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## MCCARTER THEATRE CENTER ANNOUNCES “The Manic Monologues”

*Innovative Virtual Theatre Project to Create Conversation about Mental Health  
Launches February 18, 2021 [VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE SITE](#)*

PRINCETON, NJ (Feb 3, 2021) [McCarter Theatre Center](#) in association with [Princeton University Health Services](#), [The 24 Hour Plays®](#) and [Innovations in Socially Distant Performance](#), a project of the Lewis Center for the Arts at Princeton, will launch *The Manic Monologues*, a digital theatrical experience to disrupt stigma and spotlight a conversation about mental health. The free interactive [website](#) goes live **Thurs, Feb. 18, 2021 at 7AM EST.** ([Approved Images](#) and [Bios](#))

**Breakdown to Breakthrough:** A psychotic break inspired a Stanford University geology student to create a play in an effort to de-stigmatize mental illness. In 2017, **Zack Burton** was diagnosed with bipolar disorder while finishing his Ph.D. **Elisa Hofmeister** helped him through his journey. The two, who were then dating, were driven to address the lack of visible narratives around mental health, resulting in a series of true vignettes they called *The Manic Monologues*. The play was first performed live at Stanford in 2019. McCarter planned a professional staged reading in 2020. When COVID halted live events, the project was re-conceived for virtual consumption.

**The Virtual Experience:** Visitors to the interactive [website](#) will journey through the minds and stories of individuals who have something to say about the way mental illness has affected their lives. A series of 21 monologues performed by professional actors can be viewed at one’s own pace. The site is a “studio space” where the visitor can creatively and anonymously interact and respond to the stories. *These stories are true. They are brave and personal, and range in age and background. They convey struggle and pain, triumph and resiliency.* Viewers can tailor their experience through “mindful play” (sound, writing, doodling.) **Running Time: Your Choice.**

A virtual resource guide has links to help & support, books, articles, research, and the script. The site’s “Media Center” hosts interviews with leading experts and advocates discussing Mental Health and its intersection with *Social Justice*, *Social Media* and *COVID* (including a conversation with [Jean Twenge](#), best-selling author of *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood*).

**The Creative Team:** The virtual experience is conceived & directed by [Elena Araoz](#); [Jared Mezzocchi](#) (Multi-Media Design); [Nathan Leigh](#) (Sound Design & Original Music); [Jackie Liu](#) (Web Development).

**The Cast:** [Tessa Albertson](#), [Anna Belknap](#), [Ato Blankson-Wood](#), [Mike Carlsen](#), [Maddie Corman](#), [Alexis Cruz](#), [Mateo Ferro](#), [Wilson Jermaine Heredia](#), [Sam Morales](#), [Bi Jean Ngo](#), [Armando Riesco](#), [Jon Norman Schneider](#), [Heather Alicia Simms](#), [C.J. Wilson](#), [Craig Bierko](#). (Stephanie Klapper Casting.)

*“With this digital endeavor, McCarter hopes to reinforce its role as a cultural organization dedicated to innovative projects that spark timely dialogue, and strengthen community. In pivoting to virtual creation in COVID, we’ve uncovered exciting ways of combining art and ideas. And, we are excited to make this work, and the conversation around mental health, accessible to a wider and more diverse audience than we would have in a traditional live staged-reading format. These are silver linings!” - McCarter’s Resident Producer Debbie Bisno*

[Princeton University’s Health Services](#), and [Calvin R. Chin](#), Ph.D. Director, Counseling and Psychological Services helped to curate the site’s resource guide, interviews and conversations.

[The Manic Monologues virtual experience](#) is made possible through dedicated support of [Princeton University](#) partners: The [TigerWell Initiative](#), [The Lewis Center for the Arts](#), [Residential Colleges](#) (Butler, First, Forbes, Mathey, Rockefeller, Whitman) and [The Graduate School](#); support from Daniela Bonafede-Chhabra & Ashvin Chhabra, and a partnership with [One Mind All Media](#), a non-profit organization that accelerates collaborative research and advocacy to enable all individuals facing brain health challenges to build healthy, productive lives.

**ABOUT THE MANIC MONOLOGUES** (original play) The Manic Monologues is a play showcasing true stories of mental illness to disrupt stigma, created by Zachary Burton and Elisa Hofmeister in the wake of Burton’s bipolar diagnosis while a Ph.D student at Stanford University. The two incorporated accounts from dozens of brave individuals across the continent and beyond — from survivors with diagnoses; from health professionals; from mothers, sons, and friends; from lovers. The play premiered in May 2019 at Stanford, and was performed in Des Moines & LA before COVID, drawing accolades from NPR, Washington Post, BroadwayWorld, others.

**ABOUT MCCARTER THEATRE CENTER** Under the leadership of award-winning Artistic Director Sarah Rasmussen, Managing Director Michael S. Rosenberg and Special Programming Director William W. Lockwood, McCarter's mission is to create world-class theater and present the finest artists for the community engagement, education, and entertainment. Winner of the 1994 Tony Award for Outstanding Regional Theatre, world premieres include Christopher Durang's *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*; Tarell Alvin McCarey's *The Brother/Sister Plays*, Emily Mann's *Having Our Say*, and Danai Gurira's *The Convert*. More: [www.mccarter.org](http://www.mccarter.org)

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**[LINK TO Images, Key Art, Headshots](#)**

**[LINK TO Bios of Creative, Cast, Producers, Partners, Sponsors & Panelists](#)**

The Manic Monologues Virtual Experience [WEBSITE](#)

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