

STUDY GUIDE

Chasing Mem'ries

A different
kind of musical.



GEFFEN
PLAYHOUSE

Chasing Mem'ries

A different
kind of musical.

WORLD PREMIERE IN THE
GIL CATES THEATER AT THE GEFFEN PLAYHOUSE
NOVEMBER 7 - DECEMBER 17, 2017

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Amy Levinson, Brian Dunning, Rachel Weigardt-Egel,
Amy Farkas, Scott Kriloff, Ellen Catania, Jessica Brusilow Rollins,
Carolyn Marie Wright and Brandon Drea.

STUDY GUIDE WRITTEN AND COMPILED BY

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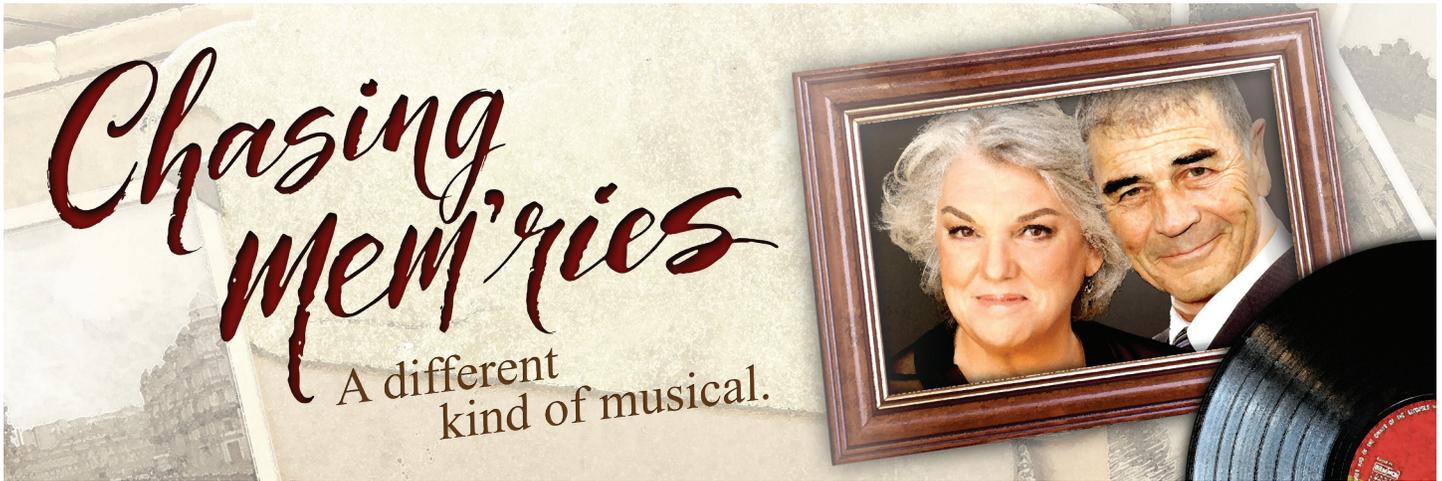
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SECTION 1

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION



WRITTEN & DIRECTED BY

Josh Ravetch

LYRICS BY

Alan & Marilyn Bergman

SCENIC DESIGNER

Tony Fanning

COSTUME DESIGNER

Kate Bergh

LIGHTING DESIGNER

Daniel Ionazzi

SOUND DESIGNER

Jonathan A. Burke

MUSIC DIRECTOR/ORCHESTRATOR

Thomas Griep

DRAMATURG

Amy Levinson

PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER

Jill Gold

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER

Cate Cundiff



Tyne Daly as Victoria



Robert Forster as Franklin



Scott Kradolfer as Mason

SYNOPSIS

Moments before the memorial service for her beloved husband Franklin is set to begin, Victoria is in the attic of the house in which they lived during their long and happy marriage. As she sifts through objects that inspire memories of the life they shared, her son Mason comes to ask when she will join the family and friends who have assembled in the backyard below. Feeling vulnerable, and not having a high opinion of the guests, she refuses to participate directly. Instead, she decides to observe the service from the attic window. After Mason leaves to lead the ceremony, she summons up Franklin to help her navigate the pain of losing him and facing life alone.

TIME/SETTING The Present. Autumn in Connecticut.

RUNNING TIME Approximately 90 minutes. There will be no intermission.

PERFORMANCE NOTES There is coarse language.

ARTISTIC BIOGRAPHIES



JOSH RAVETCH (Playwright/Director)

Josh Ravetch is returning to the Geffen Playhouse where he co-created and directed Carrie Fisher's one-woman show *Wishful Drinking*, which went on to enjoy a successful Broadway run. Ravetch also wrote and directed *The Astronomer* with Shirley Jones (Pasadena Playhouse); *One November Yankee* with Loretta Swit and Harry Hamlin; *Onward: The Diana Nyad Story* chronicling Nyad's Cuba-to-Florida swim; *Beacon* with Robert Forster and Brooke Shields; *Go Figure!*, starring Olympic champion Randy Gardner with Tai Babilonia and Dorothy Hamill and a workshop production of *Writer's Cramp* with Holland Taylor and Douglas Sills (Geffen Playhouse). His other plays include *Periscope Up* directed by Jonathan Frakes; *Girders* (Coast Playhouse); *The Lightbulb* (NoHo Arts Center) and *One From the Hart*, Stefanie Powers' one-woman show (Seegerstrom Center for the Arts). Ravetch directed productions of *The Seagull*, *The Big Knife*, *A Prayer for my Daughter* and *Deathtrap*. His television credits include *Joan of Arcadia*, *Titan* for TNT, *Horseshoe Bay* for Warner Bros. and *Yesterday* for Laura Ziskin Productions. Ravetch, a graduate of the Stella Adler Conservatory in Manhattan, took over Ms. Adler's signature script-interpretation classes which he taught before assuming the post as artistic director.

ALAN & MARILYN BERGMAN (Lyricists)

Legendary lyricists Alan and Marilyn Bergman have won three Academy Awards, four Emmy Awards and two Grammy Awards. Their songs include "The Way We Were," "The Windmills of Your Mind," "Papa, Can You Hear Me?," "What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?," "Nice 'n' Easy," "That Face," "It Might Be You," "The Summer Knows," "Where Do You Start?" and "How Do You Keep the Music Playing?" Their television work includes the musical *Queen of the Stardust Ballroom*, which was later adapted for the Broadway stage, and the theme songs for *Maude*, *Good Times*, *Alice*, *Brooklyn Bridge* and *In the Heat of the Night*. The Bergmans are the recipients of numerous academic honors and lifetime achievement awards, including induction into the Songwriters Hall of Fame and its Johnny Mercer Award, the Clooney Foundation Singers Salute to the Songwriter Award, the Songwriters Guild Aggie Award, the National Academy of Songwriters Lifetime Achievement Award and the first Johnny Mercer Award by the Johnny Mercer Foundation. Marilyn served 15 years as President and Chairman of the Board of the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP). Alan serves on the boards of the Johnny Mercer Foundation and the Jazz Bakery and on the Executive Committee of the Music Branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

SECTION 2

THEMES & TOPICS

LONG-LASTING MARRIAGES—THE JOYS & PAIN

POSITIVE EMOTIONS HEAL

Research conducted by psychologist Dale Lund of California State University found that among those widowed, “being able to draw on happy memories of the deceased helps you heal—those who are able to smile when describing their relationship to their husband or wife six months after the loss were happier and healthier 14 months out than those who could only speak of the deceased with sadness, fear and anger.” (AARP)

PHOTO CREDIT

Pixabay/PD



Couples that manage to shift from the consuming intensity that often characterizes the beginning of a romantic relationship into a more enduring and deep regard for each other, often end up with a rich connection that enhances each person’s sense of identity and location. It is no surprise then that the death of a partner can devastate the one who survives, since they not only lose a spouse, but also life as they have known it.

Creating a fulfilling, long-term marriage is often the result of each partner embracing effective communication and collaboration and a healthy dose of acceptance. Side-by-side for most of their adult lives, partners make decisions large and small, divide up household responsibilities, have fun with family members and friends, and take time to reflect on where they have been and want to go. Spouses often play multiple roles—lover, best friend, advisor, supporter and companion—in daily activities as well as major life events, such as raising children, building economic security and handling challenges and setbacks. Such partners also learn to work through differences, accept each other’s flaws and focus on what they appreciate about the other. Sharing activities and receiving feedback and encouragement can help each feel oriented, both within themselves and in relation to the world.

Once a loved one passes away, their physical absence leaves a large hole in the surviving partner’s psyche and life. The resulting grief usually encompasses a range of reactions and feelings. Sometimes there is shock, if the death was

HALLUCINATIONS OF WIDOWHOOD

From the U.S National Institutes of Health National Library: "227 widows and 66 widowers were interviewed to determine the extent to which they had hallucinatory experiences of their dead spouse... Almost half the people interviewed had hallucinations or illusions of the dead spouse... The hallucinations often lasted many years but were most common during the first 10 years of widowhood. Social isolation did not affect the incidence of hallucination, nor was it related to the incidence of known depressive illness."

COMPLICATED GRIEF (noun)

For some people, feelings of loss are debilitating and don't improve even after time passes. This is known as complicated grief, sometimes called persistent complex bereavement disorder. In complicated grief, painful emotions are so long lasting and severe that you have trouble recovering from the loss and resuming your own life. (mayoclinic.org)

SOURCES

tinyurl.com/MaritalHealthAPA

Parkes, Colin Murray.

"Bereavement in Adult Life." *BMJ : British Medical Journal* 316.7134 (1998): 856-859. Print.

tinyurl.com/GriefAARP

sudden and unexpected. Once that wears off, they encounter the sorrow of missing their companion's presence and of once-shared activities being altered forever. Anxiety and disorientation can descend because their sense of who they are and how to make their way in the world has been badly shaken. If quite elderly, there may seem to be no reason to go on living.

Though she tries to mask her pain with her hilarious and caustic wit in front of her son, and distract them both by reminiscing about the objects in the attic, Victoria is clearly reeling from the loss of Franklin. When Mason urges that she need not "put on a brave face," she retorts:

VICTORIA You think this is *me* keeping up a brave face?

MASON Well it just became a slightly confrontational face, but yes, I'm just saying, you don't have to pretend --

VICTORIA This face doesn't pretend and it doesn't have the muscle structure to express anything close to, "brave." And you know why that is?

MASON Uhhhh ----- *botox*?

VICTORIA (*Matter of fact*) Huh, that's funny. No. This face had 'happy' worked into its structure for fifty-seven years. This was a happy face and forgot how to be anything close to brave. (*Yelling into the attic*) You hear me Franklin?? You made me happy for over FIFTY GOD DAMN YEARS!!!!

According to Ruth Davis Konigsberg in her article "5 Surprising Truths About Grief" (AARP, 2011), Victoria ricocheting from detachment to anger in a split second is characteristic of grief. For years, grieving has been described as occurring in five sequential stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The research she cites on recent widows claims, "...vast fluctuations occurred from one day to the next. A widow might feel anxious and blue one day, only to feel lighthearted and cheerful the next. In other words, we don't grieve in stages at all, but oscillate rapidly. Over time, those swings diminish in both frequency and intensity until we reach a level of emotional adjustment."

In addition to experiencing mood changes as she wrestles with not wanting to go through with Franklin's memorial service, her desire to be alone is normal, since solitude can help mourners process their deepest feelings and reset their expectations, which can lead to acceptance. That Victoria speaks aloud to Franklin is also common for long-term spouses. It helps her feel supported and evokes the love they shared, which warms her.

As time goes on and the sharper edges of grief recede, those widowed realize that their partner and everything they experienced together still exists—inside of them. In this way the loved one "lives on" and memories of all they accomplished and cherished as a couple become a source of comfort. While obsessively chasing memories can lock us painfully into the past, celebrating them can give us the courage and will to go on.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF MUSICAL

MUSICAL (noun)

a film or theatrical production typically of a sentimental or humorous nature that consists of musical numbers and dialogue based on a unifying plot (merriam.webster.com)

FOURTH WALL (noun)

Sometimes when you watch a play, the characters seem to be interacting with one another without knowing that you, the audience, are watching. As a theatregoer, you get to spy on a scene as if there were a semi-transparent barrier between you and the performers. You can see them, but they can't see you. That's the idea of the "fourth wall." It's a convention, a shared metaphor that the audience and performers allow themselves to believe in. (TDF Theater Dictionary)

SOURCES

www.musicals101.com/musical.htm

"A Lifetime of Making *Mem'ries*" by Amy Levinson, Geffen Playhouse Blog blog.geffenplayhouse.org

PHOTO CREDIT

Pixabay/PD



Chasing Mem'ries is the result of a collaboration between playwright and director Josh Ravetch and award-winning lyricists Alan and Marilyn Bergman, who have written songs for film, television and theater, with composers such as Michel Legrand ("The Windmills of My Mind"), Marvin Hamlisch ("The Way We Were") and Dave Grusin ("It Might be You").

Ravetch and the Bergmans have deemed their show "a different kind of musical," in which songs serve as extensions of dialogue in what is essentially a "straight" (without music) play. In most musicals, stories are told in broad strokes and the actors portraying the main and supporting characters sing and bring choreography to life with a live orchestra. Sometimes, complicated sets fly in, unfold and fly out in thrilling ways, while performers wear an array of vivid costumes that convey exactly who they are the minute the set foot onstage. Song and dance interludes are often performed directly to the audience. The most popular musicals in the U.S. of the last 70 years, including *Guys and Dolls*, *West Side Story*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Les Misérables*, *A Chorus Line*, *The Lion King*, *Rent*, *Wicked*, *In the Heights* and *Hamilton*, could not be more different from each other, yet all have fused engaging characters, song and dance into a series of larger-than-life, emotionally charged moments that have entertained and moved audiences for years.

In *Chasing Mem'ries*, the songs—both well-known songs from the Bergman repertoire as well as music created for this play—are used in more contemplative and intimate ways to explore the characters' circumstances and feelings. The imaginary "fourth wall" is never broken. As Alan Bergman shares in an interview conducted by Amy Levinson, Geffen Literary Director and Dramaturg

for *Chasing Mem'ries*, about conceiving the piece with writer and director Josh Ravetch: "At our first meeting we discussed the possibility of a slightly different take on the classic American musical... The question was whether or not songs could exist in a play in a different way—songs that might live within the circumstances of the play itself." His wife and co-lyricist Marilyn further illustrates: "Alan and I sometimes sing songs because we hear something on the radio or a conversation evokes a certain song from our past, so we find ourselves singing and enjoying songs we love—but we never 'stop and sing,' we usually continue washing the dishes. It's just a part of our 'dialogue.'"

At their best, lyrics are poetic, condensing human experience into its essence through specific imagery; at their most powerful, melodies and their underlying rhythms capture the emotional states of the characters singing them—whether a character onstage in a musical, or the character a singer becomes while interpreting a song. In the most memorable and timeless songs, lyrics and melody enhance each other, seamlessly.

Songwriters use different approaches to crafting songs. Some start with images and words and then find the melody; the Bergmans write lyrics to the melodies created by their collaborators. They are most interested in dramatic songs that not only express specific moods but also the human complexity of the moment in which they occur in a story. In *Chasing Mem'ries*, two of the Bergmans' well-known songs are about loss, including "Where Do You Start?" (composer, Johnny Mandel), which Victoria sings at the beginning of her journey.

Where do you start?
 How do you separate the present from the past?
 How do you deal with all the things you thought would last?
 That didn't last?
 With bits of memories scattered here and there,
 I look around and don't know where to start.

The Bergmans' marriage and songwriting partnership have endured for decades. Since *Chasing Mem'ries* is full of humor and wisdom, it is not hard to imagine that they have drawn upon their own caring and honest connection to envision the next chapter in Victoria's life.

DISCUSSION POINT

What is your favorite song from a musical, or performed by a recording artist?
 How do its lyrics, melody and rhythms "speak" to you?

TIES THAT CONTINUE TO BIND



SOURCES

Birditt, Kira S. et al.
 “Tensions in the Parent and Adult Child Relationship: Links to Solidarity and Ambivalence.” *Psychology and aging* 24.2 (2009): 287–295. *PMC*. Web. 25 Oct. 2017.

PHOTO CREDIT

Pixabay/PD

In Western cultures, many regard the teenage years as the most challenging period of childrearing for both parents and children. Human beings are wired to separate from their families of origin, become independent and create their own families. As adolescents seek more autonomy yet feel frightened about leaving the safety and familiarity of home, they can act out their ambivalence on the adults who, having taken care of them since they were born, end up feeling confused, annoyed and sad that their offspring are no longer openly loving and dependent on them. Since teens can act impulsively and not always in their own best self-interest, parents also worry about their capacity to make safe choices and may try to limit their behavior, which causes more conflicts.

As children mature, parent and child relations usually ease, but new, less explosive tensions can simmer. Parents never stop worrying about how their children will fare in life. Their concerns include how their adult children will make a living, find the right person with whom to partner and live according to the values and traditions in which they have been raised. Depending on their parenting style, some carry their anxiety inside, feeling their children should be free to choose how to live their lives. Others who feel it is still their job to weigh in on the direction of their children’s lives are often perceived as intrusive and controlling. Whether cloaked or overt, these “concerns” often translate into expectations that adult children are conflicted about meeting, since they care about parental approval but are also determined to make their own life choices.

Tensions can also surface when parents become ill or lose a spouse. In addition to worrying about their physical and mental health, adult offspring must often juggle helping them with maintaining the well-being of their own families.

In *Chasing Mem’ries*, Victoria and her son Mason experience the tugs and pulls of competing concerns: she worries that he is “lost,” especially since he is facing challenges in his relationship with his fiancée; he is thrown by his mother’s grief. As their conversation deepens, mother and son share their truths, which empowers Mason and leaves his mother feeling reassured.

DISCUSSION POINT

What would be helpful for adult children and their parents to understand about each other?

MAPPING EMOTION IN SONGS

MUSIC AND EMOTION

An article on music psychology notes: “Listeners perceive music as being emotionally expressive. They appear to use both basic acoustic cues, such as loudness, as well as music- and culture-specific cues, such as mode, to recognize emotions. Listeners can identify emotions expressed in unfamiliar music from other cultures with above-chance accuracy, which implies that there are universal cues to musical emotion. In addition to recognizing emotions in music, the available evidence confirms that listeners also experience emotions in response to music.” (*Emotion Review*, 2015)

1. After reviewing the lyrics below from “The Way We Were,” by Alan and Marilyn Bergman and Marvin Hamlisch, write down the images, memories and feelings that come to mind.

*Mem’ries light the corners of my mind
Misty water-colored mem’ries of the way we were*

*Scattered pictures of the smiles we left behind
Smiles we gave to one another for the way we were*

2. Recall the melody or listen to a recording of “The Way We Were” and map the melodic and rhythmic “pathways” of the above lyrics. Using lines, indicate how the melody climbs and descends and how the notes are sustained or clipped.

DISCUSSION POINT

How do the images embedded in and inspired by the lyrics, and the tones, flow and speed of the melody express the bittersweet quality of recalling a past love?

SECTION 3

PERSONNEL PROFILE

AN INTERVIEW WITH AMY FARKAS

What is your title and how long have you worked at the Geffen Playhouse?

My official title is Lead Concierge within the Front of House team. I have worked at the Geffen for ten and a half years, since January of 2007.

What are your primary responsibilities?

As the person who is at the front desk most weekday evenings and on Saturdays, I answer the phone and am responsible for answering patron questions about current, past and future shows at the Geffen. I also provide information about parking, Geffen amenities, nearby restaurants and attractions, and the history of the building. I write up the nightly report, which documents what time the shows begin and end, how many people attended the performance, any customer service issues that come up and more. I also answer e-mails, help schedule volunteers and create various Front of House forms.

What core values underlie the Geffen's approach to customer service?

Community is a core value at the Geffen Playhouse. We are all committed to making everyone who walks in the door feel like a part of our family. We value each person as an individual and make a point to recognize our regulars—subscribers and donors—as well as to notice anyone who looks like it may be their first time here and ask if they have any questions. Over time, we get to know each other as human beings instead of faceless employees/patrons, so it doesn't even feel like "customer service," but just like friends and acquaintances catching up, relating stories and interests and having a genuine and mutual connection.

How has Front of House at the Geffen evolved over the years?

When I was hired there were about ten of us total, including the Supervising House Manager, the House Managers, the Concierges and the Ushers. We now have about twenty-five Front of House staff members. We have stepped up our customer service game significantly. We have a Donor Representative who meets the needs of those patrons who give large donations to the theater every year, and an Audience Services Manager—a full-time staff member whom patrons can contact directly with any concerns, questions or issues.

What prior experiences contributed to you assuming your role here?

I have always loved being around the theater and "theater people." I went to drama camp as a child and did musical theater productions throughout my youth. As I got older I participated



more behind the scenes, stage managing for youth productions and directing a summer drama day camp program for the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks. While away at college, I ushered at the performing arts centers on campus. After college, I moved back home to Los Angeles, saw the Geffen Playhouse was hiring ushers, interviewed and got the job! Over time, I got promoted from Usher to Concierge to Lead Concierge.

What do you find most challenging about your work?

I am by nature an introvert and find it challenging to be "on" all the time around a lot of people and engage in small talk. The knowledge and expertise I have developed over the years, however, have allowed me to feel more comfortable responding to questions, referring people to the correct place to get answers and beginning conversations with people.

What do you find most satisfying?

I love getting to see the same patrons at each show and how they value my creativity and ask about the various crafts I am always working on at the desk, during downtime. In turn, I get to ask them about their activities, whether it is a book they are writing, or the miniature models of houses that they build. I also find my relationships with coworkers incredibly satisfying. We truly value one another, work interdependently and have a great rapport. Last but not least, I am happy that I can bring my dog (Ginger, the Assistant Concierge) to work and appreciate how much everyone loves her and embraces her as part of the Front of House team. ■

SECTION 4

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Going to the theater is a unique experience, and we all need to be mindful of “audience etiquette,” or how to behave at the theater.

The Audience’s Role: The audience plays an essential role at the performance of a play. Without an audience, the actors are only rehearsing. Audience members’ concentrated silence and responses, such as laughing and applauding, provide energy to the actors as they bring the performance to life.

Behaviors to Avoid: Since the actors can hear the audience so clearly, it is important not to engage in behaviors that might disturb or distract them—and fellow audience members.

These actions include:

- Talking
- Texting
- Allowing cell phones to ring
- Taking photographs or video
- Getting up to leave before intermission or the end of the show (unless it is a true emergency)
- Eating or drinking
- Unwrapping candy or cough drops.

Use of Social Media: We appreciate you sharing your Geffen Playhouse experience via social media, but ask that you **do not do so inside the theater, where the use of electronic devices is prohibited.**

We recommend that you post your status **in the lobby after the performance**, and invite you to tag @GeffenPlayhouse and use #GeffenPlayhouse to share your experience and continue the conversation with us online.

Audience Awareness Activity: Before going to the Geffen Playhouse for the first time, compare and contrast the experience of seeing a live play with:

- going to the movies
- attending a live sporting event
- watching television.

DISCUSSION POINT

If you were onstage performing a play, how would you want the audience to behave?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Depending on the time available and your group members' interests, guide them to respond to questions selected from those suggested below. Encourage everyone to participate, while having respect for differing opinions. Individuals can share their thoughts with a partner or in a small group. Ask for several volunteers to share their groups' answers with the larger group.

- Overall, how did you feel while watching *Chasing Mem'ries*? Engaged? Distanced? Entertained? Bored? Conflicted? Moved? Inspired? What made you feel this way?
- What did you enjoy most about the play? What did you find difficult to enjoy? Why? (Provide evidence from the production.)
- Did you identify or empathize with any of the characters? If so, which character(s) and why? If not, why not?
- How would you characterize the relationship between Victoria and her son Mason, and between Victoria and her husband Franklin?
- What was Victoria's "arc" in the play? Where did she begin and where did she end up? Who and/or what helped her make this journey?
- Did experiencing this play affirm, deepen or change your thinking about the impact of loss and the grieving process? If so, how?
- How did the songs enhance the story?
- What did you find most entertaining about the play? Most moving?
- What did you appreciate most about the performances by the actors?
- How did the set, costumes and lighting contribute to the impact of the play?
- Would you recommend this production of *Chasing Mem'ries* to other theatergoers? Why, or why not?

SECTION 5

RESOURCES

WATCH Alan and Marilyn Bergman discuss their backgrounds, their craft as lyricists, and collaborations with composers at tinyurl.com/AMBergmanInterview.

LEARN about the Bergmans and their award-winning songs in an online exhibit created by ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers) and the Library of Congress at tinyurl.com/ASCAPBergmans.

LEARN more about what keeps marriages healthy in an article from the American Psychological Foundation at tinyurl.com/MaritalHealthAPA.

READ *A Widow's Story: A Memoir*, the acclaimed account of widowhood after a forty-six-year marriage, by renowned author Joyce Carol Oates. (Available at the Los Angeles Public Library and on Amazon.com)

LEARN about support and resources for those struggling with grief at www.ourhouse-grief.org.

VISIT the Grammy Museum in downtown Los Angeles to explore how popular music is created and performed by recording artists. Information is available at www.grammymuseum.org.

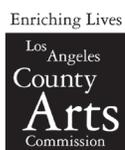
EXPLORE online tips for songwriting from established songwriters at tinyurl.com/OnlineSongTips.

EXPERIENCE career-development workshops for songwriters, offered at no charge under the auspices of ASCAP. Information is available at tinyurl.com/WkshpsASCAP.

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Joseph Drown Foundation
K Period Media
Keyes Automotive Group
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And many more!



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