

# Pre-Performance Guide

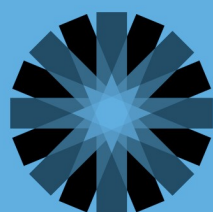
## The Catastrophist

Written by  
LAUREN M. GUNDERSON

A co-production of  
MARIN THEATRE COMPANY and  
ROUND HOUSE THEATRE

Directed by  
JASSON MINADAKIS

Featuring  
WILLIAM DEMERITT



People's  
Light

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This guide provides information about the virtual performance of *The Catastrophist* at People's Light, a theatre in Malvern, PA.

*The Catastrophist* will be viewed online, not live on stage.

This play was filmed by Marin Theatre Company and co-created with Roundhouse Theatre Company. Because of COVID-19, the performer and all of the technical crew followed very specific safety rules for making this film during the pandemic in order to protect one another.

The performance is approximately 80 minutes long, including credits. Because the performance is not live, you can pause, fast forward, or rewind whenever you like.

Closed captioning, audio-description and ASL interpretation are available.



### Creator

*The Catastrophist* is written by Lauren Gunderson. Lauren has written this play about her own real-life husband, Dr. Nathan Wolfe and his work as a virologist, someone who studies infectious diseases, including pandemics.



### Performer

The performance features only one actor, William DeMeritt. The actor portrays the character of Dr. Nathan Wolfe.

In the play, the character of Nathan sometimes talks about and to his wife, Lauren, who wrote the play. Lauren, the playwright, does not answer him.



## Structure

At the beginning of the play the character of Nathan is confused and does not know where he is. He does not know why he is here or what is going on. When he sees a title appear: “Scene 2, The Play,” Nathan realizes he is in a play that his wife has written.

During the performance Nathan tells stories of his life and explains his work as a virologist. Sometimes he asks direct questions of the audience or of his wife, the writer, as though the audience or writer might answer him back. During the performance Nathan gets information from his wife, the writer, but the audience cannot hear her responses directly. The character of Nathan slowly discovers what is happening as the play goes on.

## Scenes

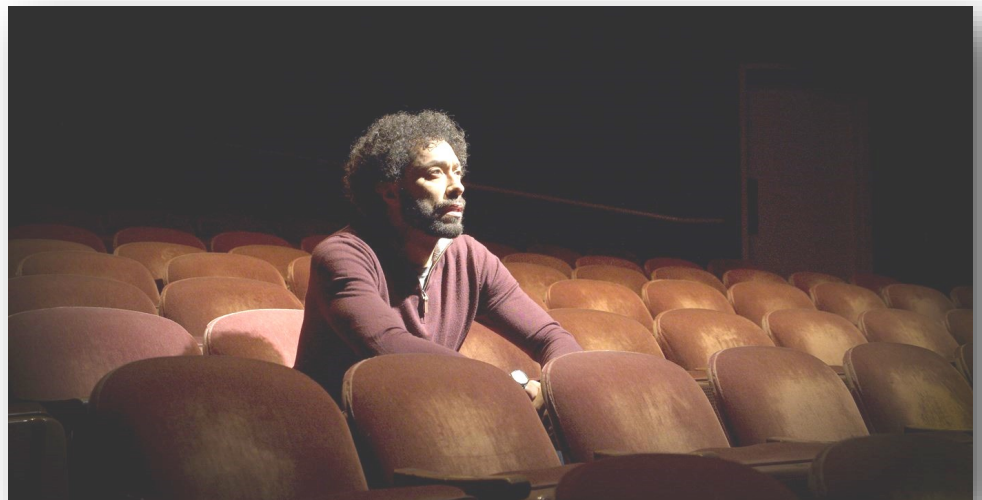
During the play, scene numbers and titles will appear on the screen marking a change in the story. The play does not take place chronologically. Sometimes the character of Nathan will share a story that happened in the past.



## Setting

The play begins in 2016 in San Francisco. For most of the play, the actor playing Nathan performs on a stage.

Later in the play, the actor playing Nathan performs from the seats in a theatre auditorium. This happens at the part of the story when Nathan is unconscious and in surgery.



## Looking Through a Lens

The camera crew and other technicians (who cannot be seen in the film) followed social distancing rules and wore masks all of the time.

Cameras moved to many places to show interesting views of the performance: from the front, behind, and from all sides.

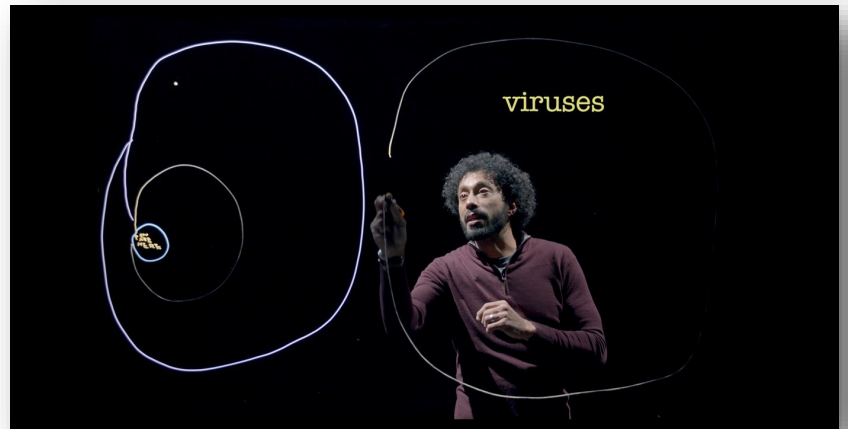


### Screens

Most of the time Nathan will appear onstage by himself. Sometimes more than one image of Nathan will appear simultaneously. Sometimes the screen appears to have static across it.

### Visuals

Sometimes Nathan will appear to write/draw images in the air. These images help to illustrate scientific information that Nathan explains as he draws.



When Nathan is unconscious and in surgery, there is an image of going under water and then glimpses of his family – his wife Lauren (the playwright), and his sons. His sons are sitting and running through the theatre auditorium in slow motion and sometimes blurry.





## Sounds

Sometimes the sound of a heartbeat can be heard during the performance. This sound is heard when Nathan is scared, confused or getting sick, as a clue that he experiences a heart attack. Beeps can be heard sometimes to indicate medical machines that would monitor Nathan's health. There are sounds of water and whispers of someone saying "keep going" as Nathan comes out of surgery.

## Health

Nathan's work focuses on immunology and infectious diseases for others. Nathan's own health is important to the story as well. Men in his family, including his father, have died from heart disease at around the age of 40. Nathan is around the age of 40 in this play.