Acting Edition

LIBERATION

BY BESS WOHL

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DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE

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LIBERATION was first produced by Roundabout Theatre Company (Scott Ellis, Interim Artistic Director; Sydney Beers, Executive Producer) and premiered at the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre, Laura Pels Theatre in New York City, on February 20, 2025. The production was directed by Whitney White, with set design by David Zinn, costume design by Qween Jean, lighting design by Cha See, sound design by Palmer Hefferan, and hair and wig design by Nikiya Mathis. The intimacy director was Kelsey Rainwater, the vocal and dialect coach was Gigi Buffington, and the production stage manager was Jenny Kennedy. The cast was as follows:

LIZZIE . . . . . Susannah Flood
MARGIE . . . . . Betsy Aidem
SUSAN . . . . . Adina Verson
CELESTE . . . . . Kristolyn Lloyd
ISIDORA . . . . . Irene Sofia Lucio
DORA . . . . . Audrey Corsa
JOANNE . . . . . Kayla Davion
BILL . . . . . Charlie Thurston
UNDERSTUDIES . . . . . Britt Faulkner, Leeanne Hutchison, Matt E. Russell, Kedren Spencer

LIBERATION was produced on Broadway by Daryl Roth, Eva Price, Rachel Sussman, and Jenny Gersten, and premiered at the James Earl Jones Theatre on October 28, 2025. The cast and creative team remained the same, with the following change: The production stage manager was Erin Gioia Albrecht.

CHARACTERS

LIZZIE – Woman. Flexible age. White.
MARGIE – Woman. 50s–60s. White.
SUSAN – Woman. Early 20s. White.
CELESTE – Woman. Late 30s. Black.
ISIDORA – Woman. Late 30s–40. White.
DORA – Woman. Mid 20s. White.
JOANNE – Woman. Early 30s. Black.
BILL – Man. Late 20s–early 30s. White.

SETTING

A stage.
And.
A basement basketball court at a local rec center, somewhere in Ohio.

TIME

Now.
And recently.
And the 1970s.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This play is a work of fiction, except for the heart of it, which is true.

A double slash // denotes where the next line begins.

A Memory Play
About Things I Don't Remember

For my mom.

ACT ONE

(A woman.)

(She speaks to the audience.)

LIZZIE. Hi.

Hi. Is everyone – is everyone good? Comfortable? Snacks unwrapped? Hello. Hi. Welcome.

They took your phones. Are we okay? Are we okay. I promise you'll get them out of that pouch at the end of this* – and – speaking of – how long is this going to take, right? I know that's all anyone really wants to know: the running time.

Honestly, it's not even your fault, it's like, this is the modern condition – not to sound grandiose, "this is the modern condition," but honestly – it's like, you decide to come, you get dressed up – *(To particular audience.)* Well all right you didn't get dressed up – but you put on clothes, thank you for that. You put on clothes. You make your way through whatever you went through – the subway, the traffic, the hellscape that is Times Square* – you finally get here, and then you hope that the entire experience will be as short as humanly possible.

No, I get it, I have kids too. I spend my life trying to get away from them and then trying to get back to them so…

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* These lines reflect the original production in New York, where audience members were required to seal their phones in a locked pouch before the performance. In productions not using this method and/or occurring outside New York City, these lines can be altered.

LIZZIE. Fear not. Surely you've noticed all of those six hour, eight hour, ten hour plays are by men with no children? A woman with children would never. Could never. You know I'm right.

And speaking of children, I should have said. This is a play – it's – a memory play, in a way – it's about my mother. For my mother. Who recently… Who's not here anymore. And so it's about her, and her friends, her beautiful friends – and a thing – this is important – a thing they tried very hard to do.

No, a thing that they did, that they unquestionably did – so why does it feel somehow like it's all slipping away?

And how do we get it back?

(She exhales.)

(Looks into the wings.)

In fact – *(Calls into the wings now.)* Could you all come out here?

(Some of the other **WOMEN** *come in, in various states of getting ready.)*

(Brushing hair, buttoning blouses, etc. It's the performance of being female.)

(They are:)

*(***MARGIE. SUSAN. CELESTE. ISIDORA. DORA.***)*

Hi.

(A few of them might wave or acknowledge her.)

So. These are the women. Some of them, anyway. These were my mother's friends, before she had me. And these are not the real people, obviously – I mean, these are real people, hi – and we are in – work with me here, we are in –

The basement of a rec center in Ohio and the year was 1970. And my mom… My devoted, dutiful mom – who sewed the costumes for every school play and cooked every family dinner and did all the dishes and took me to every piano lesson and sat through it even though I was definitely not a musician – she was actually… a radical?

(The world around her begins to shift.)

(The **WOMEN** *set up the gym space;* **ISIDORA** *exits.)*

(Surprised, surprising.) No really, she was the organizer. The instigator, the leader and I guess her basic idea was –

Is –

(The shift completes. We are back in time.)

(And **LIZZIE** *is now her mother, with whom she shares a name.)*

(Excited, optimistic.) A group, a revolution – my idea is, well, no, it's not mine, obviously – but the general concept is – if we raise our consciousness, increase our understanding of the oppression and the sources of oppression in our own lives – personally – this is how we change the world, we raise our consciousness, we change the world –

*(***LIZZIE** *turns back to the audience for a moment and transforms again into her contemporary self.)*

(To the audience.) I know, but it was the '70s. And yeah, I'm my mom. And look, I love my mom, but for most of my life – for reasons I won't get into right now – becoming my mom was like my biggest nightmare, I think this is true for a lot of us actually – anyway, the point is, here's my biggest nightmare, let's do it –

SUSAN. I'm sorry, who are you?

LIZZIE. *(Back in the '70s now.)* Oh, I'm Lizzie, Elizabeth, Liz, hi, I'm the one who, I put up the flyers.

CELESTE. And what is your… Why?

LIZZIE. Oh, I, didn't I, I think I just kind of said why.

MARGIE. I think I'm wondering what qualifies you, dear. Are you some kind of activist or organizer –

LIZZIE. Oh. Journalist. I'm – I'm a journalist, I have a degree in International Relations from University of Chicago? I'm from Chicago? So, I actually originally came here because of a guy // he got a job in the –

CELESTE, MARGIE & SUSAN. *(Re the mention of a "guy.")* Seriously? / Oh dear. / Okay.

LIZZIE. *(Quickly, over them.)* No, we broke up, we broke up. But by then I had my own job, which is that I write for *The Daily*. Obituaries and weddings – which in a way are the same thing!

(She tries lamely to laugh at her own joke.)

SUSAN. Right.

LIZZIE. No, but seriously, what I'm trying to say is, it's just honestly – I mean I have a *degree in International Relations* –

CELESTE. You said.

LIZZIE. But you know, I come in for my job interview at *The Daily*, and I say to the editor, I say –

(A quick aside, to the audience.) By the way, this happened, this part is actually true –

(Now back to the group.) Give me politics. Give me civil rights. The war, give me something, anything, that actually matters. He looks me up and down, he goes, "You can have weddings." Weddings.

(The **WOMEN** *react.)*

I had to fight to get obituaries. And every day, I'm just hoping that someone will die in an interesting way so I'll have something to write about.

*(***ISIDORA** *bursts in, late.)*

(She speaks with an Italian accent.)

Hi, hi – come // in – are you here for the –

ISIDORA. Ahhh, sorry, I had a very hard time finding the room. A very hard time! The flyer's saying eight.

LIZZIE. Really? No, did I –

ISIDORA. It says the eight!

*(***SUSAN** *checks out her own flyer.)*

SUSAN. That's a B.

ISIDORA. I know, I know this now, but really it's looking like eight.

MARGIE. // I think it looks like a B.

LIZZIE. No, it's a B, a B, for Basement.

ISIDORA. Well, I know that now. I know that now. But I went all the way up, up, up!

LIZZIE. There's only four // floors –

ISIDORA. I go up, I'm hoping that, what am I hoping? I don't know, that more floors will appear? Like a magic trick? I don't fucking know.

So, then I think, okay, am I in the wrong building? Do I have the wrong day? No. Have I fallen through the space hole in the time?

(They all stare at her, not sure what to say.)

ISIDORA. So, then I travel all the way down, back outside. There is this old man, this old, old security guard, very old man. So, I say to him, "Hello, old man. Do you know where this women's group is?" He says, "Quilting club was yesterday. Knitting circle on the weekend." I say, "No! No, this is not knitting circle! This is Women's Liberation group!"

"Liberation from what?" he says. "I don't know," I tell him, "Maybe YOU?" He looks confused.

LIZZIE. Well, you made it –

ISIDORA. So, I show him the flyer. He's looking even more confused now, but then he says, like he just solved the mystery of the fucking universe, "Oh, this is B, that's basement on B." I say, "Doesn't that look like an eight, sir?" He says yes.

*(***ISIDORA** *exhales triumphantly.)*

LIZZIE. Well, you're here now.

ISIDORA. I hope we are not to be playing the sports.

LIZZIE. It's the only place I could get.

SUSAN. It's very far down.

ISIDORA. It's smelling like boys and feet.

MARGIE. She's right. I had sons, have sons. I know the smell.

LIZZIE. I think they just had a game.

ISIDORA. I bring some spray for next time, I spray it up.

CELESTE. *(To* **ISIDORA**, *re* **LIZZIE**.*)* She was just explaining – something.

ISIDORA. Ah yes, I interrupt, I apologize –

SUSAN. It's a CR group.

MARGIE. // Consciousness raising.

ISIDORA. Yes, it says on the flyer. *(To* **MARGIE**.*)* I know what this is.

MARGIE. All right then.

LIZZIE. Okay great. And, you know, I have a feeling that others will trickle in too. And so. And so, yes. Let's get started. Well, we already started –

ISIDORA. Sorry.

(She sits.)

(In pain.) Ack, sorry my back, no, I'm fine, okay. I'm ready. Sorry.

LIZZIE. So. Let's continue.

(Pause.)

(Nobody knows what this would mean.)

I just said a little about myself, but maybe now others want to… We could each say a little bit about who we are, where we're coming from… Get to know each other… Maybe… A little…

(Another pause.)

(They all look around.)

And, just to be clear, I don't, I don't want to be, I'm not the leader or anything. Just because I put up the flyers. And it was my idea. Well, it's not even my idea, there are groups like this popping up all over the – anyway – point is, in our group, I don't think anyone should be higher than anyone else. Hierarchy is patriarchy. We all know that.

(Different levels of agreement all around. Before anyone can disagree, however –)

SUSAN. I'll go. I can go.

LIZZIE. Great, yes. Go.

*(***SUSAN** *looks at her.)*

*(**LIZZIE** forces herself to cede the floor.)*

SUSAN. Okay. So. Okay… Um, my name is Susan, Susie, Susie Hurricane. And no, that's not my legal name, but it is my real name because, yeah, I don't think things are "real" just because our dads gave 'em to us. My dad actually sat shiva for me when I left home? It's a Jewish thing, it's what you do when somebody dies. So, yeah, we don't talk anymore. And honestly at first, you know, when I thought about coming tonight I was like, okay it's 1970, you know, and I'm pretty burnt out on Women's Liberation?

ISIDORA. Mmm.

SUSAN. Like, I don't even know what to say anymore. Women are human beings. If you don't believe that, at this point, I don't know how I can help you. It feels kind of like we're shitting into the wind –

MARGIE. I think you mean spitting. Spitting into the wind.

SUSAN. No, I mean shitting, blowing around our shit, you know, and every so often some old bullshit it just, it smacks you in the face and – I don't know – so, yeah, I'm hopeful but I'm burnt the fuck out.

ISIDORA. Mmmm.

SUSAN. And, you know, I was in SNCC *(Pronounced "snick.")* in Chicago –

ISIDORA. I was in SNCC San Francisco!

SUSAN. Oh yeah? Yeah, so yeah, some stuff went down there –

ISIDORA. Yes, you're // telling me –

CELESTE. Let her talk.

SUSAN. Thanks, yeah, so I didn't really fit in, I guess? So I went to New York, joined Radical Women – then my roommate in New York kicked me out because she didn't like my bird – so I was like fuck off, my bird is

my life – then a friend in New York, she knew a guy who was opening a lefty bookstore out here // and needed some help –

LIZZIE. There's a lefty bookstore // out here?

ISIDORA. No.

MARGIE. I don't // think so.

SUSAN. No, the bookstore never happened, // of course –

ISIDORA. Of course.

SUSAN. But by the time I figured that out, I'd bought a car, total tin can, and drove out so now I'm like, maybe I just go the rest of the way, to California – I hear there's some cool shit happening out there –

ISIDORA. Eh.

SUSAN. Right, so, yeah, now, I don't know. Really, I want to buy a bike, sell my car, but also what do I do with my bird on the bike? My bird can't go on the bike to California.

ISIDORA. // No.

SUSAN. And also I don't have a job right now so my car is my home, so yeah, I guess I'd like to get a job and a bike and a place to live – maybe not in that order – and – maybe try to, like, write down some of the shit that's like swirling around in my head – because I don't sleep much, it's hard in my car – but also I've got a lot swirling around up there. Yeah. So. I guess. I guess that's it.

LIZZIE. Thank you, Susie. Susan?

SUSAN. Susie's fine.

(Pause.)

ISIDORA. // Should I go –

MARGIE. I can go –

ISIDORA. Oh, go, go, go –

MARGIE. No, that's fine. You go.

ISIDORA. No no no, it's fine, go ahead, it's fine –

MARGIE. You should, really, I don't –

ISIDORA. No, go, go, go ahead.

CELESTE. *(Ending this madness.)* I'll go. I can go.

ISIDORA. Oh. Okay.

MARGIE. All right then.

LIZZIE. Go ahead.

CELESTE. My name is Celeste. And, um, I should say, I was just in a CR group back in New York – I live in New York mostly, I'm just here temporarily – and anyway, it was really more of a dinner party than a group, really, but the point is, one of our rules, bylaws, whatever you want to call it, was that everyone got to speak uninterrupted.

ISIDORA. // Oh –

CELESTE. *(Before* **ISIDORA** *can interrupt again.)* Because we believed that a woman speaking uninterrupted is a radical act.

(She looks around, daring them all. They are quiet.)

So, let's see. The year I graduated Radcliffe, this was '63, it was actually the first year a woman could get a Harvard degree in addition to your Radcliffe degree, like a little bonus prize? So, that's what I did. That's what I got.

Now I'm an editor, a book editor – I'm also working on my own book about Women's Liberation and specifically Black women, whose resistance is, in my opinion, overdue but as of yet completely unorganized. So my book will be looking at why that is.

(Pause.)

And, so, yeah, I was in New York, now I'm back here because my mother is sick. Hopefully it's temporary. My little sojourn back to Ohio, I mean, I don't think my mom's getting better. I don't love being back in Ohio. I did a lot to get the hell out of here, but it turns out I seem to be the only responsible member of my family, so here I am. And so, yeah, I'm looking for my people, and I saw the flyer, your flyer I guess, at the grocery store – I come out here to shop because you can't get a fresh vegetable back near my mom's and… And at first of course, of course, I thought, no, that's… I'm not getting into it. Not here. Just, no.

But then. I'm, I'm sitting there, by my mother's bedside – she doesn't really get out of bed anymore – and I bring her, her Coke and her cheese, this is all she eats, Coke and cheese, and I notice, she's, the woman can barely see, but she's still got her stack of books by her bed. Poetry. And philosophy. Novels you never heard of.

My mother was always the one, you know? She was the one lending books and putting books out on the lawn for people, kids in the neighborhood to take. If you had a book on your shelf that looked interesting to her, watch out because when she left, you'd realize that book was gone, she'd put it right in her purse, she always had to have a purse big enough to hold a book.

And she sat up with me, taught me to read, drilled those multiplication tables, she was proud. But what did she do, what did she do for herself? Cleaned houses. Cleaned houses and snuck books in her purse and raised five kids on her own and never, never ever sat down 'til she was too sick to stand. And so you know, losing her, that's sad but that happens, that's what happens, parents die… But what she lost, what she lived without… That's the part that I can't…

(Pause.)

I'm finished. Somebody else can talk.

SUSAN. I like your glasses.

CELESTE. Thanks.

SUSAN. And I'm sorry about your mother.

CELESTE. Oh. Thanks. Thank you.

(Pause.)

(Their eyes meet for a moment. Then **CELESTE** *quickly looks away.)*

*(***LIZZIE** *clocks it.)*

MARGIE. I'm Margie.

*(***MARGIE** *gets out a cigarette, lights up.)*

So, on the one hand, being a housewife is what I wanted. You know, to the extent that wanting things was a thing that I knew I could do? What I mean is, I was good at it. "Keeping house."

But, now my kids are grown, and my husband is retired which means he's home all day. And so I'm really, I'm here because I need things to get me out of the house so I don't stab him to death.

*(***ISIDORA** *laughs sharply.)*

*(***MARGIE** *is dead serious.)*

I realize that sounds like a joke. It's not a joke.

LIZZIE. You could actually stab your husband.

MARGIE. It's not complicated. You just stab.

ISIDORA. With what?

MARGIE. A knife? A pen? Anything sharp.

CELESTE. I don't think you should do that.

SUSAN. You don't know her husband.

MARGIE. He's a difficult man.

(Pause.)

(The other **WOMEN** *all look at each other, not sure if she's done.)*

ISIDORA. I'm Dora.

DORA. I'm Dora!

ISIDORA. No, you are?

DORA. Sorry sorry sorry sorry –

ISIDORA. No, this is very strange.

DORA. I know!

ISIDORA. I'm Isidora, really.

DORA. Oh, no, I'm just Dora. Dorothy.

ISIDORA. Okay, so –

DORA. So, yeah, I guess // it's not so –

ISIDORA. So, not so strange.

DORA. Anyway. I interrupted you, // sorry. Dora. Go.

ISIDORA. No, it's all right, Dora, I'm Italian, that's what we do. Sicilian, yes, I am Isidora, Dora, whatever you want and, essentially, yes, I am a filmmaker. But for now, I work as a production assistant, really coffee girl, you know, at local news, Channel Five, and uh, I have the husband but really only for the green card, though, you know, he is fine, I don't mind, even though I would have preferred he get the work transferred to, I don't know, anywhere else, but here we are, American heartland, yes so anyway. I need six months more of marriage, so, providing I don't fall pregnant in these next six months, I am fine. Fingers crossed. Everything crossed.

(She crosses herself in the Catholic way.)

ISIDORA. I was in LA, then New York, then San Francisco, I work my butt off for civil rights, for SNCC, I protest, I mimeograph the flyers, we were the "angels of the mimeograph machine," they called us – and so we just did this with the civil rights and now, maybe this is not the popular opinion, but I think women deserve a turn.

CELESTE. I don't really think we should – *(Stops herself.)* Never mind.

ISIDORA. What?

CELESTE. No, nothing, continue.

ISIDORA. No, I'm only saying, this is our turn. Ours, together, not mine, yours, yes, and I don't know if the, what do you call this, the consciousness raising?

LIZZIE. Yes.

ISIDORA. Yes, is it changing everything? I don't know. I think it can change something, maybe. Maybe not. *(Emphatic, impassioned.)* But we must try, we must do something because if we do nothing, the world keeps being shit and this, this I cannot abide. *(To* **DORA***.)* Go.

DORA. Me? Oh. So. I'm Dora, like I said, the second Dora. Hi. And I um, I um, I actually thought this was a knitting circle? I brought my knitting?

(She reaches into her purse and pulls out her knitting in progress. They all stare.)

Because it's just that my roommate likes to bring her fiancé over for, um, tea on Thursdays and if I don't find things to do, it's, anyway, so, I didn't read the flyer carefully enough I guess, but also this is really interesting so far and I would love to stick around if that's okay with everyone else.

(Everyone nods agreement.)

LIZZIE. All right, then. That's everyone. We can begin.

(Shift.)

*(**LIZZIE** is now her present-day self again. She turns to the audience.)*

So they started meeting. Weekly. I know this because after my mom passed, I tracked them down, the ones who are still alive anyway, because so many are gone or will be soon…

And I wanted to know – I needed to know – what went wrong? Because, I mean, look around, look at what's happening in the world right now, can someone please explain it to me and how do I explain it to my children and so I thought – if I could just talk to these women –

*(**ISIDORA** appears as an older woman now, in the recent past. **LIZZIE** is interviewing her.)*

ISIDORA. What? What's the question.

LIZZIE. Well, it's just that, obviously you all accomplished so much, // when you think about how far we've come –

ISIDORA. Yes, blah blah blah, fine, so what. What is the question, you must have a question.

LIZZIE. I do, have a lot of questions actually – because, here we are, still. And recently it's been feeling like things might be going in the wrong direction – so I guess my question is –

ISIDORA. Why are we still so fucked.

LIZZIE. I mean, sure, yes, but – I think I was going to start by asking… About my mom.

ISIDORA. She played it safe. We didn't go far enough. We were all so middle of the road, the middle of the road is the death of everything. It's the death of art. Don't ever let it stop you.

(Pause.)

ISIDORA. Have you seen *Oleanna*?

LIZZIE. The David Mamet play?

ISIDORA. It's very good. About women and power.

LIZZIE. Oh.

ISIDORA. You know Fellini?

LIZZIE. I –

ISIDORA. *City of Women*?

LIZZIE. I don't think I –

ISIDORA. Watch it. It will enrage you, it will set your teeth on edge, don't get me wrong. But also? It explains everything.

(Shift.)

(Back in time, back to the group. **LIZZIE** *is her mother again.* **MARGIE**, **SUSAN**, *and* **CELESTE** *are there.)*

MARGIE. I brought a cheese ball.

*(***MARGIE** *unwraps it proudly, puts it out.)*

SUSAN. Whoa, that's big.

MARGIE. It's a pretty standard-sized ball. Just cream cheese, cheddar cheese, onion powder, // garlic powder, Worcestershire –

SUSAN. //Okay.

MARGIE. I figured, if this was a men's group, the wives would make snacks. I cooked for Burt's office parties for thirty-five years.

LIZZIE. So, honestly, shouldn't he be making the cheese balls?

MARGIE. Trust me, you don't want to try Burt's balls.

LIZZIE. Well, thanks, but you didn't have to // do this –

SUSAN. Yeah you did, this is delicious, marry me, Margie.

MARGIE. Thanks, once was enough.

CELESTE. *(To* **SUSAN***, concerned.)* When's the last time you ate anything?

SUSAN. *(To* **MARGIE***.)* Are these walnuts.

MARGIE. Pecans.

SUSAN. *(Picking at the pecans.)* Fucking fantastic.

MARGIE. *(Means it.)* Thank you.

CELESTE. *(To* **SUSAN***.)* Wait. Here. Let me.

*(***CELESTE** *starts to make a snack for* **SUSAN***.)*

LIZZIE. So, I guess, we can start?

MARGIE. Where's Dora?

LIZZIE. Which one?

*(***ISIDORA** *bursts in, late again.)*

ISIDORA. Sorry I'm late, cat pooped again on the carpet –

LIZZIE. We're about to begin. Margie brought cheese.

*(***ISIDORA** *starts to spray down the room.)*

ISIDORA. Where's the other Dora?

SUSAN. Maybe we've scared her off.

LIZZIE. I hope not –

(Now **DORA** *rushes in, very upset –)*

DORA. No no no, I'm here – I'm – I'm here – I'm sorry – I'm here. // Oh my God, oh my God – No no no. I'm fine.

LIZZIE. Are you – all right?

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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