



# Collaborators in Conversation

Actors Aila Peck (BRAHMAN/I)  
and Karl Gregory (EVERY  
BRILLIANT THING)

## The Actors

**Karl:** So Aila, have you done a one person show before?

**Aila:** I did *Brahman/I* with Bevin three years ago. What has the experience been like for you? There are so many different kinds of one person shows.

**Karl:** Quite honestly, I don't like doing one person shows. Just because it tends to be kind of lonely. You know what I mean?

**Aila:** It is a lonely experience and it's extremely high pressure, because you have to hone in on the entire audience. A lot of one person show experiences are trying to get the audience on your side for the whole show and not letting them go.

**Karl:** I know! And there's no one else to help you do it. But I guess I keep saying yes to these shows because they scare me in different ways. When I was sent the script of *Every Brilliant Thing*, I was like, "Oh, this is a really difficult show to pull off. I don't know if I'll be able to do that." So, of course I have to do it and see if I can.

**Aila:** Actors! One of the biggest challenges about doing a one person show is continuing to keep the audience with you. There's a power of collaboration that the audience and you experience together. One of the biggest things Bevin and I worked on together when we originally did this piece was continuously changing rhythms and patterns so the audience was forced to lean forward and listen rather than get comfortable at any point in the play. One of the great strengths of a one person show is that it's the most uncomfortable experience.

**Karl:** Now I have a question. How do you carry a show for

an hour to an hour and a half? How do you as an actor go about figuring out how to do that?

**Aila:** I think it comes down to the wants, the loves, and the needs you create for yourself. I've done three one person shows in the past and it's so much about your relationship to the audience and why you keep talking. And why this night? Keeping the moment of creation extremely close to the surface so it never seems commonplace for the characters speaking. That's always been the biggest challenge for me. How do you feel about it?

**Karl:** I think in any play, not just a one person play, you have to want something from the audience. Not just a connection but a reciprocal understanding between the two of you. You have to want a certain feeling or thought process to happen between the two of you so that you can tell this story in a way that's going to be able to be received by them. Does that make sense?

**Aila:** Yeah, absolutely. My desire is so based in laughter [in *Brahman/i*] but I ended up asking what does it look like when I get it? What does it feel like? So I know viscerally what I'm going for. I found that it is really helpful to make it slightly different every night. So I was constantly reinventing the score or the experience of my character. And it was always tailored to the audience that showed up every night.

**Karl:** Maybe more than a want, it's a need for the character. A need to connect, a need to keep talking for an hour and a half to tell this story. And that need coming from a place of whatever the play calls for and whatever the character is going through.

**Aila:** Absolutely. That's really well articulated. What are your thoughts on representation in one person shows? There's this whole movement right now where people who have been marginalized or unseen are being featured in one person shows, and it's putting a spotlight on how the individual experience of life has been looked over. For so long we've been about putting people into archetypes and I feel like we're moving into a place where those categories aren't actually representing us. I think solo work highlights how tailor-made the human experience really is and forces an audience to never fall into generalized ideas about a human being.

**Karl:** Ooh! That is such a good point, Aila! I feel like every time I see a one person show, I connect with that person and that person's story in varying ways. Especially someone whose life is completely outside of my knowledge. To recognize and connect to the fact that we are compatible human beings with the same thoughts and worries and fears and hopes is what theater is supposed to do. Right?

**Aila:** Yeah. It's just so interesting to look at the history of theatre and how theater has constantly changed the way we reach an audience. You've gone from these big, large scale, huge cast shows with a bunch of music and a bunch of singing, to being alone in a room with one single individual who will talk at you for an hour and a half. Shakespeare never did that.

**Karl:** He would bust it down to a soliloquy where one character relayed their thoughts and dreams and hopes and fears to the audience. That's kind of the same thing that you're talking about, that one person's view on the world and being able to digest that, see how it affects you.

**Aila:** I do think the Shakespearean soliloquy was the inspiration for things like one person shows. Because it does give you what a one person show does. You have a need from the audience, a real need.

**Karl:** And it is that internal battle of what we're trying to figure out. How am I trying to communicate it to these people so that they'll bear with me for the whole ride.

**Aila:** Right... "bear with you"... geez. One person shows can get really overwhelming because there's so many things you have to try to wrap your head around before you even approach an audience. How do you set yourself up to catch yourself should things go awry?

**Karl:** I don't know!

**Aila:** There has to be so much trust and extreme abandon. That makes it fun. It's like jumping off a cliff and bungee jumping.

**Karl:** Jumping off a cliff and hoping there's a bungee cord attached to your feet. I just jumped but I didn't check to make sure that it was attached. Whoopsie! ■