



GOOD ADVICE: LISTEN TO YOUR MOTHER

By Allison M. Jones
Hamilton City Magazine
May 9, 2024

*The Players' Guild of Hamilton is contributing to the **storytelling phenomenon that 'gave motherhood a microphone'***

"Listen to Your Mother," a live storytelling event celebrating every facet of motherhood, was launched in 2010 in Madison, Wisc. Its creator was Ann Imig, a popular "mommy blogger" with a background in theatre and social work. At that first show, a dozen storytellers including Imig, read their "original true stories of motherhood," as the listentoyourmothershow.com website devoted to the "phenomenon" recounts.

Starting Friday and continuing through the weekend, Hamilton theatre and motherhood enthusiasts can catch four performances of "Listen to Your Mother," presented by two groups of local storytellers.

This is a production that Maureen "Moe" Dwyer says "has been on the Guild's radar for some time." The board asked Dwyer to direct. She's been involved with The Players' Guild of Hamilton for decades. As Dwyer puts it, she's "acted, directed, stage managed, (been involved in) play reading, so there is a history and a relationship." The production itself intrigued her.



The performers in night one, act one of "Listen to Your Mother" at the Players' Guild of Hamilton.

Listen to Your Mother is about “sharing perspectives about being a ‘mother,’ loving a mother/grandmother/child, not wanting to be a mother; it's about love, loss, joy, grief, strength, admiration, celebration,” Dwyer says. “It doesn’t require seasoned performers but rather, a diversity of voices, and the monologues didn’t have to be memorized, although most have done that.

“It’s about the words and sharing those words; it’s about diversity and commonality,” she says. Imig, the show’s originator, identified its community-building power as a central reason for its popularity. In the years since it premiered, “Listen to Your Mother” has been produced more than 250 times and been turned into a book of collected essays. It’s been paired with fundraising initiatives for women and families.

The Players’ Guild will be collecting feminine hygiene products, toiletries, and cash donations at each performance in support of Interval House of Hamilton, which provides shelter and support services for women who have experienced abuse or violence. There will also be a 50/50 draw and a silent auction.



The performers in night one, act two of "Listen to Your Mother" at the Players' Guild of Hamilton.

"Listen to Your Mother" is about the full spectrum of human experience. As its synopsis says, it's about "being a mom, having a mom, losing a mom, finding a mom – as many interpretations on the theme of mothering as you can imagine...from hilarious and heartwarming, to emotionally intense and profound."

The script recommends about a dozen performers using both scripted and original monologues. The Guild production has proven so popular that it has grown to about 30 storytellers organized into two casts, each with two performances.

"Originally, I reached out to several performers who came to mind and asked if they would be interested in performing in this show. They all said yes. Then when I held the auditions over two days, I was astounded at the amount of performers who came out; some were seasoned performers, others were new to the stage," Dwyer recounts.

“When I put out the audition notice, I said you could either choose a monologue from the script or you could bring an original monologue, but it had to be under five minutes. I was truly impressed by the number of original monologues, so touching, and powerful and meaningful,” she says. “I thought, ‘How can I choose one voice over another?’”



The performers in night two, act one of "Listen to Your Mother" at the Players' Guild of Hamilton.

To lend balance, a group of core performers will anchor all four shows. One cast will perform Friday night and the Saturday matinee, while the other will go on Saturday night and the Sunday matinee. The eight core cast members include Tamara Kamermans, Shari Vandermolen, Christine Hopkins, Janine Heaven, Deirdre Pike, Lyla Miklos, Carolyn Marshall, and Michaela Mairi Kinloch.

“The most difficult process was putting all of these monologues in an order and balancing the tone and emotions in each act,” the director explains. “I always knew Janine Heaven would close the show with ‘The Heroes in Our Midst’ by

Stefania Pomponi, because it sends celebration and respect out to those who mother, but finding the right order of the other monologues was tricky.”

What binds them together? They are “all unique, and brave, and amazing.”



The performers in night two, act two of "Listen to Your Mother" at the Players' Guild of Hamilton

Here are just some of the storytellers that will be performing this weekend, and what they had to say about their monologues, inspirations, and experiences so far:

Gregory Flis, original monologue, “A Couple of Nurses”: “I loved the concept of ‘Listen to Your Mother’ – various reflections or stories of mothers – by mothers or children or others. I feel a little intimidated being onstage for these monologues, however, as I am the only man performing. I felt a need to reflect on my own mother Helen Flis and my first wife Catherine McCarthy Flis and felt I could do so now that they've each been gone well over 20 years. But they are personal reflections which make me somewhat vulnerable. Nevertheless, that's a good reason to do it.”

Dia Gupta Frid, original monologue, "I Never Did Listen to My Mother": "When Moe Dwyer invited me to be part of "Listen to Your Mother," it enabled me to realize that death doesn't end a relationship. Thanks to Moe, I found myself discovering who my mother was as a person, rather than a parent, and writing about it. Honouring the woman who was my mother – such a blessing to do this on Mother's Day!"

Tamara Kamermans, original monologue, "The Black Doll": "I was really pleased to be involved because I think I represent a family dynamic that isn't ideal but nonetheless exists, and it's important for people to see that there isn't only one story of being a mother or a daughter. There are many and each has its own merit, and I think the show really exemplifies that."

Christine Marchetti, original monologue, "Enough": "In my monologue I share that motherhood can be lonely, but it doesn't have to be. While deciding to become a mother was, without hesitation, the best decision I've ever made, it does come with significant doubt, worry, and guilt, whether you've decided to work inside the home, or outside, like I have. Both choices come with their own playing deck of fear and uncertainty. It's the support I've had from other mothers and nurturers that have bolstered me and made me feel less alone, and sharing that message is what drew me to this show."

Lyla Miklos, original monologue, "Inheritance": "After my first rehearsal in which I got to hear the many personal and scripted monologues on motherhood from the cast, I had a greater appreciation of the depth and breadth of the relationship we have as a society with the word mother. It is a very loaded word, with a lot of cultural expectations. Our experiences all speak in different ways to the burden and the responsibilities that come with the title of mother."

Deirdre Pike, original monologue, "Beautiful Mother": "Last year was my first Mother's Day without my mom. I just felt a little lost and wasn't sure how to mark the occasion. When I was asked to write a story to contribute to this play I felt very happy, like I now had a special way to honour my beautiful mother."

Judi Skinner, "The Cheese Doodle Affair," by Ellyn Cohen: "It's been a pleasure reading a humorous piece based on all of the grammars around the world who enjoy spoiling their grandchildren, but it makes me miss my little ones so much in Newfoundland. And it seemed to channel my mom who I miss oh so very much. My son was only four when she passed, but this weekend she is alive

and well through these beautiful essays written by amazing women near and far.”

Shari Vandermolen, “About Me,” by Elizabeth H. Robinson: “It’s been a wonderful experience so far. The stories are so diverse, some inspiring and uplifting, some tragic, and then there’s the stories that have you giggling throughout. There are both original monologues written by some of the cast and those that have been selected from an existing script but all of them give voice to different iterations of mother. I’ve enjoyed exploring my chosen monologue about a woman who is childfree by choice, but that doesn’t mean she has any less love to give. I didn’t write it, but it’s still personal.”

NEED TO KNOW

May 10, 8 p.m.

May 11, 2 & 8 p.m.

May 12, 2 p.m.

The Players' Guild of Hamilton

80 Queen St. S., Hamilton

Note: Cast 1 (Friday night/Saturday matinee); Cast 2 (Saturday night/Sunday matinee)

Run time: approx. 130 minutes including one intermission

Tickets: \$20

Visit playersguild.org or call 905-529-0284

From: <https://hamiltoncitymagazine.ca/good-advice-listen-to-your-mother/>