

# Iris Sowlat

Director



Iris Sowlat's work focuses on socially relevant themes, seen through an unexpected lens. She works to create a perspective that cuts right to the heart and soul of the material at hand.

[IrisSowlat.com](http://IrisSowlat.com)

# UNDERWORLD ANTHEM

Devised by the Ensemble from poetry by Alexandra Ranieri  
at Prop Theatre's RhinoFest  
January - February 2019

Orpheus takes the plunge from his own Underworld on Earth to the Underworld of Hades and Persephone. How will he escape with the one he loves? What awaits him way across the Styx River? Through a cycle of poems by Alexandra Ranieri, this piece explores the many facets of Orpheus' journey into the Underworld and what compels one to seek the Underworld, leave it, relish it, rule it, and create within it.

## *Takeaways:*

- I used poetry that was not originally about Orpheus, crafted a cycle that told the story of a journey to an Underworld, and worked with actors to shape the story of Orpheus and Eudrydice around that base text.
- I utilized actors' special skills, such as clown, dance, songwriting, and dramaturgy, to add to the development of the world and characters.
- I worked with dramaturg Emma Pauly to layer on excerpts from Ovid's "Orpheus and Eurydice" and the Orphic Hymn to Persephone to give context for the story.
- I used improvisation, Viola Spolin games, contact improv, and Laban movement analysis for world-building and character building.



# UNDERWORLD ANTHEM



Cast: Dana Macel, Angie Fisher, Emma Pauly, Charlie Diaz, Jess Smoot, Terri Lynne Hudson, Athanasia Sawicz, Electra Tremulis, and Alicia Jade

Costume Design: Jenn Oswald

Lighting Design: Cat Davis

Choreography: Angie Fisher

Fight Choreography: Electra Tremulis

Original Music: Electra Tremulis

Dramaturg: Emma Pauly

Photo credit: Carlos Mocino

# THE DAYS ARE SHORTER

by Corinne Kawecki  
Pride Films & Plays  
May - June 2018

53-year-old Julia sees her life unravelling before her as she approaches middle-age, and is thrown into an unforgettable journey through a heightened fantastical version of her own reality to deal with these changes. It's about the magic of the universe and how it is always there to help us if we would only let it in.

## *Takeaways:*

- I explored how to create the physical manifestations of a character losing her perception of reality and questioning what of her world is real or imaginary.
- As this was the Chicago premiere and second full production of the play, I worked with the playwright on small script changes for clarity.

"Recommended" - *Windy City Times*



Photo credit: Liz Cooper & Paul Goyette

# THE DAYS ARE SHORTER



Cast: Pat Parks, Joan McGrath, Gay Glenn, and Kendra Verhage

Scenic Design: Chas Mathieu

Costume Design: Ssanja Manakoski

Lighting Design: Liz Cooper

Sound Design: John Nichols

Magic Consultant: Neil Tobin

Photo credit: Liz Cooper & Paul Goyette

# JOAN OF ARC

by Alexandra Ranieri  
at Prop Theatre's RhinoFest  
January - February 2018

In a once-prosperous town left ravaged by never-ending war, a 19-year-old girl is on trial. She has reopened a long conflict, and lit a fire under the rebel cause. The government has at last caught up with her, and the punishment they seek is death. Joan is surrounded, both in the court and in her jail cell, by educated men who will use any means to find the legal loophole, which makes the most convenient noose.

## *Takeaways:*

- I used staging, movement work, and conversations with the actors about their characters to intentionally frame the story as a meditation on survival. The piece was shaped to be about how Joan the person spent her final days while being attacked in different ways on all sides - by the regal and manipulative Bishop of Beauvais, by her jailers, and by her Saints who she once sought guidance from.
- I used Viewpoints, specifically those of Topography, Kinesthetic Response, and Tempo, to show the Saints as supernatural beings to depict their relationship to Joan in relation to Joan's changing spirituality.

"A poetic fever dream."  
- The Chicago Reader



# JOAN OF ARC



Cast: Sierra Buffum, Olivia Gregorich, Amanda Hays, Jared McDaris, Kim Fukawa, Erik Schiller, Matt Schutz, Alex Stuart, and Jessica Goforth  
Costume Design: Jenn Oswald  
Lighting Design: Cat Davis  
Sound Dsign: Colin Morris  
Fight Choreography: Matthew Perry Smith

Photo credit: Iris Sowlat

# NARRATIVES OF ACHROMATOPSIA

by Iris Sowlat  
Chicago Fringe Festival  
September 2017

Told through a tapestry of first-person narratives taken from interviews, this original documentary play about the visual impairment Achromatopsia tells the story of my secret life - and that of others with the same visual impairment - constantly adapting to world that is not set up for us, and with virtually no public awareness of what it's like to be legally blind with enough vision to pass through the world as sighted. The narratives cover everything from diagnosis, going to school, working, and parenting, to experiencing everyday ableism and making "1,000 unseen adaptations every day."

I have the rare visual impairment Achromatopsia, which has informed nearly every aspect of how I live my life and move through the world. Upon noticing that there was no representation of Achromatopsia in popular media - let alone theatre - I set out to create one.

I interviewed over 15 individuals based around the United States and internationally, of varying ages, professions, and walks of life, who had Achromatopsia. I edited content from the interviews into a script for this documentary play. Everything said in Narratives of Achromatopsia is taken completely verbatim from the interviews I conducted, with minimal artistic license.

## *Takeaways*

- I created an original docu-drama using interviews for the first time, and in the process, learned about the researching, writing, and editing processes involved in docu-drama.
- I learned about what the new play development process and production process looks like for a docu-drama



Cast: Kaitlin Stewart, Kimmy Higginbotham, Whitney Pipes, Erin Caswell, Sunny Anam, Avi Kritzman, Timothy Swaim, and Logan Padbury

Lighting Design: Bucky Emmerling

Sound Design: Coln Morris

# THE ANXIETY VARIETY SHOW

by Cal Walker  
at Prop Theatre's RhinoFest  
January-February 2020

Equal parts sardonic, uncompromising, and unflinchingly honest, Cal Walker's solo show about their Anxiety uses audience participation, song, comedy, and puppetry to examine our understanding of mental illness.



## *Takeaways:*

- I dove deeper into exploring the solo show as an artistic form, this time with a script that wove together intimately personal storytelling, music, various other variety-style acts, audience participation, and educational content.
- I examined the effect of the artistic double-helix of using a storytelling about deeply personal and occasionally traumatic events, foiled against comedy in order to bring out truths about personal experience with mental illness.



Cast: Cal Walker

Lighting Design: Lena Aubrey

Music Direction: Jordan Conrad

Puppet Design: Ricki Jay

Photo Credit: Madison Kesselring

# TURN THAT THING AROUND

by Aaron Harris

Chicago Fringe Festival

August - September 2015

Jack, a college freshman, learns that he has Bipolar Disorder after having a manic episode at the end of a cross-country road trip. This play is about giving oneself the tools to manage one's mental health, recognizing one's inner courage, and always maintaining hope even when things seem hopeless.

## *Takeaways:*

- This was my first experience working with a non-linear script. I figured out how to use staging to strategically convey time hopping from the past to the present
- This was my first time working with a living playwright on a production of a script still in development based on the playwright's lived experiences and he was in the room for most rehearsals.



Cast: Justin Dietzel, Frank Gasparro, Avi Kritzman,  
Connie Rodriguez, Kimmy Higginbotham, Chloe Bluml,  
Larnell Shadd, Kate Lass, and Sharron Palm

Scenic, Sound, and Projection Design: Aaron Harris  
Woodstein

Costume Design: Sharron Palm

Lighting Design: Nathaniel Kelley

Fight Choreography: Kate Lass

Photo credit: Richard Smith

# ABCD

by Rukmini Girish  
The Lab at Piven Theatre  
March 2019

In 2008, writer/performer Rukmini Girish moved from India to the United States. Soon after, her family began to wonder whether she would become an American-Born Confused Desi. As she began to find her place in Chicago and navigated being Indian, American and queer, she began to wonder what those words really mean. Her solo show *ABCD* explores the effects of labeling and how we can build spaces where we can really belong. The script informed by the tenants of Neo-Futurism and is structured such that Rukmini performed varying scenes in an order determined by the audience.

## *Takeaways:*

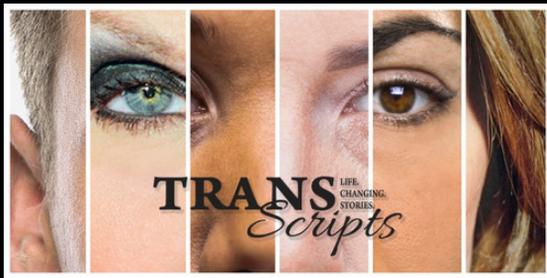
- In one of my first explorations of solo work, I worked with playwright/performer Rukmini Girish to create a vibrant, vulnerable, and entertaining performance by fully exploring a range of storytelling techniques for each vignette in the play
- *ABCD* is written such that audience participation determines the order of the scenes. So I worked with Rukmini and a few "test audience" guests to rehearse the play in different configurations and to prepare for a range of audience responses to some more open-ended moments of audience participation.



# ASSISTANT DIRECTING



*Into the Breeches!*  
by George Brant  
Directed by Jessica Thebus  
Northlight Theatre  
May-June 2019



*Trans Scripts, Part 1: The Women*  
by Paul Lucas  
Directed by Delia Kropp  
About Face Theatre (reading)  
November 2018



*Human Terrain*  
by Jennifer Blackmer  
Directed by Benjamin Brownson  
Broken Nose Theatre  
June - July 2016



*The Luckiest People*  
by Meredith Friedman  
Directed by Jason Fleece  
Stage Left Theatre  
March - April 2018



*The Firestorm*  
by Meredith Friedman  
Directed by Drew Martin  
Stage Left Theatre  
October - November 2015

# ADDITIONAL WORK

Selected from 25+ short plays, readings, and festival peices.



*After Orlando* reading series  
NoPassport Theatre Alliance and Pride Arts Center  
November 2016



*Barbarism* by Jason Grote  
Collaboration's Peacebook Festival  
August - October 2017



*Jane* by Paula Kamen  
Chicago Women's History Center  
July 2017



*I Really Love Lucy* by Eileen Mitchell  
*Violet Surprise: Femslash Fest*  
August 2019



*Art & Army* by Shozzett Silva  
MadKap Productions  
August 2016



*Everyone's a Critic* by Michele Stine  
Broken Nose Theatre's Bechdel Fest  
October 2016