

2008 Humana Festival of New American Plays

*Script samples from all six featured works at the
Part of our continuing new-play sampling series*

A Denver Post exclusive



**Presented by The Actors Theatre of Louisville.
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“This Beautiful City”

By Steven Cosson and Jim Lewis
Music and lyrics by Michael Friedman

TGIRL CHRISTIAN (TRANSGENDER)

I've known since I was three that I was supposed to be a girl, but something was wrong with the outer package. Before I transitioned, to full-time T-Girl, I was a civil designer, which is like a step below a civil engineer. But, oh, I was pushing the limits was going more androgynous, wearing earrings but not like these. (*Shows earrings*). And finally I was enough is enough! I was not going to do shock and awe or show up in my Easter dress. So I called a business meeting, the principals at the company, every significant person. I had handouts, I explained what it is to be transgendered, and asked if there were any questions you know, my life is an open book. My supervisor said you are really brave, I never would have been able to do that. And I said what I need to know from you all is this OK for me to go full time—it's required for my surgery. They said they needed some time to think, and a week went by and they handed me my pink slip. They couldn't come out and say it per se. I called the labor commission and they said they had no protections for transgendered people. And that was the last straw, I had lost everything, I had just lost my job, my church, my family, my fortune. And I went completely political after that.

For six months I was getting unemployment, but that's all they ever give you in Colorado, six months. Now only by the grace of the friends of mine, they're propping me up. Otherwise I'd be a bag lady by now. No shit. I'd be out in the street. My vision's horrible. I can't work at McDonalds, because I can hardly read the itty-bitty buttons on the cash register. But when I was at my job, if I had trouble seeing on the computer, I can zoom it up. Plus, to me, designing things, it's like playing Sim City. I love my job. It's like a video game to me. Designing stuff. Designing roads. I design a neighborhood and then a year later, there it is. They don't know I did it, but there's a warm place in my heart because I helped the city.

We see the same nighttime city lights as we did at the beginning of the play. A different cast member performs the song.

SONG: URBAN PLANNING

You design a neighborhood.
One year later there it is.
Or a place that was empty
Now a bridge a here
A road there
So you make a city
So you build it gently
And you see that when it gets done
There's a sign here

A park there
It's paradise.
Yes it's Paradise.
It's a paradise that you've made.
So my doctor says draw something.
So I draw a city.
Cause I've always liked cities.
I have since I was a kid.
So he tells me it's beautiful.
But where are the people?
I had never thought of the people
They move.
They get in the way.
They get in the way.
I'm looking at buildings.
He says that's kind of an issue.
Have people hurt you
Have people hurt you a lot?
But it's Paradise.
But it's Paradise.
Almost paradise.
That I've made.

TGIRL CHRISTIAN

I'd never seen all that when I was trying to run from me. If I learned anything from all this hell I went through is now I see the people. Now I see the people. And this is a beautiful city. A lot of my friends say well why don't you just move it's just too ornery it's too hostile they don't want you here. You know what this is AMERICA, I like it here. I LIKE seeing Pikes Peak out of my front door. I'll be doggonned if some guy is gonna to tell me where I can or can't live. The moment we have to run and hide and live in shadows that is the moment when we have lost our liberties. And it's NOT gonna happen, not on my watch. You didn't get permission from me to be who you are, so damn sure I'm not gonna get permission from you to be who I am.

A New Life Pastor addresses his congregation.

TAG PASTOR

Good morning. Today is... the first day of the rest of your life. (*audience laughs*). And the beginning of the next chapter for New Life Church. Okay New Life, we have been fasting for 21 days and I am so excited about our going without food to make space for the Holy Spirit to speak to us, I am so excited about what God wants to do from this day forward, I am very excited about the biscuits and gravy I had this morning (*audience laughs*). People, I have not had a coke in three weeks. I have not had a *Mountain Dew*. Yeah, it's serious. But see the act of fasting, going without food, requires the same mechanism, now hear me, the same mechanism for resisting sin. It has to do with your flesh. And I want you to think about this because Jesus, when he was tempted in the

desert, what he really did was, he was sacrificing something. The devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor, all this I will give you, he said, if you will bow down and worship me, and Jesus said, away from me Satan.

And then the devil left him.

And the Angels came.

And here is what I began to think: Jesus was faced with the temptation of immediate gratification. All sin is about instant gratification. It about doing what you want to do when you want to do it, and that immediate gratification is how we are built in America.

I don't know if you realize that.

We're kind of in trouble. Because in this country you can get anything you want any time of day or night. But when you go to an early prayer meeting, not because you like to get up at five thirty in the morning it's not just because it is so good for me now, but because it is going to be so good for me many years from now. In fact, I think it is important for every parent to understand that the reason you have kids is not your own self-fulfillment. The reason you have kids is not that they'll be so great. The reason you have kids is that we are building the kingdom of God into these little lives. And that is going to have an impact and an effect on their world and the people around them as they get older.

So we've got something to think about here with the idea of delayed gratification. Everybody say, delayed gratification. Say it.

(Audience: delayed gratification)

Delayed gratification.

It's not a fun concept. But it defines our role on the earth. We don't like to wait very much, but the Scriptures tell us to wait on God, that his timing is always perfect. This church has been going though some suffering over these last several months, but it is producing something.

What is it producing? Perseverance.

Testing of your faith develops perseverance.

Perseverance, say it:

ALL
Perseverance.

TAG PASTOR
Ok.

“Becky Shaw”

BY GINA
GIONFRIDDO

MAX

Women and empathy, man... This is just like that date I had last week... The dance professor who wanted to talk about the Iraq war...

ANDREW

You can't talk about the Iraq war?

MAX

For a few minutes, fine. But there's nothing I can do about it, and there is definitely nothing Annabelle the dance professor can do about it, so--

ANDREW

Wait, you can't really believe there's nothing anyone can do.

MAX

Let me clarify. I send a lot of money to people whose job it is to do the right thing--

SUZANNA

The Democrats?

MAX

No, NAMBLA. Of course, the Democrats, stupid.

ANDREW

So people who don't have money can't exert any impact?

MAX

That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying I do my share... I give away ten percent of my income to people whose job it is to solve this problem. It's their job. It's not mine. And I don't want my dinner ruined.

ANDREW

So what did you say to her?

MAX

Oh... She wanted to tell me about this protest at Harvard. Some artists emoting against the war bull shit...

SUZANNA

You told her it was stupid and pointless.

MAX

I did not say it was stupid. I did say it was pointless.

SUZANNA

You're a jerk.

ANDREW

(to MAX)

You're probably right, but you don't want to say that on a first date.

MAX

Wait. Did you just agree with me?

ANDREW

It depends on how you said it. I used to go to those protests at Brown, but... I started to feel like they weren't really about the war. No one important was watching, we were just... assuaging our guilt and getting laid. I feel like... Do something real or do nothing, you know?

SUZANNA

Now, if you say it like that, it's OK...

MAX

Which do you do?

ANDREW

What?

MAX

About the war. Do you do something real or do you do nothing?

ANDREW

Umm... I don't do as much as I should. There's a group at Brown that sends books to the troops--

MAX

Oh, those poor troops. The Brown kids are sending them books...

SUZANNA

The troops are not illiterate, Max.

MAX

No, they're not. But when you live in fear of dirty bombs and torture, you do not want a used, highlighted copy of *To the Fucking Lighthouse!*

SUZANNA

Let's change the subject.

MAX

You throw any sun block in with the great books?

SUZANNA

Stop it, Max. You're now officially being a dick.

ANDREW

Again, man... You make valid points. I stopped doing the book drive--

MAX

See? He agrees with me!

SUZANNA

No! He does not--

ANDREW

I'm standing right here. Jesus!

(after a beat)

Max, I need you to take, like, a mellower tone with Becky.

SUZANNA

She's delicate.

ANDREW

She is not delicate! Just... Max, it's not, like, emasculating to open yourself to another person's experience...

MAX

I don't know, Andrew. That sounded pretty fucking womanly.

SUZANNA

Tell him what to say. Give him actual words.

ANDREW

You could say something like, "Wow, that's kind of outside my experience, so I would need for you to say more."

MAX

(to Suzanna; genuine)

Is that... Don't tell me he snared you talking like that?

SUZANNA

I love it. It makes me weak.

ANDREW

Or you could say, like... "Whoa, that's a little heavy for Saturday night" and then segue out... with a question about her life-

(Andrew's phone rings; he answers it.)

ANDREW

Hello? (pause) Hey! (pause) Sorry. It's Porter. Just buzz-- (pause) Oh, sure. Stay there. I'll meet you. Bye.

(hangs up)

That's Becky. I'm gonna go get her.

SUZANNA

Why don't you just have her buzz?

ANDREW

She was actually calling from the mini mart. She didn't know my last name either.

SUZANNA

Why is she at the mini mart?

ANDREW

She doesn't have a cell phone. I'm gonna go get her.

(Andrew grabs his coat and leaves.)

MAX

Is my date... Amish?

“All Hail Hurricane Gordo”

By Carly Mensch

1.

A living room turned makeshift office. Two desks, one neat and organized with a typewriter and carefully arranged stacks of paper and the other a total wreck, purgatory-like, where things half-eaten and half-assed take up residence—opened bags of chips, abandoned Tinker Toy projects, wrinkled Wrestlemania magazines, parts of an old Bingo set, a bug collection in a recycled yogurt container, swimming goggles, etc. There is a worn-out couch dead center covered with piles and piles of phone books and a lone wooden chair in the corner.

CHAZ, late 20s, sits at the neat desk. Shirt and tie. Typing. Enter GORDO, mid 20s. In boxers and a little boys pajama top. CHAZ continues typing. GORDO watches for a moment.

GORDO
Hey.

Type type. Type type.

Hey Chaz.

CHAZ doesn't respond. GORDO patiently repeats himself.

Chaz. Chaz. Chaz.

CHAZ
I hear you.

GORDO
You want breakfast?

CHAZ

Already ate.

GORDO

Alright.

GORDO exits. CHAZ pulls out the sheet of paper from the typewriter and puts it into an envelope. He finds the appropriate address in one of the phone books open on his desk.

GORDO returns with some old mush in Tupperware. He loiters around CHAZ's desk while he eats.

GORDO

Mmm.

CHAZ

What is that?

GORDO

Stir-fry.

CHAZ

From last week?

GORDO

I guess.

CHAZ

You didn't see any cereal?

GORDO shrugs.

I bought some yesterday.

GORDO

You bought the bad kind.

CHAZ

I bought Cheerios.

GORDO

You bought Shit-e-os. The kind in the plastic bag. The kind you have to crawl on the floor of the supermarket to get. They look like Cheerios but surprise- they're really Shit-e-os. Simple mistake. How long you been working?

CHAZ

Little over an hour.

GORDO

Jeez. That's discipline.

CHAZ

Just finished the fourth one this morning. Oh. And we need to pick up more stamps. We're running low.

GORDO

Look at you. You're like this self-guided missile. Like your brain is on autopilot.

CHAZ

It's after ten by the way.

GORDO

See? You've even got an internal clock.

CHAZ

We start at nine thirty.

GORDO

We?

CHAZ

The household.

GORDO

Yeah... I can't get up then. Sorry.

CHAZ

Why not?

GORDO

Because. You got rid of the TV. That's how I used to tell time—the channel guide. I used to watch the channel guide every morning until breakfast. Do you know you can basically schedule your entire life just by watching the channel guide. It tells you what's on and when and how long, and there's even a little ticking clock in the upper hand corner. But now it's just...nothing. I'm a little ship, lost at sea, all floating around. Where's my compass? Where's my best friend? Oh yeah, Chaz sold it on eBay.

CHAZ

I didn't sell it on eBay. I sold it to Kip Bearman.

GORDO

The guy from the Y?

CHAZ

Yeah.

GORDO

Now what's he gonna do with a TV? Smoke it?

CHAZ

(amused)

Please tell me how you smoke a television set.

GORDO

Oh he'll figure out a way. He'll probably pull out all the wires and try to snort the electricity out of them.

CHAZ

What makes you think he does drugs? We see him at the pool, that's it.

GORDO

And on the bench outside, waiting for the bus. Smoking Lucky Strikes. Every Wednesday, just sitting on the bench. Smoking.

CHAZ

Cigarettes.

GORDO

Cigarettes are a drug, man. They've got nicotine. You smoke one and Bang! your brain is a plate of scrambled eggs. Haven't you seen the commercials? Don't ever smoke Chaz. Promise me you'll never smoke.

CHAZ

It's a little late for me to take up smoking, don't you think?

GORDO

Promise me Chaz.

CHAZ

Fine. I promise.

GORDO

Promise.

CHAZ

I said I promise.

GORDO

You can't die on me.

CHAZ

I'm not dying.

GORDO

I'm just saying, you better not. (A moment.)

I'm thinking of writing a letter. To Child Protective Services. With a note that says,

“Dear Protective Services. Question: Do you really protect every child in America?

Answer: No. You don't. Love, Gordon. P.S. Can you please get me a new TV?”

CHAZ just stares at him.

CHAZ

Why don't you go get dressed. Your leg hair- it's blinding me.

GORDO

You don't think that's funny? Writing a letter to Child Protective Services?

CHAZ

It's not that funny anymore.

GORDO

You write letters.

CHAZ

That's different.

GORDO

You write like ten a day.

CHAZ

I write inquiries. It's a different thing.

GORDO

I can sign both our names. They might like that—a two for one deal. (Noticing). What's up with the tie?

CHAZ

Oh. Right.

GORDO

You look good. You look like you're going to court.

CHAZ

I've... got a meeting today. We both do, actually.

GORDO

Ah... we're auctioning off the couch. First the TV, now the couch. Everything must go!

CHAZ

We're not selling anything. It's—an interview.

GORDO

What kind of interview?

CHAZ

You know, an interview.

GORDO

Okay. But what kind?

CHAZ

You can't get upset.

GORDO

What? Are you getting another job?

CHAZ

Not me. Someone else. Coming here.

GORDO

Someone who?

CHAZ

Someone who's coming here to interview with us.

GORDO

Why would they do that?

CHAZ

Go get dressed and we'll talk all about it. And put on a nice shirt—you can borrow one of mine if you want. With a collar.

GORDO

No. Tell me now Chaz.

CHAZ

It's no big deal. It's just a meeting.

GORDO

Tell me what's going on.

"Great Falls"

By Lee Blessing

(He goes into the bathroom)

BITCH

(calling out)

I saw you drooling!

(She slips on an oversized t-shirt, picks up her cell phone and punches a button)

BITCH (cont'd)

Hi, Mom? I'm fine. I'm *fine!* Since six hours ago? Yes, I'm fine. We're in Therm something, Thermos—I don't know. In a hotel. They've got hotels in Wyoming. It's very nice, if you must know. It's got a hot spring and everything. It's like a spa. He's spending lots of money. I think he's trying to buy my love. It's totally pathetic. What? No, he's in a room down the hall. No, I'm not going to get him, I'm too tired. Why do you always worry? He's a piece of shit; he's not gonna make me sympathize. God, you are so—! I'll call you tomorrow. I'll call you *tomorrow*. I'll— Hey! *Hey*. Almost eighteen here, remember? If you do that, I'll never speak to you again. I mean it. Listen. No, listen to me. This is the grown-up voice. Right? Right. Okay, good night.

(She hangs up. He comes out of the bathroom. He wears only boxer shorts)

MONKEY MAN

This is how I sleep.

BITCH

I can see why she left you.

MONKEY MAN

(glancing down at his body as she turns her back to go to sleep)

What do you mean?

BITCH

Look at you. Can't believe she didn't vomit every time you—

MONKEY MAN

I'm just average. I'm not special . . . I'm not awful.

BITCH

You're old.

MONKEY MAN

(getting into his bed)

Is that the awful part?

BITCH

Men are bad enough, but old men . . .

(as she shudders at the thought)

You gonna read or something?

MONKEY MAN

No.

BITCH

Then turn off the light.

MONKEY MAN

(looking at the light next to the bed, not moving)

I was thirteen when I was here before. We went to the hot springs. They didn't have all the stuff they have now, of course.

BITCH

The grass and trees?

MONKEY MAN

Mom hated it, said it stank. Which it did, of course. Just . . . overpowering. But even so, Dad and I climbed up to this place above the main spring. It was so beautiful. The water was the clearest I ever . . . well, it had to be, right? What could live in it? And the colors were . . . And all this heat just kind of flowed up from it in big waves, through the air. I could see where humans got their vision of hell, you know? So beautiful and . . . lethal. Strange to be someplace where the earth's so much hotter than everything else. Guess nobody's sleeping in the cold, cold ground around here, eh?

MONKEY MAN (cont'd)

(no response)

That was a great trip. I liked my parents best on trips. Wish we'd taken more trips with you and your brother. Bet you guys would have traveled well. Are you asleep?

BITCH

No, I'm thinking.

MONKEY MAN

About what?

BITCH

Who I hate more. You, or my father.
(after a long beat)

Turn out the light.

“Neighborhood 3: Requisition of Doom”

by Jennifer Haley

players

father type	steve, doug, tobias
mother type	leslie, vicki, barbara, joy
son type	trevor, ryan, jared, zombiekllr14, blake
daughter type	makaela, kaitlyn, madison, chelsea

notes

most of the play
takes place in the virtual reality
of a video game
or a suburban Neighborhood
except for the last scenes
which may be staged conventionally
as though they were more real
than the others
the walkthroughs
are voiceovers
like gaming instructions
or god

4 pool

doug it's okay son
 things die
 Snickers had a
 good life

ryan

doug we don't really know what happens
 when something dies
 Snickers could be with us
 right here
 right now
 we could even say
 hello Snickers
 you were an awesome cat
 i'm sorry you got hit by that
 hummer
 at least it happened fast
 we should all hope to be
 so lucky

ryan

doug as henry david thoreau said
 i went to the woods
 because i wished to live deliberately
 to front only the
 essential facts of life
 and not
 when i came to die
 discover that i had not lived

ryan Snickers didn't go to the woods

doug well he went into the bushes a lot

ryan

doug look
 ryan
 i just don't want you to feel
 alone
 you know you're not
 alone

ryan sure

doug we've all been affected
 by the death of Snickers

ryan i know

doug it reminds us of our own mortality
 and i know that can be scary
 as inderpal bahra said
 we are afraid to live
 but scared to die

ryan yeah

doug death comes to everyone
 think of it as something really democratic
 like our country

ryan or as warren leblanc said
 life is like a video game
 everyone must die

doug who is warren leblanc

ryan he got caught up in this game called manhunt
 and killed his fourteen-year-old friend
 with a Claw Hammer

doug

ryan

doug that's not quite
 what i mean
 look
 ryan
 we need to do something about this
 crying
 everyone has had a
 good cry over Snickers
 now it's time to dry our eyes
 lift the shades
 and let in the sun
 do you think you can do that

ryan

doug you're not a child anymore
 part of growing up is realizing
 there's a lot of pain in this world
 and taking responsibility for your life
 means you don't let it destroy you
 and you don't let your behavior
 increase the pain and fear
 for everyone else

ryan

doug your mother wants to put you
 on anti-depressants

do you want to be put
on anti-depressants

“the break/s”

.a travel diary recorded as dream. . .lewis and clark at hip hop’s Mason Dixon line
. . . one last look at Africa. . .a decision to love, but not live. . .

by Marc Bamuthi Joseph

Because negroes can’t have success without feelin like they’re sellin SOMEBODY out. .
Because I want a lexus AND justice
Because I’m teaching hip hop in Madison Wisconsin
And *she*’s sitting with the dalai lama in India
Because of jeff chang.

MOTIFS

Falling. . .”i was in Haiti once at a vodun ceremony and I passed out. I personally think that I just turned chicken shit at the sight of blood and fainted like a little beyoncé, but my whole crew believed I’d been possessed.”

The action in this piece sometimes mirrors this line. This falling, not knowing what hit you. . .i want this piece to have a sense of narcolepsy, and I want to create signatures in the physical environment (light, sound, blocking, gesture) that reflect the sensation of falling over into dark space, thought, or sleep. . .most of the choreography plays with this idea, but not too literally.

DREAMING . .mostly journal entries taken from planet hip hop. That sounds so big *planet hip hop*. . really what I mean is my world. Black artist being seen. Whenever I’m feeling too self-conscious I drop into a dream. Race matters less here. I feel safe to laugh at it. There should be a music signature, think music for a dream deferred. . .super

African American, Langston Hughes-Spike Lee- Duke Ellington-Dr. Dre. . .this basic score takes on the reflection and resonance and character of each international venue we visit in the dream state

Crossing. . .code switching. . .timetwist as shapeshift. . .using anything that's happened before in the action and sampling it into the present to compound the metaphor in the present moment. Any one of the four agents on stage can "cross". . .mostly scripted, but when we get good at this thing, we can have a little jazz during the last few loops. . .
NEED GOBO OF RECORD GROOVES—the grooves move when a new "time code" is scratched in. the call for a cross is "**WHEEL UP!!!**"

There are three folks on stage. One plays words and body. One plays images and recorded music. One makes the music live. They all play time. There are two cameras on stage as well, used by the DJ/VJ to capture the moment and project the feed onto two screens, placed in accordance with the director and set designer's shared vision. One camera is downstage right. The other is directly overhead the action.

Kasé is a Dance Sequence.

Title. . .

LOOP 1.

*If jazz is the broom Africans jump over to become Americans
Then what is hip hop? . . .*

KASE w/ Text

Kase is a series of "clock walks", quarter turn rotations performed while a dancer is on his back. Upon completion of the turns, the imprint of MBJ dragging his feet around in a circle "draws" record grooves on the stage surface.

MBJ

Cycles to break

No more lying

Much less flying

Call your grandma

Practice faith.

Don't confuse your art with your life
embody what you write.

Stop contradicting.

Slipped in the groove of institution and reparations

Funk and function equally separating to reveal me in the break

Psychically cycling
I got patterns to shake

Music to make
Culture to love
Guilt to feel
Prayers to say

OVERTURE

MBJ-Excess-Soulati

OVERTURE is staged like RUN DMC would do modern dance.

All three characters are “introduced” in the span of an 8 bar sequence

A chance to scratch in our tools. . .

An exhibition of drums, scratch, dance, poetry, vocal percussion, and lights.

MBJ sets metronome, a sound like the wind inhaling and exhaling, then eventually becomes the break from The South Bronx by BDP which Soulati performs vocally.

Closes with the tone that MBJ started with, this time with Soulati assuming the metronome as MBJ begins to spit.

MBJ

This is what it looks like right before I fall

3 beat pause as Excess slowly spins a record backwards, then everyone comes back in on the one. . .

Music: “The South Bronx”

MBJ (cont’d)

Jackie robinson swinging under the color line
Jesse owens hoverin over the hand of the heil
J-Hova
The brown bomber
Obama
Crossover

Music: Traditional folkloric rhythm

Legba bring the drama with the lesson
I am an American at the edge
More than less
I keep tryin to push this blackface
In urban high schools
More and more it matters less

I'm straddling the line

Don't push me

cuz I'm close. . .

I'm trying not to. . .

FALL

I am trying to believe that loving you

Doesn't mean I'm crossing over

Trying to accept a self concept that includes being your partner

But every time I think the question of commitment

I fall sleep

A not quite coma

Anxiety driven neuroses

that feels like spending the entire day in a dream. . .