

## **MP1 Slideshow Link**

<https://vimeo.com/867818193>

## **Local Theater Production Shines Light on Mental Health**

**Sheffield, Alabama** - In a powerful showcase of local talent and compassion, Tonya S. Holly, a seasoned producer with an impressive 20-year career, presented Marsha Norman's Pulitzer Prize-winning play 'Night Mother' at Cypress Moon Studios, home to the Full Moon Theater.

Holly, owner of Cypress Moon Studios, said "This piece was presented to me just after I had lost my brother to suicide. I almost decided against the production..." 'I bought the rights and before I knew it rehearsals were underway and now it is opening night. I hadn't seen a single rehearsal until tonight' "...these women take you on a journey. I cried. I am so grateful I took the opportunity to bring this issue to the attention of my community."

The play is directed by first time director Eli Milliman and local director Brynn Albretsten and stars Elizabeth Ragsdale as Thelma Cates and Macy Ladner as Jessie Cates. Milliman said the team aims to "present this mother daughter drama fearlessly as it explores denial, silence, and despair."

The production is immediately followed by a panel discussion about mental health and suicide prevention with the directors and cast featuring special guest Dr. Andrea Hunt, a distinguished professor of Sociology and Executive Director of the Mitchell-West Center for Social Inclusion and the Center of Women's Studies at the University of North Alabama.

"People ask themselves 'How do I try and understand something that I don't know how to understand,' and it is through having these kinds of open discussions and destigmatizing the topic that we will be able to help others understand and be able to make positive changes within our homes and communities,' said Dr. Hunt during opening night's panel.

The show's final dates are Sept. 23 at 7 p.m. and Sept. 24 at 2 p.m.

Tickets are available at 256-335-6961 or visit [www.cypressmoonstudios.org](http://www.cypressmoonstudios.org)

# Cutlines

## **Image One:**

“Night Mother” makes the top of the marquee outside the Full Moon Theater. The signage lets everyone know what shows to look forward to next.

## **Image Two:**

The entrance to Cypress Moon Studios illuminates the way for guests to find the main office. Cypress Moon Studios was the second location of Muscle Shoals Sound Studios 1978-2005.

## **Image Three:**

The audience listens quietly as the cast and directors prepare for the panel. There is a brief moment of silence before the panel in lue of the play’s ending.

## **Image Four:**

Front row audience members get the special privilege of sitting in the middle of the set. Set designer Matt Upton worked with directors to bring the show to the audience.

## **Image Five:**

Dr. Adrea Hunt shares her personal battles with mental health to the audience. Hunt works with numerous workshops on trauma-informed practices and ways to create more inclusive environments in education, nonprofits, and organizations.

## **Image Six:**

Panelists draw their attention to actress Elizabeth Ragsdale as she shares the details of her son’s struggles with mental health. Ragsdale considers this role a passion project, due to its subject matter and playing character Jesse Cates in college.

## **Image Seven:**

Actress Macy Ladner embraces friends after her emotional performance. Audience members clung to tissues during the final scenes.

## **Image Eight:**

Thelma Cates, played by Elizabeth Ragsdale, speaks with fans after the play. Ragsdale has been acting for over 40 years from Paris to N.Y.C.

## **Image Nine:**

Director Eli Milliman speaks with audience members on set after the panel. Milliman hosted the panel, with co-director Brynn Albretsen, game show style in efforts to lighten the mood.

## **Image Ten:**

Milliman speaks passionately about the directing process with an audience member. “Night Mother” was Milliman’s first ever play he directed.

## **Image Eleven:**

Director Brynn Albresten speaks with friends in the audience about the symbolism of the characters’ all sugar diet. Dr. Hunt mentioned that high amounts of sugar can cause depression in adults.

## **Image Twelve:**

The set of the Cates' kitchen displays a reproduction of Eric Enstrom's famous "Grace." The photograph is said to symbolize having gratitude during loss.

**Image Thirteen:**

This end table holds not only props, but personal keepsakes of the cast. The framed photograph pictures Elizabeth Ragsdale (Thelma Cates) and her family.