

Stories and Symphonies. Breathing Life into *Breathing Room*



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a visual artist who was creative but somewhat trapped
inside her standards and a little overwhelmed with life.
I named her Marilyn.*

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 also 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 barraged with stimuli, losing 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 "Bed, Bath, and Beyond Experience" is a combination of storytelling and musical soundscapes. It is based on a disorienting experience I had with a store that relocated across Olympic Blvd. and had grown in size to become a bit frightening, where the "shopping carts became stalkers that just followed you home whether you wanted them to 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 mischievous, playful, and grounded in an odd way. Both these characters sprouted from more abstract figures in my previous dance/theater work, "Breath of Trees." The two of them could help each other to see their differences and tease 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' blind spots before they do.

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