



OPEN

BY **CRYSTAL
SKILLMAN**



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PLAY SERVICE
INC.



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OPEN received its world premiere in New York City at the Tank. It was co-produced by the Tank (Rosalind Grush and Meghan Finn, Artistic Directors) and All For One Theater (Michael Wolk, Artistic Director; Nicholas Cotz, Executive & Producing Director) in June 2019. It was directed by Jessi D. Hill, the lighting and scenic designs were by Sarah Johnston, the sound design was by Emma Wilk, the costume design was by Becky Bodurtha, the assistant director was Chelsey Smith, the production supervisor was Donghyuk Chang, and the production stage manager Sydney Golden. The cast was as follows:

THE MAGICIAN Megan Hill

THANKS

A play of course is created with the support of many artists. I am so grateful to director Jessi D. Hill and actress Megan Hill for their incredible work with me on this play over the past three years.

I would love to thank William Jackson Harper and director Michael Padden for the early explorations of the piece. And friends and champions of the play: Oliver Baer, Adam McGovern, and Lynn Brunskill, who this play is dedicated in memory of.

And the several theaters and theater-makers who helped guide the way for us. First of course, our fearless producers Meghan Finn and Rosalind Grush at the Tank; Nicholas Cotz and Michael Wolk at All For One, alongside Josh Adam Ramos and Giverny Petitmermet. And those that supported the play's development: Susan Bernfield and New Georges, Orietta Crispino and TheaterLab, Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, WP Theater, The Lark. We are also so grateful to the encouragement of the Ground Floor at Berkeley Rep and Mabou Mines. And a very special thank-you to the Walking Shadow Theatre Company and Executive Director David Pisa for producing the first second production of the play directed by Amy Rummenie, featuring Allison Witham, in Minneapolis.

Finally, a special thank-you to magician Scott Hitchcock for his early work consulting with us, and for reminding us to be true to the concept, and to stay true to a magic show without magic in all its glory.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I believe artists are the truth-tellers. When we create a fictional world, we create a reality that an audience must experience. We allow them to step outside themselves, and into themselves. We make an audience feel.

I believe theater is the most genuine way to learn empathy. The goal of this work, and these approaches in my work, is to make people feel. Go through an experience together in that dark cave called theater. How I choose to write a play mimics the structure of the world. I use genre.

Open is a magic show without magic. *Open* is a magic act about love and forgiveness, but that magic show is a magic show without magic UNTIL we BELIEVE that there IS.

Since He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named was elected, the intolerance of our time has increased. The minute it happened, I wanted to imagine myself out of this world. I wanted magic. When I sat to write, the character of the Magician came to me. I realized I was writing a magic show but this Magician had different tricks up her sleeve. *Open* is a play that opens as it goes—it reveals itself in a unique theatrical experience through the love story of these two women. And in Kristen's acceptance of herself.

Most importantly, the play's concept, and how it has been written, invites everyone in. I hope this play can be done across the country and world. It connects and asks us all to believe in the truth.

The truth IS Love is Love. And love can conquer hate.

Times will change, they always will. But let us continue to work for, advocate for, and fight for change for the better. We can all reach the last act of transformation, and I am grateful this play has been seen as a powerful tool to guide that experience in theater.

This is indeed a play of the imagination. I can't wait to see what you imagine.

—Crystal Skillman

CHARACTER

THE MAGICIAN

OPEN is a play for one person. The play is written to be performed by a female-identifying actress.

PLACE

A theatrical space, which is revealed to be more than it seems.

TIME

Now. While the Magician slips into stories, she operates from the urgency of the now.

SOUND & LIGHT & MAGIC

Light, sound, and shadows help us understand the power of what we're imagining.

But we must believe in what the audience can imagine.

They will.

NOTES

There is no set. This is a language play. The trick, and fun of it, is how we see the magic.

And one last bit of practical advice—consulting with a magician is extremely helpful in making sure your actor is able to fully pantomime each trick.

OPEN

As we enter the Magician is onstage. Her eyes are closed. Even if they were open, the Magician doesn't blink an eye. The Magician is good in any situation. The Magician has seen the world. At the right time, the Magician opens her eyes. She sees us for the very first time, gathered. She is amazed. Speaks to us.

THE MAGICIAN. I'm here.

I'm here.

I am here.

Your magician.

The Magician steps into the audience—investigating us.

Here you are.

An audience. A kind of audience.

Thank you for joining me.

It's incredible.

Imagining you here.

(To audience member.) You look great. Love this, all of it.

(Looking over all.) All of you. You're so pretty.

The power of the imagination!

She returns to the stage.

We are here for... Jenny.

Jenny evoked me.

Jenny called my name.

So we must prepare. Why?

Well... every person who has ever loved—has a magician!

King Arthur had Merlin.

Claudia Schiffer had David Copperfield.

Penn has Teller.

Jenny has me.

So we IMAGINE.

For I have to confess—this world and I...*reality*...we don't really get along.

She reaches up—and pantomimes pulling a light switch; a spotlight on the floor forms around her.

You clearly don't either or you wouldn't be here.

And—as much as we'd like to go to Vegas, your very conjured in the moment Merlin girl lives in New York Fucking City!

Okay, now, each of these magic tricks I perform tonight, you must imagine.

Things have gone horribly wrong, I know!

We are in crisis!

And what better way to get to the root of a crisis than a magic show?!!

When love hangs in the balance it is life or death.

Magic isn't denial.

No one ever said that something strange isn't happening over here.

She waves left hand in a distracting way.

It's simply that when I wave my hands—like this! That's what you watch. But then—

With her right hand, the Magician makes a wild gesture and “pulls” a bouquet of flowers from her hat. It is pantomime... but in reality, before us, she holds nothing in her hands. She holds it as seriously and committedly as if it was really there. This is how the magic works in our show.

Do you see? Flowers! How beautiful...

(*Looking out at the audience, realizing.*) You don't see.

She looks at the audience. Regains confidence, smiles.

I get it. You need a word. You need tradition. Even Criss Angel plays on the traditional.

Abacadabra.

When I say abracadabra we will accomplish our task! *To bring forth the reality of the imagination.* Abracadabra, did you know? Means “as it is spoken.” As I have been brought here, so have you. This magic show is a contract between you and I.

Magic is when what we imagine can become real.

Abracadabra.

She gestures—pantomiming the flower trick again. This time we hear the flowers coming out of the hat.

Ta-da! Roses! Pink!

She gives this pantomimed bouquet to audience member.

For you my dear.

HOLD THEM TIGHT!

She smells them in the audience member’s hand.

(*Aside to another audience member.*) Plastic.

She takes the flowers back. Makes a show of “disappearing them” back into her hat. Looks out, smiles.

THE TRUTH?!

I’m a writer. Young adult. I’ve written a book about two boys who use magic.

I have researched.

I have a book on magic.

The Magic of Magic—A History of Magic!

I try my best!

I practice! I believe! I care!

A secret.

I’ve only ever performed for Jenny.

“Magic only fades when it’s forgotten,” Jenny always says.

Jenny is right about so many things.

The Magician looks up. She knows something is going to fall. She runs across the stage—the sound of a ball falling in her hands. She runs. Gets the next one and the next.

One. Two. Three!

Balls.

What color... did we decide what color?

You—blue, yellow, or red?

The audience member picks a color. [If the audience member picks a color that is not one of those choices, she can remind them of those choices.] The lighting shifts as the stage is flooded with the color chosen. She smiles.

Ah I see it! Very good, you're getting it.

She juggles. We hear the balls as she tosses them.

Secrets are the balls we keep in the air.

Ours will come crashing down this evening.

Keeping it all in the air—Three short acts!

First Love

The Magician throws a pantomimed ball into the audience. When someone catches it, we hear the sound.

Commitment

Another.

And Sacrifice—

She throws that one out to the audience.

And one extra.

She holds out her hand—a white gleaming ball of light appears in her hand.

A promise.

She blows on the ball and watches it ascend into the air. Shift... it's unsettling—fluorescent lighting creeps in.

I step through that door.

Will Jenny's eyes say she doesn't know me.

Will there be a glimmer.

An opening...

She gestures—the theatrical lighting returns.

Act One: First Love!

The first act of any relationship is trust.

Trust, ironically, can only GROW out of doubt.

Something's in my hand. An egg.

A tiny bird to be. Still in its shell.

Here.

Do you hear its heart beating?

It asks “How does Love grow?”

Hold this.

She gives the pantomimed egg to audience member. [If the audience member isn't holding it “right,” she might have to show the audience member how to hold it carefully.]

NOW! I take a large red scarf.

She pantomimes pulling out a scarf from her breast pocket. It's long and large!

Do you see?

She goes to the audience member and puts this pantomimed scarf over the pantomimed egg.

The scarf covers the egg.

She reminds the audience member holding the egg, with the scarf now covering:

Hold on to that.

That red scarf you're holding.

I gave to Jenny.

My mother gave it to me... it was her mother's.

My mother grew up in Indianapolis. She met my father in Indianapolis.

I grew up in Indianapolis. Guess where my grandmother grew up?

Beat.

Lebanon... outside of Indianapolis.

(Checking back in on audience member.) You're still holding it right?

My mother would tell me this story: My grandmother made a wish while holding that very scarf.

To meet the lover of her dreams.

The next morning, my grandfather-to-be walked past her gate—he fell. As he fell he cut himself on the edges of her gate. He called out.

She heard him through the window. She raced down. She bandaged him with that very red scarf.

Now, she believed in all sorts of magic. Old-school shit.

“Close your eyes,” she told him.

OPEN

by Crystal Skillman

1 woman

OPEN is a magic act that reveals itself to be a resurrection. A woman called the Magician presents a myriad of tricks for our entertainment, yet her performance seems to be attempting the impossible—to save the life of her partner, Jenny. But is our faith in her illusions enough to rewrite the past? The clock is ticking, the show must go on, and, as impossible as it may seem, this Magician's act may be our last hope against a world filled with intolerance and hate.

“Critics pick! ...Kristen, the narrator and sole character of [OPEN], executes magic tricks because she is the one who needs to believe. The miracle this lovely show pulls out is that by the end, she does—and so do we.”

—The New York Times

“This play is music. It is that song you love. You know that song when every note of it is perfect, every instrument chosen is the correct choice, and the voice of the singer is the kind that lifts you to another realm. It is a poem, a love letter to us, crafted by an artist. ...[Crystal Skillman] has the words for us when we do not, and she is indeed a skilled craftsman, a healer. ...She mixes the world of magic with the world of the living, all with precision and grace.”

—FrontRowCenter.com

“Crystal Skillman's script provides a perfect playground for designers to be imaginative. Instead of realism, audiences are given fantasy through which reality can be seen more clearly. ...OPEN is a lovely one-woman show about the intimate metaphors magic provides us for interpreting our loves, our lives, and ourselves.”

—MinnesotaPlaylist.com

ISBN: 978-0-8222-4128-7



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