

THIS. IS. US.

By

PAIGE ANNE MILLS

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A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelor's Degree  
With Honors in

Musical Theatre

THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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Approved By:

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Danny Gurwin  
Head of BFA Musical Theatre  
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Abstract

“This. Is. Us.” is the accumulation of the emotions and growth that two young women have experienced during their four years of college. Courtney Blanc and I have been crafting our honors thesis since our freshmen year, and we are extremely proud of our final project. We performed our honors thesis cabaret on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at 7:00pm in the Marshall Plaza, to an intimate audience of our friends, family, and professors. With the help of our advisor and Musical Theatre professor, Danny Gurwin, we are telling the story of who we were when we started college and who we are now, through a series of songs that explain where we were on our journeys, every step of the way. Mixed into the songs, we tell stories and share fun anecdotes about our mental states and how our friendship ebbed and flowed over the years. Courtney and I are moving to NYC in the Fall and a big part of this thesis is about looking to the future and where our careers will take us.

Due to COVID-19, we had to limit the number of audience members we could have in-person, so we livestreamed the event through Arizona Arts. We received nothing but positive feedback about the show, and people loved how we were true to who we are as friends, and performers, throughout the entirety of the performance.

Link to Recorded Performance: <https://vimeo.com/548224670>

Password: BeMadAndExplore!

**THIS. IS. US.**

**FULL SCRIPT**

**Opening Number (Duet):  
“Freedom” from *The Mad Ones***

Both: Hi! Welcome to our honors thesis cabaret, “This. Is. Us.” We felt that it was only fitting to take you through our journey here at the University of Arizona, because we have grown so much, not only as artists, but as people. We got this idea during our freshmen year of college when we saw our bigs, Marissa Munter and Kailyn Toussaint do their honors thesis, and we knew that this is what we wanted to share with the world our senior year.

Paige: Now, I don't know about Court, but I came to college as ready as ever. I felt so prepared to start my journey on my own as a “real adult”, but little did I know how much hard work these next few years would be...

*Cue:* Tucson, here I am!

**“Here I Am” from *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels***

Paige: Quick story time. So, I was so prepared for freshman year, that after the first month, I scheduled a meeting with Hank, where I told him that I was BORED. Yes, I know, BORED. Hank assured me that I would soon come back to him begging for my free time back and boy, was he right.

Courtney: So... We were not feeling the same about freshman year. I came back to school from Thanksgiving break, EARLY, because I was so stressed about Encore.

Paige: You're joking.

Courtney: Nope. I was really that stressed. I grew up in a small town in Northern California - in the woods, hunting with my dad at like 3, and I knew most everyone. I thought growing up dancing and singing in the high school show choir was going to be plenty of training for a BFA MT program. Ha, I arrived in Tucson, AZ and to say I was "under prepared" is a little bit of an understatement. I had never had an acting class, like EVER. Monte, the sweetest man to ever live, pulled me aside and said, “we have work to do on the way you sing.” Not to mention, I now was living in a co-ed dorm with people and a roommate that were far more experienced in life than I was. I was so overwhelmed that I would tell myself “I'm just going to do this for 1 semester.”

*Cue:* The comfort and familiarity of home was no more....

**“I Ain't in Checotah” by *Carrie Underwood***

Courtney: Well, I didn't drop out, and made it through freshman year successfully. So ...sophomore year. Paige & I moved into a beautiful apartment across from campus, but the vibe was just not what I thought it would be, we were just really living our own lives separately. I just really felt lost & for some reason the challenges of life at this time were real. At this point, I either let those things consume me or I stepped out and made things happen.

*Cue:* All I can say, I just had to thank God for really stepping in and answering some tough prayers.

**Broken Prayers by Riley Clemmons**

Paige: Are we gonna have a problem?

Courtney: You got a bone to pick?

Paige: You've come so far, why now are you pulling on my-

Courtney: Okay, okay we don't want to get into all of that.

Paige: Yeah, you're right.

Courtney: Sophomore year was a tough one man.

Paige: Yep. Sophomore year was challenging because I wasn't completely fulfilled with what I was doing. I knew I still wanted to be doing theatre, but it wasn't turning out the way I imagined in my head. So, at this point, I turned to the things outside of theatre that made me happiest. I did tons of yoga, I went to parties, I spent time with my boyfriend and my non-theatre friends, and I just tried to surround myself with love.

*Cue:* Here's to Arizona.

**“Always Remember Us This Way” by Lady Gaga from *A Star is Born* (2018)**

Courtney: Cool, cool, cool, cool, we are still friends.

Paige: Dude, we made it.

Courtney: Yes.

Paige: Should I tell the story? I promised I wouldn't tell the story.

Courtney: Nah, I think you should tell the story.

Paige: So, the first party of junior year, we became friends again. Through lots of tears, truthfully, a little bit of alcohol, and the backyard of the water house.

Courtney: Never forget!

Paige: We are friends! We finally just talked openly about what we were feeling.

Courtney: Imagine that.

Paige: And we realized that it was just a big misunderstanding.

Courtney: Now, on to junior year.

Paige: Okay, I'm just gonna be totally honest with you guys. Junior year was my YEAR. I was in my moment. I was the lead in *Pippin*, which, if you ask Courtney, that was the last thing ANY of us expected. And I was also #14 in *The Wolves*, which has since become my most favorite piece of theatre I've ever done. When I found out that I got Leading Player, I was terrified. Because I knew in that moment that I had to prove myself. And I think I did, but it was not easy. But the best part about junior year is that I can tell you exactly what changed for me. I didn't care anymore. I just let myself throw everything at the wall and hope for the best. Not caring about what other people think of me is what made me the performer I am today.

*Cue:* So, this next song is going to tell you exactly what I was feeling on my first day of rehearsals junior year.

**“Maybe It's Me” from *A Quiet Revolution***

Courtney: Well, here we are, beginning of Junior year and yeah, Paige and I were still roommates. We made it through and learned to journey together-- but our moments had come,

Paige, the lead in Pippin and me, the lead in Light in the Piazza! Wow. My first professional audition in NYC, I was finally growing as an artist, LIFE IS GOOD!

*Cue:* LIFE IS GOOD!

**“Watch Me Soar” by Scott Alan**

(Middle of Song Patter) Courtney: I need to talk about “The Light in the Piazza” for one more second. We all have had those moments in life that really just impact you. This role, this show, and the journey I had with it showed me that I was worthy of being a part of this industry. This show made me fall in love with theatre and the impact it has all over again. I am eternally grateful for the time I spent with this show.

*Cue:* I am eternally grateful for the time I spent with this show.

**(Cont.) “Watch Me Soar” by Scott Alan**

**COVID-19 Song (Duet):  
“Ordinary Senior Year” from *The Mad Ones***

Courtney: So yeah. The world literally stopped. It was new. We couldn't perform, we couldn't audition, we couldn't go onto campus, we couldn't be with our friends (when we needed them the most). It was everything and nothing all at the same time - just raw emotion. But we wouldn't be the people and artist we are now without the last year.

Paige: This year has taught us not to take anything for granted; our art, friends, family, and our health. Even though there have been so many bad things about COVID-19, one good thing that has come out of it is the growth in our friendship. We are so much closer, and I can't imagine taking on this new chapter with anyone else.

*Cue:* In,

**“Not for The Life of Me/NYC/Astonishing” by Sutton Foster**

(Middle of Song Patter) Paige: Yes, I know this is a little mega-criinge, but it feels right that I'm moving to New York in a few months, and these are my last songs in the show.

*Cue:* So,

**(Cont.) “Not for The Life of Me/NYC/Astonishing” by Sutton Foster**

Courtney: Like we said COVID brought some really dark days, AND if it hadn't been for this girl RIGHT HERE, I don't want to think about where I would be. Obviously, living with each other EVERY DAY and not being able to leave our apartment has given us a whole new perspective on our friendship -- we encourage each other, we support each other and quite honestly, have continued to GRIND.

*Cue:* I feel like I'm in a Free Fall moving across the country and giving this a shot, but hey here we go.

**“New York, Do You Care?” from *Island Song* by Carner & Gregor**

Paige: As I look toward this next chapter in my life, I have been reflecting on the person I was when I started college and who I am now. I have grown so much as a person and as a performer and I am so excited to see where the future will take me. And I am especially excited to be doing it with my best friend by my side.

Court: I’m always the sappy one, so I know you mean it when you’re the one saying it.

Cue: Here’s what I’ll say about this next song, you know I love a full circle moment.

**Closing Number/Finale (Duet):  
“Spark of Creation/Our Time”**

Cue: Everything happens for a reason, and this friendship was definitely meant to be.

**Encore (Duet):  
“Some Things Are Meant to Be” from *Little Women***

Thank You’s: First and foremost, we would like to thank Danny Gurwin for being the best advisor for our thesis and being an amazing mentor to us. You really made tonight happen and we are so thankful for you. Thank you to our amazing crew and to Brice, who is the most patient and has been KILLING it on piano tonight! We would like to thank Chad Herzog, Teri McGil and everyone at Arizona Arts for their support. A huge thanks to Kris Siuda at the Marshall Foundation for the opportunity to use this terrific new space, and a big shout-out to Fine Arts Technology — Dal, Dane, and Cy for all their work in streaming tonight’s event. Thank you to our friends and family for being there through it all and supporting us every step of the way. Thank you to everyone who is watching at home! And last but not least, thank you to the class of 2021. Without you, we wouldn’t be who we are today. We love you all so much. Here’s to the next chapter!

Group Members

Paige Anne Mills: organizing materials, writing the script, cutting music, creating rehearsal

schedule, correspondence with technical crew

Courtney Blanc: organizing materials, writing the script, cutting music, creating rehearsal

schedule, audience outreach

Advertising Materials

11 May 2021 | 7pm | Marshall Plaza

Some things are just meant to be.  
Join Courtney Blanc and Paige  
Anne Mills for the presentation of  
their honors thesis. Stream:  
<http://watch.tftv.arizona.edu/>



### Artist's Statement

This was the first time I had the opportunity to create my own show, and it was such a fulfilling experience seeing everything I pictured in my head become a reality. This show took the hard work of so many people to come to fruition and I am truly so proud of the final product that Courtney and I created. Through late nights of cutting music, singing through duets, and working out the kinks in our patter, the final show was so magical and I'm so glad that we got to share it with an audience of our closest family and friends.

Though COVID-19 has created a world where so much about art will have to be altered moving forward, one positive thing that came out of COVID-19 is the fact that so many more people were able to watch our performance virtually. My grandparents, family across the country, and even old schoolteachers from California were able to tune in through the livestreaming link and watch from the comfort of their homes. Because of COVID-19, I was able to share this intimate piece of myself to so many more people. This aspect of our thesis in particular was so successful because one of the beautiful things about creating art is the thrill you get from being able to share it with the world.

One of the biggest challenges we faced throughout this process was creating music and translating our vision to a live pianist. Our pianist, Brice Kimball, is so talented and collaborating with another artist without the input of a professor was a new experience for me. Brice is a student in the Fred Fox School of Music, and he helped craft our show into the dynamic piece of art that I envisioned. Every time I threw a new weird arrangement or mash-up of songs at him, he was patient while we worked out the kinks. This was one of the biggest challenges for me because I know how to speak to other actors but talking with a musician in terms that he understands was something that I had never had to do before.



Another challenge we faced while crafting our honors thesis was how to make our separate stories cohesive. Even though our show was titled, “This. Is. Us.”, much of the show was about our separate journeys through college, and how they intertwine here and there. Towards the end of the rehearsal process, we had the idea to incorporate some stories about us at each chapter of college, mixed in with our solo pieces. This proved to be very successful and our advisor, Danny Gurwin, said that it made the audience feel like they were taking the journey with us, not as outsiders looking in.

Due to COVID-19, I haven’t had the chance to perform live for an audience since February 2020. As a performer, this time has been tough because we thrive on getting share music and art with the world, so I am so thankful that we were able to perform live for our honors thesis. I couldn’t have asked for a better final performance of my college career and I wouldn’t want to take my final bow as a University of Arizona student with anyone else by my side. Courtney and I work extremely well together and this definitely isn’t our last show as a duo. Not only have I grown so much as a human and as an artist over these past four years, but these past few months have deepened my love for the craft and I can’t wait to see what the future holds for me.