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"Bipolar disorder, electric shock treatment, suicide, and grief...this may not sound like a fun evening at the theatre, but *NEXT TO NORMAL* is an



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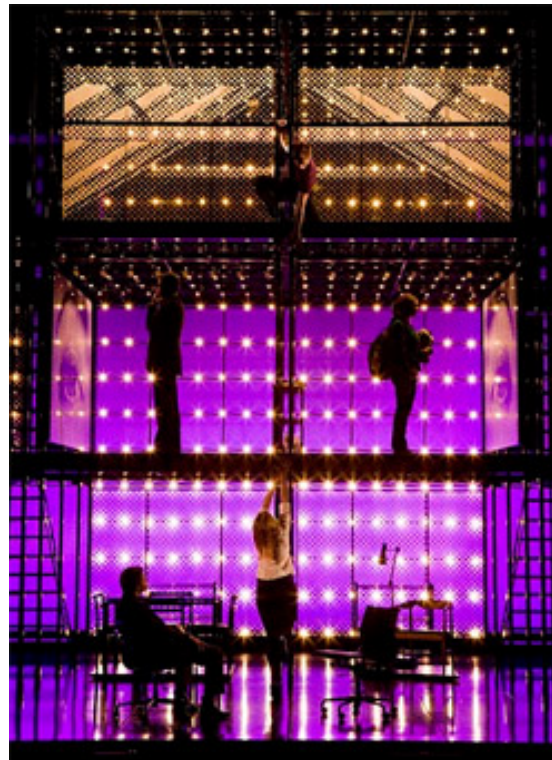


Photo Credit: The National Touring Company of Next to Normal. Photo by: Craig Schwartz.

engaging and touching musical that does it right." *CBS San Francisco.com*

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"Bipolar disorder, electric shock treatment, suicide, and grief...this may not sound like a fun evening at the theatre, but [NEXT TO NORMAL](#) is an engaging and touching musical that does it right." *CBS San Francisco.com*

"It's an intensely serio-comic drama, propelled along by the galvanic, nearly non-stop music, gripping acting and a staging propelled with turbo force by director Michael Greif." *Seattle Times*

"[NEXT TO NORMAL](#) courageously shatters genre conventions with its startling serio-comic portrait of bipolar disorder, coupled with a profound examination of a family in emotional meltdown—arguably the first Albee-esque musical." *Backstage.com*

"A hallmark of a great musical is that it can grab you, shake you and take you into its world...the brilliant star of this show is the show itself." *NY Daily News*

"The hilarious, insane and frightening musical portrayal about living with mental illness...exploring themes of loss, recovery and relapse is a surprisingly uplifting experience since the musical is portrayed more like a rock concert onstage--complete with electric guitar, keyboard, and orchestra stage right and left." *HuffingtonPost.com*

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Awards

[NEXT TO NORMAL](#) has been nominated for 11 Tony awards, winning three, and received the coveted Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

It has also been given an Outer Critics Circle award, a Frederick Lowe award, an OMMA Award, four Broadway.com awards, three Helen Hayes

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awards and was nominated for two Drama Desk and three Lucille Lortel awards as well as one Webby award.

This successful show went global in 2010 with performances in Norway, Finland, and the Philippines. Canadian and Australian productions followed in 2011 with a production in The Netherlands set to open in 2012.

Synopsis

Mental illness, grief, therapy, suicide, amnesia, hallucinations, death, drug usage, dysfunctional family and the suburbs...this is NEXT TO NORMAL.

The show tells how a mother's mental illness affects and changes the entire family. As the father fights to hold the family together, the daughter struggles to have a relationship with her mother and the son maintains a super-boy image of perfection, the mother continually combats her mental illness. This family is trying to find their way back to the light.

In trying to have a normal life, the family may discover that they:

“Don't need a life that's normal
That's way too far away
But something next to normal
Would be okay
Yeah, something next to normal...
Close enough to normal
To get by.”


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Alice

Ripley & Jeremy Kushnier in the National Tour of Next to Normal.

Photo by Craig Schwartz.

According to American writer Rita Mae Brown, "The statistics on sanity are that one out of every four Americans is suffering from some form of mental illness. Think of your three best friends. If they're okay, then it's you."

The character Diana, the mother in NEXT TO NORMAL, suffers from a mental illness called bipolar disorder.

Vote Now

"The sensation that you're screaming, but you never make a sound. Or the feeling that you're falling, but you never hit the ground. It just keeps on rushing at you day by day by day by day. You don't know, you don't know what it's like to live that way. Like a refugee, a fugitive, forever on the run. If it gets me it will kill me, but I don't know what I've done."

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What is Bipolar Disorder?

Bipolar Disorder is a mental illness. The Mayo Clinic explains bipolar or manic-depressive disorder as causing "mood swings that range from of the lows of depression to the highs of mania. When you become depressed, you may feel sad or hopeless and lose interest or pleasure in most activities. When your mood shifts in the other direction, you may feel euphoric and full of energy. Mood shifts may only occur only a few times a year, or as often as several times a day. In some cases, bipolar disorder causes symptoms of depression and mania at the same time."

Diana describes her illness:

"Do you wake up in the morning and need help to lift your head?

Do you read obituaries and feel jealous of the dead?

It's like living on a cliff side not knowing when you'll dive.

Do you know, do you know what it's like to die alive?"

While bipolar disorder can be controlled with medications and therapy, people often stop taking them. Why? Many different reasons including: side effects, lack of insurance or sources to pay for the medication, weight gain, belief that medication causes a robotic or foggy feeling, a denial that the illness exists or a belief of being cured.

Diana on therapy and medication:

"I've had this lovely and fascinating relationship with you doctors and your treatments for 16 years but now I think I'm done."

Brian Yorkey, the librettist, told the *Chicago Post-Tribune*, "I wanted to write a story about a suburban mom and how difficult it is to survive with this illness. As we were writing the show, people would tell us their stories. Tom (the composer) and I worked hard to get the details right, to be a source of enlightenment, and to show these problems happen to more people than we think."

Celebrities with Bipolar Disorder

Catherine Zeta-Jones, Russell Brand, Kurt Cobain, Rosemary Clooney, Macy Gray, Jackson Pollock, Ernest Hemingway, Demi Lovato, Charley Pride, Ozzy Osbourne, Edgar Allen Poe, Jane Pauley, Vincent Van Gogh, Brian Wilson and Patrick J. Kennedy are just a few celebrities with bipolar disorder. A study done by the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) states that bipolar disorder affects 5.7 million American adults or two percent of the

adult population.


Quotations are lyrics from NEXT TO NORMAL.

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Jeremy

Kushnier, Alice Ripley & Asa Somers in the National Tour of Next to Normal.

Photo by Craig Schwartz.

In 2009, NEXT TO NORMAL won an OMMA (Online Media Marketing and Advertising) award and a Webby nomination as the first Broadway show performed on [Twitter](#).

Twitter is a social networking site that allows people to send short messages, or "tweets," of 140 characters, in real time, back and forth via the Internet or cell phone. These messages can be shared with a single person or a group.

How did NEXT TO NORMAL [Vote Now](#) tweet?

The first tweet explained that the show would be tweeted in five weeks, with a new scene revealed each day and a link to the songs for the audience to listen to. The entire story was told in 281 tweets.

This Twitter performance attracted more than 361,000 followers. It was followed by an interactive chat between fans of the show, the cast and the

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creative team. Fans also were encouraged to submit questions to be answered by the NEXT TO NORMAL team.

Download a copy of the complete NEXT TO NORMAL [Twitter performance](#).

Twitter Song

After the Twitter performance, NEXT TO NORMAL librettist Brian Yorkey and composer Tom Kitt invited fans to collaborate on a new song via Twitter. Fans were asked to submit suggestions about who would sing the song, where in the story the song would take, and ideas for lyrics. 4,000 suggestions were submitted and the song, "Something I Can't See" was the result.

Podcast

While the song was not added to the show, it was performed by cast members at a special event. Accompanying the song was a panel discussion with the show's creative team and questions asked of the cast via video. The entire event was open to the public and could also be followed by fans via Twitter. Today, it can be listened to on a [podcast](#).

Other NEXT TO NORMAL Social Networking Events

Blog

Actor Kyle Dean Massey, while portraying Gabe in the show, ran a weekly video blog of the behind-the-scenes action called [Normal Life](#).

Facebook

NEXT TO NORMAL has a Quiz on Facebook. Take the quiz to find out which NEXT TO NORMAL [song are you feeling](#).

YouTube

Once again Yorkey and Kitt asked for fan input, this time on NEXT TO NORMAL's YouTube channel. Kitt recorded piano for four songs from the show, then asked fans to download the music, interpret and record a song, then submit the video. After seeing hundreds of videos, Yorkey and Kitt created a [mash-up](#) of fans performing songs from the show.

Interactive

Situation Interactive, an entertainment marketing and interactive advertising agency organized these social networking events. Situation Interactive's clients have included Broadway shows *Wicked*, *The Lion King*, *Mary Poppins*, *Mama Mia*, *Billy Elliot The Musical*, *Hair*, *Catch Me If You Can* and The Blue Man Group. They also service The Metropolitan Opera, Cirque de Soleil, The Tony Awards, The Roundabout Theatre Company, and Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus, just to name of few.

You are there.


NEXT TO NORMAL's Twitter campaign gathered more than 850,000 followers. It has started a whole new way to expand enjoyment of the theater. See the show, and then join in the show via the Internet. Welcome to the 21st century.

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TALKING WITH LIBRETTIST BRIAN YORKEY



Emma

Hunton, Curt Hansen & Preston Sadlier in the National Tour of Next to Normal.

Photo by Craig Schwartz.

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Buzz Extra spoke with the Pulitzer Prize and Tony award-winning librettist of NEXT TO NORMAL, Brian Yorkey. Director, playwright and lyricist, Mr. Yorkey has been writing plays since he was a child.

YORKEY: I wrote my first play in third grade, a knock off of the *Encyclopedia Brown* mysteries. I used to imitate versions of those for my third-grade class and make them guess the solutions. Actually, my dream was to be a playwright. I used to read author's bios in the backs of books and Columbia University kept coming up. It seemed like New York was where you had to be if you wanted to be a playwright.

EXTRA: So you went to Columbia.

YORKEY: Yes. Columbia has this annual tradition called the Varsity Show. It is a musical written by and starring undergrads about campus life. I fell in with this show, which is where I met Tom [Kitt, the composer of NEXT TO NORMAL], and from then on started writing musicals.

EXTRA: What ever made you pick bipolar disorder as subject matter for NEXT TO NORMAL?

YORKEY: The original idea came from a TV news report on *Dateline* that I saw about shock therapy. I thought shock therapy was just a relic from a bygone era. But it is still practiced and actually a really important treatment for a certain patient who may be drug resistant and needs it. That opened my eyes. It made me think of a woman who struggled with mental illness her whole life and all the different doctors and men in her life who tried to help her but failed. That was the starting point for me.

EXTRA: Is there a stigma today with mental illness?

YORKEY: I would say there is...[Vote Now](#) particularly depression and bipolar...a sense that you should hide such things and they should be shameful secrets. I also think there is still quite a strong feeling that people aren't really depressed, they just don't like their life and need to change it. I have to confess that, probably before working on this show, I was one of those "get out-of-bed and go to work kind of people." But working on the show, researching bipolar and depression, my eyes have been opened to the fact that it's a disease. It's not

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a matter of will; it's an illness that needs to be treated. And it's a very difficult disease to treat.

I have to tell you a story. We were in previews on Broadway, at the Booth Theatre, and it was a few days before the critics were going to start coming. We were waiting in the house after the show, for tech notes, and a young kid, like 16 years old, walked up to us. I remember him so vividly. A redheaded kid asked if we were Mr. Kitt and Mr. Yorkey. He started to cry and thanked us for writing the show because he had been diagnosed with bipolar three months ago and had no way to explain to his friends what that was or what it felt like. But now, he has this show that he can point to and say that's what it is.

EXTRA: With such an unusual subject matter, how did this show ever get produced?

YORKEY: We've been incredibly lucky. Village Theatre in Seattle gave us a reading and a workshop, sight unseen. It was produced at The New York Musical Theater Festival where David Stone saw it and picked it up. Then it went to the Arena Stage, who also took a chance for continued work, which helped us finish what we wanted to do, so it could come back and be a Broadway show.

An awful lot of people did an awful lot of great work on NEXT TO NORMAL, but to me it always comes down to producing. The good producers know how to put a team together, shepherd a show and take care of it until it is ready for the public and David Stone is one of the best.

EXTRA: Was it always going to be sung through?

YORKEY: We worked on it as a scripted piece with music, but realized it was going to be five hours long and we'd have to cut songs that we really loved. So, we set ourselves the challenge of telling the story entirely through song.

There's an old rule in traditional music theater that when the emotion of a scene reaches a certain point where they can no longer contain themselves just by speaking, they sing. These are people that live at extremes of emotion most of their lives, so having them in song most of the time made sense.

EXTRA: What are you working on now?

YORKEY: Tom and I are working on another original show about a woman approaching middle age and taking stock of the choices she's made in her life. We are also writing a musical feature film for Warner Brothers and Robert Downey, Jr. And Sting and I are working on a musical theater piece loosely based on his album *The Soul Cages*.

EXTRA: Well, Cleveland is excited to see NEXT TO NORMAL.

YORKEY: I love Cleveland and wish I could be there with the show. I've only been to Cleveland a couple times, but I dug the city.


EXTRA: Anything else we should know about the show?

YORKEY: I think the show is entertaining...it's not so much that it's hard, but it's powerful. I hope you enjoy it.

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THE PULITZER PRIZE



Photo: Lee C. Bollinger, President of Columbia University (left), presents the 2010 Drama prize to Tom Kitt (center) and Brian Yorkey (right). Credit: pulitzer.org.

Pronouncing Pulitzer

According to the Pulitzer Prize website, Pulitzer is pronounced “PULL-it,

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sir" not "POO-lit, sir" or "PUEL-it-sir."

Origins of the Prize

The Pulitzer Prize was instituted in 1917 in honor of American publisher and journalist Joseph Pulitzer. This annual ceremony awards 21 categories such as: fiction, history, poetry, photography, editorial cartooning, criticism, news reporting and other areas of journalism, letters, music and drama. The prize in drama includes a \$10,000 award.

NEXT TO NORMAL

The official Pulitzer Prize guidelines chooses a winner of a "distinguished play by an American author, preferably original in its source and dealing with American life."

Librettist Brian Yorkey and Composer Tom Kitt won the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. Musicals rarely win this prize. In the 92 years Pulitzer Prizes have been awarded, only eight musicals have received this honor.

Rent, the last musical to win the Pulitzer in 1996, was directed by Michael Greif, the same director of NEXT TO NORMAL. Yorkey calls Greif "the Pulitzer maker." Other musicals to win have been: *Sunday in the Park With George* (1985), *A Chorus Line* (1976), *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (1962), *Fiorello!* (1960), *South Pacific* (1950) and *Of Thee I Sing* (1932).

The Pulitzer Board called Kitt and Yorkey's show "a powerful rock musical that grapples with mental illness in a suburban family and expands the scope of subject matter for musicals."

Cleveland Connection

Ironically, two of the three 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Drama finalists have Cleveland ties. Kristoffer Diaz, who wrote *The Elaborate Entrance of Chad Deity*, is a former teaching artist at Play House and Play House and Rajiv Joseph, author of *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, was born and raised in Cleveland and attended Cleveland Heights High School.

Prize Committee

The Pulitzer Prize committee consists of a jury of theater artists and critics

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who make recommendations on which plays to consider for the award. The 2010 jurors included chairman, Charles McNulty, drama critic for the *LA Times*; John M. Clum, professor of Theater and English at Duke University; playwright Nilo Cruz; David Rooney, former *Variety* theater critic; and Hedy Weiss, theater/dance critic of *The Chicago Sun-Times*. This committee recommended three plays to the voting board out of 79 plays considered. The 17 member voting board, however, did not choose one of the three plays recommended. Instead, NEXT TO NORMAL was the winner.

Playwriting Award

It is generally considered that the Pulitzer Prize for Drama is a playwriting award rather than an award for the production. The voting Board reads all plays considered and attends a performance or views a video when possible. But for the 2010 prize, the other three finalists' plays had already closed. When several Pulitzer Board members saw NEXT TO NORMAL the evening before the vote, a slight controversy between the committee and the Voting Board arose.

You Are There

Committee member David Rooney noted, "Any of us who cover theater know that the nature of theater itself is that you are there, you are experiencing it, you have a direct emotional impact. Whatever they're seeing physically represented on a stage in front of them has a greater emotional impact than something they're reading on the page. Seeing it on the stage [is seeing it] in its intended form...If you look at the history, particularly in recent years, I think it's very clear that things that are actually on the boards and playing in New York have a better chance" of winning the prize.

Commended


While the winning play was not one of the three finalists, it had been commended to the board. Rooney noted that he "likes to see people pushing the boundaries of musicals and is thrilled that a musical gets the prize...I think it's great...to see that there is some reward there in experimenting in new forms and risky subject matter on Broadway... push the idea of what a musical is and what kind of audience it can reach."

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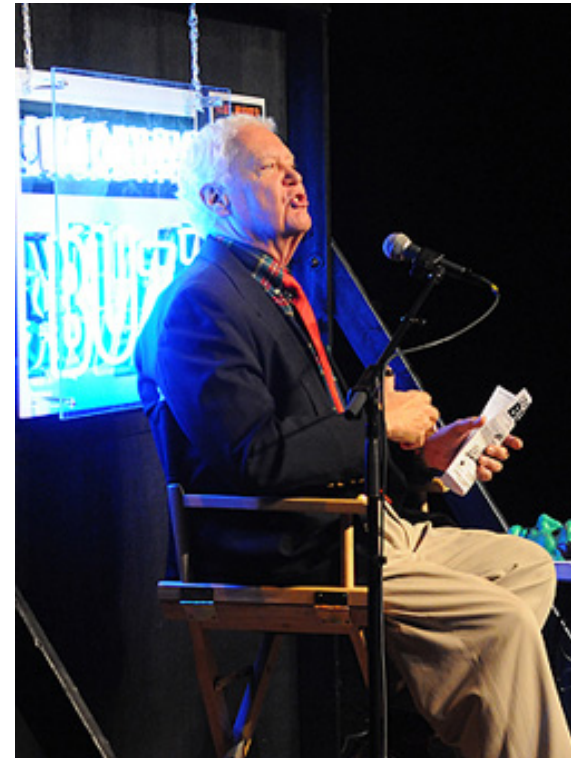
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Can't make it to the Pre-Show Talk? Listen live on opening night (June 7) at 6:30 p.m. on WCLV 104.9 FM or watch live on wclv.com. The video will be available for viewing after opening night at playhousesquare.org/broadwaybuzz.

Catch our Post-Show Chats with the Cast following Thursday evening performances (June 9 and 16).

There is no charge for admission to Broadway Buzz events.

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NEXT TO NORMAL RESONATES FOR A LOCAL MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATION

“I’d like to share with you why we think this show is important and want you to join us in experiencing it. Ultimately, it is a story of hope and growth, the core components of Magnolia Clubhouse. Next to Normal provides a vehicle to further the understanding of mental illness and the lives of people who live with it.



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In this show, as in the Clubhouse, you get to know the person first, not just the symptoms of an illness. Often mental illness is depicted as a very frightening and alien experience. Unfortunately, this can lead people to fear those who experience mental illness, and can lead to shame for those who are dealing with it themselves.

What we see in the Clubhouse model is that acceptance is achieved by coming to know our profound connections with each other. The more we can accept our own fears and experiences of aloneness and despair, the more we are able to deal with and overcome them. Working together with the shared purpose of the Clubhouse develops all of our abilities to accept, connect, heal and grow." Lori D'Angelo, Ph.D., Executive Director, Magnolia Clubhouse

Magnolia Clubhouse is a Club for people who live with mental illness. In partnership with mental health professionals, the members of Magnolia Clubhouse engage in all the work of the day to day operations of a vibrant community. The purpose of the Club is to provide members with opportunities to become a part of the larger community, through jobs and education, and by being friends and neighbors. This model is internationally replicated and has over 55,000 members around the world. The Clubhouse network is a human rights movement for social justice for those whose lives are touched by mental illness.



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Learn more about Magnolia Clubhouse – www.magnoliacubhouse.org

Alice Ripley in the National Tour of Next to Normal.

Photo by Craig Schwartz.



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