

Bushwick Starr tumblr
Interview with Christina Masciotti
Playwright, “Social Security”



Photo Credit: Maria Baranova

"Social Security"

Written by Christina Masciotti

Directed by Paul Lazar

June, a retired pretzel factory worker, finds herself deaf after forty years with machines, widowed, and stranded in the urban muck of Reading, PA. She forges ahead gamely, but her yearning for ordinary human companionship only drives her further into danger.

Starring: Cynthia Hopkins, T. Ryder Smith, and Elizabeth Dement*

**Appears Courtesy of Actor's Equity Association*

What inspires you creatively?

What sparks a play for me can be the most offhand, overlookable comment that for some reason takes hold. For this play, it was: “We were supposed to pick up our Easter eggs from Margaret today.” Something June [the person the central character of *Social Security* is based on] told me within five minutes of meeting her, as she was describing the death of her husband the night before. The way she said it, full of humble acceptance and good cheer, was infused with ineffable heartache. That’s a good place to start writing for me.

What inspired “Social Security’s” distinct characters, and what larger message do you hope to convey through their voices?

The characters are based on neighbors of my mom, and my mom herself. June came to us for help when she lost her husband. So we got in a car and took her to pick up those peanut butter eggs. In the supermarket, I listened to her repeat the story of her husband’s death to every stranger who crossed our path. It kind of stopped me in my tracks. You just want to take her aside and say: “Be careful. Protect yourself. You can’t trust everyone.” But she’s deaf – in more ways than one. It’s not just that she can’t hear; she refuses to acknowledge anything out of line with what she wants to think. Sitting in her apartment with her, at one point or another, I would be overcome by these really strong feelings that something bad was about to happen. The phone would ring, I’d pick up, hear a click. Her landlord would come in with his dog, unannounced, regard me curiously. There was just a lot of unnerving tension. So the story naturally took the form of a thriller.

I hope that the characters come through – the full force of who they are. I think any time you present characters with their individuality intact and undiluted, you’re making a statement that the lives of these people mean something; they deserve your attention.

Describe your collaborative process with Paul Lazar. How do your respective writing and directing styles mesh, and where do they diverge?

In *Social Security* the writing is painstakingly nuanced to the point of heightened reality. What Paul and I noticed early on was matching that kind of naturalism in the physical life of the play didn’t work. The play seemed to fold in on itself stylistically and collapse. A rift between the verbal and physical life of the play was necessary to activate the language.

One day at rehearsal, Paul experimented with a synchronized movement sequence in a transition between scenes, and suddenly the whole world of the play opened up. You were left with the sense that anything could happen. It was so compelling to watch and so hard to explain why. From that point on, we looked for ways to free up the blocking and design from trying to convince the audience of anything – for example, that they are looking at the interior of a real row home situated in an inner city. Instead, liberties are taken that speak to the reality of the circumstances without being realistic.

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The Bushwick Starr - 207 Starr Street, Brooklyn, NY 11237

Tickets \$18: <https://web.ovationtix.com/trs/pr/942845/1422838800000>