

*Original article written by Hiroe Bailey Mizoguchi
Translated by Manatsu Tanaka*

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Trending in NYC! My First Immersive Theater Show Experience featuring Japanese Performer Manatsu Tanaka

Immersive Theater is a new style of theater that first came out in the UK in the early 2000s, and recently some immersive shows has been produced in Japan. However, it is still a very new concept for many audience members.

Unlike the traditional proscenium stage, the whole building IS the stage; multiple rooms, no designated audience seats but allowing audience members to walk around and explore as they like. As an audience member myself, it was a little exciting to be guided to sit on one of the huge couches, because it really felt like as if I went up on stage and sat on this “stage set” couch on stage, something that we could never do in traditional theater experiences.

Immersive theater seems like the hot topic, especially since the pandemic has been calming down and now that people are going out for theater experiences again.

Today, I was invited by Manatsu Tanaka, (NY1Page.com Artist Spotlight Interview Article) who is performing in “The Art of Killin’ It An Immersive BIPOC Murder Mystery Show. Located in Brooklyn, even the walk from the station to the theater was full of fun, as the

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area is surrounded with galleries and I saw some amazing graphic arts on building walls. The vibe was ART.

With full of excitement, I entered the building and then was greeted with a friendly “Are you here for The Art of Killin It?”. I knew this afterwards but it seems like there are other immersive shows also performed in the same building.

I saw this room of this other production through an entrance and was quite surprised with how real the bar looked like. Perhaps it was a real functioning bar, and I was really intrigued to go in and order a drink before the show.



©NY1page.com LLC, It is a murder scene, as you can see there are some creepy things sneaking underneath the stage curtain...

Before the show started, we were directed to put our phones into Yondr, a locked pouch, and though we are restricted access to our phones for preventing filming during the show, but were allowed to have it with us during the experience. I also wondered if it could also be to protect the actors from being taken photos without consent. We got the pre-show introduction from the gatekeeper and now we are fully ready to be 'immersed' into this world!

In this dimmed room, there was a small stage, and a very comfortable looking huge sofa in front of it. I guess the 'show has started' already! I was pulled into the experience as Manatsu playing "Xander" welcomed us with a very high energetic voice.

After they welcomed us in English, they said, "I am an influencer from Japan! You can talk to me in Japanese too!" which gave me a mini-relief because as a Japanese audience member, I was a little worried if I could understand the show completely.

In the post-show interview, Manatsu said that "Although there is a script, we are encouraged to make the characters and lines more closer to our backgrounds. If we know more than one language, we are super super encouraged to incorporate that into our improvisation and lines! Since I am bilingual in Japanese and English, especially with this 'Xander' track, I do a mix of the two languages when I am performing."

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©NY1page.com LLC, ...The vibe of this room..... SUS.

There are immersive productions where they ask audience members to refrain from talking during the experience, but this show is the quite opposite. ‘The Art of Killin It’ is super interactive!!

Not only Manatsu but also other actors were super friendly and talked to me, asking my name and all that fun stuff and I found myself really getting immersed into this party. I was invited to DaBody’s album release party!! There is also a bar in the space and we can get drinks like wine and cocktails, and later I figured, but the bartender was also an actor.

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Surrounded and immersed by immersive actors, I was full with excitement. As I was talking and greeting with the actors, I met a very grumpy actor, completely opposite from the other characters' vibe. Even when the other actors introduced them to the guests, this character wouldn't even say hi or introduce themselves. I mean, in my head I know they are 'acting' but their acting was so good, I almost thought they hated greeting people for real.

As the show goes on, the interactivensess is everywhere; I got asked a question from a stand up comedian who did a set on stage, I danced with other audience members, I got to take a selfie with one of the characters, and it was so much fun! We walked around the Manor to look for clues that could possibly lead to the killer.



©NY1page.com LLC, I really love this picture!

As someone who enjoys drinking, there is nothing more better than being able to sip and relax on a sofa as if I am in my living room AND being a part of this experience.

The actors are all very talented, simply I was impressed with them memorizing all those long lines and monologues and improvising at the same time, and it was a sensation to me to be experiencing such a high energy acting scene right next to it.

I had a similar experience when I went to see “Our Voices, Our Time” produced by Fumiko Tanaka, as I have interviewed her a while ago. ([NY1Page.com Article](#)) In this show, the distance between the stage and the audience members were so close and as it was a small theater, it was also an intimate experience. But the content of the show wasn’t much interactive like ‘The Art of Killin’ It’, which was still interesting to be able to experience another different level of intimacy in shows.

In this show, ‘The Art of Killin’ It’, it is full with humour, and comedy (Even it takes place at a murder scene!) so audience members are invited to laugh out loud and actually go up and talk to the actors. The actors are also interactive with us, they directly talk with us looking into our eyes, and even if you are not really for interactive shows, you can choose your level of interactiveness you want, but I am sure that you will find yourself nodding and looking for clues and thinking of your own theory who the killer might be! In fact, that was my experience.



©NY1page.com LLC,the props on the bookshelves are also free for the audience members to take a look at it!

I also got some information that they have multiple endings. I am pretty sure that there is not a single show that is the exact same, and that the audience members are guaranteed to have a different experience from the show every time they go.

Producer and Rehearsal Director (and many other roles!), Jordon Waters said that he is always checking and updating the show; from the script to blockings to ideas and concepts. He also mentioned that he makes sure that someone from the creative team is always observing the show to protect the actors from any emergencies during the show. There is a lot to be aware of in immersive shows since the distance between the audience members and the actors are so

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intimate and close, it is crucial to always make sure safety comes first for both sides.

Below are what Manatsu Tanaka and Jordon Waters wanted to share with us!

Manatsu Tanaka



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What I really enjoy about immersive shows is that I get to really feel the energy exchange between the audience members and the actors.

There are nights where we have 30 people in the room, and there will be a night where we only have one person. But no matter how many

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audience members we have in the room, I really enjoy thinking fast on my feet, adjusting energy levels and volume depending where the audiences are at in terms of how willing they are to be interactive, how eager they are to move around the Manor, who wants to be immersed and who wants to observe the show and such. I find such depth in the skills as an immersive theater performer and I want to keep on working on thinking fast, flexible thinking and improvisation skills.

As someone who has been working as a Dancer first, this is actually my first time having to memorize this amount of lines and monologues in the shortest amount of rehearsal time I ever had. I remember the first time I was in a play in college where I had a few lines and being extremely nervous and self conscious about it, but by performing with *The Art of Killin'* It has really boosted my confidence as an Actor, and now I know that I CAN act, I am a fast learner and it has been a huge level up moment for myself as a performer, and I am very grateful for this family being super supportive and caring and creating a safe space. Additionally, I also got the privilege to experience what a Swing is like in a show. It is my first experience having to learn more than one roles in a show and given the responsibility to be prepared to go on anytime in case of an emergency. I will say it out loud because I believe in manifestation; My ambition and dream is to be a Swing on Broadway, and I only see this experience with *The Art of Killin'* It as a pre-step learning opportunity leading to my next stage and to my dreams so I am highly motivated to work as a part of this show with the utmost professionalism and dedication I can with every single rehearsal and show! I am forever grateful. So much gratitude to *The Art of Killin'* It fam!

(Manatsu covers the roles below; Cheryl, Xander, Bartender and debuting soon as Celebrity X)

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JORDON WATERS

I want the audience to feel like they physically are a part of the story. Not just watching it but they get fully immersed with the characters, story and set!

I want you all to have a genuine good time, lots of laughs and a reason to come back and do it again. Hence why we have heavy improv, fun clues and multiple endings.

I chose to do a Bipoc Immersive show because there is nothing like this in the Immersive world. All Immersive Productions dont feature many BIPOC artists. It was my goal to change the norm and become something no one else has ever seen before. As well as choosing the Immersive theater route gives the audience a sense of walking around and making their own choices and decisions. If you have ever wanted to stand up and talk go the actors half way through a show this is the show for you!

We stand for love, health and fun. We want audiences to have a great time and encourage them to come back. TheyGotTime Productions is about reinventing how we view performance in comedy and featuring people of color!

Jordon Waters, Producer/Writer/Rehearsal Director/Creator/Actor)

TheyGotTime Productions

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©NY1page.com LLC, *(From the Left) Jordon Waters, Manatsu Tanaka, Hiroe Bailey (Writer), Miyoko Hirakawa (Writer's Friend)*

[The Art of Killin' It Website](#)

[Manatsu Tanaka Website](#)