around camp fires in our early days. As the show reminds us, Sondheim says the point of art is to make order out of the chaos of our world. Art chooses from life, tricks, juxtaposes, reveals, magnifies, all in the service of telling a meaningful story that helps us navigate the average human terrain in the 21st century. You don't have to be bipolar to see your own daily struggles in Diana's more extreme struggles. And that is why storytelling is important for Culture. And why do we need theatre. And why people find Next to normal so really powerful and incisive. Agent chaos is a conventional storytelling device, and these characters are often flawed. Next to Normal Diana has malnutrition, but only psychologically. Outside, she's an average suburban wife and mother, and yet from the inside she's broken. And this hacking makes it very difficult – impossible? – to fit into the world. In Act II, when the family surveys old photos, we catch references to numerous embarrassing incidents in Diana's past. This has been going on for a long time. But in Diana's case, she's not an agent of chaos because she ID run wild, like many agents of chaos, but because Ego and Superego are largely dysfunctional. She's an unwelcome, accidental agent of chaos. In an interview with next to Normal's creative team, composer Tom Kitt, lyricist and book author Brian Yorkie, director Michael Greif and producer David Stone, the team talked about how the show originally called Feeling Electric, partly because the original push to write the show was the ISSUE OF ETC (shock therapy), and partly because the show initially had a snarkier, a smarter tone. But one of the lessons the writing team learned when they developed the show for several years was that they had to write about a person, not an idea. When they rewrote the show, it became more personal and sincere. In its earlier versions it is a question, etc. now we are talking about a woman and her family who are fond of mental illness. Big difference. And the new name, perhaps chosen more by gut instinct than reason, reflected this new tone. Interestingly, they chose this title before writing the title song, so they built this song around their new title. Next to Normal is an unusual phrase that captures your attention, and although we're all so used to it now, if you think about it for even a second, you see it packing a lot of meaning. In most shows, the downside doesn't end up comfortably fitting into the community. Once flawed, there is always a drawback. (Two exceptions are Harold Hill and Maria von Trapp, though you could argue that the Meredith Willson River is an entire city full of flaws.) So in Next to Normal, instead of taking Diana on a journey from wrong to normal, the writers gave her a more modest, more honest, more nuanced goal, to find a place next to normal. In the show's finale, Diana sings: It's not Rogers's Bromide and Hammerstein's like You'll Never Walk Alone. It's real life. Here Diana chooses to walk alone. And note that Diana's lyrics in the second person – you find some way to survive – as a reminder that this is not just her journey, but all our journeys. This song is a kind of companion to the equally ambiguous Being Alive in Sondheim's company. It's not a happy ending here because there are no happy endings in real life; there's always the next chapter (so we've all learned from the forest). What's today may be fixed tomorrow, but it's equally true that what's good today could be removed tomorrow. We know at the end of Next to Normal that Diana made the decision, but we have no idea how



it will turn out. As stated in the song, they will go further ... The show's secondary history (and The Hero Myth's parallel journey) between Natalie and Henry, both mirrors and intersect with the main story. Like Diana, Natalie is also malnour't malnoured, but she's lucky, so is Henry. Structurally, Natalie and Henry are more serious, more integrated versions of Annie and Will Parker's Ado. Throughout Next to Normal, there is a underlying tension as we are slowly aware of the friction between Natalie and Diana derived from Natalie's fear that she will grow up to be über-misfit Diana that she is as broken as her mother. This fear perks up and shapes Natalie's relationship with Henry. Yorkey highlights this by setting the two couples together at one point in Act I when they're actually talking lines together in unison. And while Diana takes her own hero Myth Journey, Natalie takes one too. Natalie's goal throughout the show is to find normality. But by the end she had learned she had the wrong purpose. Instead of trying to be normal - in other words like everyone else - Natalie finally realizes that her real goal should be to find out who she is and what her dear is, just like the youth in Passing Strange. We know that Natalie grew up - or growing up - near the end of the show when she sings to Diana: She frees Diana from guilt and expectations, and in the process, she lets go of her own nevros, as well. Perhaps Natalie finally realized, with the help of Stoner Zen Master Henry, that it's normally artificial that it's a design. The Goodmans don't look like other families because everyone's road is different. In the real world, there is no such thing as normal, just as there is no such thing as average. These are shortcuts about statistics, but our story is about complex, ever-changing individuals. Normal doesn't make any sense here. And if there is no such thing as normal, can someone really be flawed? Or are we all flawed? Besides, isn't life itself fundamentally chaotic? And if that's the case, doesn't that make us all agents of chaos? As the children in Bute's spelling remind us: Life is random and unjust. Neither good nor bad, nor wrong, nor right, just chaos. You may be terrified of it, or you can embrace adventure. Diana and Natalie were terrified of it and should both learn to embrace adventure. The show's title even seems to evoke (though probably unintentionally) a new American musical in which the hero's love stories and myths are as complex as the real life in which there is easy answers or endings in which we can see ourselves and our own lives much clearer than we can see them in simplified shows like Sound of Music or Brigadoon. It's not a normal musical (if there's such a thing anymore), but it uses devices from both the R&A model. H, and from classical musical comedy (as in I'll Be Good), so it's fair to say that next to Normal next to normal... This story is not neat, tidy or easily wrapped in a nice little package of short stories, as many musicals did in the old days. It's part of what some people hate about the new golden age of musical theatre that we currently have, but that's what others love most about it. In a production on Broadway, in a song (later cut) called Feeling Electric, they did a trick with a hospital gurney on its end and Alice Ripley standing against it, so it seemed like we were looking down at her from above. It's an effect also used in the woods, Capeman, and Hairspray, but it works, it's clear and it's always fun a bit of stage tricks. On Broadway - using the new song Wish I Were Here in that place - they brought Diana's deity out on the gam while the real Diana sang from the rest of the stage. But apparently the gurney is getting on with the best story because this scene doesn't really happen in the hospital, it takes place inside Diana's anesthetic mind, in a hallucination dream. While Diana is on the table and Natalie is in the clubhouse, the two meet here at Diana's Dreamscape and Diana tells her daughter: Cute! What are you doing in my electricity? Even Diana has the self-consciousness to know she's inside her own head as laid. This song is not about the hospital, it's about the chaos in Diana's mind as she is under assault for shock treatment as her memories are destroyed as electricity explodes in her past and her very identities. Ultimately, our sense of self comes from the accumulated experience and understanding we have picked up along the Road of Life, so destroying memories - whether temporarily or permanently - means destroying ourselves. From this perspective, the whole show becomes about Diana's struggle to save her own life. It's a song about an existential threat to Diana's very existence. It's about Diana's consciousness and the violence done to her, represented by a pulsating rock beat in music - Diana's heartbeat, her vitality, in the voice of an electric giggitarian. It's a powerful and subtle use of music as storytelling, something from which Tom Kitt is a master - just listen to High Fidelity. The whole show is dreamy to some degree, but a few moments in the show are very dreamy, disorienting, disturbing and revealing in a way that a more naturalistic writing or staging will be. One of the reasons the show has such resonance for the audience is that Diana seems to favor America at this point in our history - confused by competing versions of reality, unable to rely on credibility or long-established institutions (government, education, religion, capitalism, etc.). The characters of the myth of history like Diana are metaphors for human life, but they are also metaphors for our collective journeys as the evolution of society. I wish that I was here is part of the hero myth, in which the Hero must travel to the underworld and fight the erring wizard. Here, the underworld is the broken personal reality of Diana's electrified mind, and Ect is the magic spell of an evil wizard. But gabe her magic amulet or antagonist here? Or both ...? Underworld Diana easily stands behind America's current darkness, in which rival parties can't even agree on what's actually real anymore, in which opponents compare each other to Hitler, in which one side rewrites school textbooks to align their belief system (and, let's be honest, in order to indoctrinate the next generation), in which so many rules of polite society have been pushed aside. How do we navigate this new, altered, dangerous landscape? As we watch Diana navigate her own Underworld, we gain some insight into our personal and collective underworlds. I wish I was here less about this damaged woman undergoing a terrible medical procedure, and more about finding your way in the dark. That's kind of the point of the whole show. How do we find our way when we don't have a map to guide us? We use art. The song is forgetfulness in Act II - an interesting song structurally, because poems are dialogue, but the chorus is commentary, a kind of Fourth Wall Busting that acts as a powerful meta-moment because they sing about singing. In the original production, Dan sang Natalie's chorus, presumably enlisting her in his demure agenda, but that choice makes Natalie a more active player in family psychodromy who doesn't mesh well with the rest of her character arc. Natalie stands outside the central storyline for most of the show, and it's important to address her story. The script doesn't say dan sings this to anyone in particular. If he sings the chorus to the audience, it makes us complicit, and that leaves Dan's dark agenda defied inside the reality of the story, making his motivations richer and more complex, only to gradually reveal Natalie in Better Than Before. Phrase Sing a Song... has biblical roots, but here it is deliberately ambiguous. Throughout human history, why do we sing songs? Celebrate and remember. Is Dan celebrating diana's memory loss? Please note that it He celebrates as it was not, times they never knew. And then he sings, not remembering, and unpretty remembered memories. In addition, note that the first two lines do not rhyme - they stick out, in order to underline the most important idea - as everything was not. It's a poetic way of articulating Dan's agenda, which is to reformant Diana 's - and family - past to your liking. It's a dangerous road it's coming down to, but we only have hints of it here. Rich music gives him a romantic feel, but when you listen to what he says, we realize that the song itself mirrors Dan's duplicity by working on two levels at once. The song begins with the discovery of the breadth of Diana's memory loss after her treatment. Notice how natural dialogue sounds, but also note that Yorkey never breaks the structure and rhyming. Then Natalie explodes into a hard-driving, irregular rock 'n' roll. And then all three sing the chorus, but the words mean something different to each one. Dan's idealized past is phonetics. Natalie's past is pain. And Diana's past is past. From these three contradictory perspectives, these words acquire layers of meaning that slam against each other and foreword emotional clashes. Dan, Natalie and Diana sing: It's great writing. It functions as a Brechtian commentary song, but also as a regular book scene, in that it moves the story forward, and it perseveres Dan's desperate decision to try to rewrite his family history. The song Better Than Before uses the same kind of musical dialogue, but minus the false commentary. We reached a new level of lyrical sophistication in musical theater today. Oscar Hammerstein invented the music scene nearly a century ago, with Make Believe in Show Boat and later from If I Loved You in Carousel. Stephen Sondheim designed it further in Sweeney Todd. Passion and other shows. But in naked and next to normal, it was developed even further. Hammerstein's musical dialogue has always been a little stylized, sometimes having to rely on inverted sentences, a strange choice of words, etc. to do stunt work. Sondheim's musical dialogue was almost too skillful (look at the stunning lyrics for Weekend in the Country), often attracting too much attention to his own artistry. But John Hartner's work in Naked (just look at Wonderland's wonderful number) and Brian Yorkie's work in Next to Normal take us to a whole new level. And it's very interesting. We are indeed in the new golden age of musical theatre, and Next to Normal is a shining example of this. 1937 agitprop musical The Cradle Will Rock uses clever label names for its characters - Reverend Salvation, Doctor Specialist, Editor of the Daily, Larry Forman, and wealthy capitalist Mr. Mister, along with mrs. Mister, Mr. Jr. and Sister Mister. This fable and its characters are types, so instead of trying to disguise that fact, the show's writer and composer Mark Blitzstein openly admits it the way he calls them. There are a few plays and musicals that do this, but not a lot. And of those that do, some make it very thin, while others expressly announce it. There is a Christ's figure Jason and his companion Peter in naked, but there is also an orphan, Angel and Edgar Allen Rich in celebration. And the sly satirical Gitlow in Purley. Next to Normal, it does it more subtly. In Next to normal bipolar woman at the center of history - Diane Goodman. Immediately, her last name sounds like a shortcut-name, as if to suggest that these are decent, normal people - and by extension, that mental illness does not play a preference. Bad things happen to good people. Her name refers to the Roman goddess of hunting, moon and birth, which has also been associated with wild animals and forest (often a dark place of self-openness in storytelling). Goddess Diana was widely known as the virgin goddess of childbirth and women. But her name takes on even more serious resonance once we start hearing Dan call her Dee, which he does throughout the script. It's powerful enough for this damaged woman on edgy sanity to be called a name that sounds like dying. And this nickname gains even deeper resonance once we reach the world there. And then there's Gabe, named after one of the most famous angels in Christian culture, an archangel who serves as a messenger to people from heaven who announced the birth of Christ the Virgin Mary. With this in mind, Gabe's first lyric takes on even greater significance: The Angel Gabriel appears to various people throughout the Bible, and in the Old Testament he appears to the prophet Daniel, delivering an explanation of Daniel's visions. Daniel is a Jewish name, literally meaning God is my judge. Is that a hint of Dan's guilt? And does this change our response to this last conversation between Dan and Gabe before the final? And indeed, Goodman is Dan's name - Diana just married him - so maybe that label's name is more about him. Does Diana call him in the song Why Stay? both unwavering and durable, stoic and solid. And not in a good way. Maybe the fact here is that being a good person is not enough in this situation. Maybe nothing is enough. Earlier in Act II, Gabe says: Until you call me, you can't tame me, and it's not until we realize that no one has mentioned Gabe's name yet. The moment when someone finally makes it all the more powerful because of it. All of which seems to argue that these carefully chosen names should make sense in history. But wait, there's more... Where is the name Come? It is Natalie's English form that comes from Italian natalie, which means a birthday. This specifically refers to the birth of Christ - the Italian phrase for The Nativity of Christ! It's buon natal! (literally a good birthday!). Then there are two doctors. The less responsive, more drug-captured Dr. Fine has only one goal - stability. He wants Diana to be just wonderful, nothing more. Dr Madden seems to care more about Diana, but his treatment will apparently go mad at Diana even further. Heinrich is a name shared by British, French and German kings, and one Catholic saint. It comes from a Germanic name that combines words for home and ruler or power. Henry as the owner of the house? Maybe it's more about Henry representing Natalie's house, a safe place. In terms of the story of the myth of the hero Natalie, she finds her magical amulet in the love of Henry. She finds a real human connection after a lifetime has been denied this. Maybe the reference to all these kings means no more than that Henry will be a strong man - different from Dan. And maybe it's all accidental. But it seems hard to believe when the meanings of names are so perfect for their characters. Then again, maybe it was just the gut feeling that led writers to each name. Despite its dark theme, Next to Normal has a lot of laughs. For example, at the end of My Psychopharmacologist and I, after weeks of mixing and matching medication, Diana tells Dr. Fine: I don't feel like myself. I mean, I can't feel anything. Dr. Fine grunts and writes in his notes: The patient is stable. The audience laughs, but it's a muffled, ironic laugh. We see dark humor from the outside, but we also see horror from within. And this confession from us sets I miss the mountains, making it even more resonant. Also, late in Act I, Dan asks Natalie: Is Henry a good influence? Natalie replies: Like, compared to what? Dan says, OK, that's fair. And we get a big laugh from the audience, sometimes even double laughter along the lines of Natalie and Dan. Viewers see a complex truth in humor, and they also desperately need the release of laughter at this point in history. Next to Normal requires an active audience that listens carefully to what is engaged. This is not a passive experience. One of the most powerful elements of Next to Normal is battles. There's nothing so riveting on stage as a good, downed fight. Many actors and directors are afraid of a full struggle, but conflict is the heart of drama, and a great struggle is the height of conflicts. With scenes like You Don't Know and I'm Alone and Later, There Will Be Good Recriming and Why Stay?, there are fireworks on stage. Next to Normal there is a roller coaster in everything, but Act II is even bigger While the whole show is mostly music, the only small bits of dialogue here and there, Act II is even more wall-to-wall music. And composer Tom Keith keeps the tension up without finishing most of the songs in Act II, robbing us of buttons, often overlapping the beginning of one song over the end of another - and more than once, he creates overlapping in two different keys to cause the music's tension and conflicts of action. It created the musical equivalent of a roller coaster, and that's part of the reason Act II is so emotionally draining - there's no release, no pause, no moment for reflection. Like Diana, we should just hang out and go on this wild trip. Sondheim used music this way in Sweeney Todd, but Keith pushes it even further here to extraordinary effect. And yet for those quieter, more emotional moments, there are these beautiful phrases strings between vocal phrases that give such beauty and such fragile emotions to action. Violin and cello play a lot in harmony, which is chic, but they sometimes play in a very dissonant harmony, telling us musically that something wrong is happening on stage, even if only subtext. The band's arrangements are incredible, and like Kitt's score for High Fidelity, music does a lot of storytelling in Next to Normal. Brian Yorkie's dialogue and lyrics for Next to Normal use several text themes. References to light, death and madness appear throughout the show, but light to the heart. Word light appears throughout the text, along with related ideas such as daytime and electricity. Just as the word rental in rent acquires multiple meanings, everything is very resonant inside the narrative, so the word light acquires multiple meanings in Next to Normal. Sometimes it means literal light, sometimes it means enlightenment or revelation, sometimes it means light or frivolous. But actual physical light is also a theme in the show. The show begins with Diana turning on the lights, and the show's Light finale begins with Natalie turning on the lights. Halfway through Act I, Diana even brings on a birthday cake covered in lit candles. This story is a hero's myth - about the search for light. As Dr. Madden tries to gipnoticize Diana to unlock her past, he asks her to imagine going down a dark staircase, and in her passive-aggressive support she asks: Should we turn on the lights? You know, with the stairs? This is ridiculous, but in the context of this action, light takes on double meaning. Perhaps Yorkie hints that Madden might just lead Diana to genuine enlightenment at last. Next time we hear the word in I Dreamed a Dream as Diana slips into fantasy. She starts the song: I saw you light up the ballroom with your shiny blue eyes. Here the light is beautiful, romantic, joyful. This time a conversation late in Act I in which Madden tells Dana that he recommends electroconvulsive therapy - shock therapy. Here, light is associated with electricity, danger, risk, and it also takes us back to Diana's reference to turning on the light in the hypnosis scene, and that moment of the show's opening. Act I of the finale, Dan Diana's plea to agree to Ect, is called Light in the Dark, and once again the word light acquires all these different tastes of meaning - lighting, enlightenment, happiness, peace, but also life. Dan sings: While the first images are specific, this song works in metaphor. They live in a world of darkness, and Dan desperately wants to find the light. Later in the song, he sings: And at the end of the song: He's right, but it might not be the light he's looking for. Dan is desperately trying to find light, but Diana is afraid of the light, and he doesn't understand that. Like many of the songs in the show, this one works at both specific and metaphorical levels at the same time. As we begin Act II, we go into Diana's head as she passes ECT, in the song Wish I Were Here, and her first line. Again, the light is dangerous, destructive, painful. For Dan, light is salvation: Diana, this is the enemy. Later in the song both Diana and Natalie sing: I am the light and warmth of every sun... Light illuminates, but it also burns and consumes. When Diana returns home, Madden suggests Dana is like jogging her memories - Keep it light at first glance, it's better. Careful that she's not upset. There's light about frivolity. How can I ever forget? one of Diana's recovering memories is the city's lights flew by. Whether Yorkey conceived it consciously or not, the phrase works on two levels, both as a specific memory, and as a description of her returning memories - her enlightenment - rushes past her graspy mind. In Promise, Dan Diana's desperate retribution later in the same scene, he sings: Again, the light is about burning. Dan Moth is drawn to the flames, only to be consumed by it? When Diana returns to Madden in a recrim of Make Up Your Mind, he asks her to come up with that there are moments of light. Light is like enlightenment, hope. In the final scene, Natalie enters the darkness and says: Dad? What is it? Why is the lights off? Why does Dan choose the dark? Now the light takes on the final meaning, drawn to the truth, to life, the first step to enlightenment. Finale The Light is summing up, tying the show's themes and giving each character a moment to reflect on where they were and where they were headed. Each character uses images of light and darkness in different ways. Natalie sings: This is the first time Natalie uses light as a metaphor and she also physically switches on it grows and gains its own enlightenment. In the next verse, Dan sings: Dan hasn't found the light yet, but now he can see he was on the wrong track. Later in the song, Gabe sings: And then they all sing: So let it shine, repeating the word to shine. Like the finale of Hair, this song recognizes the darkness and begs us - all of us - to let the sun shine, to let light to defeat the darkness. We, of whom they sing, are not only the Goodmans, but the all of us. Song and show end with this incitement, it's a celebration of the human spirit: Despite the darkness of history, this finale offers some hope, limited and narrow, though it may be. The light is there, the characters tell us, but we have to be open to it and we have to fight against the dark. While Hair asked us, pleaded with us for the sun to shine, Next to Normal ends on declarative expression - there will be light. (Pay attention to york's exclamation point on the latter!) Diana and Natalie both found self-consciousness and some enlightenment - or at least they're on their way. Dan even took the first tentative step toward his own enlightenment. Are these people going to be ok? Who knows? That's not the point. The thing is, travel, constant search for light. Very similar to finding Real in Passing Strange. It's a matter of the new century. Text topics like this don't always sign up deliberately to the audience, but they work for us. They create connections and associations. They will fork out important points and ideas. And this particular theme of light registers with all of us at such a primary level. We humans are always in search of light. That's part of why Next to Normal connects so powerfully with audiences. We all need light. ----- copyright 2013. An excerpt from Scott Miller's forthcoming book about an untitled musical theater. All rights reserved. Miller is also the author of Strike Up the Band: A New History of Musical Theater, Harold Hill's Deconstruction, Rebel applause, Let the Sun Shine: Genius Hair, From Assassins to the Westside, and Sex, Drugs, Rock 'n' Roll and Musicals.. Musicals..

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