

DIVA: LIVE FROM HELL

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
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DIVA: LIVE FROM HELL premiered at the Community Space Theater at Theater for the New City on March 23rd, 2017, produced by Jenna Grossano and Unstoppable Theater. It was directed by Daniel Goldstein, the musical direction and orchestrations were by Luke McGinnis, the choreography was by Jennifer Jancuska, the scenic design was by Daniel Geggatt and Caitlyn Murphy, the costume design was by Tilly Grimes, the sound design was by Tyler Kieffer, the sound mixing was by Evan Tyor, the lighting design was by Paige Seber, the production stage manager was Cristin Gordon, and the assistant stage manager was Kathleen Hefferon.

Desmond Channing and all of the onstage characters were portrayed by Nora Brigid Monahan. Offstage characters were originally voiced by Charles Busch, Penny Fuller, and Seth Rudetsky. Luke McGinnis played piano and conducted, Rob Taylor played bass, and Sam Wagner played drums.

DIVA: LIVE FROM HELL was developed by Axis Theatre, Fordham University, Indie Theater Now, Less Than Rent Theatre, Pittsburgh Civic Light Opera, and the United Solo Theatre Festival, with support from Brian Barnhart, Charles Busch, Martin Denton, Mark Fleischer, Morgan Jenness, Marcin Lipinski, Matthew Maguire, Sidney Myer, Olivia O'Connor, James Presson, Omar Sangare, Randy Sharp, and Kelly Thomas.

CHARACTERS
(in order of appearance)

VOICE

DESMOND CHANNING

MR. DALLAS

EVAN HARRIS

ALLIE HEWITT

SARAH SIDDONBACHER

RADIO

GRANDMA

SECURITY

SONG LISTING

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. "The Overture!" | Desmond |
| 2. "Live From Hell!" | Desmond |
| 3. "Highest Heights!" | Desmond, Evan |
| 4. "His Best Friend!" | Allie |
| 5. "Strong!" | Evan |
| 6. "The Big Time!" | Desmond, Dallas |
| 7. "How's The Show?!" | Desmond |
| 8. "Strong Reprise!/The Executive Order!" | Desmond |
| 9. "Rock Bottom!" | Desmond |
| 10. "Desmond's Epiphany!" | Desmond |
| 11. "Bows!" | Performer |

DIVA: LIVE FROM HELL

Prologue

Welcome to the Seventh Circle, the dingiest cabaret in Hell.

A tattered curtain hangs at the back of the stage, the edges of which are only slightly on fire (don't freak out—it's a lighting effect). Up front, dusty tables are set out in cabaret style with little, misshapen candles on them. Standard pre-show muzak plays, with subtle, hellish distortions applied—in the distance, we might hear the occasional groan of tortured agony and, of course, the subtle crackling of embers.

As the house lights fade, a voice echoes from beyond...

VOICE. Greetings, demons and miscreants, and welcome to the Seventh Circle and to *DIVA: Live from Hell*. We implore you to give the artist performing this evening a brief reprieve from his torturous punishment, by turning off your cell phones and unwrapping any hard candies or soothing throat lozenges now. In the unlikely event of an infernal disaster, you may exit out the door through which you entered, and proceed straight into the bowels of Hell.* MWAHAHAHAHA!

The three-piece band enters, and the musicians take their place. The Conductor (the one who plays piano) cues the band to play.

1. "The Overture!"

VOICE. And now, ladies and gentlemen, we give you the only: DESMOND CHANNING.

A drumroll. A spotlight flits around the theater. It hits the upstage curtain. Bursting through it and onto the stage: Desmond Channing, still flaming. He blows kisses and waves to the audience as he sings...

* Any additional safety details pertinent to your theater may be written into this curtain speech.

DESMOND.

ON A NIGHT LIKE TONIGHT,
I CAN SEE THE WHOLE WORLD CHANGING AROUND ME,
AND IT'S STRANGE HOW I FEEL,
LIKE MY LIFE'S GREATEST PURPOSE HAS FOUND ME!
AND I'M HERE AND I KNOW,
THERE IS NOWHERE IN THE WORLD I'D RATHER BE,
WITH MY NAME BURNING BRIGHT ON THAT MARQUEE...

(Spoken.) That name is Desmond Channing, and this is *DIVA: Live from Hell*, a musical retrospective wherein I relive the scandalous events that drove me, an otherwise normal teenage boy, over the edge of sanity and into a homicidal rage.

Desmond takes a drink of water, then:

(Suddenly bitter.) I know there are *nicer* cabarets down here for you to go to. I hear Roy Cohn's got a new act at the Inferno Room—a Jule Styne tribute, “Everything's Coming Up Rosenbergs.” And at Club Malebolge, John Wayne Gacy sings “Send in the Clowns.” But you all came here. Because you want to hear me talk about *him*. Evan Harris. I know—it's all about Evan. It's always been ALL ABOUT EVAN. My life, my *death*... That's the worst part for me—worse than having an accompanist who hates me, worse than having to drink *this* for my voice... You thought this was water? There's no water in Hell. This is Bob Fosse's ball sweat.

Beat.

When I woke up here in the Seventh Circle, I was already onstage. I didn't have an act, but the band started playing. And at first I stood here, not knowing what to do. But then a hideous, grotesque audience of demons—just like you—began booing me. Well, I've never been one to shy from the spotlight, so I tried putting on a show—belted every big number I used to sing in the shower—but they kept booing and booing... Until I figured it out—the story I have to tell. I'm a star at last, but I'll never get away... From HIM.

(To the Conductor.) Hit it, Professor!

2. “Live From Hell!”

The Conductor nods to the band, and they come in with a big intro, as Desmond strikes a dramatic pose.

DESMOND.

I WAS JUST AN AVERAGE TEENAGER,
WITH NORMAL TYPES OF DREAMS,

THEN I SAW MY PERFECT LITTLE LIFE,
WAS FRAYING AT THE SEAMS,
NOW THE ONLY KINDS OF TUNES I HEAR,
ARE LONG AND TORTURED SCREAMS,
IT'S TRUE,
I WAS WALKING THROUGH THE HIGH SCHOOL HALLS,
WITH ETHEL MERMAN FLAIR,
AND I SAW THE LADIES GASP,
AT MY PERFECTLY COIFFED HAIR,
DOWN HERE HAIR WON'T KEEP ITS SHAPE,
AND I GUESS THAT'S KIND OF FAIR,
DON'T YOU?

WE'RE COMING LIVE FROM HELL,
I'VE GOT A TALE TO TELL,
AND THE DETAILS FROM HERE ON, THEY GET REAL GORY,
SO IF YOU'RE SQUEAMISH, SIR,
DON'T LET YOUR VISION BLUR,
AS YOU SETTLE IN AND LISTEN TO MY STORY...

(Spoken.) Give it up for my terrific band! Charlie and the Manson Girls!

OH, THE DEVIL SET ME UP
WITH A FIRST-RATE BAND AND CREW
SO I'LL SHOW YOU ALL THE WHOLE ORDEAL,
I PUT THOSE PEOPLE THROUGH,
YES, MA'AM, UNLIKE *HAMILTON*,
MY ENTIRE STORY'S TRUE,
EN GARDE,
LET ME INTRODUCE TO YOU,
ALL THE CHARACTERS YOU'LL SEE,
MR. DALLAS, ALLY, EVAN,
OH AND THEN, OF COURSE, THERE'S ME,
HOW MORE TRAGIC CAN THE STORY,
OF A LEADING PLAYER BE?
LIFE'S HARD...

WE'RE COMING LIVE FROM HELL,
I'VE GOT A SHOW TO SELL,
AND BY NOW, YOU SHOULD KNOW WHERE THIS IS GOING,
I DO THE SHOW EACH NIGHT,

HERE IN THE LONE SPOTLIGHT,
AND I CAN FEEL THE ANTICIPATION GROWING,

WHO'D HAVE GUESSED THAT THIS EXTENDED RUN,
WOULD LACK THAT CERTAIN SENSE OF FUN,
SOMETIMES I WISH I HAD A GUN,
IT'S TRUE,
BUT I'LL COME OUT HERE TO SING MY SONGS,
AND ACT OUT ALL MY FORMER WRONGS,
MY FINAL JUDGMENT, IT BELONGS TO YOU...
DON'T BOO!

WE'RE COMING LIVE FROM HELL,
I'VE GOT A TALE TO TELL,
IT'S A LONG AND PAINFUL ALLEGORY,
SO IF YOU'RE SQUEAMISH, MA'AM,
WELL I DON'T GIVE A DAMN,
AS I'M HERE TO TELL MY FATEFUL STORY,
SO SIT DOWN, SHUT UP, AND LISTEN TO MY STORY!

When Desmond finishes the opening number, he strikes another pose, and the lights cut out. This time, flames roar on the curtain behind him, leaving him in silhouette.

Scene 1

A school bell rings. Lights up on Desmond, addressing the invisible Drama Club.

DESMOND. Thank you all so much! What an honor for me, Desmond Channing, to stand on this stage, in this hallowed auditorium and be elected president of the Ronald Reagan High School Drama Club! Before I do anything else, I'd like to salute my opponent, Ashley Miller, who was a worthy adversary, in spite of being a chorus girl three years running. But this is your year, Ashley. I'd also like to salute Ariel Casswell, our now-graduated former president. When I talked to Ariel on the phone this morning, I said to her, "Ariel," I said, "How will we go on without you? There's so much you almost accomplished, so much you *nearly* achieved." And she said to me, "Desmond, you can do it. You can pick up my legacy

and go further. You can *actually* accomplish things. *You* should run for Drama Club president.” So here I am. But my administration will take a slightly less scattered approach than Ariel’s. My first act as president will be to ratify a Club Constitution, streamlining my power as the Executive.

Desmond pulls out a hundred-page packet.

I happen to have a copy of one I drafted over the summer. It looks pretty good to me. I approve! You can peruse that at your leisure.

Desmond tosses the constitution into the audience.

Next order of business, we have an announcement from our fearless leader. Not just an educator, but a director. Not just a director, but a visionary. I mean, I’m sure we all remember last year’s stunning production of *Flower Drum Song*. And *not* because of the controversy surrounding the casting! I’m still very hurt by Howard Sherman’s letter-writing campaign vilifying me for my portrayal of Wang Chi-Yang. But this man stood by me then, and I am proud to stand by his side today. Without further ado: Mr. Harold Dallas!

Desmond transforms into Mr. Dallas.

DALLAS. The Board of Ed—

DESMOND. Oooh! I knew it—they’re promoting you. Principal? Superintendent? Full-time faculty at the very least.

DALLAS. Uh—well, no, Desmond. They’re not promoting me. I’m *not* being promoted. I’m as disappointed as you are. I’ve been a substitute for twenty-nine years. Mother doesn’t even ask when I’m moving out anymore. But anyway. The Board of Ed has voted to cut all arts funding in the district.

DESMOND. *All funding?! Why are the arts always the first to go? And what about the fall musical? It’s the highlight of the school year! It’s like prom but better.*

DALLAS. Boys and girls, I know how much the fall musical means to you, so I sat down with Principal Swanson, and we reached a compromise. She said we can do the show, but since we don’t have any money to acquire rights, whatever we do must be in the public domain. So I said, “We’ll do *A Chorus Line*. If that’s not in the domain of The Public, I don’t know what is!”

DESMOND. Oh, Mr. Dallas, that’s a scream! A real scream!

Desmond alternates between laughing uproariously as himself and as Mr. Dallas.

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book & characters by Nora Brigid Monahan
music & lyrics by Alexander Sage Oyen

1 man

As president of the drama club at Ronald Reagan High School and the star of every school play, Desmond Channing spent most of his short life in the spotlight. But when Evan Harris, a hotshot transfer from New York, challenges his throne, Desmond responds, as any diva would, with lethal force. Now, stuck in the Seventh Circle, Hell's most squalid cabaret venue, Desmond is forced to relive his disturbing tale of woe. As he presents his one-millionth consecutive show, Desmond performs with a desperate vigor in the hopes that he can prove he's repented and be freed from this eternal, campy torment.

"A tale of jealousy and revenge, DIVA: LIVE FROM HELL is a musical for the theater kid at heart. ...genuine and accessible. ...the quintessential show for musical theater lovers."

—**TheaterintheNow.com**

"...clever, fun, camp and deliciously mean-spirited. ...DIVA: LIVE FROM HELL... displays a keen, witty sense of the closed-minded community and, particularly, the aches and pains of the high school years."

—**TheaterScene.net**

"DIVA: LIVE FROM HELL is a brilliant...one-man musical detailing the exploits of Desmond Channing, a high school drama student whose exploits offstage would probably make much of Broadway fare seem rather tame in comparison. ...The songs by Oyen are clever and vibrant and flow seamlessly with the script."

—**Charged.fm**

Also by Nora Brigid Monahan
AUNT JACK

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