

OVARYACTING by Bridget McKeivitt
“A Solo Performance of My Own Design”

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Abstract

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A Solo Performance of My Own Design

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Chair of the Supervisory Committee: Tim Bond

“Stop joking around and act your age!” is a complaint that I’ve heard, somewhat like a broken record, my entire life. I often wonder, how does a woman my age act, exactly? If you prick us, do we not bleed? Over 50 percent of the population menstruates, has menstruated, or will menstruate. Stigmatizing menstruation creates a culture where cisgender men are able to go about the world without censoring themselves, while everyone for whom periods are a part of everyday life has to worry about both what they talk about and what they're logistically able to do given the lack of accommodations for menstruating people. Women are only human. We fart. And urinate and defecate and bleed. And I want to talk about it. As the saying goes, “There is a grain of truth in every joke,” or “a joke is truth wrapped in a smile.” But is there really truth in every joke? The purpose behind creating my solo performance was to explore whether or not there is; theorizing that when you add comedy to drama it becomes more human.

I began writing my solo show the moment I woke up on August 6, 2017. My 36th birthday. I vowed to myself that every morning for the next year, I would jot down a memory, describe an image in my mind, or just plan bitch about my aging body, lack of relationship, career or money. Whatever thought I had I would write without judgment. I often ruminated on feelings of failure, guilt, shame and loss, so by December I needed a good laugh. I turned on the boob tube, put up my feet, and binged on HBO's Comedy Special, *Amy Schumer: Live at The Apollo*, then almost immediately I gorged myself on Netflix Original, *Ali Wong: Baby Cobra*. I laughed so hard at both I cried, and nearly peed myself on multiple occasions, which inspired me! And so I spent my winter break researching comic geniuses Lucille Ball (with whom I share a birthday), Mae West, Carol Burnett, Madeline Kahn, Gilda Radner, Lily Tomlin and Wanda Sykes. I watched every episode of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, *Roseanne*, *Married with Children*, and *Jane Fonda's Original Workout*. I even went so far as to immerse myself in today's pop culture, gluing my eyeballs to every superficial tampon, toothpaste, and mascara commercial I could YouTube, listening to overgrown tween sensations like Katie Perry, Britney Spears and P!nk until my ears nearly bled, and I did it all on a stationary bike in the tiny basement gym of my Seattle apartment.

I'll admit – I'm a memoir junky. I'm nose-y but I don't like trash so gossip mags don't do it for me. I need the truth. So I cracked open some of my dusty, haven't been read in almost three years, "cause grad school" books: *Just Kids* by Patti Smith, *White Girls* by Hilton Als, *H Is For Hawk* by Helen Macdonald, *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* by Nancy Isenberg, *Wild* by Cheryl Strayed, *Lit* by Mary Karr, *Country Girl* by Edna O'Brien, *Vagina* by Naomi Wolf, *Pain, Parties, Work: Sylvia Plath in New York, Summer 1953* by Elizabeth Winder, and *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* by Jill Lepore, just to name a few. But I decided based on Mary

Karr's *The Art of Memoir*, that I would attempt an autobiographical piece. I created a timeline based on my coming of age as an adult and the female cycle. A woman's very first period is called menarche, from there on after it's menstrual, until of course menopause – I laughed at the thought of menarche sounding like anarchy and so it began...

I dissected every female comic's stand-up routine I had time for, finding out that there was a recipe! I knew I needed to make a period joke, a joke about my mother, a potty humor joke, a joke about vaginal intercourse, oral and anal sex, a joke about pregnancy, my age, the workplace, penises, to be a mom or not to be a mom, menopause, and if I had the gull – a joke about rape. I had multiple options but still my work didn't seem like a solo show but rather a stand-up bit / a routine. So now the challenge became how to make it theatrical.

I wanted to play a modern day spinster without ever using the word "spinster". That's where the bike came in and that's when I started using the training I received at UW. I used research and writing techniques I remembered from my first-year script analysis and documentary solo show class with Karen Hartman, composition class with Jeffery France, and devised piece *Skies Over Seattle* with the company PearlDamour. The prologue was inspired by my study of Shakespeare with Amy Thone combined with the Voice and Speech training of Judy Shawn, Bridget Connors and Scott Hafso. I used operative words, antithesis, lifting the ending of the line, and connecting breath to thought in order to elevate my comedic timing. The three different walks and rising up from a low plié I stole from Suzuki class where I often tried my jokes out during Viewpoints. I sang. Allow me to repeat myself - I SANG! I faced my fears as taught by Valerie Curtis Newton and I attempted something bawdy which was suggested by Tim Bond. I

used my whole body and a little clown work that I learned in Alexander Technique class with Cathy Madden. I focused on story instead of emotionality as suggested by Zane Jones. I took a medium that's performed live but shot through a lens and broadcast in post via a 32-inch television screen, and I reimagined it for the stage, thanks to the clarity of Andrew Tsao's on-camera training in Screen Acting class. I said "fuck sentimentality" and took a look at my life with humor, simplicity and truth, much like I did the wonderfully complex characters in *Three Sisters* by Anton Chekov, which I studied with Mark Jenkins.

Some say, "Fifty percent of every joke is true" or "every joke is a half truth". The whole truth is, I wanted to write for myself. A 30-something year old woman. I figured, I know how to make an audience cry but this time I wanted to make them laugh and the best advice I heard was to tell the truth. So I did. I had a blast making this show. I believe it lives somewhere between art-house and comedy-club. Fear and self-acceptance. Feminine and Feminist. I plan on submitting it to Solo and One-Act play festivals in New York City, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh and Seattle.

"Well-behaved women seldom make history."

Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

OVARYACTING by Bridget McKeivitt

Blackout.

The play begins as "Love Is All Around" by Sonny Curtis plays. Living room type lights fill the space. At 0:33/1:04 WOMAN enters center stage. WOMAN is reading from a play. At 0:54/1:04 the music begins to fade and the WOMAN paces as she reads out loud from her script...

A woman in her mid-to-late 30's. Stands no taller than 5'8" and no shorter than 5'6". Weights between 125 and 127 pounds.

[Beat]

Her build is feminine and athletic. Her hair is brunette. Never blonde.

[Beat]

She should not have an aversion to sweating and should be able to briskly ride a stationary bike for at least 20 minutes without stopping. She must be an aunt to at least one niece or nephew.

[Beat]

She should have a wide circle of both female and male friends and careers and hobbies to fill her life with. She is not lonely or pitiful. She is a modern woman with excellent work-life balance.

[Beat]

She has impeccable taste in clothing, home décor, food and wine. She is unmarried, childless, educated and is approaching the end of her reproductive cycle.

[Beat]

Sound and lighting will play an important role in this production, reinforcing the thirty-something woman's aging but ageless mental landscape and contributing a neurotic sense of unease throughout.

[Beat]

The design is more literal than abstract, or perhaps transforms the abstract into literal. The time is current. The sole set piece is a spin bike. The only prop is a play. The costume is simple, smart, well cut, all white athleisure wear.

[Beat]

The telling of this story must be in good fun, akin to a standup routine, very active, and must allow for a full range of emotion; the end must not be played at the beginning. The audience is the woman's confidante, to varying degrees of familiarity, until perhaps the end. When other characters enter the woman's story, she may somewhat inhabit them, she fancies herself an actress.

[Beat]

We hear the "Miss Gulch" theme from The Wizard of Oz. Lights switch to a tight spot illuminating the WOMAN while a YOUNG MAN enters carrying a 1980's copper toned Schwinn Exerciser stationary bike. He places the bike center stage and plays tug-of-war with the WOMAN for her script. He wins and exits. WOMAN watches YOUNG MAN leave, considers the bike, mounts it and begins to pedal as the lights change to that of a stand-up comedy special...

Today is my 36th birthday!

[Beat]

I was roused from sleep on this very special day by my period. An obvious reminder that I am still of child bearing age and yet without child.

[Beat]

It's crazy how women can just tell the exact moment when our period starts. I'll be sitting in bed, or paying for my grande hemp milk latte, or rising up in Shakuhachi - and my face goes all...

[Stays on bike but physicalize face and body as if in Shakuhachi]

And I'm all, "Okay kegels don't fail me now!" And I clench those mythical muscles as if to hold it in.

[Beat]

Just to be clear, for you guys out there, it doesn't work like that.

[Beat]

But I go ahead and pinch my pussy all tight and walk to the bathroom like...

[Gets off bike to physicalize "mall walk"]

... like ...

[Gets back on bike]

... like some horny old cougar in a track suit cruisin' the mall.

[Beat]

I'm 36 today. In 20 years I'll be joining AARP. I mean, once you reach 55, you're eligible for senior citizen discounts! 20 years? Woof.

[Beat]

You know Sanford Meisner said, "It takes 20 years to become an actor".

[Beat]

This morning I asked myself, "Where were you twenty years ago today?" And then just as my body began to shed the lining of it's uterine wall – it dawned on me...

[Same face and body as earlier "rising in Shakuhachi"]

... It was my 16th birthday. 1997. The beginning of August. Summer in the Steel City. And all I wanted for my birthday was to lose my virginity.

[Beat]

I prepped all day. Arrangements were made. All my girlfriends were in on it. I would tell my parents I was sleeping at my best friend's house, and when her parents fell asleep I would sneak out, my boyfriend would pick me up at the end of the block, and we would spend the night alone on the other side of town, where he was house sitting for his aunt and uncle. And as soon as we arrived wouldn'tcha know...

[Same face and body as earlier "rising in Shakuhachi" just slightly quicker]

... I got my period.

[Beat]

I went to the bathroom to check not once, not twice, but three times...

[Same face and body as earlier "rising in Shakuhachi" but quicker]

... False alarm? Nope.

[Same face and body but even quicker]

... False alarm? Nope.

[Same face and body and yet even quicker]

... False Alarm? Nope.

[Same face and body now deflated]

... After a few moments of utter disappointment, I said to myself...

[Same face and body but now fully inflated]

... "Fuck it! I'm gonna bleed anyway!"

[Beat]

I learned two very important things that night. One: sex on your period is messy. And two: the meaning behind my then boyfriend's high school nickname – Stumpy.

[Beat]

What they say is true though. Size doesn't matter. Big dicks, they're gratuitous. Like stretch limos. Sure they look cool. But if you can't park them anywhere, what's the point?

[Beat]

Stumpy went off to University of Montana that fall. But he didn't leave without making sure I would remember him. That summer of my 16th year, I also experienced my first orgasm. That moment of sweet sweet satisfaction was like...

[Sings]

A whole new world
What is this stuff it feels like goo
Whether we're friend or foe
Don't call me "ho"
Or say I'm only screaming
A whole new world

[Climaxes / Stops singing]

It didn't hurt like every girl's mother warns her it will. Of course my mother? Didn't tell me shit about sex. She didn't even tell me what to do when I got my first period. I had to rely on the

writing of Stephen King's Carrie. A horror movie. The shower scene. They were throwing tampons at her screaming "Plug it up! Plug it up! Plug it up!" So that's what I did.

[Beat]

I braced my feet against the bath tub, placed one hand on the back of the toilet and arched.

[Puts feet on handle bars of bike + one hand on back of seat + lifts to "insert tampon"]

I wanted to scream bloody murder but the only person home was my father so I...

[Silent scream]

... With a tampon...

[Bites knuckle]

... Half-hanging out of my...

[Looks to coot / Beat / Back to riding the bike]

Only now do I realize that while that may not have been the day I lost my virginity – it was the day I broke my hymen. It's why I don't do tampons. I wear a tampon and I walk around like...

[Gets off bike to physicalize "tiny orgasms walk"]

... like ...

[Gets back on bike]

... like I'm having tiny orgasms all day!

[Beat]

Please tell me I'm not the only one this happens to?

[Polls the audience]

No? No? No? Liar. You? Yeah? Yeah? She's all like, "Honey. I'm having one right now."

[Beat]

There's no longer any mystery to the female orgasm. We've come a long way. We've even classified them into four types: Clitoral, Vaginal, Blended (aside: I know. That's a new one for

me too. It means whole body.), and the rare but attainable Multiple. Women have become so orgasmically advanced that it's gotten to the point where if I heard a woman say, "I had multiple orgasms today!" I'd barely flinch. I'd fist bump or head nod and like bro out.

[Beat]

But if I heard a woman say, "I took multiple shits today!" I would respond with "LIAR! How dare you fill our heads with such fibs and fables. You... you... you beautiful goddess of defecation."

[Beat]

You know you're getting older when you get jealous of other people's regular bowel movements. When you long for the day when you could eat like shit and then take a shit.

[Beat]

Now-a-days I eat more than one stalk of celery? And what I used to call a food baby I now call a hysterical pregnancy.

[Beat]

It's a problem. I almost got audited last year for trying to write off three month's worth of Clearblue Easy. 2 Count!

[Beat]

Now I'm a psyllium husk and bentonite "morning, noon, and night" kinda woman. You have to work for regularity in your 30s. It's why I don't do anal. Sure I'll take a finger every once in a while but if some dude dare put his penis anywhere near my butthole I'm all like "You better back up! Before I get backed up." "You think PMS is bad? Wait till you get a load of my IBS!" "They don't call it IRRITABLE bowel syndrome for nothing."

[Beat]

Oh, come on. Everybody poops – it's even a children's book – I read it to my nieces every time I visit.

[*This is where WOMAN may grant herself a dramatic pause*]

Sorry. I needed a moment to savor the fact that I just said "I read it to my nieces" and not "I read it to my children".

[Beat]

You see, I'm not sure if motherhood is for me. I mean, unlike most women, I don't get jealous when someone I know announces their pregnancy. In fact, my auto response is usually... Poor kid.

[Beat]

I do however track my ovulation cycle. On an app. On my phone. That sends me text alerts so I know when I'm fertile. The only difference between my fertility app and that of my wannabe mommy friends is that theirs has ads for baby strollers and mine sends me a link to vibrators with same-day delivery on Amazon Prime.

[Beat]

I purposely avoid sex from day 2 to day 9 of my monthly cycle. As not to get knocked up. I mean really? Could you imagine me nine months pregnant walking around like...

[Gets off bike to physicalize "prissy pregnant lady walk"]

... like ...

[Gets back on bike]

... like "My periods on hiatus for 9 months. I can eat whatever I want. I have an excuse for getting fat – what's yours?"

[Beat]

And new moms are even worse. Who do they think they are taking laps around a restaurant or bellying up to a bar with a baby strapped to their tit, the libido killing scent of spit-up and dirty diaper lingering in their wake.

[Beat]

And then they whine about not getting laid...?!?!?! All the while I can catch a D whenever I want. I've been told I carry a scent.

[Beat]

You know what I should do. For all the single ladies out there. I should strut my ass through a PTA meeting. Commando! Wearing a dress that's just a little too high. Allowing the aroma of my tender, juicy, USDA Prime pussy just waft through the air. Leaving behind me a trail of pusspourri like...

[Gets off bike to physicalize "vaginal sommelier walk"]

... like ...

[*Gets back on bike*]

... like some high-falutin', artisanal cheese eatin', gets better with age drinkin', vaginal sommelier!

[*Beat*]

I like the sound of that. I should put it on my resume under special skills.

[*Beat*]

Women talk about how they dry up in their thirties. I've only gotten wetter. I was sleeping with this guy once who told me he would drink a cup of it. But for as much as I loved the attention – he could never get me off. I'd lay there thinking ... A cup? Like a sippy cup?

[*Beat*]

Granted – he was younger than me. I'd imagine him at breakfast. With a two handed cookie monster cup. And a bib. Making the same weirdo slurping noise he did when he'd go down on me. Like {make slurping noise} ... Like he's on death row and my pussy's his last supper ... and I'm all {yawn and stretch}, bored, I might like play with his hair, or text my classmates like, "yo what scene we doin' in Chekov tomorrow?"

[*Beat*]

Don't get me wrong. I enjoy oral sex just as much as the next person. Giving and receiving. I just don't like to swallow. And I'm not into the whole "pearl necklace" thing unless it's tit for tat. So, back-pocket plan... I came up with the female version.

[*Beat*]

Would you like to hear it?

[*Beat*]

Would you like me to demonstrate it?

[*Beat*]

Okay.

[Gets off bike to demonstrate "white collar sex position"]

So... You have to be sitting on your partners face. And then just as you're about to climax, you pop your ass up and back over his chin. And then cum on his chest.

[Beat + Rising up slowly from a low plié]

I call it...

[Beat]

"The white collar!"

[Beat + Walking back to bike]

Hey! For some men, it's a step up in life. Talk about career goals.

[Gets back on bike + Beat]

Please don't be fooled by my cavalier attitude towards sex. I'm currently abstinent. I'm not even dating.

[Beat]

I took my sexual inventory last year and realized that my age and the number of men I had slept with ... were the same.

[Beat]

Unless you don't count the rape. But it's not clear whether or not it was rape.

[Beat]

You see, I never heard him say "No".

[Beat]

What I heard him say was...

[Beat]

"I suffer. From erectile dysfunction."

[Beat]

And I love a challenge!

[Beat]

99.9% of the time I initiate sex. If I didn't initiate it, I don't have it. It's my golden rule. And I think this is how we should teach young women about sex. In order to avoid shame and guilt. We make it like a game. Example: looks like Mark Wahlberg. Has a bank account like Mark Zuckerberg? Initiate. [Pause] Looks like Zack Morris. Has the personality of Zach Galifianakis? Initiate. [Pause] Looks like Donald Trump Junior. Acts like Donald Trump Senior? RUN! Send in the choppers [*makes copter noise*]. Get her outta there!

[Beat]

It's tough finding a decent guy. I am hopeful about 36 though. The age and the notch on the bedpost...

[Beat]

I'm getting my masters. I still have some thigh gap. I've successfully avoided the flabby mom arm. I've only found one grey hair. In my pubes. Who's gonna see that?!?!?!?!?

[Beat]

I finally feel like I know what I'm talking about. I've been fucking for twenty years. That means I'm a professional. The only thing I regret is not charging for it!

[Beat]

I'm kidding. I take my life and my body very seriously.

[Beat]

In four years I'll turn forty. And I'm the kind of person like... I'm already planning to make a very big deal out of this birthday.

[Beat]

You see I believe that age forty is when "young adulthood" ends and "middle adulthood" begins.

[Beat]

And I vow that when that day comes, I will properly celebrate my place in the order of things, no matter how unsettling it is to accept that I am no longer... Younger.

[Beat]

... But until then ...

The play ends with WOMAN on bike, she loosens the resistance and pedals as fast as she can as the song "Spinster" by Joan Jett & The Blackhearts blares, and the broad light slowly tightens to a single spot on the front wheel of the 1980's copper toned Schwinn Exerciser stationary bike before...

Blackout.

OVARYACTING or My Cycle Play
by Bridget McKeivitt

For Briana, Brodwyn, and Laynette



OVARYACTING

BY BRIDGET McKEVITT

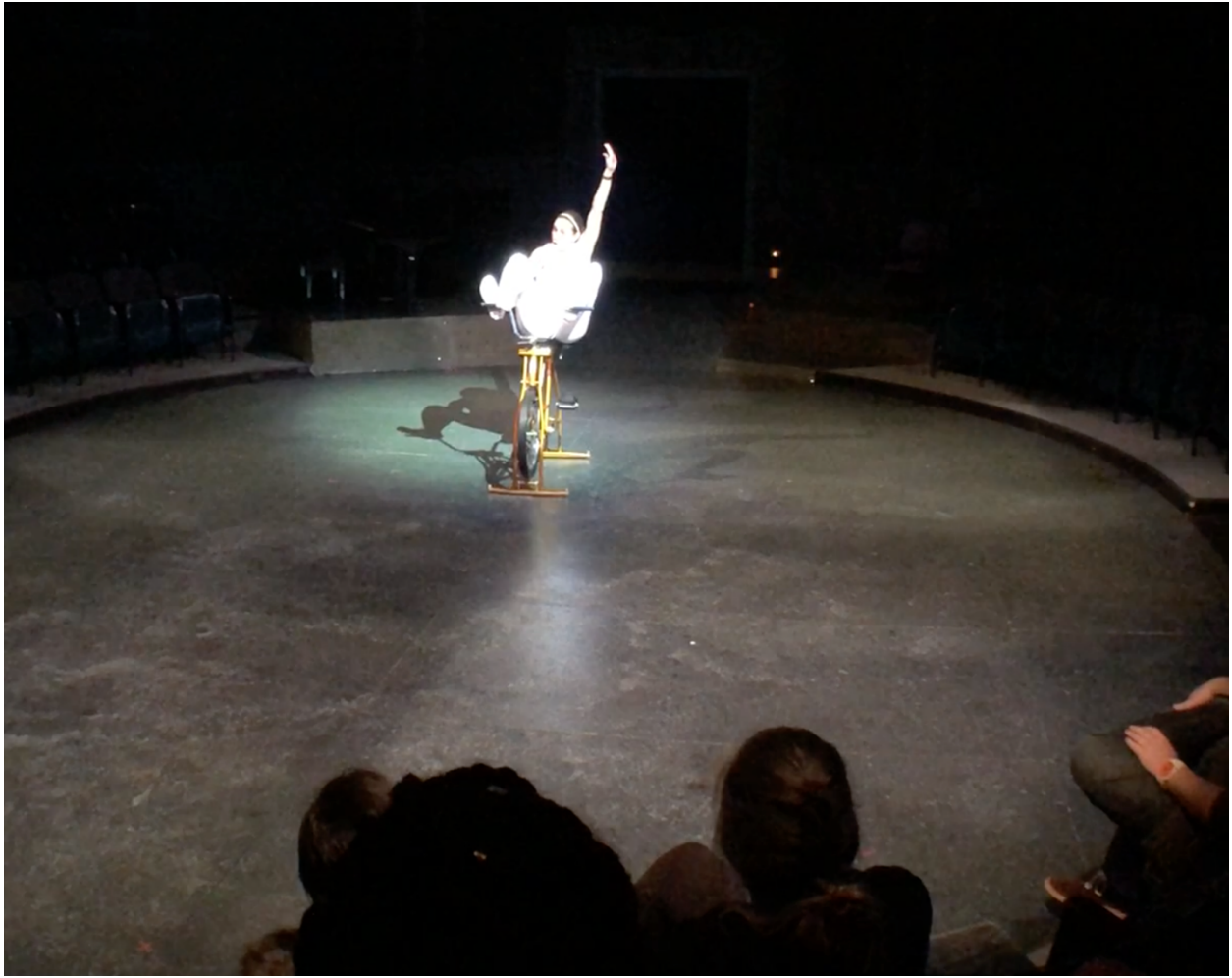


★
**DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.**

OVARYACTING or My Cycle Play
by Bridget McKeVitt

A bawdy, witty, spirited piece, about a thirty-something single woman who's not ready to settle. Heavy is her flow of period puns and micro dramas on aging, femininity, and the body.









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