



Living Large

a new musical about

Marie Dressler

Written by Diane Sampson and Lauren Mayer

Based on an idea by Tim Heitman

Prospectus

July 2, 2021

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Thank you for helping to bring the story of Marie Dressler to the stage.

Creative Team



Lauren Mayer (composer, co-lyricist) is a songwriter who works in educational theatre, musical revues, cabaret acts, and her own comedy performances. She wrote the music, lyrics & books for several published children's shows, including December Rainbow which was commissioned by Broadway by the Bay, and she was the songwriter/music director for Darlene Popovic's award-winning solo show. She has performed her own comedy songs at Society Cabaret, The Plush Room, Feinstein's at the Niko, and others, and she is a 5-time recipient of the San Francisco Cabaret Gold Award, as well as a phi beta kappa graduate of Yale University (where she studied songwriting and music theory with composer/lyricist Maury Yeston). Lauren is thrilled to be working with Diane and Tim to help audiences fall in love with Marie Dressler, just like we have.

Diane Sampson (librettist, co-lyricist) has written the books and lyrics for 4 other musicals, including Oh, Progeny! (two Bay Area productions) and The Tale of Sleeping Cutie, a commissioned work produced in San Francisco in 2014. Full-length non-musicals include Naked and The Greater Good, a finalist in Memphis's Playhouse on the Square's New Works Competition in 2019. Diane's short plays have been staged in venues as far afield as Seattle, Miami and London, and her short piece Undone was made into a film shown in PlayGround's Annual Film Festival in 2013. She was an associate producer and co-writer for the documentary Faces of Genocide, winner of an award for Excellence in Filmmaking at the Newport Beach Film Festival in 2019. Diane is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild and delighted to be collaborating with Lauren and Tim on Living Large.



Tim Heitman (Producer) has spent most of his career as a presenter working for the Nederlander Producing Company at Broadway San Diego and Broadway San Jose. He spent 6 years at the La Jolla Stage Company as Artistic Director where he produced all, directed most, and even wrote some of the work at that theatre. He is currently the General Manger of Society Cabaret and Theatricals and is very proud to be working with Lauren and Diane to produce Living Large. If you have any questions or comments please feel free to reach him at tim@societycabaret.com or by phone at 650-504-9792.

A Story Worth Telling

“Living Large” is an original musical about Marie Dressler, a major show business presence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Though her name may not be as familiar as that of various contemporaries – Greta Garbo or Charlie Chaplin, for example – she was a unique woman whose off-stage life held as much delight and tragedy as she brought to the roles she played.

Born poor in a small Canadian town, Marie, abused as a child, went on to become a Broadway and Hollywood star who bucked all the current trends. She was large and plain while delicacy and beauty were celebrated. She had relationships with women as well as men at a time when such things were verboten. And she always stood up for the underdog, which didn’t earn her points with those less open-minded.

In her early years, Marie parlayed her ungainly appearance into a comic persona that delighted audiences on the vaudeville circuit. In her later career in Hollywood, however, she had the opportunity to play more serious roles, which she relished. In 1931, when she was over 60, she won an Oscar for her role in “Min and Bill,” the oldest person up to that time to be so honored. She remains to this day the oldest person to have been Hollywood’s top box office draw. Sadly, Marie died at the height of her fame.

So why do so few people recognize her name? Perhaps it’s because she needed to have a musical written about her! Lauren and Diane have, with a bit of poetic license, fashioned a tuneful celebration of the life of this complex and fascinating woman.



Synopsis

Act One begins as 14-year-old runaway Leila Koerber auditions brilliantly for a seedy traveling stock company. She's hired but limited to comic roles due to her large size and homeliness. Though disappointed, she agrees and is given her new name: Marie Dressler. Having accepted that playing big, ungainly women is her lot, Marie parlays this persona into ever-increasing success on the vaudeville and comic-opera circuit. She moves to New York where she meets Frances Marion, a young female reporter. Marie grants her an interview, earning Frances's unwavering gratitude.

Marie's personal life is a study in ups and downs. Happily, she hires Mamie Steele as a maid, who soon becomes her devoted confidante. Marie is rebuffed by Frances as a lover, but she meets and marries Jim Dalton, a mysterious suitor. She invests in enterprises that fail, creating financial pressure. When the U.S. enters WWI, Marie drops everything to do war work, but her fans begin to forget her. She also learns Jim is a bigamist; he lied about being divorced. Things get bleaker when producers blackball her for her role in forming a chorus members union, and the woman who seemed to have a charmed life hits rock bottom.

Act Two begins, Marie's hotel suite is now one small room. Enter Nella Webb, Marie's astrologer, who convinces her to move to Hollywood. There, she reconnects with Claire Dubrey, a movie actress whom she met briefly in New York and found appealing. Equally smitten, Claire abandons her career to be Marie's live-in "secretary." Marie's roller-coaster life is again on the upswing with an exciting romance and the support of her new boss, Louis B. Mayer, MGM Studios head. Marie goes on to win an Academy Award as a serious actress, shifting the focus away from her size and shape. All her life she's been the butt of jokes about her appearance, and though she encouraged them for the laughs they brought, in private, it was hurtful.

At the height of her career, with another Best Actress Oscar nomination under her belt, Louis B. is told that Marie has cancer. Those who love her most are horrified and decide to withhold the news from her, thinking it an act of kindness. When Claire, interested in reviving her own career, secures an audition for a new film, Marie over-reacts, feeling used and betrayed as she did with Jim. She kicks Claire out and tells herself she's better off alone.

Louis B. throws Marie a huge birthday party. Just before Marie is called upon to give a speech, she reveals to Mamie that she knows this will be her last birthday, but before Mamie can respond, Marie is at the microphone, thanking her fans and promising them cheerfully they'll be seeing lots more of Marie Dressler in the years to come.

The show ends after Marie's death where the major players in Marie's life speak briefly to the audience about what she meant to them, and then fade away themselves. The bare stage is suddenly illuminated by Marie, standing in a spotlight between some plants on a pedestal. Smiling, she performs the signature curtsey her fans came to love, stretching out her arms knocking over plants and pedestals. With a wink at the audience, the lights fade. End of play.

Next Steps

A theatre mentor of mine once said “If you want to produce a show, book a theatre.” That spoke to me because in my days as the Artistic Director at La Jolla Stage Company I was faced each year with a blank calendar, and by adding production dates to it I was planting the seeds of shows. The authors of Living Large will learn a lot from the two zoom readings and will continue to improve each element so that it can be ready for our December staged reading. We hope you can attend. – Tim Heitman, Producer

How You Can Help

Contributions

Living Large is currently raising \$50,000 in the form of 25 subscriptions at \$2000 each. Partial subscriptions can be purchased after a full one is purchased, so the minimum to be considered a *Contributor* is \$2000. We will be spending this money in three major categories—

1. the production of our December staged reading
2. professional video and audio recordings (demos) which we need to promote the show
3. legal filings and fees and administration.

This breaks down as follows

1. \$30,000 December staged reading
2. \$15,000 Professional video and audio
3. \$ 5,000 Legal et al

Currently there are two ways you can be a part of Living Large financially. You can contribute funds which will be used toward those above named categories, or you can purchase tickets to our staged reading taking place in December 2021.

A few of the things contributors can expect to receive are-- tickets to our December reading, and future productions of the show, invitations to the cast parties, monthly insider email newsletters, recognition on programs and websites.

Buying tickets

If contributing to the show is not right for you but you still want to financially support Living Large, you can purchase tickets to our upcoming staged reading taking place the weekend of December 11 and 12, 2021 in San Francisco. Here are the types of tickets you can purchase.

- \$25 STANDARD TICKET, this gets you a standard admission to the December reading before the price may increase due to demand.
- \$50, \$100, \$250, \$500 PRIME TICKET, this gets you a prime admission to the reading before the price may increase due to demand. Prime purchasers are seated in the best seats before Standard purchasers are seated.

How You Can Help – How to make a contribution

SoCab LLC doing business as Society Cabaret is the entity responsible for the production of Living Large. Below is the information on how and where to mail checks, and also the website address for online purchases.

By Check

When making a contribution, checks are preferred as they don't carry credit card transaction fees. But a credit transaction for a contribution is available online. (see below)	Mail to
Pay to the order of – Society Cabaret In memo section put – Living Large	Living Large C/O Society Cabaret 2801 B St #2063 San Diego, CA 92102

Online

Shopify purchase page can be found by going to our website→	LivingLargeMusical.com Then click on the button pictured below, use the pull down menu to select your transaction.
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Your contribution can be turned into an investment once we've finished the legal paperwork and filings.