

Bathroom Confessions Exchanged in “Broken Bone Bathtub,” an Immersive Performance, at Guild Hall

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by Pat Rogers

Exchanging personal stories with strangers inside a bathroom isn't a common experience. Add in a naked actress taking a bath (while discretely covered with bubbles) and the theatrical experience should be a surreal one. Instead, what unfolds is a memorable hour of theater that's hard to forget. Welcome to “Broken Bone Bathtub” where human connection (or the lack thereof) is examined from the confines of a bathroom with personal stories and confessions from the audience as integral as those shared by Siobhan O'Loughlin, Broken Bone Bathtub creator and sole performer.

“Broken Bone Bathtub” is in the middle of a 10-day run at Guild Hall in East Hampton, NY. Performances continue this weekend through Sunday, September 22, 2019. Afterwards, bathtubs in New York, the Hudson Valley, Philadelphia and other cities and towns across the United States await O'Loughlin as part of the international tour of her one-woman show that wraps up in 2019.

Part monologue, part confessional and part participatory theater piece, “Broken Bone Bathtub” at Guild Hall has the audience led into Guild House—the home of Guild Hall's artists-in-residency program—climb a set of stairs and ease onto chairs set up in the bathroom. O'Loughlin is already there mid-bubble bath with a colorful cast wrapping her forearm. As the audience settles in and gets their bearings, the performance begins with O'Loughlin sharing her blight of a Brooklyn bicycle collision (which she may or may not have caused) that resulted in a broken arm and a total stranger comforting O'Loughlin on the pavement while waiting for an ambulance to arrive and the accident details to sort out.

Uncomfortable with taking a shower and managing her new cast, taking baths made more sense, the actress explains. Except that she didn't have a bathtub and turned to friends to borrow theirs. Journaling to overcome the trauma and help quell the uncomfortableness of being vulnerable, her real life event from 2014 became the impetus for “Broken Bone Bathroom.” In the immersive performance, the memoir-monologue morphs into something more when O'Loughlin breaks the fourth wall and directly (and casually) engages the audience in conversation through pointed questions. Through the answers, the piece (and the audience) explore what it feels like to experience connection, trauma, generosity, vulnerability and isolation.

“People want to feel connected to the people around them, no matter what the connection,” O'Loughlin said. “There's something about being in bathroom – and me being naked and completely

vulnerable - that allows people to become vulnerable too.”



Siobhan O'Loughlin in “Broken Bone Bathtub.” Courtesy of Guild Hall.

Intimacy and genuine connection among strangers may seem unlikely but as “Broken Bone Theater” unfolds, it feels completely natural. Halting at first, stories are exchanged, conversations being to bubble and connections unexpectedly start to visually bloom among audience members as the piece comes to a close. So much so, that it’s common for audiences to exit the bathroom and seek to meet outside the performance space to continue conversations and ask her questions, O’Loughlin said in an interview. This is always possible, O’Loughlin said, and provides another unique layer to the theatrical experience.

“People want to talk more after the performance,” O’Loughlin said. “Many people will ask and we meet afterwards—the entire audience—and people can ask me questions. A lot of people take pictures of the entire audience because they’ve bonded. It’s that type of experience...Once you hear the stuff people are grappling with, its clear that we’re not different from each other.”



Brooklyn artist Siobhan O'Loughlin shares a laugh with an audience during a performance of "Broken Bone Bathtub." Courtesy Guild Hall.

The connection can continue well after the audience departs with people staying in touch through her Facebook page or with each other directly, she said. "People feel connected to each other. They've shared things that they don't typically do. There's a flow that happens when we're inside the bathroom. We all have interesting stories but we don't have people asking us about it. We don't ask people because we're afraid of rejection or what people will think and so we put up walls for appearances. It's not easy being vulnerable because it's considered to be a weakness. Instead, it should be considered a strength. That's what's happening in 'Broken Bone Bathroom' - I'm asking."

The experience has been an intense one for O'Loughlin as well. The piece began as a monologue and was performed in a bathtub in Tokyo in 2015. From her perch, it was apparent the audience was craving something more, she said. They wanted connection with each other and with her, as performer, so she revised the piece to include the audience and make the performance immersive theater. All who enter the bathroom (which are frequently in private homes) play the parts of her close friends who have gathered to see how she is and help her, as needed. Audiences are typically limited to a handful (only 10 are admitted per performance at Guild Hall) to ensure intimacy and to foster connection.

Having presented "Broken Bone Theater" worldwide and in bathrooms across the country, the immersive theater piece is on its final leg of performance. A documentary film crew joined O'Loughlin this week to begin filming the details of what it takes to present the roving theatrical piece taking place in non-traditional settings. Starting the documentary with the performance at Guild Hall has symmetry since O'Loughlin has developed work and performed there before when she was a Guild House artist-in-residence. During her stay, she created site-specific performances inside a tent pitched on the grounds (for four audience members) and a dance piece that took place

in the front parlor of Guild House.

The film will not only serve as a record of the performance but will explore what it takes to be an artist and the choices (and sacrifices) one makes for their craft, she said. Filmed by Diego Madrigal, there will be six weeks of footage taken and will include interviews with venue organizers, supporters and audience members to create a full picture, she said. At Guild Hall, Executive Director Andrea Grover and John Drew Theater Artistic Director Josh Gladstone will both be interviewed for the documentary. The film is being produced by Edgardo Parada. To discover more (or to make a contribution), click [here](#).

As the editing begins, O'Loughlin will close this performative chapter and look to the future which may involve a move from Brooklyn to L.A., she said. New York has audiences for immersive theater but LA might present opportunities as their theater and art scene is burgeoning and isn't as established (or as competitive). Regardless of which coast she finds herself, O'Loughlin plans to continue creating theater pieces that are personal, made for unusual places and draw people into the piece as participants. as New York. No matter what the future may hold, O'Loughlin is looking forward to it. Stories will be involved.

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BASIC FACTS: “Broken Bone Bathtub” by Siobhan O’Loughlin is performed at Guild Hall through September 22, 2019. Performances take place Fridays and Saturdays at 7 and 9 p.m. and on Sunday at 3 p.m. Tickets are \$40 or \$38 for Guild Hall Members on Friday and Saturday and cost \$30 or \$28 for Guild Hall Members on Sunday. Tickets can be purchased by clicking [here](#). Audiences are limited to 10 per performance. Guild Hall is located at 158 Main Street, East Hampton, NY 11937. www.guildhall.org.

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