

“I don’t belong here”

is written by **Joëlle Rabu** and **Nico Rhodes**; it is a poignant musical interpretation of a day in the life of residents at a dementia care facility.

Outline - A Play with Music

Through a blend of grief and humour, the audience is invited to witness the daily struggles and triumphs of the residents as they grapple with the gradual loss of Self. Moments of clarity intertwine with confusion, and bittersweet recollections are juxtaposed with fleeting glimpses of the present.

The bold and aching melodies of the late Harry Nilsson provide a haunting backdrop for this performance exposé which delves into the lonely existence of fading memories, puzzling uncertainty, and at times, droll perceptions of people whose lives once reflected brilliance, talent, and vitality.

The Music

The music of the late **Harry Nilsson** weaves through the narrative, serving as a poignant reminder of the passage of time and the enduring power of memory. “*I don’t belong here*” explores the complexities of aging as well as the struggles faced by the caregivers, all the while highlighting the resilience and humanity of those navigating the uncertain terrain of dementia.

Harry Nilsson is still considered the most underrated singer-songwriter of the post-war era. His knowledge of the form and structure of almost every genre of popular music was encyclopaedic as were his intense observations on the absurdities, fragilities, and wonders of life. The choice to feature his beautiful, uncluttered music was clear: it transcends generations and styles, and candidly resonates with everyday life.

The Performers

Joëlle’s chameleon-like portrayals of the five (5) resident characters combined with her compelling vocal interpretations are supported by the brilliance of music director **Nico Rhodes**, whose insightful musical arrangements render homage to Nilsson’s timeless songs. As the pianist, Rhodes also plays the role of a care-aid who carefully weaves the essential threads of constant, compassion, care, and connections.

Ultimately, the play challenges audiences to assess their perceptions of aging, and to reflect on the profound importance of empathy and sensitivity in the journey of caring for our elderly.

3 Vignettes from “I don’t belong here.” (Video: <https://youtu.be/enE0a68Fy6U>)

1. A caregiver is preparing the room for a new resident arriving today. They pack all the personal possessions of a lifetime into one box. They ready the room and hang a welcome sign. The arrival of a new resident means the departure of another. The caregiver dreams, traces the journey, reflects on the significance of taking the time to **Remember**.
2. Day in and day out, Jim waits stoically by the door, regularly checking his pocket watch, anticipating the return of his wife who will come and pick him up today. The passing of time is marked by the caregiver who devotedly plays along. Jim has been here for 4 years, waiting for his wife to return. He sings of living **Without Her**, fading in and out of yesterday and the present.
3. Connie once was a radiant professional dancer. She hears the music in her mind, her young body dances, and twirls, she had contagious charm. Today she is chair-ridden, withdrawn, and rarely utters a word. Her invisible struggle is briefly exposed as she lets her imagination take flight and declares her life would benefit from companionship... **If only I had a Puppy**.

Outreach for this Play:

Joelle and Nico will go into senior’s residences (assisted living, dementia supported) and offer recreational musical concert including a sing-along experience. They will perform music that is nostalgic.

Background- Why a play about Dementia?

Despite my personal intrigue and foundational knowledge from studies in social psychology, I found that delving into the creation of a play about dementia released a new realm of understanding, empathy, and curiosity. Drawing from a tapestry of personal encounters with dementia, I embarked on the journey of shaping a play that delves deep into the complexities of this debilitating disease. I wanted to communicate, through the tempered cadence of music and

the poetry of song, a testament to the human spirits who are navigating through the shadows of forgetfulness and to present it from all perspectives: the patient, the family, the caregivers. Inspired by the onset of dementia in my father, the poignant conversations with my oldest friend afflicted by Alzheimer's and the profound experiences of my son working at a residence for seniors with dementia, during the pandemic, I sought to weave together a musical narrative that captures the essence of loss, resilience, humour, courage, confusion, and strength. At times, these conditions can make you laugh, at times they can make you weep. Dementia doesn't discriminate in its companions; much like deep sorrow and overwhelming joy, it envelops everyone, inviting them to join its intricate dance and prompting introspection that challenges preconceptions about oneself and others.

The choice for the title was based on the most heard sentence in dementia residences “I don't belong here”. Data shows global dementia cases are set to triple, with 153 million living with dementia by 2050.

“We do not remember days, we remember moments.” Italian poet Cesare Pavese

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