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The off-Broadway musical "Night Side Songs" is performed at the Lincoln Center's Claire Tow Theater in 2026. (Marc J. Franklin)



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When I was in graduate school in the early 1990s, my 13-year-old sister Meggan was in a terrible car accident. Two of her friends were killed instantly. Meggan spent a week in a medically-induced coma to try and save her life, but ultimately she died as well.

That week and my sister's subsequent death are not things I often talk about. Even 36 years later, it is still a confusing and painful jumble of feelings that I am generally loath to allow others to access.

Then last winter I went to an off-Broadway musical titled "Night Side Songs," which follows a woman's cancer journey and the experiences of her family and caregivers. The circumstances did not hold many similarities to that of my own family, but one unusual dimension of the show took me back to the vulnerability of that hospital waiting room. And rather than a nightmare, it was a blessing.

The defining element was this: The audience was invited to sing along.

I realize that for some, this probably sounds like a nightmare. But the material was written with a simplicity that made the tunes easy to catch, often structured in a call-and-response style similar to Taizé. At various moments, the actors would gently gesture toward us, inviting us to repeat what they were singing or to join in. The experience felt almost liturgical.

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As it turns out, that was the idea. The creators of "Night Side Songs," siblings Daniel and Patrick Lazour, were raised Catholic. Patrick — who, like his parents, went to Boston College — told the National Catholic Reporter in a Zoom interview that the brothers conceived the show as a kind of "secular Mass."

"The idea of singing together, considering big questions, life's mysteries, in song and in community, is just a very human-feeling thing," Daniel agreed. "And so many of us just don't have that experience anymore."

Inviting a random assortment of people to not only come to a musical about illness, but to sing along, is a huge ask. At first, the brothers weren't sure it was going to work.

"The priority was to make sure the audience feels at ease and comfortable and welcome," said Daniel. But that involved considering a wide range of experience: "You're going to have kids of like 12 or 13, maybe they've never experienced a death in their life. And then you'll have someone who three days ago lost their mother or something. How do you make a piece that respects all of those proximities?"

Here, too, the liturgy provided inspiration. "At a Mass, we say, 'Now, we'll do the responsorial psalm,' 'Now we'll do the first reading,' the second reading ..." They decided to do something similar: At the start of each scene, the actors lay out what the scene is, so that audiences wouldn't feel surprised or "duped," as Patrick put it. It ended up becoming one of their favorite elements of the show.



Daniel and Patrick Lazour at the opening night gala for "Night Side Songs" in 2026 (Chasi Annexy)

Audience members did still occasionally react in funny ways. "There were truly moments where you could almost hear people saying to each other, 'What did you get me into?' " Daniel remembered, laughing.

But in general the show really affected people. The two delighted in watching as people who were initially resistant gave themselves over to it. Often it happened during a song called "When You ...", which lays out the entirety of the main character's life with her partner through small, specific moments like taking a kitten to the vet, playing Nintendo 64 or buying McDonald's for their kids.

The song was constructed "like a hymn," Daniel shared. "You learn the melody, but you don't know all the words until you sing them, just like you'll know the first verse of this hymn, but you won't know verse four." And so when the song would suddenly include "some goofy lyrics," Patrick offered, "it really helped people to understand, 'Oh, they're not taking themselves so seriously.'" And suddenly they were hooked.

Having finished their New York engagement, the Lazours are hoping other groups across the country will find comfort and joy in "Night Side Songs." The production of their just-released cast [album](#) was reassuring: "We had 20 friends who came together to play the audience," said Daniel. "I thought that wasn't going to be enough, but it worked. I'm really excited that you could do the show with a small group and it would still work."

How do we mourn the people we have lost? Live with the wounds we've endured? Face the specters of mortality that haunt us? In "Night Side Songs," the Lazours reveal how much can be accomplished together, and in song. "There was such a joy in writing those simple songs," Patrick shared. "The show has the sort of healing powers of a Mass."

"Music," Daniel mused, "it's a tenderizing agent."

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