

A series of seven vertical black lines of varying heights, stacked on top of each other, located on the left side of the page.

I WAS MOST ALIVE WITH YOU

BY
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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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Dedicated to Frankie Krainz

The New York premiere of I WAS MOST ALIVE WITH YOU was produced by Playwrights Horizons, Inc. (Tim Sanford, Artistic Director; Leslie Marcus, Managing Director) in 2018. It was directed by Tyne Rafaeli, the director of artistic sign language was Sabrina Dennison, the scenic design was by Arnulfo Maldonado, the costume design was by David C. Woolard, the lighting design was by Annie Wiegand, the sound design was by Jane Shaw, the projection design was by Alex Basco Koch, the original music was by Daniel Kluger, and the production stage manager was Brett Anders. The cast was as follows:

ASH	Michael Gaston
ASTRID	Marianna Bassham
PLEASANT	Lisa Emery
KNOX	Russell Harvard
FARHAD	Tad Cooley
CARLA	Lois Smith
MARIAMA	Gameela Wright

The play was simultaneously performed in American Sign Language by a shadow cast of Deaf actors:

ASH	Seth Gore
ASTRID	Beth Applebaum
PLEASANT	Amelia Hensley
KNOX	Harold Foxx
FARHAD	Anthony Natale
CARLA	Christina Marie
MARIAMA	Alexandria Wailes

I WAS MOST ALIVE WITH YOU was originally produced by the Huntington Theatre Company (Peter DuBois, Artistic Director; Michael Maso, Managing Director), Boston, Massachusetts, in 2016. It was directed by Craig Lucas, the director of artistic sign language was Sabrina Dennison, the scenic and costume designs were by Dane Laffrey, the lighting design was by Mark Barton, the original music and sound design were by Daniel Kluger, and the production stage manager was Adele Nadine Traub. The cast was as follows:

ASH	Steven Goldstein
ASTRID	Marianna Bassham
PLEASANT	Dee Nelson
KNOX	Russell Harvard
FARHAD	Tad Cooley
CARLA	Nancy E. Carroll
MARIAMA	Gameela Wright

The play was simultaneously performed in American Sign Language by a shadow cast of Deaf actors:

ASH	Joey Caverly
ASTRID/CARLA	Monique Holt
PLEASANT/MARIAMA	Amelia Hensley
KNOX/FARHAD	Christopher Robinson

I WAS MOST ALIVE WITH YOU was originally developed at the Kenyon Institute's Playwrights Conference at Kenyon College. It was commissioned by the Institute in association with Atlantic Theater Company (Neil Pepe, Artistic Director; Jeffory Lawson, Managing Director).

The original production of I WAS MOST ALIVE WITH YOU contained the song "You, Me & the Boatman (Truth Is, I've Been Thirsty My Whole Life)," music, lyrics, and recording by Quiet Company.

CHARACTERS

ASH—late 50s, 60ish, hearing, signs well; recovering alcoholic; Jewish (largely secular); has found spirituality through 12-Step work.

ASTRID—a bit younger, Ash's writing partner, hearing, signs well; drinks occasionally, not to excess; atheist.

PLEASANT—late 50s, 60ish, married to Ash, hearing, does not sign; drinks heavily, though not considered to be an alcoholic; lapsed Protestant; stylish and well educated.

KNOX—30ish, maybe a bit older, Deaf, signs fluently, speaks and reads lips well; recovering alcoholic and drug addict; raised Jewish, is now a JewBu; for Act One he relies entirely on ASL; in Act Two he switches to spoken English.

FARHAD—early to mid 20s, deaf (small “d” to start, perhaps big “D” by play's end); reads lips, speaks well; may or may not understand a certain amount of ASL; raised in a secular Muslim family; active drug user.

CARLA—70s, 80s, Ash's mother, hearing, signs; drinks little or not at all; converted to Judaism (Reconstructionist) in her younger years.

MARIAMA—40s, 50s, 60s, a trained nurse; hearing, uses ASL; does not drink; converted to Jehovah's Witness during her recovery from drug addiction years before.

TIME & PLACE

All of the action takes place in California. The scenes in the workroom occur over a single day in March 2010; they represent the only present-tense action; the workroom, therefore, can remain present in ways throughout all other scenes, which represent memories or imagined events.

NOTES

Roman dialogue is spoken English.

Italicized dialogue is rendered in ASL (by a principal character).

Dialogue in **bold** provides the actor/character with a choice of signing, speaking, or a combination (SimCom). Since each character has a different level of fluency in ASL, an interplay between these two languages can be useful. The ratio of one to the other is a matter of interpretation for the actor and director to determine, so it is also possible that *some* of these passages could be entirely signed or entirely spoken.

A slash midway through a line indicates the point at which the subsequent speaker *may* begin overlapping.

Words in brackets indicate unspoken thoughts.

I Was Most Alive With You was created to be performed by Deaf and hearing actors for Deaf and hearing audiences. In the original productions, shadow actors augmented the principal cast, providing ASL translations of all dialogue. Projected English translations were provided for lines performed solely in ASL. Some sound cues were projected.

All future productions must aim for full access for hearing and Deaf audiences at every performance. This may be achieved through *whatever techniques best suit the new production*. Closed captioning is absolutely an option, which keeps the cast size to seven.

In all events a director of artistic sign language (DASL) must be engaged.

“The outside world is too small, too clear-cut, too truthful, to contain everything that a person has room for inside.”

—Franz Kafka

“Life, as we find it, is too hard for us; it brings us too many pains, disappointments and impossible tasks. In order to bear it we cannot dispense with palliative measures... There are perhaps three such measures: powerful deflections, which cause us to make light of such misery; substitutive satisfactions, which diminish it; and intoxicating substances, which make us insensible to it.”

—Sigmund Freud

“Nothing is more whole than a broken heart.”

—Rabbi Nachman

I WAS MOST ALIVE WITH YOU

ACT ONE

1. Workroom

March 2010.

A writing table center with rolling chairs. A recliner, copier, corkboard with notes, a kitchenette with a coffee maker and half-fridge. Walls and walls of shelves with teleplays. A bathroom.

Astrid enters with a plastic bag of supplies for the day's work. She turns on the lights. She crosses the space, takes off her jacket, moves into the kitchen, makes coffee, throws out sour milk from the fridge, then a dead plant. She moves to the worktable and lays out seven folders, which she arranges as—

Ash enters, about to begin recording a video message on his cell phone, hand up toward Astrid.

ASH. Sorry sorry sorry.

He sets the cell phone down, propping it against something, begins signing while simultaneously speaking (SimCom). He is peppered with pink spots on his neck, arms, midriff, ankles.

Farhad, hey, it's Knox's dad. Oh man, I hope you get this. That was me before, listen—Can you see me? I've left Knox alone for a bit and... I wouldn't be able to forgive myself if I didn't ask—*(To Astrid.)* One sec. *(Into phone.)* The key's under the rock where I showed you. Knox is by himself, I'm a little worried. I—Well, anyway, thanks, Farhad. It's Knox's dad. Yeah.

He hangs up, starts texting at once.

Ugh.

ASTRID. Okay, these are— (*Sees him still texting.*) Sorry.

ASH. I just want to... Oh fuck it, Knox isn't gonna... I'm—

Beat. He looks at Astrid.

Hi!

ASTRID. Hey.

ASH. And he signed before I left, so—for the first time!

ASTRID. Great.

ASH. So...

ASTRID. Yeah.

ASH. Yeah.

Silence.

ASTRID. Okay, so these are our seven basic ideas we've sketched out at your place.

ASH. I don't remember any ideas.

ASTRID. Well, I clung to them, however nascent. They just need a little love.

ASH. When was I here last?

ASTRID. I don't—Anyway—

ASH. Is this the first time since the accident?

ASTRID. Ash, let's just jump in.

ASH. This is the first we've left him alone like this, okay?

ASTRID. So that we can WRITE?

ASH. Yes?

ASTRID. Finally?

ASH. Okay, okay.

ASTRID. After three / and a half months?

ASH. I'm sorry.

ASTRID. Of NOT?

ASH. All right.

ASTRID. So we don't lose our insurance?

ASH. (*Checking his phone.*) I'm just gonna keep this here... Do you mind if I put it on vibrate?

ASTRID. I understand.

ASH. You do.

ASTRID. I don't think he's going to call.

ASH. You're right.

He turns off vibrate, then puts the phone where he can see it; sighs.

(*Waves of anxiety coming over him.*) FUCK!

ASTRID. Look, we can go get Farhad.

ASH. I don't know where he lives.

ASTRID. Well... Call.

ASH. Again?

ASTRID. No, / Knox.

ASH. Oh. No. God. / No.

ASTRID. Okay. Don't.

ASH. He'd... No.

ASTRID. You want to try working there again?

ASH. No. He'll kill me.

ASTRID. Well better that.

ASH. Don't put that out there. Please.

ASTRID. I thought you didn't believe any / of that—

ASH. I believe anything at this point, okay?

ASTRID. Right. Of course.

ASH. He's alone in that room all night when I sleep, I don't see what's different now.

ASTRID. Exactly—

ASH. He takes walks; he could have done it plenty of times by now.

ASTRID. Sure. I can call.

ASH. No. No no no... Let's... (*Looks at the folders.*) Okay...

He opens a folder, lifts a feather from inside.

ASTRID. That was that bird idea.

ASH. It gets its own folder?

ASTRID. It needs a little fleshing out.

ASH. It needs a trip to Lourdes.

ASTRID. We need something we can pitch.

ASH. The worst is I keep going over that day thinking what could I have done differently?

ASTRID. Thanksgiving?

ASH. Did you see it coming? Any of it?

ASTRID. Of course not. Hey. Should we take one of these— (*Indicates the folders.*) but do a two-pronged narrative, what one DID and what one MIGHT have done, SHOULD'VE?

ASH. I saw the way you did that, that was / deft.

ASTRID. Thanks.

ASH. But do you? See anything either one of us should have done?

ASTRID. Now? Sure.

ASH. You do?

ASTRID. Of course, that's always true.

ASH. What?

ASTRID. Ten million things one SHOULD've/COULD've done. But...you can't change what happened, so why—? (*Stops; an idea hits her.*) Hey.

ASH. What?

ASTRID. This is the great idea.

ASH. What?

ASTRID. Say what happened.

ASH. What are you...?

ASTRID. Thanksgiving.

Does she put away the seven folders?

“Why not say what happened?” Go with me. In the car. That morning. You, me—Pleasant gets in. Just...to get the juices flowing...

ASH. Okay...

ASTRID. We were waiting, was she...?

ASH. She was late as always.

ASTRID. You drove.

ASH. Right.

ASTRID. So... Here she comes... She gets in... What does she say?

They enter a shared memory.

2. Ash's Car

Thanksgiving 2009.

Ash and Astrid are sitting, engine running, waiting in the front seat, Ash at the wheel. Pleasant appearing in the back seat.

PLEASANT. Dammit.

Ash begins to drive.

Every year I mean to bone up on something in the Old Testament to show up your mother and stop her from holding forth about the goddam Torah.

Astrid finds the Bible on her iPad, hands it to Pleasant.

You carry the Bible?

ASTRID. It's good for names.

PLEASANT. What's the worst possible case to be made for God's goodness?

ASTRID and ASH. Job.

PLEASANT. You two. I hope to Christ you two are sleeping together, it would be one glimmer of love in my life to know my beloved husband and his very best friend are happy.

Beat.

(Perhaps leaning in to whisper to Astrid.) I just hope he fucks YOU like he means it—

ASH. Okay, thanks.

PLEASANT. It'd be amazing to know what that's like.

ASH. Okay, we're not going.

PLEASANT. For a comedy writer you're awfully thin-skinned.

ASH. Don't drink anymore please.

PLEASANT. I thought I wasn't an alcoholic.

ASH. No. That doesn't mean you're a fun drunk.

PLEASANT. I am too.

ASTRID. Are we picking up Knox?

ASH. No, he's bringing a friend. JUST friend. Well, he likes him—
Younger. Smart, fun, cute, apparently—

PLEASANT. Oh, don't act like you don't know what cute is.

ASH. I haven't met him is all I'm saying... But he isn't sober and he
doesn't sign...

ASTRID. No, he does, he just won't.

ASH. Oh, well, why am I telling you?

ASTRID. He has some hearing, it's complicated.

PLEASANT. So Knox reads his lips.

ASH. Calm down.

PLEASANT. Why his and not mine?

*Astrid shows a photo of Farhad on her phone; a silent "Fuck!"
from Ash.*

Oh, that's why.

ASTRID. And they're living together.

ASH. They are?!

ASTRID. But not sleeping in the same bed. Well, once, but...

ASH. Oh shit!...

ASTRID. I shouldn't have said anything.

ASH. I didn't know any of that. Is there more?

ASTRID. I'm only a friend of the court.

PLEASANT. (*Reading from the iPad.*) "A man there was in the
land of Uz. His name was Job and he was blameless and upright
in all things." Oh, right, God tests the poor schlub by taking away
everything he has—killing all his kids just to find out if Job really
loves him. That's some swell deity you Jews got yourselves there.

Astrid has risen to look in the bookshelves. The car and the past disappear as we return to:

3. Workroom

ASH. What?

ASTRID. (*Taking a book off the shelf.*) Job. Maybe there's something for us...

ASH. I keep wondering if Knox had told me what he told you—that he and Farhad were actually in love—

ASTRID. (*Cutting him off.*) I hope this isn't about why didn't I tell you sooner, because—

ASH. No! God no.

ASTRID. You sure?

ASH. Let me finish. No no. Or if I had known what was going on with Mom—Why was everyone keeping things from me? You know what, don't answer that.

ASTRID. (*Back to the work.*) They were in love... You could warm your hands by it. And if we're saying what happened, then don't we have to include everyone?

ASH. What do you mean?

ASTRID. Thanksgiving. That morning... Farhad would have been nervous meeting us. Wouldn't he?

ASH. Of course.

ASTRID. So. Crosscut from the three of us in the car to... Where do you want to pick them up?

ASH. Uh, Knox's apartment.

ASTRID. That same day.

ASH. "November light. Theeee..."

ASTRID. ...gay / recovering—

ASH. Gay recovering alcoholic / addict—

ASTRID. ...Deaf—

ASH. Deaf big "D" / in his—

ASTRID. Big “D.”

ASH. —brand new ambiguous relationship with his gay deaf—

ASTRID. —small / “d” —

ASH. —small “d” secular Muslim escort—

ASTRID. RENT BOY?

ASH. Rent boy, thank you, slash drug addict who categorically refuses to—

ASTRID. (*Trying to keep up.*) Slow down.

ASH. Good. (*Realizing this was an imperative as opposed to part of the character description.*) Oh.

ASTRID. No, that works too—“refuses to slow down...—enters and heeeeeee—”

This scene remains as we see:

4. Knox’s Apartment

That same Thanksgiving. Imagined scene. Knox enters. Astrid and Ash observe.

ASH. Uh...

Knox kneels, assuming a prayer posture.

ASTRID. Prays?

ASH. Yeah. He prays. Good, very good.

During the following prayer, Farhad, half-dressed, enters, observing Knox praying in ASL.

KNOX. God... May I be a guard for those who need protection, a guide for those on the path, a boat, a raft, a bridge for those who wish to cross the flood. May I be a lamp in the darkness, a resting place for the weary, a healing medicine for all who are sick, a vase of plenty, a tree of miracles, and for the boundless multitudes of living beings. May I bring nourishment and awakening, enduring like the earth and sky until all beings are freed from sorrow and all are awakened. Amen. (*Rises, sees Farhad.*) What did I just say?

FARHAD. Didn't want to eavesdrop.

KNOX. ("Why won't you sign?!") What?

Farhad begins to play with his portable game player.

(Indicating the game player: "You are not bringing that along today.")

No.

FARHAD. Keep my hands occupied and off you.

KNOX. *Don't bring that. Please? And put some clothes on! It's time to leave.*

Knox helps Farhad dress.

FARHAD. You really think someone is listening to your prayers?

KNOX. *Make a deal with you: Stay sober today, leave that thing (Gaming device.) here and you don't have to sleep on the couch tonight. Just cuddling.*

FARHAD. Close but no deal.

KNOX. *Please?*

FARHAD. ("I'm keeping it.") Idle hands, devil's playground.

KNOX. *Please be good, it's my family, okay?*

FARHAD. I will.

KNOX. *Promise?*

FARHAD. I will try to be good, though...the things I'm good at might not go over with everybody.

KNOX. *Promise me you'll behave?*

FARHAD. Can I ask your parents for their blessing?

KNOX. *Not until you're sober. Implant?*

Farhad has no intention of bringing along his cochlear implant.

YES. *You'll need it.*

FARHAD. No, I can—

Farhad indicates vestigial hearing on one side.

KNOX. *Well, I think you will. Please?*

Farhad puts on the implant.

Is it even on?

FARHAD. I won't need it!

KNOX. *You've never met these people, they are not sane. My mom and I are barely speaking, and my grandmom really needs me today.*

FARHAD. *(Turns on implant.)* Now I get to **SUCK** you in the car.

KNOX. *Oh, you know that sign! Stop drinking, start signing, you can do that for the rest of our lives.*

ASTRID. *(In the present.)* Stop scratching.

KNOX. *Come.*

Farhad and Knox exit.

5. Workroom

ASH. We're good, that's not a bad—Who says we're washed up, huh?

Astrid has picked up Ash's tube of ointment and applies it to Ash's rash.

ASTRID. Did you know they now think the one thing that makes us human—

ASH. Ow.

ASTRID. Hold still. They thought it was language, then tools, keeping rhythm, lying, counting, but animals do all those—but it's...

ASH. Psychosomatic skin ailments?

ASTRID. Storytelling.

ASH. Oh... What's, wait, what's a bee doing when it dances to tell another bee where all the flowers are? "Go right at the elm tree." Isn't that a story?

ASTRID. I don't suggest we pitch that, but—Storytelling—what is it but trying to make sense out of chaos. And that's what makes us human. Like Job: bestseller 849 B.C.

ASH. *(Reading.)* "One day the celestial entourage came to stand before the Lord."

ASTRID. ENTOURAGE!

ASH. Right?

ASTRID. All good ideas come from the good book.

ASH. Can we work this up and pitch it to the networks, please?
Please? As is, I mean!

ASTRID. Uhhhhh...

ASH. Please? I want to see their faces, say yes.

ASTRID. I mean what happened to us...it IS kind of biblical, Ash.

Beat.

Cold Open:

ASH. Our guy...

ASTRID. Job.

ASH. Jobey. Blameless, upright, out counting his she-asses—Don't
all his kids die but—

ASTRID. He won't curse God.

ASH. So—

ASTRID. Yeah.

ASH. He gets all new kids?

ASTRID. Uh-huh.

ASH. Everything's peachy. Who liked those first kids anyway? The
Hallmark Channel! It's a slam dunk, come on, we gotta go for it!

ASTRID. (*Typing.*) Wide shot. Later, that Thanksgiving. "The
celestial entourage comes to stand in attendance before the Lord."

6. Carla's Home

*Later that same Thanksgiving. Carla, Mariama, Knox, and
Farhad appear.*

ASH. Yeah.

*We are now simultaneously in the workroom (present) and
Carla's home (past).*

(*Resumes reading.*) "And the Accuser came as well."

*Pleasant appears at Carla's front door (past); Astrid and Ash
look at one another (present).*

ASTRID and ASH. Ding dong!

As Ash continues reading from the Book of Job, he and Astrid recall the memory of Thanksgiving.

ASH. "...And the Accuser came as well."

ASTRID. *(Moving toward/into the memory, following Pleasant.)* Is that Satan...?

ASH. The snake in the grass.

ASTRID. Shaking its she-ass.

ASH. "God asked His Accuser, 'From where do you come?'"

Pleasant avoids engaging with Knox. She and Carla greet one another.

"And the Accuser said, 'I have been walking the earth.' 'Have you seen my servant Job?' God asks."

Ash watches Knox inside the memory.

"There is no other like him, blameless and upright. He fears me and shuns evil."

Astrid moves through the memory.

"The Accuser said, 'Take away his bounty, his children, his cattle— You'll see, he will curse You.' God said, 'I place all that is Job's in your hands. Only do not harm him.' And the Accuser said—" *(Noticing that Astrid has moved away.)* Where are you?

The memory freezes, holding still during:

7. Workroom & Carla's

The present and past.

ASTRID. You know what we could have done differently? Or I could?

ASH. No.

ASTRID. I think we all enjoyed isolating her. Pleasant.

ASH. What? NO. Please don't say that.

ASTRID. Why? You asked. If we're using what really happened, don't we have to be merciless with everyone?

The play doesn't end here...

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