

Acting Edition

The Reservoir

by Jake Brasch

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-71256-2

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New York Premiere
Presented By
Atlantic Theater Company, Ensemble Studio Theatre, and
The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation
New York City, 2026

Co-World Premiere Produced by
Denver Center for the Performing Arts Theatre Company
Chris Coleman, Artistic Director
Charles Varin, Managing Director

Alliance Theatre, Atlanta, GA
Tinashe Kajese-Bolden, Jennings Hertz Artistic Director
Christopher Moses, Jennings Hertz Artistic Director
Mike Schleifer, Managing Director

Geffen Playhouse
Tarell Alvin McCraney, Artistic Director
Gil Cates, Jr., Executive Director/CEO

THE RESERVOIR was originally produced and featured in the 2022
Colorado New Play Summit at the Denver Center Theatre Company,
Chris Coleman, Artistic Director.

THE RESERVOIR was originally commissioned and developed by
The Ensemble Studio Theatre/Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Science &
Technology Project.

The world premiere co-production of *THE RESERVOIR* was directed by Shelley Butler, with scenic design by Takeshi Kata, costume design by Sara Ryung Clem, lighting design by Jeanette Oi-Suk Yew, sound design/composition by Michael Costagliola, dramaturgy by Olivia O'Connor, and associate sound design by Jake Eisner.

At Denver Center for the Performing Arts Theatre Company and Alliance Theatre, the stage manager was Liz Campbell. The cast was as follows:

JOSH Philip Schneider
BEVERLY Lori Wilner
SHRIMPY Peter Van Wagner
HANK Mark Kincaid
IRENE Joyce Cohen
PATRICIA Vanessa Lock
HUGO Rodney Lizcano

At Geffen Playhouse, the stage manager was Liz Brohm Hanrahan. The cast was as follows:

JOSH Jake Horowitz
BEVERLY Liz Larsen
SHRIMPY Lee Wilkof
HANK Geoffrey Wade
IRENE Carolyn Mignini
PATRICIA Marin Hinkle
HUGO Adrián González

The New York premiere of *THE RESERVOIR* was directed by Shelley Butler; with set design by Takeshi Kata; costume design by Sara Ryung Clement; lighting design by Jiyoun Chang; wig, hair, and makeup design by J. Jared Janas; sound design and original music by Kate Marvin; and movement by David Neumann. The production stage manager was Michelle Bosch. The cast was as follows:

JOSH Noah Galvin
BEVERLY Caroline Aaron
SHRIMPY Chip Zien
HANK Peter Maloney
IRENE Mary Beth Peil
PATRICIA Heidi Armbruster
HUGO Matthew Saldívar

CHARACTERS

JOSH – A drunk. On medical leave from college. Desperate to make sense of the world and the noise in his head. He copes through humor, but also evades through humor. He's maddening yet charming. Heart-forward.

BEVERLY – A loving but no-bullshit Jewish woman. Tough as nails, endlessly curious, relentless, and full of surprises. The moral and spiritual center of the play.

SHRIMPY – A Brooklynite Jewish jokester with a huge heart. He manages to be both unacceptably filthy and somehow endearing.

HANK – A conservative Nebraskan evangelical with traditional views. He's a loving husband and grandpa, but isn't here for Josh's antics.

IRENE – The sweetest Midwestern grandma in the whole wide world. Josh's favorite as a kiddo. Former singer and church pianist. Effortlessly emanates warmth and love.

PATRICIA – Josh's mom. Hurt and angered by Josh's recent behavior, but at her core, a mom who just wants to be loving and goofy again. (Also plays **JEANETTE HOOPER**, **LENNI**, **DARLENE**, and **RABBI SILVER**.)

HUGO – A long-time bookstore manager. Desperately believes in books and the store. Reserved...until he isn't. (Also plays **TAYLOR**, **YAAKOV STERN**, and **COUNSELOR RICK**.)

SETTING

Denver, Colorado/Josh's Mind Palace

The various settings needn't be shown in great detail.

Let the play feel like the inside of Josh's brain – scattered, irreverent, and slowly healing.

TIME

2013–2015

AUTHOR'S NOTES

Josh's grandparents are onstage throughout (most) of the play. They are there for Josh until he can be there for himself.

There are no proper transitions in the play. This will require divorcing yourself from the literal and finding creative workarounds in design and staging. I hope you do something wild and bold with it. I've also seen a killer version with four folding chairs. Keep 'er moving at all costs.

The play depends entirely on Josh's connection with the audience. His asides are his safe space, the way he makes sense of himself. There must be ease and genuine warmth there, or some of his crushing choices will become simply unbearable. Addicts are charming, if slippery. The play is much more interesting if we like the guy.

Speaking of the asides, I've noticed that it doesn't serve the story to rigidly delineate them with light cues or actors freezing onstage. The play swims in and out of reality. There is some fuzziness. It's meant to mirror Josh's mind. Embrace it.

And one final note on tone:

Play against the pain. In spite of everything, let this be a celebration of life.

for my grandparents

*and more specifically, my grandma b, who would
have requested a paper copy of this play to litter
with hilarious, scathing, and insightful notes in
red-colored pencil*

יהי זכרה מהפכה

yehi zichra mahapecha

may your memory be a revolution

ACT ONE

(Four empty chairs.)

(And then – sunrise.)

(JOSH is asleep on the banks of the Cherry Creek Reservoir in suburban Denver...though he doesn't know that yet.)

(He has a carry-on suitcase with him.)

(He has a gnarly fresh wound on his arm.)

(Then, he startles awake.)

(He panics for a brief moment.)

(He checks to be sure he has his suitcase.)

(Then, he looks to us.)

JOSH. Wait...this is actually really nice.

The beach. Sunrise. Magenta. Lavender. Fuchsia.

Whoa, I just realized something major: Sunrises are gay. This is the perfect way to wake up from a bender.

Why can't it be like this every time? Usually it's all broken teeth and handcuffs.

(Then REGINALD, a park ranger, shows up.)

REGINALD. Morning. You can't sleep here.

JOSH. *(To us.)* Damn, spoke too soon.

REGINALD. Hello? Did you hear me? I'm gonna need you to stand up for me, son.

JOSH. *(To us.)* "Son." Daddy in the uniform called me "son."

(To REGINALD.) Good Morning, Captain.

REGINALD. Are you able to stand up for me?

(Into his radio.) Can I get –

JOSH. Oh no. Sorry. Um. Just went for a run. Sat down for a moment to watch the sunrise over the ocean and the mountains and I fell as–

(To us.) Wait. Mountains. There are no mountains. This is Florida.

REGINALD. Sir? Are you alright? You're bleeding, your arm.

JOSH. *(To us.)* Okay I'm bleeding and there are mountains and wait – that's the Cherry Creek Reservoir. I'm home in Denver.

REGINALD. Do you need assistance?

JOSH. *(To us.)* Focus on the cop, speak to the cop. But how did I get here? Did I get on a plane? A greyhound? Wouldn't be the first time. One time I went to a club in Brooklyn and woke up three days later at a Chick-fil-A in West Virginia.

REGINALD. Hold tight son, I'm calling for help. That cut is deep.

JOSH. *(To the officer.)* No, uh, this? It's nothing. No, I'm fine. My dog. She's a biter. But I really appreciate you checking on me. Do you happen to have the time, Officer?

REGINALD. Uh... 6:04.

JOSH. Oh!

(As if he's late, JOSH closes his eyes and begins to pray aloud in Hebrew. REGINALD doesn't know how to respond to this and, discombobulated, decides to leave.)

REGINALD. Okay. Stay safe.

JOSH. Shabbat Shalom.

(REGINALD walks away.)

(To us.) Nailed it! I'm really good at handling cops. I've had like twenty of these kinda run-ins and I've only been arrested thrice.

Okay. Focus. Morning. Bleeding. Suitcase. Denver. What's the last thing I remember? The hot rehab worker Breathalyzed me and drove me into Miami and then...

Here we go. Here comes the sober. I hate this part, when the dam breaks and the questions come pouring in: How long was the blackout? Hours? Days? How did I get this cut? Should I just book a flight back to New York? Maybe I shouldn't have dropped out of school. Maybe that just made things worse. Should I go to the liquor store and get just one shooter so I can – whoa.

Remember: Your brain is broken and “you can't fix broken thinking with broken thinking” which is a slogan that I learned at the group therapy place NYU forced me to go to before I was kicked out for chugging six Smirnoff Ices in the bathroom and then singing the entirety of Whitney Houston's “I Have Nothing” during a group therapy session.

Where do I go? I can't go home. Can't face Mom.

But where else? I don't have a key so I let myself in through the dog door.

This carpet. I remember this carpet. Soft. Shag.

(JOSH falls asleep.)

(**PATRICIA** *instantaneously appears and claps to wake JOSH up. She's home from work.*)

PATRICIA. Josh?!

JOSH. Hi.

PATRICIA. What's going on?

JOSH. Good morning.

PATRICIA. What? It's six p.m. How did you get here? What happened?

JOSH. They caught me fermenting grapefruit juice in the boiler room.

(**JOSH** *smiles.*)

PATRICIA. You think that's funny? Josh, what the fuck?

JOSH. (*To us.*) I mean c'mon, that's kinda funny, right? Making my own hooch at rehab? That'll be a good story at some point, when I get it together. *If.* If I get it together.

PATRICIA. Josh! You got kicked out of treatment and then what, you just got on a plane?

JOSH. I don't remember.

(**PATRICIA** *notices the cut on JOSH's arm.*)

PATRICIA. Oh my God, honey. What happened?

JOSH. I don't know.

PATRICIA. It's deep. I think that might need stitches. Let's take you to urgent care and then back to detox.

JOSH. I don't need detox. I'm not drunk.

PATRICIA. *Right.*

JOSH. I'm not.

(*To us.*) Honestly, I'm *actually* not! I'm calm when I'm drunk. But when I'm hungover, I start shaking and can't stay focused and my mind spins and spins with –

PATRICIA. Josh!

JOSH. Sorry. Mom. I can't keep doing this. This has to stop. I'm done.

PATRICIA. I've heard that one before. That's what you said when you moved home to get sober. And *then* you proceeded to steal my wallet, pawn my iPad, buzz the dog with your fucking beard trimmer –

JOSH. Daphne's haircut looked *objectively* good!

PATRICIA. She looked insane! They had to shave her!

JOSH. I was doing her a service! Her hair was getting in her eyes! She was so grateful afterward.

PATRICIA. And *then* I spend thousands of dollars to send you to rehab and you get kicked out after two weeks?

JOSH. I'm really sorry.

PATRICIA. You cannot stay here.

JOSH. ...where am I supposed to go?

PATRICIA. Call your dad. He could fly you to Chicago.

JOSH. Do you really think that's a good idea?

PATRICIA. Well, I'm not sure what else to do at this point!

JOSH. You can get me a grunt job at the bookstore. I'll give you all my pay in exchange for rent. We can play Scrabble every night. And if I relapse, that's it. But if I stay sober, from today on, then I'll go back to school next fall with a year sober.

PATRICIA. ...

Ten months. It would be ten months.

JOSH. Can I please just have one more chance?

(**PATRICIA** *sighs.*)

(*She disappears.*)

(**JOSH** *finds a bandage for his arm.*)

JOSH. (*To us.*) Eleven stitches. Detoxing is awful. Everything hurts. I keep forgetting where I am and what I'm supposed to be doing.

(*A cart full of books gets placed in front of*
JOSH.)

Right. The bookstore.

(**JOSH** *brings a book to his nose.*)

Alphabetizing proved to be too hard, so I've kinda just been shelving by smell.

I can't remember the last book I read. Do I like books? Do I care about books? Do I care about anything?

Shelve, Josh, shelve.

(**JOSH** *catches a whiff of a book.*)

This smell. It reminds me of happier times. I grew up in this bookstore. My mom has worked here as a buyer for thirty years. That's the only reason they were willing to hire someone who drank so much bourbon they forgot the alphabet.

(**HUGO**, *Josh's boss, appears.*)

HUGO. How's it going over here?

JOSH. LMNOP.

HUGO. Okay. Great. You okay?

JOSH. Sure.

HUGO. Are you almost done with this?

JOSH. Uh...no. I just started.

HUGO. Well. Okay. Is there something else you might want to try? Maybe dusting? We can always use –

JOSH. No, I'm good with this.

HUGO. ...got it. I'll be back to check on you in a few.

(HUGO disappears.)

JOSH. *(To us.)* This will get easier.

I'll get back to New York.

In ten months, I'll be back in New York, back at school, and I'll write and star in an original harrowing gay rock opera about my recovery. Maybe it'll be called "Rock Bottom."

(HANK, Josh's grandfather, enters.)

(JOSH is elsewhere and doesn't recognize him at first.)

HANK. Joshy!

JOSH. Hi. How can I help you?

HANK. What? Joshy. It's me.

JOSH. Oh. Grandpa. Hi.

HANK. What are you doing here?

JOSH. Um...working?

HANK. Aren't you supposed to be in New York?

JOSH. *(To us.)* Oh shit. He knows nothing.

HANK. What happened to your arm?

JOSH. Golf accident.

HANK. A *golf* accident?

JOSH. Frisbee golf.

HANK. Oh. Okay. You're just taking a semester off or what?

JOSH. Yeah.

HANK. And you're working at the bookstore! Figures. You've always loved books. Remember when you came over to our house and read Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* in one sitting?

JOSH. (*To us.*) Right. This story. He tells it every time I see him. It's always been annoying, but this time it strikes me as lovely. I used to read. Voraciously. Now I can't even alphabetize.

But I used to *read*. I used to read cookbooks at their house, their house that always smelled like Cheetos.

I could stand to remember more stories like that right now. Childhood things. I think that might feel really nice.

(**IRENE** enters.)

IRENE. Oh honey, you were a wonderfully unique child. You used big words like "voraciously" at age three.

(*She takes a seat.*)

(*She stays and listens.*)

(**BEVERLY** enters.)

BEVERLY. You were maybe five? Celeste Rosenbach got down on her knees, pinched your cheeks and offered you a lollipop. To which you responded: "Get away from me, you patronizing old hag."

(*She sits.*)

(*She stays and listens.*)

(**SHRIMPY** enters.)

SHRIMPY. Oh yeah, you were a precocious little fuck. As a nine-month-old baby, I changed your diaper

and you said, “Thank you so much for changing my diaper, Grandpa” and I said, “Joshy, if you speak in full sentences, why are you still shitting your pants?”

(**SHRIMPY** *sits.*)

(*He stays and listens.*)

JOSH. I’ve shat my pants a few times over the last couple months.

SHRIMPY. As have I.

IRENE. I have as well. We’re all losing our minds. The lot of us.

JOSH. Hey. I guess that’s true. I guess we all have that in common.

HANK. Remember when you came over to our house and read Julia Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* in one sitting?

JOSH. Your house always smelled like Cheetos.

(**JOSH** *remembers he’s still in conversation with HANK at the bookstore.*)

(*He’s gone on a tangent in his head.*)

(*Reality.*)

HANK. What’s that?

JOSH. Cheetos.

HANK. Yes, well...

(*Awk silence.*)

Did you bring a girlfriend home with you?

(**JOSH** *looks to us.*)

JOSH. ...no.

HANK. Josh. I know your old man wasn't around to teach you this stuff, but at some point, you gotta stop playing the field. Just pick one. Someone to keep you in line. Loyal and nosy, like your grandmother. You should come over and see Nana. You two were always so chummy.

JOSH. I'd love that. I'll come over to the house and we can make cookies.

HANK. What?

JOSH. Nana and I. Cookies. I remember that.

HANK. Right well. We've moved.

JOSH. Moved?

HANK. How about you come over for lunch on Saturday? Ask your mom for the address. Now. Where's the fiction at? I wanna buy a copy of *The Fountainhead* for my gastroenterologist.

(**HANK** *sits.*)

JOSH. Well some things never change. But weirdly that's kinda comforting? He still sees me as a reader. A straight boy. I may not have any friends here, but I do have my grandparents.

(*All four* **GRANDPARENTS** *wave to* **JOSH.**)

My sweet grandparents.

They don't know where I've been. They're not furious like my mom. They don't expect anything from me. They still see me as who I was before I got lost. I don't remember the last few years, but I remember them.

I remember how each of my grandparents smells:

BEVERLY. Like Lemon Pledge. Like I use Lemon Pledge on my hair instead of shampoo.

SHRIMPY. Like I've hosed myself with fourteen different colognes.

HANK. Budweiser and cinnamon gum. And Cheetos, I guess?

IRENE. Flowers and all-purpose flour. Lilies and cookies. Ethereal. Like a fairy. I smell like Christmas.

JOSH. A fairy indeed. Nana. Flighty. Sweet. Musical. She's always been my favorite.

BEVERLY. What the fuck?

JOSH. Sorry, but it's true. She'd kidnap me on adventures to Chinese restaurants and the botanic gardens. I'd ditch soccer practice and hang out at her house after school.

IRENE. You were always so terrible at soccer. Poor thing.

JOSH. We'd play piano duets and make her famous Christmas cookies together all throughout the year.

IRENE. The secret is an eighth teaspoon of almond extract.

JOSH. Most of the time we'd eat all of the dough before we could make any cookies.

IRENE. I was a terrible influence. Just awful.

JOSH. What are you talking about? You taught me how to be kind.

IRENE. That's sweet, dear.

JOSH. We were buddies. Until I started wearing girl jeans. Then she ran for the hills.

IRENE. Oh, that's not true.

JOSH. It is. But maybe we can go back to old times. Maybe we can play piano duets and drink peppermint hot cocoa and sing along to *The Sound of Music* at the top of our lungs. I'm excited to see her. I'm excited for lunch with –

(Then JOSH, HANK, and IRENE are eating lunch at an assisted living facility.)

(IRENE is completely checked out.)

(She stares into space; JOSH stares at her. He's having trouble believing what he's seeing.)

(TAYLOR, an aide, appears.)

TAYLOR. How are you doing today, sweet Irene? You enjoying your tomato soup?

HANK. She is.

TAYLOR. We know how much sweet Irene loves her tomato soup. Are you all coming to Music Hour this afternoon? We know how much your grandma just loves music. I love Irene so much. She's my favorite. Sh! Don't tell anyone.

(To JOSH.) Are you almost done with that veggie burger?

JOSH. No.

TAYLOR. ...okay.

(TAYLOR disappears.)

HANK. What's wrong with you? Don't be rude to Taylor. He's my favorite guy here. He's a Nebraska fan.

JOSH. Why didn't you tell me?

HANK. Tell you what?

JOSH. That...that she's...

HANK. Did you see the game last night? That two-point conversion?

JOSH. *(To us.)* Football. Who cares? When did this happen? I'm trying to remember the last time I saw her. And when was the last time that she saw me? Were my eyes this baggy? Was I drunk? Did she know?

HANK. I say fire the coach. I know everyone loves him, but –

JOSH. (*To us.*) Nana, oh God, are we in the same place?
Eyes glazed over. Lost to the world. Trying to remember
who we are. Detached? Demented? Broken?

HANK. What do you think?

JOSH. About what?

HANK. What's the matter with you? You're like...all at sea
over there.

JOSH. *I'm* at sea? What about her?

HANK. She's tired. It's an off day.

JOSH. (*Raising his voice.*) If I knew that she was getting
like this, I would have come home. I would have come
to see her much earlier!

(**TAYLOR** appears.)

TAYLOR. Everything alright here?

JOSH. No. Everything is not alright. Nana is gone and he
won't shut up about football!

HANK. Hey!

TAYLOR. Okay. Let's take a breath here.

JOSH. Why did nobody tell me?

TAYLOR. Josh, I understand that you're –

JOSH. Nobody told me! And now it's too late. I could have
spent time with her! I could have –

(**IRENE** suddenly launches into a full-blown
soprano operatic rendition of "O Come All Ye
Faithful.")

(*She can really sing.*)

(*Resist any comedy here. Let this be earnest
and strange.*)

IRENE.

O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL
JOYFUL AND TRIUMPHANT
O COME YE, O COME YE TO BETHLEHEM

(A brief pause.)

(Is she going to stop? Nope!)

COME AND BEHOLD HIM
BORN THE KING OF ANGELS!
O COME LET US ADORE HIM
O COME LET US ADORE HIM
O COME LET US ADORE HIM, CHRIST THE LORD!

HANK. It's not Christmastime, Irene.

(HANK, IRENE, and TAYLOR disappear.)

(BEVERLY takes a seat at the table with JOSH.)

*(Then, JOSH and BEVERLY are having coffee
the next day.)*

BEVERLY. So this was truly, completely out of nowhere?

JOSH. Unprompted. It felt channeled. Like a spirit was moving through her or something.

BEVERLY. Christ.

JOSH. Yeah, maybe, could have been him. I mean really though, it was actually kinda beautiful.

BEVERLY. Well, if I ever get like that, if I start randomly singing at lunch, you have to shoot me, understand?

JOSH. What?

BEVERLY. I'm serious. It's not hard. This is Colorado. Use my credit card, go to Walmart, buy a rifle.

JOSH. Dark.

BEVERLY. I'll tell *you* what's dark: old age. That's why you'll help your granny when the time is right.

JOSH. I won't.

BEVERLY. If I'm all but three words into "O Come All Ye Faithful" –

JOSH. I doubt that would be your song of choice.

BEVERLY. "Mi Chamocha" – whatever. Push me off a cliff.

JOSH. Hank is in full-on denial. It's weird.

BEVERLY. How old is Irene again?

JOSH. About your age, I think.

BEVERLY. Oy. My mother went through it. It was hell. She turned all violent and started calling everybody Judy. She was like, "I HATE YOU, JUDY, I HATE YOU!" over and over. She threw an entire hot brisket at me, true story. I still have the scar on my arm.

JOSH. Wait, who's Judy?

BEVERLY. To this day, nobody fucking knows.

JOSH. At least that's something, you know? A story. A joke.

BEVERLY. I'm not laughing.

JOSH. Nana's just gone. I think that's worse. To vanish. To become...nothing. A worm. A worm person. That's worse.

BEVERLY. Is that worse for her or worse for you?

JOSH. But if she's able to remember that song, maybe she's still in there somewhere? Maybe I can help her access those parts of herself. Maybe that's why I'm here. Like, cosmically.

BEVERLY. Huh. I think you need to focus on helping yourself. I hear you're a drunk.

JOSH. (*To us.*) Oh, she knows.

BEVERLY. Do you want to talk about that?

JOSH. What about it?

BEVERLY. I dunno. Let's start with the scary arm wound.

JOSH. Frisbee golf accident.

BEVERLY. That's a pretty weird lie, Joshy. Are you drunk now?

JOSH. I have twelve days clean.

BEVERLY. Really? You look awful.

JOSH. I feel awful. Why am I still shaking?

BEVERLY. You've done a number on your body.

JOSH. I feel so out of it. I feel like Irene.

BEVERLY. Like you're about to burst into song? You've always been that way, since you were four.

A little boy trapped in the mind of a forty-year-old gay man who's always on the verge of either bursting into tears or a full-fledged musical number. You've always been *so* emotional.

JOSH. (*To us.*) Wait, have I always been like this? Maybe this isn't a new thing. Maybe I've always been broken. Maybe it's not even about the alcohol. What if I get sober and still feel this way? Then what's the point in getting sober, maybe I should just keep –

BEVERLY. Hello? You there?

JOSH. Yeah sorry. I keep...losing it.

BEVERLY. Losing what?

JOSH. My mind?

BEVERLY. Ruh-roh.

JOSH. My train of thought? It gets away from me. It just takes off and I can't stop it.

BEVERLY. Wait, what? I'm not following.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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