



OR, AN ASTRONAUT PLAY.

BY JOHNNY G. LLOYD

DIRECTED BY WILLIAM STEINBERGER

JANUARY 4TH-26TH, 2020

THE TANK, 312 W. 36TH ST., 1ST FL.

Ground Control

InVersion Theatre excavates and liberates found and foundational texts, transforming them into raucous, unrecognizable new theatrical experiences.

InVersion Theatre was founded in 2011 in Philadelphia. Starting with an existing and often overdetermined text, we create weird, genre-bending work, that remixes the orthodox with the avant-garde.

Between 2011 and 2014, InVersion produced four full length works in Philadelphia, all directed by William Steinberger and produced by Johnny G. Lloyd: Dutchman by Amiri Baraka in 2011; Miss Julie by August Strindberg, and SHEPARD/BECKETT, a night of one-acts by Sam Shepard and Samuel Beckett, in 2012; and Owners by Caryl Churchill in 2013. In 2014, InVersion collaborated with composer Marc LeMay on Mirroring Sky: An App-Play, which took participants on a guided listening tour through the streets of Philadelphia, as part of Philadelphia FringeArts.

2015 brought big changes to InVersion: we moved to New York City and produced In the Woods We Return, a world premiere by our own Johnny G. Lloyd. In the spring of 2016, we presented Gregor, an adaptation of Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," written by William Steinberger and brought to life through several months of workshops and readings. And in 2018, we produced (in collaboration with The Tank) the first round of We Read Books, a night of brand new short plays by different playwrights, inspired by a classic text selected by InVersion.

On the horizon? More We Read Books; an audacious adaptation of Bram Stoker's Dracula, set in the venture capital scene of Silicon Valley and co-created with composer Andrew Underberg; an all-new app-play, set amidst the enchanted wilds of Brooklyn's Prospect Park; and of course, the world premiere of Johnny G. Lloyd's Or, An Astronaut Play.

To learn more, please visit inversiontheatre.com. And to bring InVersion Theatre to your community, please contact Johnny Lloyd, Producing Director at inversion@inversiontheatre.com to discuss further.

Destination APAP

Small but immense, tight but sprawling, Or, An Astronaut Play ties together transcendentalist sentiment with modern-day struggles to create a play that interrogates privilege, capitalism, and outer space.

The Astronaut School has four students—but only one can actually make it to outer space. Who has what it takes? Does anyone even know what it takes? Following the experiences of Daria, an intense, focused student, Claire, a woman struggling to fully realize her own ambitions, Paul, a hobbyist, and Tom, a straight, white, American man, Or, An Astronaut Play explores who gets access to the space they want to enter, why, and what's left for the rest of us.

Or, An Astronaut Play is perfect for communities that crave new ways to engage with conversations regarding privilege, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The play's whimsical nature allows its messages to remain present but never feel didactic. Its childlike sense of wonder allows it to feel immense in both small and large spaces, and the ensemble nature of the play gives multiple communities with access points and ways to understand the struggle of these characters.

Or, An Astronaut Play is a distinctly InVersion event. InVersion specializes in creating theatrical experiences that use existing texts as a jumping off point for fantastical, wild, and unrecognizable performances. Projects include full length plays, musicals, short plays, and "app-play,s" (theatrical experiences using phone technology and geolocation). We hope that APAP presenters will want to learn more about InVersion and our unique take on the art of adaptation.

Or, An Astronaut Play's surreal universe is created with glow-in-the-dark paint, assorted projectors, vintage video game sound, and mounds of recycled cardboard. Featuring designs by Izmir Ickbal (TFANA, Yale Rep, Berkeley Rep), Barbara Erin Delo (Parsons Dance, Martha Graham Company), Bailey Costa (Wellfleet, Great Comet Assistant Designer) Brian Hickey (Rattlestick, BRIC) and Rebecca LeVine (InVersion, Czech Center NYC).

Getting to Liftoff

Or, An Astronaut Play was developed in part at Judson Memorial Church's Magic Time in February 2017 and as part of 59E59's invited reading series in July 2017. It was further developed by Theater Lab at Florida Atlantic University in their new play development conference in January 2019.

Rehearsal for the February 2017 reading of Or, An Astronaut Play, as part of Judson Memorial Church's Magic Time



From playwright Johnny G. Lloyd:

The idea for Or, An Astronaut Play first came as I was reading On Nature by Ralph Waldo Emerson. (Hear me out on this one.) As I read his chapter on Beauty, I was struck by the sheer ecstasy Emerson experiences in describing the outdoors, and how he prioritizes the natural over the man-made. "Give me health and a day, and I will make the pomp of emperors ridiculous," he says. "The dawn is my Assyria; the sun-set and moon-rise my Paphos, and unimaginable realms of faerie; broad noon shall be my England of the senses and the understanding; the night shall be my Germany of mystic philosophy and dreams." But at the same time, Emerson acknowledges that ultimately the beauty of natural world is ungraspable: "only a mirage as you look from the windows of diligence." Our understanding of nature—and what nature is—has changed so much as we have watched humans destroy so much of the

environment, elements we previously believed to be immutable. I wanted to write about a place that could still inspire this type of awe, that I still looked at as pristine, dangerous, unchanging—and that, I realized, was outer space.

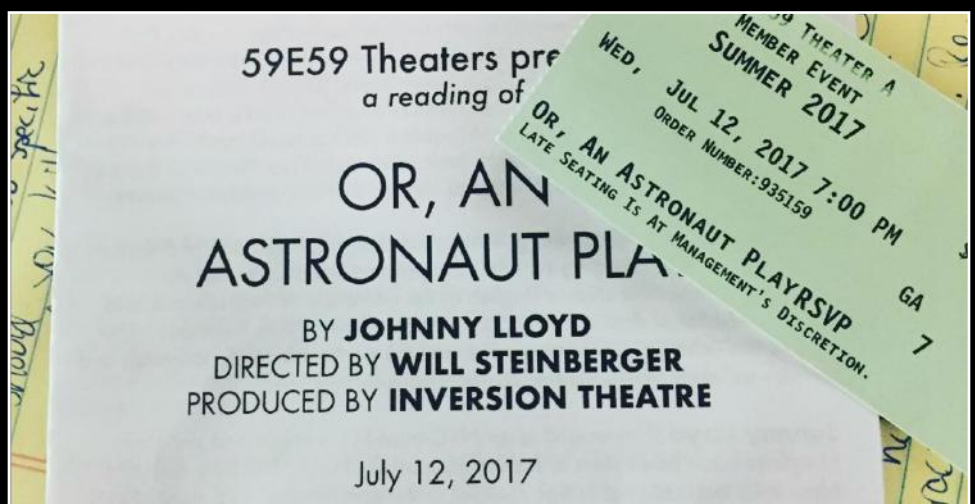
At the same time, I couldn't ignore the casual racism in Emerson's text. First Nations people are treated less as human and more as environmental circumstance; the understanding of what beauty is in the first place is rooted only in Western ideals, European sunsets, and Greek mythos. This felt like one of the follies of American transcendentalism—the inability to see beyond one's own context despite attempting to reach something universal. This actual transcendence too, felt necessary.

And finally, I was struck by one small paragraph buried in the middle of the essay: "All men are in some degree impressed by the face of the world; some men even to delight. This love of beauty is Taste. Others have the same love in such excess, that, not content with admiring, they seek to embody it in new forms. The creation of beauty is Art."

Right before writing OR, AN ASTRONAUT PLAY, in 2015, I had wrapped up a career in arts administration (at the ripe old age of 25!) and found myself transitioning into a scary new world as a generative artist—and I was terrified. But I did know that I wanted to create beauty. That I had discovered that I was not simply content with admiring. And I was scared that I wouldn't have the chance to explore these impulses—that the forces that had already robbed brown bodies of their humanity paragraphs earlier in the article would somehow prevent me from exploring mine. Or, even worse, that my Art would be allowed to exist but would be deemed somehow less than, or untruthful, or bad. Un-beautiful. And this was the seed from which I began to write.

The play has gone through several years of transformation and exploration but the ultimate nugget remains: we want to reach something that feels out of reach and find out that it's beautiful. And if we fail, that's okay—because after all, that beauty? It's just a construct. It's just an illusion.

Ephemera from
the July 2017
reading of Or,
An Astronaut
Play at 59E59
Theaters



The Flight Crew

Johnny Lloyd, Producing Director

Johnny G. Lloyd is a New York-based writer, producer, and theatre artist. Recent productions include Patience (workshop productions at Corkscrew Theatre Festival, Columbia University), Round (Samuel French Off-Off Broadway Short Play Festival), It's a Ghost Story (Homebase Collective), In the Woods We Return (FringeNYC). Upcoming productions include Or, An Astronaut Play. (Co-Production, The Tank and InVersion Theatre). His play Greenness was a semi-finalist for the National Playwrights Conference. Johnny's work has been seen at Judson Memorial Church, 59E59, TheatreLab (Boca Raton, FL), The Tank, Tiny Rhino, Dixon Place, and more. Johnny is a member of the 2019-2020 Liberation Theatre Company's Writing Residency. Johnny was a semi-finalist for the 2018 Open-Application Commission at Clubbed Thumb and was the 2017-2018 Shubert Fellow for Playwriting at Columbia University. As the producing director for InVersion Theatre, Johnny has produced plays including Strindberg's Miss Julie; Shepard/Beckett, a night of one-acts; Mirroring Sky, an App-Play; Gregor, an adaptation of Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis", and more. Johnny has been the producing director for InVersion Theatre since 2011, and has produced work with InVersion and independently at Access Theatre, The Drama League, Czech Center New York, and Columbia University. He has dramaturged projects such as The Historical Range of Ursus Americanus by Emma McFarland, and assisted Obie-Award winning director Katie Pearl on Red Hills, with En Garde Arts. He also served as the Associate Director for jazz singer (Abrons Arts Center) created by Joshua William Gelb and Nehemiah Lockett. MFA Candidate in Playwriting at Columbia University. jllloyd.weebly.com.

William Steinberger, Artistic Director

William Steinberger is a director, producer and dramaturg. As director, he has developed new plays at Hartford Stage, the Drama League, Berkshire Theatre Group, the Wilma, 59E59, Judson Church, The Tank, Jewish Plays Project, Czech Center NYC, Passage Theatre, Theatre Horizon, InterAct, FGP, Uglyrhino and several universities. Will is proud co-founder of InVersion Theatre. Astronaut Play is InVersion's eighth production. Recent InVersion productions include Johnny Lloyd's In the Woods We Return and Gregor, his own adaptation of Kafka's "The Metamorphosis." Other favorite productions include Zizi Majid's Return to Fall (Columbia), Sarah Pappalardo's Cold (Quince), Hannah Van Sciver's Marbles (FringeArts) and Fifty Days at

The Astronauts

William (Greenfield Collective) and David Auburn's Proof (Neumann University). He has assistant directed for Doug Hughes, Darko Tresnjak, David Auburn, Michael Wilson, Vivienne Benesch, Kip Fagan, Lee Sunday Evans and Robert O'Hara. He is a resident director at the Flea, former MTC Directing Fellow and member of the Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab. Will has worked at Hartford Stage, PlayCo, Andy Bragen Theatre Projects, the Wilma and Passage Theatre. His dramaturgy has been featured in the Wall Street Journal. Wsteinberger.com

Rebecca LeVine, Designer and Dramaturg

Rebecca LeVine has worked with InVersion since 2012, dramaturging Miss Julie, Shepard/Beckett, Owners, Mirroring Sky, Gregor, and Or, An Astronaut Play. She studied English at the University of Pennsylvania, where she also acted, directed, dramaturged, and designed for theater. She holds a Master of Arts in Performance Studies from NYU's Tisch School, where she wrote about photography and the performance of mourning and theater as labor versus theater as enchantment. Since then, she has worked primarily in publishing, moonlighting as a graphic designer. rebeccalevine.co



Harrison Unger (Tom)

Broadway: Dennis (aka Perkins the Butler) in The Play That Goes Wrong. Other NYC appearances at: 59E59, Joe's Pub, Park Avenue Armory, HERE Arts Center, Dixon Place, The Wild Project, The Brick Theater, NY International Fringe Fest/Fringe Encore Series. Web includes: I Love You (NPR's This American Life), web-series Good Cop Great Cop. TV: Hack My Life (truTV). Trained at London's British American Drama Academy and NYC's Atlantic Acting School; improv training at UCB and Second City. BA: University of Pennsylvania. He also makes short videos (and more!) under the name Harrington Plunger.



Tay Bass (Claire)

Tay Bass is thrilled to be joining the InVersion team here at The Tank! She was last seen in Boo Killebrew's Summer's Soldier at Williamstown Theatre Festival. NY theatre credits include Hype Man: a break beat play (The Flea), 48 Hour Forum (Noor Theatre) and As You Like It (El Barrios Artspace). Regional Credits include: ORLANDO (Williamstown), RENT (Bristol Valley), and Much Ado About Nothing (Texas Shakes). Tay received her BFA in Acting from Long Island University Post '17. www.taybass.com



Caturah Brown (Daria)

Caturah Brown is excited to be bringing the character of Daria to life in Or, An Astronaut Play. She is a New York City based actor/dancer who graduated from Marymount Manhattan College with her BFA in Acting. She then completed her classical training with a focus on Shakespeare in Oxford at the British American Dramatic Academy. Her previous credits include good friday (The Flea Theater), Almost Maimed (The Tank), Marc in Venice (Theatre at St. John's), ms. estrada (The Flea Theater), and The Reality Plays (St. Clemente's Theater). www.caturahbrown.com IG: @caturahdelores_



Jonathan Cruz (Paul)

Jonathan is thrilled to be a part of this production of Or, An Astronaut Play. Growing up in New York, he attended the Fame school (Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School) where he studied performing arts. His recent credits include The Seance Machine (The Tank) and a television appearance on Evil Lives Here (Investigation Discovery). Jonathan would like to thank his loving family, friends, and the entire Or, An Astronaut Play team. Follow Jonathan @ [yesiamjonathan](https://www.instagram.com/yesiamjonathan).

Bailey Costa, Lighting Designer

Bailey Costa is a NYC-based lighting designer and assistant working throughout the Northeast. Currently pursuing her MFA at NYU Tisch, Bailey has worked as lighting supervisor for such companies as Boston Lyric Opera and North Shore Music Theatre, as well as assistant lighting designer for Amélie and The Great Comet of 1812 on Broadway. Most recently she designed lighting for productions with Columbia University, NYU Grad Acting, and Tisch Dance. www.baileycostadesign.com

Barbara Erin Delo, Costume Designer

Barbara Erin Delo is a freelance costumer who is excited to be working on this exciting new work. A New York native, she has previously costume designed for Williamstown Theatre Company, Theatre at St Clements (The Bigot, Off Broadway premier), Martha Graham Dance Company, The Flea, Parsons Dance Company, Megan Williams Dance Projects, Capital Repertory Theatre, Battery Dance Company, NYC Fringe Festival, Chain Theatre Company, Third Rail Productions as well as many other NY and regional theatres. She studied costume design at SUNY Binghamton and NYU Tisch.

Brian Hickey, Sound Designer

Brian Hickey is a Brooklyn based sound designer. He has designed, engineered and assisted at various theaters and venues here on the east coast and in the San Francisco Bay Area. He is very excited to be working with InVersion for the first time, and thrilled to be working alongside Will following their work on Zizi Majid's Return To Fall. His recent design work

includes Novenas For A Lost Hospital (Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre) and Esai's Table (Briggs Opera House, Vermont), which runs Off-Broadway at Cherry Lane Theatre in March 2020. Additionally, Brian is a musician and composer, with a focus on experimental electronic work. He holds an MFA from the Yale School of Drama.

Izmir Ickbal, Scenic Designer

Izmir Ickbal is a New York based designer whose credits include A Christmas Carol in Harlem (Classical Theatre of Harlem), La Negra (BRIC), Round Table (Fault Line Theater), Dead Are My People (Noor Theater), Queen (Hot! Festival, Dixon Place), 125th and FREEDOM, Serious Adverse Effects (National Black Theatre), Happy Days starring Diane Wiest (Mark Taper Forum LA, Theater For A New Audience NY), The Late Wedding and 1001 (Teatro LATEA, Columbia Stages). Other credits include Big River (Unquowa Repertory Theater), The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost (Elm Shakespeare Company); Nanyang: the musical (International Festival of Arts, Singapore); MFA, Yale. More info: izmirickbal.com

Sarah Zerod, Stage Manager

Sarah Zerod is a New York-based stage manager. She has previously worked with InVersion Theatre, The Mechanicals, Double Eye Productions, EgoPo Classic Theater, The Greenfield Collective, Orbiter 3 and Enchantment Theatre Co.

The Tank, Co-Producer

The Tank is a non-profit arts presenter and producer. Our mission is to remove economic barriers from the creation of new work for artists launching their careers and experimenting within their art form, and to do so in an environment that is inclusive and accessible. We serve over 2,500 artists and over 1,000 performances, and work across all disciplines, including theater, comedy, dance, film, music, puppetry, and storytelling. The heart of our services is providing free performance space in our two-stage theater complex Manhattan, and we also offer a suite of other services such as free rehearsal space, promotional support, artist fees, and much more. We support work at all phases of development, from readings and residencies to fully produced world premieres. We keep ticket prices affordable and view our work as democratic, opening up both the creation and attendance of the arts to all.

Mission Support

InVersion Theatre is grateful to donors large and small for their support of [Or, An Astronaut Play](#). The below list acknowledges donors to the [Or, An Astronaut Play](#) fundraising campaign, which began in October 2019.

For a full list of donors to this project, visit inversiontheatre.com/astronautplay.

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inversiontheatre.com
inversion@inversiontheatre.com