

## Public Theatre's 'Every Brilliant Thing' delivers warmth, humor, hope

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It takes a rare and special talent to take a topic as sensitive and harrowing as suicidal depression and bring it to light in a way that is real, raw, yet hopeful, and deliver it with warmth and humor.

This is exactly what director Laura Kepley and The Public Theater have accomplished with the current production of "Every Brilliant Thing."

When faced with darkness, what makes life worth living? What motivates us to go on, when all we can see is the dark? Is it the obvious things like our children, our family, our pets? Or maybe it's a million other things, like the color yellow, the taste of chocolate, or a song that brings back a favorite memory.

"Every Brilliant Thing" takes us on a journey of a lifetime of coping with family mental illness, of adapting to difficult circumstances and, most importantly, of finding glimmers of hope in the most ordinary things.

The set is minimal with simply a record player up center stage. The story opens with the lead — and only — actor, Tarah Flanagan, taking us back to her childhood when her only experience with death was the loss of a beloved pet. This changed when she was 7 years old, the day her father picked her up from school and told her that her mother was hospitalized because she was very very sad and "did something stupid."

The playwrights, Duncan Macmillan and Jonny Donahoe, do an amazing job of conveying just how a young child would process such a grave situation. The young girl, filled with 7-year-old optimism, decides that the way to help her mother is by making her a list of all the good things in life.

The story takes us through the years of her life, through the struggles of her teens and on into college and adulthood, all the while in the shadow of her mother's illness. As she grows, the list grows, and becomes an integral part of who she is and who she becomes.

Flanagan does an outstanding job bringing this character to life. Her performance is moving, sad, and funny all at the same time as she conveys the many nuances of human emotion. Whether Flanagan is relating the optimism of a 7-year-old, the angst of a teenager, the elation of a college student in love, or the anger and fear of an adult coming to terms with her past, the audience can't help but experience the feelings along with her.

While Flanagan is technically the only actor in the show, she is by no means performing by herself. Audience members, particularly the ones seated on the stage, perform various roles throughout the



Actor Tarah Flanagan rehearses a scene from "Every Brilliant Thing" at the Public Theatre in Lewiston earlier this month.  
*Shawn Patrick Ouellette/Portland Press Herald*

show. These roles include the young woman's father, the school counselor with a sock puppet assistant, and her eventual husband.

Other audience members are asked to yell out the various items on the list while others are asked to lend an item, such as a book or a piece of candy. In short, if you are in the audience, you can be part of the show.

At one point, the audience is even asked to sing. This interactive performance style helps to create that surreal feeling of going from watching the story to becoming a part of it.

"Every Brilliant Thing" does more than entertain. It brings to light a sensitive, yet important, topic and it does so with tact, humor and most importantly, hope.

Upcoming performances are scheduled for Thursday, Jan. 30, at 7 p.m.; Friday, Jan. 31, at 7 p.m.; Saturday, Feb. 1, at 3 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.; and Sunday, Feb. 2, at 2 p.m.

Tickets are \$35 for adults, \$30 each for groups of 10 or more and \$15 for children age 13-18. Special on stage tickets are \$20.

The Public Theatre is located at 31 Maple St. in Lewiston. For more information or tickets, call 207-782-3200 or visit [thepublictheatre.org](http://thepublictheatre.org).