



# Exploding Moments: Two Girls

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 2009

Heather here. Exploding Moments #2 features the play *Two Girls* written and performed by Gabrielle Maisels, produced by Dina Leytes. Before launching into the exploded moment, I should say that you have one chance left to see this play:

**Final Performance of *Two Girls***

**Sunday, August 2nd at 6:00pm**

The Dorothy Strelsin Theatre - 312 W. 36th St., first floor

Tickets: [www.midtownfestival.org](http://www.midtownfestival.org)

## **About the Play**

*"South Africa, 1988. Two girls—Lindiwe, Black, and Corinne, Jewish—are coming of age in the twilight of apartheid."*

*Two Girls* is a remarkable one-woman play tracing the journeys of two children of apartheid South Africa: Corinne, Jewish, and Lindiwe, black. Gabrielle Maisels vividly portrays nine characters, delving into the deep pain politics can inflict, and the fierce hope that the two girls struggle to sustain. The play is written and performed by Gabrielle Maisels, who is the granddaughter of Israel Aaron Maisels, leader of the defense team that secured Mandela's acquittal in the 1956 Treason Trial.

## **The Exploded Moment**

Midway through the play, the elderly house keeper, Beauty (mother of Lindiwe), finds

out that Lindiwe did not pass her regents exams, which means she may not graduate high school. Beauty, who up until this point has held her head high, showing love through her tough demeanor and discipline, crumbles in this moment. All her hopes and dreams that her daughter will live a better life than she herself has are crushed, and Beauty literally collapses to the ground in a fit of hysteria. Gabrielle navigates this emotional breakdown for Beauty with such grace while simultaneously popping out of that character to portray young Corrine and Corrine's mother coming to Beauty's aid. I wanted to discover how Gabrielle's training and rehearsal process led to the seamlessness and tragedy of Beauty's collapse.

### **The Questions**

NB: I asked the questions in one order, but rightfully so Gabrielle chose to answer Question 2 before Question 1, so I present the answers to you that way:

**Question 2:** *You never lost the precision of motion/movement even in Beauty's collapse. What was the process for writing this scene? And how did you rehearse this scene?*

**GABRIELLE:** The answer to this is in the acting technique that I use, which is Carol Fox Prescott's "Breathing, Awareness and Joy." She has this brilliant idea – which is sometimes very hard to comprehend as a new actor, but which is the linchpin of my acting, I think – that the "joy" she talks about comes from letting every possible human emotion flow THROUGH you, and RELISHING that experience. So, if you're playing someone who is bitter, or anguished, or murderous, or despairing, or any of those emotions that you wouldn't think would feel good to feel...the joy is in 150% filling yourself with that experience, because there is something delicious and pure in being fully human in that way, and expressing something that every human feels whether to a very small or very large degree. And, perhaps most importantly: it's not "yours." Beauty's anguish is not "mine." It is flowing THROUGH me, PHYSICALLY, and in a split second,

another experience can flow through me – because, as Carol says, we all have the entire universe of human experiences within us at every moment, so it's simply a matter of being a supple and receptive instrument and being brave enough to let an experience that big flow THROUGH me, without getting overwhelmed by it, or resisting it in any way, because I know that, as long as I keep my breath moving and my energy releasing, then in the next second, I can access something else (in this case Myra, and her concern for Beauty.)

The process for writing the scene: I had written a scene in which they all discover that Lindiwe hasn't passed – but it was a much “smaller” scene, emotionally. Beauty didn't show her reaction. Then, after performing that scene a time or two (rehearsing? I think) and dramaturging/rewriting the play, I think I could sense that I was “hiding” from something big in that scene because it was somehow “scary” to me emotionally – and potentially embarrassing, as a performer. So, again, this is where I go to my technique and try to let the impulses flow – and I think I did that on my feet? If I let myself be free, physically, then the emotion of the moment arises in me – and then I knew how huge this would be for Beauty. I hadn't “known” that before. It's all a process. I think I remember improvising it rather than writing it first? But i'm not sure.

**Question 1:** *Throughout the play I was struck by the precision, almost choreography, of your physical movements. How did you discover/rehearse the stylization of the piece?*

**GABRIELLE:** In terms of the “precision of motion/movement” – that's interesting to me, too. Because I don't use a specific physical “technique.” I just fully inhabit the characters, and, again, FULLY release my energy – and then my body wants to do what that character does. It's much more about getting OUT OF THE WAY, than about “doing” something physical. There's nothing cerebral about it. I never made decisions about certain postures or gestures for each character. (Carol has beaten into me her prohibition against “making decisions” about anyone! Because it kills the process. How can you decide something about a full human being? Humans change all the time.) So, the technique has more to do with courage, again. If I am brave enough to let my own mannerisms and protections fall away, then impulses arise all the time – and I have trained

myself to follow those impulses, and trust them, and release that energy fully, and then a full character emerges in a split-second.

In terms of “choreography” – I know that Beauty collapses at that moment in the play – but my guess is that I do it differently every time? I think Joey [the director] might be able to speak to that. [*Joey's answer below*]

When I don't trust my technique, and my impulses (e.g. when I was first rehearsing this, and was worried that the audience wouldn't be able to distinguish characters) then the transitions between characters actually gets muddier. Because then I'm in my head, “trying” to “show” the audience that “Now I'm Corinne!”. Again, from Carol: I have to just do it for MYSELF. If I try to “show” something, then it gets stiff. If I just have the experience, 200%, for myself, and relish it, then the audience just gets to join me on the wild ride.

**JOEY (the director):** When we began the process of staging this play, I knew we had to find the landmarks that would guide Gabrielle through this story. We would find the structure that would give her the freedom to bring these people through. We began at the beginning and found the map that felt the most organic and "right." We rehearsed one moment at a time. It was like being on a treasure hunt. Each gem lead us to the next. We didn't decide how each character moved or talked, it was more like we gave them space and structure so they could come through.

The moment that you are talking about is one of my favorites as well because four different people come through with no transition time and you get the sense of how everyone is reacting in the moment as if you can watch all of them separately and then you realize they are all coming through one person. It is a little different every night, but every night it is incredibly precise because of Gabrielle's commitment.

**Question 3:** *I don't remember Beauty coming back again after that scene. Can you talk about why we don't see her again?*

**GABRIELLE:** It wasn't a decision. I hadn't noticed that, until audience members started telling me they missed her in the second half. (I miss her too! I love her.) But I think it's just right, so it happened that way. In some way, Beauty's story is over. Beauty is so, so much a product of apartheid, in that incredibly painful, terrible way. She's amazing. But she isn't the future. Lindiwe and Corrine have to wrestle with the future. It's theirs.

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This "joy" that Gabrielle speaks of most certainly comes through in her performance. The first thing I mentioned to someone when talking about the show was how giving Gabrielle is as a performer. As an audience member, I felt so welcome and loved. And now with the insight above--learning about Gabrielle's training and process--I understand why.