

REFUGE

a modular immersive theater installation written, directed, designed, and composed by Vita Tzykun and David Adam Moore, the creation of which was ignited by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Brief scenes descriptions

1. Shrines to the Mundane:

As audience members enter the space and begin their journey through a narrow corridor in near darkness, they hear live, unseen voices recounting the experience of fleeing in various languages. The words spoken are actual testimonies of refugee women who had to flee their homes with their children on a very short notice. They come across small pools of light illuminating some of the basic objects we take for granted. Those things are, in fact, life-giving - and we only really think about them when we can no longer have them: a glass of clean drinking water, a child's toy, a musical instrument, a warm coat. Each of these items is described in detail as the audience members encounter the object. What did they decide to take with them? Which items turned from ordinary to life-giving in a matter of minutes?

2. Innocence

INNOCENT (appearing about 14y/o) is getting ready for bed in a three-walled fragment of a hyper-realistic bedroom. She is playing a song on a guitar, singing quietly to herself. Once the audience gathers, she puts the guitar away and falls asleep. All is calm and quiet until the silence breaks with an air raid siren in the distance that starts quietly and then intensifies. CARE bursts into the room through the audience to grab INNOCENT. CARE wakes her up and pulls her out of bed. INNOCENT is shocked - doesn't understand what's going on. She is shaking. CARE is trying to dress her in warmer clothes - it's difficult, but urgent, so they are both working to get through this. As they are leaving the room - the girl realizes that she forgot her favorite clown doll - the one she has been sleeping with since she was a baby - and runs back to grab it. INNOCENT takes two steps forward, doll in hand. --TIME WARP-- The siren sticks on one note. Unseen live voices enter, harmonizing with it. INNOCENT and CARE move in extreme slow motion. The walls of the room drift apart into the darkness, making the room vanish into the distance. Her life will never be the same. She will remember this moment forever.

3. Shelter

Audience follows INNOCENT and CARE, who run to seek shelter in a dark, cavernous basement filled with furniture that has accumulated there over the years. One by one, other characters make their way into the shelter - an unlikely mix of personalities coexisting in very close quarters. Everyone listens to news. A cacophony of sounds. We

hear distant blasts that get closer and closer. Then - BAM! - lights flicker and furniture shakes. One of the characters has a panic attack. She frantically climbs upwards on a pile of furniture, trying to get out. Others rush to help, pull her down, and comfort her. Lights go out briefly. It's clear they can't leave but there is also nothing to do. Eventually, adrenaline depletion seeps in. Adults fall asleep. Only INNOCENT keeps awake, trembling. She tries to catch up on some homework to busy herself, but as soon as she puts pen to paper, her hands start shaking. A small pair of hands emerges from within the blankets piled behind her and gently caresses her arms to stop them from trembling. Lighting changes. LIMINAL INNOCENT - a live version of INNOCENT'S clown doll - emerges from behind INNOCENT and tumbles into the scene. We are in the girl's dream space. Seeing that she can't entertain the girl on her own, LIMINAL INNOCENT brings a helper - a character named "X", and the two create an impromptu slapstick routine. INNOCENT has escaped into her imagination - her place of refuge. It's colorful, funny, with beautiful music. Once she is asleep, LIMINAL INNOCENT and X vanish into a blend of waking life and dreamspace.

4. One Who Has Seen It All

ONE WHO HAS SEEN IT ALL sits at a kitchen table in a bombed out house drinking her tea. Her home has been partially destroyed by the war, but she is still there, determined to stay for as long as she can. We encounter her as she finds refuge in her daily ritual of tea drinking, holding on to the one piece of normalcy she can still access.

DISINFORMANT and BODYGUARD enter what's left of her property. They need to shoot a promotional video showing how the occupied civilians eagerly sign a referendum placing themselves under new rule. Thinking that this old woman would be an easy target, they learn that they were gravely mistaken when she defiantly tears the referendum and throws it into the face of the DISINFORMANT. Enraged, they ransack what little remains from her home, steal what is left of her food, and storm out. "X" emerges from the rubble, embraces her, and guides her away from her bombed out home and into a new, unknown, fate.

5. Vigil

We enter a scene of partially sunken furniture guarded by two soldiers. Remnants of home that are slipping through our fingers, a familiar world that we try so desperately to hold on to.

WARRIOR 1 has been preparing for this war for years and has learned more about bravery than caution. He sits on the topmost point of the tallest furniture fragment to maximize visibility - keeping vigil. WARRIOR 2 is his trainee - a timid character who was never meant to be a fighter. Bored and anxious, they listen to music on their phones, go through instruction protocols, and try to crack each other up in the tense, cold environment. As we hear the loud sound of an aircraft flying low overhead, WARRIOR 1 is taken out by an unseen sniper. He collapses off of the backside of the furniture fragment and disappears from sight. WARRIOR 2 jumps up to see where the shot came from. He calls to WARRIOR 1 - no answer. He climbs around from fragment to fragment searching, and eventually discovers his mentor's lifeless body.

With no idea how to call in for help, WARRIOR 2 remains alone, under-equipped, and unable to leave his post. What to do? How to calm himself down? He pauses, and starts humming a lullaby he remembers from childhood - barely holding it together. "X" appears in the background near an old piano and starts accompanying him. An attempt to bring beauty and harmony into a broken world.

6. Traces of Loss

CARE's Dream. She lies asleep in a bed. Projection-mapped ocean waves envelop her from the bottom of the bed. As the waves recede, her partner appears next to her but then vanishes. CARE is awakened by her partner's absence, realizes that they are gone, climbs out of bed and moves silently in confusion, desperation, and mourning. As CARE climbs out of bed, CARE 2 appears in her place from under the sheets and the scenario replays with another projected partner and variation on the first dance. And then it happens again with CARE 3. It's not a story of one loss, but many losses. The three CAREs unite in movement and sound, learning how to shoulder the loss together. A haunting, motet-like collage of *a capella* folk songs in Ukrainian and Yiddish are sung by an unseen trio of female voices.

7. HOME

All of our other characters enter one by one and join the three CAREs. They support them both through movement and sound. It's easier to bear a burden when it is shared with, and held by, a community. They each carry a pulsating light rod that is synchronized to the sound of a heartbeat. Once they join their individual light sources into a symbol of a house, they glow in color and animate. Once they break the house apart, the lights desaturate and turn into white. The female vocal trio from the previous scene is joined by more voices and the haunting folk tune collage morphs into a soothing, wordless motet. The characters move around the space - creating a home and losing it, creating it again, and losing it again, but always attempting to create it once more. When they reach the center of the space and are surrounded by the audience, they lift their lights up, and many more such light sources descend from above, bathing the entire space with colorful light.

It is in community that we find REFUGE.