

ABSTRACT

Quit Anytime: When You Think You're in Control

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Quit Anytime is a new American Musical written by Mitchell T. Gilly, Emily Arden Seggerman, and Emilia Getzinger. The musical centers around the topic of addiction as it focuses on three individuals who suffer from different forms of it. Each character is in a different stage of life from one another to emphasize the point of 'anyone can suffer from anything at any time.' The first of the three characters is a seventeen-year-old boy, Jack Darrell, who is currently a senior in high school. He and his best friend, Keegan, drink excessively during the show, but Jack takes the situation too far when he steals liquor from Keegan's parents. The second character to be focused on is seventy-two-year-old Eliana Zlatic. She is the representation of what modern day video gaming addicts will likely grow up into if they don't moderate their own gaming. Eliana accidentally pushes her own daughter out of her life because she spends so much time playing video games. The final addict to be featured is twenty-five-year-old Lily Morrison. Lily struggles with a severe porn addiction but refuses to acknowledge it despite it having drastic consequences with her current romantic partner. The entire musical focuses on the relationships between each addict and their friends and family by showing how addiction can impact them.

Quit Anytime: When You Think You're in Control

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A Thesis

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QUIT ANYTIME: WHEN YOU THINK YOU'RE IN CONTROL

Introduction

Growing up, I would say that I have lived a relatively normal childhood: played with my siblings outside in the dirt, had a few close friends, ate an unhealthy amount of sugar, and loved watching kids programs on television. I never once thought that anyone could have a different childhood than this because this was what engraved as 'normal' to me. I would not find out until much later in life that people I once considered as close friends were plagued by addiction, whether it be first hand or second hand. I learned that there was a friend who was in Boy Scouts with me who had a nicotine and alcohol addiction when he was only thirteen. There was another friend in band with me whom I found out later had a severe porn addiction. There have also been family members in my own family that have also struggled with an addiction of some kind. Learning that these people have been silently struggling with addiction for a significant portion of their life drew me to the conclusion that anyone can be addicted to anything at any time.

It was this statement that inspired me, along with two other writers, to write *Quit Anytime: When You Think You're in Control*. This is a concert musical centering around 3 addicts who are at different stages of life and addiction: Jack Darrell, a 17-year-old alcoholic who is on the brink of caving into a life of alcoholism; Lily Morrison, a 24-year-old pornography addict who is in denial that she is struggling with addiction; and

Eliana Zlatic, a 72-year-old video game addict who has been in recovery for a few years after accidentally pushing her only daughter out of her life.

The Process

I first had the idea to dedicate my Master's Thesis to center around addiction back in the Fall of 2021. It was around this time when my father told me about my family's addiction history. I knew that I had very little knowledge in script-writing and lyrics, so if I were going to make this musical come to life, I would have to reach out to other artists to achieve best results. I first reached out to Emily Arden Seggerman, a current senior in Theater Performance, to join this project. Soon after agreeing, Emily Arden asked Emilia Getzinger to also join us in writing this show. Between the three of us, we were able to bring different talents to *Quit Anytime*: Emilia (a passionate writer and actress) served as the scriptwriter for the show; Emily Arden (an actress, composer, and lyricist who has always had a passion for writing musical theater) acted as the lyricist for the project; and myself (a composer, arranger, and actor) serving as the composer. We all started meeting to discuss which addictions we could write about that would have the most impact. After much deliberation, we all settled on three different addictions to focus on: alcoholism, pornography abuse, and video gaming addiction. The reason these three addictions were selected was because these are the three addictions that have affected me the most, alongside being three very common addictions in today's world.

We first started meeting in December of 2021 to brainstorm ideas for the show. We then spent the entire semester of Spring 2022 and the following summer writing the script, then Emily Arden and I spent several sessions writing the songs together from

August of 2022 to March of 2023. When it came to writing music, theater professor Guilherme Almeida suggested that we come up with an efficient system of writing as this part is supposed to be done relatively quickly. The system that we were able to come up with was to establish the message or theme of the song early on, then make a map or flowchart to create the form, write the lyrics, then write the music. Oftentimes, the last two steps were done at the same time. After spending 8 months writing the music, all of the numbers were completed.

The songs that will be focused on for this thesis are five numbers that center the Narrator's personality as well as around the most vulnerable aspects of each addict. For Jack, the alcoholic, the number "Just Another" and its reprise were selected. For Lily, the porn addict, the number "The Point of it All" was selected. For Eliana, the video game addict, the number "What I Would Give" was selected. In each of these songs, the addict has a conversation with the Narrator of the show. The Narrator is depicted as the human embodiment of addiction and has control over everything that happens in the show (akin to the Leading Player from *Pippin*). Throughout the show, when the addict gives in to their addiction, the Narrator is granted the ability to speak with them. In addition, he is also granted power to alter reality and play with time; if something happens that pulls the addict away from their addiction, the Narrator can then reset time to redo the scene in his own preferred way. In the following songs, the Narrator is shown having various levels of control over each addict

'The Show is About to Start': A Juxtaposing Opener

The show begins with a number that is sung by the Narrator, who takes on the persona of a 'dating-show' host. The Narrator acts as a link between the audience and the performers, regularly showing that he has control over what happens on stage. The Narrator then pulls three 'random' people from the audience to show the previously mentioned statement of 'anyone can be addicted to anything at any time.' The Narrator then exposes all of the characters' addictions to the audience and continually makes comedic remarks about it during the show.

This number was inspired in part by the opening number of *Bandstand*, "Just Like it Was Before." In this number, Donny Novitski is just returning from fighting in World War II, but is having serious trouble adapting back into society despite the entire ensemble singing that things are going to be "just like it was before." I decided to run with a similar irony of theme by introducing three characters with serious addictions, but having upbeat music juxtaposing the dark themes to add to the Narrator's untrustworthy personality.

'Just Another': Jack's Reasoning With Danger

The first piece that will be looked at is "Just Another". This is a patter song and soliloquy for Jack Darrell. In this number, Jack starts the song off in a memory in his guidance counselors office trying to figure out college applications, but his grades have been slipping due to his early stages of alcoholism unbeknownst to the counselor. Jack sings about how everything around him is falling apart and the only way to deal with the pressures of life is to "take off the edge" by regularly drinking, as if it were a medication.

Jack soon goes to his alcohol supplier, his best friend's older brother, and asks for an egregious amount of alcohol only to realize that it is extremely expensive. After seeing that he does not have enough money to buy everything he wanted, he ultimately settled to steal the remaining difference from his mother's purse under the justification that it would only happen this once and never again. He then has a conversation with his best friend, Keegan, regarding his addiction where Keegan expresses his concerns to an exasperated Jack. Finally, Jack has a conversation with the Narrator before he passes out from drinking too much.

Later in the show, a reprise of this song happens, but it is instead sung by the Narrator. Jack has been caught stealing liquor from his best friend, Keegan, who initially stole the liquor from his parents. When Keegan confronts Jack about his thievery, they break out into a fight and Keegan ends up leaving Jack. Later, Jack tries to amend his friendship with Keegan (out of fear of losing his alcohol plug rather than actual sympathy), but his phone calls always end up going to voicemail. We later find out that this was because Keegan was involved in a car accident where he was hit by a drunk driver and was left in critical condition. The reprise happens after Jack learns this news and the Narrator tries to make Jack turn to alcohol to help "take off the edge".

The music for this song is written as a "lopsided waltz"; the music is written in a primarily triple meter while occasionally having the flow interrupted by a duple or quadruple measure to give the music an 'off-kilter' sensation (This technique is something I pulled from studying Video Game Music, where composers would create "creepy music" by breaking expectations of predictable musical patterns such as 4 or 8

bar phrasing or traditional harmonic progressions). The melody is written in a fast-paced manner to emphasize the anxiety felt by Jack, with a few moments of slow contemplation to show that there is some level of moral decisions being made. At the end of the song, the Narrator takes over the melodic line showing that he is in full control over Jack. In the reprise, however, the song is sung almost completely by the Narrator, showing that he has full influence over Jack. When Jack joins in at the end, it shows that he has succumbed to the addiction and is letting it consume him further.

'What I Would Give': Eliana's Lament and Trauma Revisited

The next piece to be discussed is "What I Would Give", to be sung by Eliana, the video game addict. Eliana is a representation of today's young adult generation growing up with nearly unlimited access to video gaming into the future. Her character is described as an elderly woman who recently renounced her gaming addiction as it caused a nearly irreparable rift in her relationship with her daughter, Jenny. A couple of years ago, Jenny was giving birth to her stillborn child while her husband was deployed with the military. When she went into labor, she repeatedly tried phoning Eliana to no avail because she was busy participating in an online video game tournament that had been going on for a few months. This was one of the incidents where Eliana chose gaming over her daughter, resulting in Lily forever cutting contact with Eliana. After the stillbirth, Eliana tries desperately to make amends with Lily only to be met with her rejecting Eliana again and again.

In this song, Eliana wakes up late for work and is frantically getting ready to leave while racing through her own thoughts. Her thoughts fly through her head until they

repeatedly land on her two most traumatic memories: her husband's death and her daughter resenting her. She eventually begins expressing her regrets for never being at her daughter's side when she needed her most. This is reflected in the music by having her racing thoughts presented as a brisk pattering sequence through her mind, then her lament being rhythmically slowed down in order to present what her mind continues to linger on.

'The Point of it All': Lily's Eleven o'Clock Realization

The final song to be looked at is the Eleven o'Clock soliloquy of Lily, the porn addict, in "The Point of it All". In this song, Lily is recovering from a very rough breakup with her boyfriend, Danny. Lily, having been addicted to porn for many years, oversteps a boundary with him by mistakenly believing that the only reason he is in the relationship with her is for sexual favors. After making her mistake, she and Danny erupt into a heated argument and decide to end things. She then shares a conversation with the Narrator where he is nearly successful in making her relapse, but she is able to cast him out before she starts to sing.

The song begins with an acapella reprise of the opening melody of a romantic duet she and Danny shared earlier in the show. The music then suddenly shifts to a new setting as Lily asks herself what the point of having a relationship is if everything she wanted was a few taps on her phone away. She realizes that the importance of having a relationship in the real world is that one is able to gain more fulfilling and worthwhile experiences rather than obsessing over a phone screen watching fake intimacy, and we

see her unravel that conclusion throughout the song as it becomes lighter and more active during its runtime.

Compositionally, I use a traditional “soliloquy” format of writing. The melody features minimal repetition of ideas except on the phrase “the point of it all”. This represents how the mind formulates thoughts on a linear plane only repeating key phrases if anything at all. The number ends with variations on the singular “point of it all” motif as she finally decides to overcome her addiction and begin fixing her life.