

## Stories and Symphonies. Breathing Life into *Breathing Room*



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by Mary Lou Newmark

I was trained as a classical musician, so my approach to theater comes from a different perspective than most playwrights. I view my theater work as an extension of my music composition.

I usually start with music, with sounds, and with the rhythm of words. I later write poems that can stand alone, but sometimes become integrated into the music.

"Breathing Room" began with music compositions and poems. Over time, I recognized common themes appearing in my pieces: a sped-up society bargained with alcohol, being touch with our bodies, and with Nature around us. I realized that there was a work here that was bigger than a collection of poems and more than a series of music compositions.

My pieces were initially based on personal experience. The "Bad, Bath, and Beyond Experience" is a combination of drinking and musical soundscapes. It is based on a disappointing experience I had with a store that resembled some Olympic shop, and had grown in size to become a bit frightening, where the "shopping carts became soldiers that just followed you home whether you wanted them or not." After writing this piece, I saw a character emerging who was not me – a visual artist who was creative but somewhat trapped inside her standards and a little overwhelmed with life. I named her Marilyn.

A second character then began to appear, with a contrasting persona: a science teacher with a mysterious past. The Professor is Marilyn's neighbor, analytical, but mysterious, playful, and grounded in an odd way. Both these characters sprouted from more abstract figures in my previous devised theater work, "Breath of Trees." The two of them could help each other to see their differences and ease each other into new ways of thinking.

My two characters would explore how people in contemporary society engage with each other. And how we engage with Nature personally and collectively. The audience would see the characters blend apart before they do.

I began to write monologues, dialogues, and triologues poems spoke back and forth by the two characters. I composed more music and emotional possible dance sequences. The work grew more complex, so I began to play with juxtaposing different elements to show connections between them. My characters began to find equivalences things that people don't think of having connections: words and music, quantum physics and spirituality, light and sound.