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BEAUTIFUL AND MOVING: JAKE BRODER'S UNRAVELLED TOUCHES THE HEART AND MIND

Jake Broder is a brilliant wordsmith. His important and moving play *UnRavelled* explores the fascinating connection between the work of modern day biologist turned famed Canadian painter Anne Adams (1940–2007) and French composer Maurice Ravel (1875–1937), both of whom lived and worked with the same rare brain disease.

Incorporating research and interviews conducted by Broder, as a Hellman Visiting Artist at UCSF's Memory and Aging CBased on the fascinating real life connection between the two, *UnRavelled* is an essential new play about love, art, and who we are on the most profound level.



Unravelling Bolero, 1994--a bar-by-bar representation of Ravel's *Bolero* by Anne Adams

Directed by Nike Doukas. *UnRavelled* stars Lucy Davenport, Conor Duffy, Melissa Greenspan, Leo Marks, Rob Nagle with Michael Lanahan on narrations. All deliver superb performances.

The play opens in the living room of middle-aged couple Robert and his wife Anne who are playing Scrabble. She has trouble remembering letters and spells nonexistent words. She says that her thoughts have smells. The tone of his voice possesses a certain edge indicating he is stressing.

Their child, Eric, survived a serious auto accident and is getting better, and is now out of the house They never thought he'd recover. They were told if he lived, he'd never walk.

Robert took on a second job while Anne, who is a respected cell biologist at the University of Toronto in Ontario, Canada. has taken up painting, concentrating on strawberries which Robert considers a waste of time. He calls her a "one subject artist".

Robert is sarcastic when he questions why he is working two jobs so she can paint. He fears that her university tenure chair will be taken way.

Scene II is an art lecture by psychiatrist Dr. Miller on modern art explaining how modern art is powerful and clever.

Another art scene regards cubism how time becomes a visual form.

A series of short scenes are introduced by an off camera voice. The music is Ravel's repetitive and hypnotic *Bolero*. The use of short, sharp scenes segueing between the past and present accompanied by the music of *Bolero* is piercingly powerful. As Robert puts it they "mated to it in college."

As her disease progress, her artistic ability improves. Her first truly professional, respected work was *Unravelling Bolero, 1994* - a bar-by-bar representation of Ravel's *Bolero*. At that time, she was unaware of her diagnosis, let alone her connection to Ravel.

Broder, an actor, writer, and musician, who got his BA from Tufts and then trained at the Guildhall in London, calls the painting a measure-by-measure recounting of *Bolero*, in which each rectangular figure represents one bar of music. "It tracks it almost perfectly," he has stated, emphasizing, "It was a gigantic leap in her work," and "an accidental experiment that provides intriguing insights into the neurology of creativity."

In the play Anne walks around in a daze - hasn't kissed her husband in weeks and he senses that she isn't "even there."

Suddenly Anne, then 53, becomes affectionate, which confuses Robert. Normally prone to conservative dressing, she has taken to wearing garish colored outfits.

During speechless segments, an off camera announcer describes the action.



Maurice Ravel

It is ballet dancer Ida who commissioned *Bolero* and who would eventually take care of Ravel. As his disease progresses Ida feels that Ravel understands her less and less and has become obsessed with *Bolero*.

As Anne's disease progresses her art work become sublime, demonstrating how colors incite the brain.

There is procrastination and avoidance.

Robert wonders if Anne has suffered a mid-life crisis - things are different but not all bad. Then he wonders if she is having an affair.

Her paintings are now rich and statement making.

However, her vision has changed and she suffers migraines. Her third painting is, in fact, titled *Migraine*.

During a lengthy conversation between Ida and Ravel he points out that you know that something is coming that will eat you alive.

Psychiatrist Dr. Miller uses his segments to describe art and its relationship to the brain. Thoughts are transmutative. Art has a profound relationship to neurology.

Frontal lobe injury: If the right side is effected the person loses empathy, can develop addiction problems. if the left side is affected the patient loses speech - language. Primary aphasia can effect movements and eventually the patient stops breathing.

Ann can't find the words, so she paints them. Robert insists insists that they have to stop pretending that everything is fine - she has trouble with words. Her artistic abilities develop as her speaking ability diminishes. The brain compensates. Anne argues that she is fine.

A confused and distraught Robert attends a support group in which a woman who dearly loves her husband gives an intense, heart wrenching account of what it is like to care for him - including his total incontinence - "we don't have any warning, he just goes. We call it Code Brown."

All of the support members admit that there are times when they really wish the person was dead - "so we could mourn and move on."

***UnRavelled* is educational, illuminating and heart breaking.**

According to GBHI co-director Dr. Bruce Miller, "Ravel and Dr. Adams were in the early stages of primary progressive aphasia, a form of frontotemporal dementia, when they were working. The disease apparently altered circuits in their brains, changing the connections between the front and back parts and resulting in a torrent of creativity."

Sharp and clear production design by Corwin Evans. Excellent sound design by Jeff Gardner. Production Coordinator by Bree Pavey.

Presented by Global Brain Health Institute, UC San Francisco, and Trinity College Dublin.

A production not to be missed.

A screening of *UnRavelled*, followed by a live seminar, will be held on March 3 (5 p.m. GMT), 2021. *UnRavelled* remains available on demand at UnRavelledPlay.com through March 31, 2021.

Q&A featuring:

**Jake Broder, Hellman Artist, UCSF Memory and Aging Center; Writer, *UnRavelled*
Nike Doukas, Director, *UnRavelled***

Bruce Miller; Co-Director, GBHI; Director, UCSF Memory and Aging Center

Bill Seeley; Neurologist, UCSF Memory and Aging Center

Moderated by Francesca Farina, Neuroscientist, Atlantic Fellow for Equity in Brain Health.

Followed by a brief presentation on brain health by Nicky Taylor, Theater & Dementia Specialist, Atlantic Fellow for Equity in Brain Health, with contributions from people living with dementia.