

# Discovering the Artist: Interview with Elise Hudson of ‘Looking for Lightning’

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I had the delicious pleasure of doing a [review](#) of “Looking for Lightning” at the beginning of the United Solo Festival. It starred the talents of ingénue Elise Hudson, who both wrote and performed in this exquisite one-woman, reincarnation-themed pearl. Her piece was given an additional performance due to its popularity, and I caught up with her as she was in the throes of rehearsals for both “Looking for Lightning” at Theatre Row and “Dracula” at the Hunger and Thirst Theatre Collective in October.

## **What was the main impetus for choosing to create and perform “Looking for Lightning”?**

This show began as an assignment—my grad school “recital,” or exit project. My classmates and I were challenged to do *something* on stage for 30 minutes...a cabaret, a one-person Shakespeare play, an account of the life of a loved one, an exploration of a beloved historical figure through multiple accounts, a famous children’s book come to life...you name it, my class did it. I remember being so inspired daily watching my classmates’ recitals develop. I knew I wanted to start from scratch and write my own piece, and I journaled and journaled and worried that maybe I didn’t have anything to say. One day, the idea fell into my lap like an unexpected gift. Past lives. Past selves. What if we could meet them? Once the idea hit, I was lit up and I barely slept. My best ideas come at night. I think I wrote the 12-page version of my character Ilsa around 3 in the morning after waking up from a dream.

## **Who are your primary female mentors/role models/inspirations, and why?**

I’m late to the Brené Brown party, but I’m so glad I finally arrived. She is full of wisdom. My teacher and mentor from grad school, Shura Baryshnikov, who helped me develop this piece, is a constant inspiration. She’s an electrifying dancer and actor with a way of piercing your heart with just one glance. I also have found new role models in Natalie Roy and Kristin Hanggi, who are both theatre professionals and spiritual teachers full of an insane amount of joy, knowledge, love, and quite possibly the secrets of the universe. They teach the CREATE series at Actor’s Green Room, which has become a staple for my personal and professional growth.

## **What are the biggest challenges in doing a one-woman show?**

The hardest part for me was learning that I cannot wear my “producer hat” and “actor hat” at the same time. Producing is no joke! This is my first time with that. Thankfully, I have a fabulous director, Sophie Netanel (also an actor and Brown/Trinity Rep MFA grad), who reminds me to leave my producer hat out of rehearsal so that we could keep our creative brains and hearts on full power.

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## **What is your most favorite moment of your own show, and why?**

Probably the beginning of the Mary Jane segment. She has a ridiculous and unnatural amount of energy, and it always surprises me. It would be exhausting (but very entertaining) to live in her skin and world full time.

Also, another favorite moment is the end. My final realization is always different. My audience can get pretty vulnerable with me, and I learn from them. It’s magical to make eye contact and share that space with them for the final chapter.

**If you could imagine your piece being performed anywhere in NYC, where would it be?**

If I could get crazy and have any space? I would love to do it in a Broadway house...but backwards. My audience would sit on the stage with me, but upstage facing the house. I would be downstage, facing them. And the empty Broadway house would be the backdrop. I have lots of reasons for this...but I don't want to give anything away in case I do get to do that at some point.

**Do you have plans for taking your work further?**

I hope to share "Looking for Lightning" many more times. I'm dying to do the show in my hometown, Nashville. I think I would like to write a young adult novel for my character Ilsa's story. And I know Mary Jane deserves her own full-length play. I already have the structure planned out for that. I'll write it at some point. I'm sure the first scene will wake me up one of these nights.

**Would you say that your work is feminist in its expression? If yes, how so?**

I think it is simply about the universal desire for Love. And the realization that this desire for Love is timeless...it has likely been felt by all humans throughout all of time. So when we feel our most alone, we are really quite the opposite. We are united in a quest, in a longing to find a person or community to call home.

**What do you want the audience to leave with after seeing your work?**

I hope that, whether they have found Love, have lost it, or are still searching, that they leave with a feeling of hope, and with excitement for the good things the universe has waiting for them. And also that they LAUGH. Mary Jane certainly hopes they will.

**Why are you drawn to the medium of theatre?**

Theatre is like going on a field trip into someone else's heart. There's nothing quite like watching stories unfold right in front of you—knowing that every night is different, that every actor is bringing their unique experience and understanding to the role, and that whether the words were written centuries ago by Shakespeare or a year ago by the performer now onstage, you are witnessing someone's truth that is longing to be seen, to be held gently. It's an honor to be given that sort of gift, I believe. And it is the best feeling to give it.

The "Looking for Lightning" encore show will take place on October 25, 2016 at 9PM at Theatre Row in New York City as a part of United Solo 2016. For more information, click [here](#). For more information on the festival, click [here](#).