HALFWAY BITCHES GO STRAIGHT TO HEAVEN

World Premiere Co-Production with LAByrinth Theater Company

by Stephen Adly Guirgis
directed by John Ortiz

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SECTION I: THE PLAY

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SYNOPSIS

Pulitzer Prize winner Stephen Adly Guirgis takes his style to another level in this world premiere play about the harrowing, humorous, and heartbreaking inner workings of a women’s halfway house in New York City, helmed by John Ortiz (LAByrinth Artistic Director) in his Off-Broadway directing debut.

THEMES

Mental health
Self-care/self-love
Toxic relationships
Stigma
Family/Chosen Family
Domestic violence/abuse
Rehabilitation
Bureaucracy

TRIGGER WARNINGS

*Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven* contains some material that may be distressing to some audience members. This content includes:

- Descriptions of domestic violence/sexual violence
- Intravenous drug usage
- Self harm
- Transphobic/homophobic language
SECTION II: CREATIVE TEAM

Creative Biographies
Characters/Cast List
Behind the Scenes Look
CREATIVE BIOGRAPHIES

STEPHEN ADLY GUIRGIS (Playwright) is a member and former co-artistic director of LAByrinth Theater Company. His plays have been produced on five continents and throughout the United States. His most recent play, Between Riverside and Crazy (dir: Austin Pendleton) premiered at Atlantic Theater Company, moved to Second Stage Theatre, and garnered numerous awards including the 2015 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Other plays include: The Motherf***er with the Hat (6 Tony nominations, including Best Play, dir: Anna D. Shapiro), Den of Thieves (directed by Max Daniels), Dominica The Fat Ugly Ho (dir: Adam Rapp), as well as Our Lady of 121st Street, Jesus Hopped the ‘A’ Train, In Arabia We’d All Be Kings, The Last Days of Judas Iscariot (Public Theater) and The Little Flower of East Orange (Public Theater) – all five directed by Philip Seymour Hoffman and world premiered at LAByrinth Theater Company. In London, his plays have premiered at The Donmar Warehouse, The Almeida (dir: Rupert Goold), The Hampstead (dir: Robert Delamere), and at The Arts Theater in the West End (dir: Philip Seymour Hoffman). As an actor, he has appeared in theater, film and television, including roles in Alejandro Inarritu's Oscar winning Birdman, Adam McKay’s VICE, Kenneth Lonergan’s Margaret, Todd Solondz’s Palindromes, and Brett C. Leonard’s Jailbait opposite Michael Pitt. He co-created and executive produced Netflix’s "The Get Down" with Baz Luhrmann. Other awards include: the Yale Wyndham-Campbell Prize, The Harold & Mimi Steinberg Award, PEN/Laura Pels Award, Whiting Award, TCG fellowship, Fringe First Award, NY Drama Critics Circle, L.A. Drama Critics Prize, and a Lucille Lortel Award. A former violence prevention specialist and H.I.V. educator, he lives in New York City.

JOHN ORTIZ (Director) is a co-founder of LAByrinth Theater Company and currently serves as its Artistic Director. He served as co-artistic director with Philip Seymour Hoffman for eight seasons (2002-2010). John has acted in over 12 LAByrinth productions including plays by Stephen Adly Guirgis, Brett C. Leonard, John Patrick Shanley, and Bob
Glaudini. In 2009 he appeared as the titular role in William Shakespeare’s *Othello* opposite Phil Hoffman as Iago, directed by Peter Sellars. John has appeared on stage in some of the world’s most prominent theaters including on Broadway, the Public Theater, London’s West End, Bobigny in Paris, Lyric in Edinburgh, Steppenwolf, The Goodman, The Mark Taper Forum, and The Arena Stage in DC. On film and TV, John worked with acclaimed directors including Ridley Scott (*American Gangster*, SAG nomination), David O. Russell (*Silver Linings Playbook*, SAG and Gotham nomination), Michael Mann (*Miami Vice, Public Enemies*, and *Blackhat*), Danny Boyle (*Steve Jobs*), JJ Abrams (*Hope*), The Duplass Brothers (“Togetherness”), Philip Seymour Hoffman (LAByrinth’s screen adaptation of *Jack Goes Boating*, Spirit nomination), and more. Upcoming: “Messiah” for Netflix. As LAByrinth enters its 28th season, John remains committed as an artistic director/producer in leading an ensemble-driven company, focused on developing original works.
CHARACTERS/CAST LIST

Victor Almanzar
Joey Fresco

David Anzuelo
Father Miguel

Elizabeth Canavan
Rockaway Rosie

Sean Carvajal
Mateo

Patrice Johnson
Chevannes
Wanda Wheels

Molly Collier
Jennifer

Liza Colón-Zayas
Sarge

Esteban
Andres Cruz
Venus Ramirez

Greg Keller
Nicky/Detective
Sullivan

Wilemina
Olivia-Garcia
Happy Meal Sonia

Kristina Poe
Betty Woods

Neil Tyrone
Pritchard
Mr. Mobo
Elizabeth Rodriguez
Miss Rivera

Andrea Syglowski
Bella/Councilwoman Golden

Benja Kay Thomas
Queen Sugar

Viviana Valeria Taina

Pernell Walker
Munchies

Kara Young
Little Melba Diaz
BEHIND THE SCENES LOOK AT REHEARSAL

Photos by Ahron R. Foster
SECTION III: YOUR STUDENTS AS AUDIENCE

Theater Vocabulary

*Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven* in Context:
- Understanding the Transgender Community
- Support Hotlines and Hate Incidents
THEATER VOCABULARY

TEACHER OBJECTIVE
To be able to discuss theater through a common, shared vocabulary.

STUDENT GOAL
To understand that the most effective way to discuss theater and new ideas is through a shared vocabulary.

ACTION: The events that move along the story of the play and which influence the characters within the play.

CHARACTERS: Individuals the audience learns about from their actions and reactions.

ENSEMBLE: A group of performers working together to create a complete production.

DIALOGUE: The exchange of speech between two characters which reveals the feelings of the character as well as the story of the play.

MONOLOGUE: A speech by one actor on stage, which is intended to reveal the inner thoughts of the character the actor plays.

CHARACTER ARC: The change produced in a character by the events and other characters in the play.

MUSICAL THEATER: A twentieth century creation where writers and musicians collaborate to create a play which features song, dance and drama.

MOOD: The overall feeling the play evokes.

COSTUME: The clothes, boots, etc., worn by the actors based on their character.
**PROP:** Objects used by an actor to enhance their character. For example, wine glasses at a bar for drinks.

**SET:** The constructed environment of a play within which the action takes place.

**SOUND:** Noises and music used in the play.
HALFWAY BITCHES GO STRAIGHT TO HEAVEN
IN CONTEXT:

*Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven* takes place in and around a women’s shelter. The characters reference this particular shelter as a halfway house. The facility is referenced in the stage direction as a sort of amalgamation of a transitional living facility, a halfway house, and a domestic abuse safe house for women. The characters who live and work in the facility have experienced a variety of circumstances including homelessness, addiction, and domestic or family violence.

Halfway houses, women’s shelters, and other transitional living facilities all provide a variety of services for residents including safety planning, counseling, support groups, housing assistance, legal consultation, employment assistance, etc.

**Domestic Violence Shelter:**
Domestic Violence shelters are safe places away from abusers that offer help and support... Counseling, occupational therapy and case management are a few of the services you find at this type of shelter. Finding the right shelter and programs gives a victim of domestic abuse the tools to regain control of their life.

**Halfway house:**
A residence for individuals after release from institutionalization (as for mental illness, drug addiction, or criminal activity) that is designed to facilitate their readjustment to private life.

**Transitional Living Facility**
A facility that provides temporary housing and services for people recovering from some form of hardship. Transitional living facilities are often non-profit, charitable, government, or church run. They serve
Understanding the Transgender Community

From the Human Rights Campaign

Transgender people come from all walks of life. We are dads and moms, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters. We are your coworkers, and your neighbors. We are 7-year-old children and 70-year-old grandparents. We are a diverse community, representing all racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as faith backgrounds.

The word “transgender” – or trans – is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity is different from the sex assigned to us at birth. Although the word “transgender” and our modern definition of it only came into use in the late 20th century, people who would fit under this definition have existed in every culture throughout recorded history.

Despite the increased visibility of transgender celebrities like actress Laverne Cox or writer Janet Mock, many Americans still don't personally know anyone who is transgender – but the number who do is growing rapidly. According to a 2016 survey by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, commissioned by the Human Rights Campaign, 35 percent of likely voters in the United States “personally know or work with someone who is transgender.” That's more than double the 17 percent who answered yes when asked the same question in 2014.

Other research suggests that there are at least 700,000 transgender people in the United States, about 0.3 percent of the total population and about 3.5 percent of the LGBTQ community; but these estimates are likely conservative because of the limited amount of studies that have attempted to measure the transgender population.
What does it mean to be transgender?

The transgender community is incredibly diverse. Some transgender people identify as male or female, and some identify as genderqueer, nonbinary, agender, or somewhere else on or outside of the spectrum of what we understand gender to be. Some of us take hormones and have surgery as part of our transition, and some don’t. Some choose to openly identify as transgender, while others simply identify as men or women...

In the HRC Foundation’s 2012 survey of LGBTQ youth, about 10 percent of respondents identified themselves either as “transgender” or as “other gender,” and wrote in identities like “genderqueer,” “gender-fluid” or “androgynous.” This suggests that a larger portion of this generation’s youth are identifying somewhere on the broad transgender spectrum.

In many ways, transgender people are just like cisgender (non-transgender) people; but because of the social stigma surrounding our transgender identity, our community faces a unique set of challenges.

What challenges do transgender people face?

While the visibility of transgender people is increasing in popular culture and daily life, we still face severe discrimination, stigma and systemic inequality. Some of the specific issues facing the transgender community are:

- **Lack of legal protection**—While the federal government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Department of Education have recently taken steps to include transgender people under existing non-discrimination protections, there is still no comprehensive non-discrimination law that includes gender identity. According to the Human Rights Campaign’s [2014 State Equality Index](https://www.hrc.org/content/state-equality-index), only 18 states and the District of Columbia prohibit employment and housing discrimination based on gender identity; only 17 states and the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination based on gender identity in public accommodations; and only 15 states and the District of Columbia prohibit discrimination based on gender identity in education. Moreover, state legislatures across the country are debating – and in some cases
passing – legislation specifically designed to prohibit transgender people from accessing public bathrooms that correspond with our gender identity, or creating exemptions based on religious beliefs that would allow discrimination against LGBTQ people.

- **Poverty**– In too many cases, this lack of legal protection translates into unemployment for transgender people. The National Transgender Discrimination Survey (NTDS) found that 15 percent of respondents were living in severe poverty (making less than $10,000/year). For transgender people of color, those rates were even higher, with 34 percent of Black and 28 percent of Latina/o respondents reporting a household income of less than $10,000 a year. As anyone who has experienced poverty or unemployment understands, being unable to afford basic living necessities can result in homelessness or lead people to engage in underground economies like drug sales or survival sex work, which can put people at increased risk for violence and arrest.

- **Harassment and stigma**– The LGBTQ community still faces considerable stigma based on over a century of being characterized as mentally ill, socially deviant and sexually predatory. While these flawed views have faded in recent years for lesbians and gay men, transgender people are still often met with ridicule from a society that does not understand us. This stigma plays out in a variety of contexts – leaving us vulnerable to lawmakers who attempt to leverage anti-transgender stigma to score cheap political points; to family, friends or coworkers who reject transgender people upon learning about our transgender identities; and to people who harass, bully and commit serious violence against transgender people.

- **Anti-transgender violence**– At least 13 transgender women were murdered in 2014, and 2015 is on track to see even higher numbers. These women were stabbed, shot, strangled, burned; killed violently by intimate partners or strangers. According to the 2013 National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) report on hate violence against lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and HIV-affected (LGBTQH) communities, 72 percent of the victims of LGBTQ or HIV-motivated hate
violence homicides in 2013 were transgender women, and 67 percent were transgender women of color. Transgender people have few options for protecting ourselves from violence or seeking justice. The NTDS found that 22 percent of transgender people who had interacted with police experienced bias-based harassment from police, with transgender people of color reporting much higher rates. Six percent reported physical assault; 2 percent reported sexual assault by police; and 20 percent reported having been denied equal service by law enforcement. Nearly half of the transgender people surveyed in the study said that they were uncomfortable turning to police for help.

- **Barriers to healthcare** – Data collection on health disparities among transgender people is very limited, but the data we do have reveal a healthcare system that is not meeting the needs of the transgender community. In a 2012 needs assessment by the Washington D.C. Trans Coalition, 44 percent of those who identified health as one of their top priorities said that access to transgender-sensitive healthcare was their most significant need. Beyond facing barriers to obtaining medically-necessary health services and encountering medical professionals who lacked transgender health care competency, the NTDS found that almost 20 percent of respondents had been refused medical care outright because of bias.

- **Identity Documents** – The widespread lack of accurate identity documents among transgender people can have an impact on every area of their lives, including access to emergency housing or other public services. To be clear, without identification, one cannot travel, register for school or access many services that are essential to function in society. Many states require evidence of medical transition – which can be prohibitively expensive and is not something that all transgender people want – as well as fees for processing new identity documents, which may make them unaffordable for some members of the transgender community. The NTDS found that among those respondents who have already transitioned, 33 percent had not been able to update any of their identity documents to match their affirmed gender.
While advocates continue working to remedy these disparities, change cannot come too soon for transgender people. Visibility – especially positive images of transgender people in the media and society – continues to make a critical difference for us; but visibility is not enough and comes with real risks to our safety, especially for those of us who are part of other marginalized communities. That is why the Human Rights Campaign is committed to continuing to support and advocate for the transgender community, so that the transgender Americans who are and will become your friends, neighbors, coworkers and family members have an equal chance to succeed and thrive.
SUPPORT HOTLINES AND HATE INCIDENTS

National Suicide Prevention Hotline
24/7 hotline, staffed by trained individuals, for those in suicidal crisis or emotional distress
http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/
Crisis hotline: 800-273-TALK (8255); 888-628-9454 (en español)

Crisis Text Line
Free, 24/7 support for people in crisis
https://www.crisistextline.org/
Text 741741 from anywhere in the USA to text with a trained Crisis Counselor.

The Trevor Project
Crisis intervention and mental health services for those ages 13-24
http://www.thetrevorproject.org/
Crisis hotline: 866-488-7386 (for those ages 13-24)

National Sexual Assault Hotline
24/7 hotline, staffed by trained individuals, for those experiencing sexual assault or violence
Crisis hotline: 800-656-HOPE (4673)

The National Domestic Violence Hotline
24/7 confidential crisis line for those experiencing domestic violence
http://www.thehotline.org/
800-799-SAFE (7233)

Communities Against Hate
National coalition documenting hate incidents
Report an incident at: http://communitiesagainsthate.org/report
Report and get help at: 1-844-9-NO-HATE
SECTION IV: YOUR STUDENTS AS ACTORS

Reading a Scene for Understanding
The Atlantic Technique Exercise
Scene Analysis Worksheet
READING A SCENE FOR UNDERSTANDING

TEACHER OBJECTIVE
To introduce the Practical Aesthetics “tools” for breaking down a scene. To understand the character and the story of the scene by relating the character’s actions to the student’s own life.

STUDENT GOAL
To understand that an important part of creating a simple, honest character involves knowing what that character wants.

MATERIALS
Pens, pencils, copies of the following scene from *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven*, and copies of the Literal, Want, Action, As-If worksheet and/or Mini-Lesson.

THE ATLANTIC TECHNIQUE EXERCISE

STEP ONE
Divide the students in pairs. Ask the students to select which character they want to portray.

STEP TWO
Allow the students time to read the scene silently to themselves.

STEP THREE
Ask the students to read the Introduction to the Practical Aesthetic Introduction sheet and have the students answer the four questions on the Scene Analysis Worksheet.

*NOTE: The four questions and the students' answers to them form the basis for the Practical Aesthetics scene analysis; and enables the actor to create a simple, honest character. They're simply being honest to their own experiences!*

STEP FOUR
After the students have completed the question worksheet, ask each pair of actors to read the scene in front of the classroom for an audience. The students should incorporate the ideas from the worksheet as they read the scene.
Jennifer
They don't listen to me. The clients. I try to do my job, but they don't listen.

Miss Jenkins
And you want me to do what?

Jennifer
I don't know. I'm just telling you I come here every day, Miss Jenkins, fully committed to doing my job, but they just don't listen.

Miss Jenkins
I see. Well, if you're not happy here, maybe you need to go somewhere else.

Jennifer
What? But I just started two months ago!

Miss Jenkins
And?

Jennifer
I can't leave a job after only two months, it won't look good.

Miss Jenkins
Is that why you became a social worker, Jennifer, so you can look good?

Jennifer
I'm doing my best! I'm doing everything I can!

Miss Jenkins
This just may not be the place for you.
THE ATLANTIC TECHNIQUE INTRODUCTION

ANALYSIS
Script analysis is the process of breaking down a beat within a scene. We ask four questions in order to do this.

1. What is the character literally doing?
2. What does the character want?
3. What is the essential ACTION?
4. What is that action like to me? It is AS-IF...

LITERAL: In this step, the actor determines what the character he or she is playing is literally doing according to the text.

PURPOSE: An actor has to travel far—think of this preparation as the road map.

WANT: In this step, the actor identifies the goal of the character in the scene, specifically what the character wants from the other character/s in the scene. The given circumstances of the story inform the WANT.

PURPOSE: To focus the actor on the characters’ interaction.

ACTION: Playing an ACTION is the physical pursuit of a goal. Defining the ACTION of the scene allows the actor to determine what result or CAP he or she is looking for from the other actor/s in the scene.

EXAMPLES:
• Put someone in their place | • Beg someone for forgiveness. | • Get a favor.
• Get someone to let me off the hook. | • Force someone to face the facts.
• Inspire someone to greatness. | • Get someone to see the light.

PURPOSE: Using an action gives the actor a task and a specific point of view. The Atlantic Theater Company teaches that the Action creates character.

AS-IF: In this step, the actor personalizes the action by finding a real-life situation in which they would behave according to the action they have chosen for the scene.
**EXAMPLE:** Get a favor. It’s AS-IF I forgot to do my science homework and I’m asking my teacher for an extra day to hand it in.

**PURPOSE:** To gain personal insight and urgency to the scene or beat.

**TACTICS & TOOLS:** Different ways an actor goes about getting his action.

**EXAMPLE:** Plead, flirt, demand, inspire, challenge, level, threaten.

**LIVING IN THE MOMENT:** Reacting impulsively to what the other actor in the scene is doing, from the point of view of the chosen action.
SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT IS MY CHARACTER LITERALLY DOING?</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING JENNIFER...</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING MISS JENKINS...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer is literally telling Miss Jenkins that her social work clients don't listen to her no matter how hard she tries.</td>
<td>Miss Jenkins is telling Jennifer that if she is not happy here maybe she should go somewhere else.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| WHAT DOES MY CHARACTER WANT? | Jennifer wants Miss Jenkins to get her clients to listen to her so she can do her job. | Miss Jenkins wants Jennifer to admit she can't handle the job and leave. |

| WHAT IS THE ACTION I’M GOING TO PLAY? | To get a lifeline. | To get someone to admit defeat. |

| THE AS-IF... | As if you are talking to a teacher about why they should give you an extension on a very important final assignment. | As if you are telling your friend they need to stop trying to get back with their ex. |
SECTION V | YOUR STUDENTS AS ARTISTS

Post Theater Creative Response Activities
Common Core & DOE Theater Blueprint
Sources
POST THEATER CREATIVE RESPONSE ACTIVITY

Developing a Personal Creative Response

TEACHER OBJECTIVE
To develop critical thinking skills through examining a theme in *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven* and relating that theme to an individual creative response.

STUDENT GOAL
To understand that an important theme from *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven* portrays the truths and messages of the play.

MATERIALS
Pencils, pens, writing paper, chalkboard.

STEP ONE
Discuss the impact self-love and self-care have had on the characters in *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven*.

STEP TWO
Ask the students to respond to the Writing Trigger ... A relationship that influenced my life for better or worse. NOTE: Allow 7-minutes for this free write.

STEP THREE
Ask the students to share their writings, offering positive feedback after each share.
**ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS**
Theater conveys the significance individuals place on their life choices.

For example:
Theater conveys the meaning behind an individual's struggle to have his or her life or life choices validated by family, friends, community, and the broader world.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**
Do the direction and staging reinforce the theme of “rehabilitation” which is prevalent in *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven*?

Do you accept the concept put forward in *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven* that someone’s mental health can be profoundly impacted, for better or worse, by their family and chosen family relationships?

**SOURCES:**
- Barrier Free Living
- Human Rights Campaign
- Merriam Webster Dictionary
- Oxford English Dictionary

**STRAND BENCHMARKS**

**THEATER MAKING: ACTING**
Benchmark: Students increase their ability as imaginative actors while continuing to participate as collaborative ensemble members. Students demonstrate the ability to reflect on and think critically about their own work.

**THEATER MAKING: PLAYWRITING/PLAY MAKING**
Benchmark: Students refine their ability as playwrights to express point of view and personal vision.

**DEVELOPING THEATER LITERACY**
Benchmark: Students develop skills as critics by analyzing the critical writings of others.

**MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH THEATER**
Benchmark: Students demonstrate a capacity for deep personal connection to theater and a realization of the meaning and messages of theater.

**WORKING WITH COMMUNITY AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**
Benchmark: Students invigorate and broaden their understanding of theater through collaborative partnerships with theater professionals.
Atlantic Theater Company & Atlantic Acting School

Founded as an ensemble of impassioned student artists in 1985, Atlantic Theater Company has grown into a powerhouse Off-Broadway company. We challenge, inspire, and awaken audiences with truthful storytelling presented across our two venues, the Linda Gross Theater and the intimate Stage 2 black-box. As a producer of compelling new works, we are committed to championing the stories from new and established artists alike, amplifying the voices of emerging playwrights through our deeply collaborative programs and initiatives.

At Atlantic, our aim is singular—to empower simple and honest storytelling that fosters greater understanding of our shared world. We are a family of artists dedicated to exploring essential truths onstage, be it a show at Atlantic Theater Company or a class at Atlantic Acting School. As a producer, presenter, and educator of theater, we are driven by the belief that theater can challenge and transform our ways of thinking and urge us to reflect on our role in society. From our Tony Award and Pulitzer Prize-winning productions to our community-based education programs, we are committed to uncovering and celebrating the stories of our varied human existence.

At Atlantic Acting School, we equip our students with the physical, emotional, and tactical tools of acting to discover their truths, and prepare them for success beyond our doors. From our full-time and evening conservatories to our NYU Tisch studio, and our after-school and summer programs for kids and teens, our immersive, learn-by-doing approach is central to an Atlantic Acting education. We have mentored and trained outstanding artists for more than 30 years. No matter their age or background, our students learn to break through their creative comfort zones in service to bringing essential human stories to life.