

“I don’t belong here”

is a play with music written and performed by **Joëlle Rabu**. It is a poignant musical interpretation of a day in the life of residents at a dementia care facility.

Outline - A Play with Music

The Residents: 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 Care Aids: Alzheimer's takes its toll on many people. The author has chosen to offer a glimpse into the heartache, pain, and sometimes chaotic routines that care aides experience while working with minds that can no longer reason, body that don't always respond, yet these caregivers play the important role of being keepers of the memories.

The Family: The play offers a well-rounded perspective by including the experiences of family members who have faced the difficult yet necessary decision to place their loved ones in care. We follow their journey, witnessing the guilt that follows, and the ongoing grief of losing someone before they're truly gone.

The Music: 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.

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 close to a dozen different characters combined with her compelling vocal interpretations are buoyed by co-author Kelly Wyatt's colourful supporting characters as she carefully weaves the essential threads of constant, compassion, care, and connections. The scenes are supported by the brilliance of music director/pianist/supporting actor Nico Rhodes, whose insightful musical arrangements render homage to Nilsson's timeless songs. 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?

Joelle Rabu: 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 with my life-long friend Kelly, 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 resident, the family, the care aids. Inspired by my own father's journey with dementia; the many poignant conversations with one of my oldest friends 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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