

[“The Asylum Project” Shows That Refuge Isn’t Always Comfortable](https://allaboutsolo.com/the-asylum-project-shows-that-refuge-isnt-always-comfortable/?fbclid=IwAR3l_dIHjXWp9R54FtbsMFQTKluMWTCbP6wliy4AyoeXe5b7Ec17wO5NxHg)

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 all about **SOLO Critics' Choice**

By Alex Miller

In a small corner, a shawled woman-actress, educator, director Elizabeth Mozer-ruffles through photos, documents, normal things, a soft light engulfing her shawl. The contents of the small box she holds are still foreign to the audience. After about a minute, she gathers the confidence to speak into a recording device. Her memories just do whatever they want to do, she says. She can't remember things that she should, and recalls things she can't entirely remember.

“One of the images that comes to me unexpectedly,” she tells the recorder. “There’s a man sitting outside with a hat...” She cannot place it, so she drops it. The memory will have to wait till later. She signs off on the recorder, which will be given to her therapist at some point in the near future. “Lina, 4-11-77.” Her birthday and name.

Wind chimes. A bubbly young woman in a head scarf, holding a suitcase, joyfully announces her arrival to America. A Polish immigrant, she comes from a time when all it took to pass customs was hair and clothes that looked clean enough. Hers is an immigrant experience one can only wish for these days. A dream too many are dying to obtain, and will die trying. She came to Ellis Island because it “was no more safe,” in her homeland. She meets a “nice Russian,” they have a child together, and the family settles down at a farm upstate. At some point, when her daughter is still a baby, a fire spreads through the house. The woman suffers a head injury and ends up at Binghamton State Hospital.

Binghamton houses several other characters. A sterile Irish woman who attempted suicide, and who thinks she is pregnant. A Southern woman with ideas that make doctors believe she is “a very sick person,” and give her electroshock treatments. And a woman who thinks she’s a child, and gleefully tells anyone who’ll listen how great plants are because of the oxygen they give us.

At the very end, there is a twist that should have you in tears. After having grown so attached to the characters, you won’t entirely be ready for it. That’s the beauty of such a great play.

In the hands of another actor, this play could easily have gone in a variety of bad directions. Ms. Mozer is a gift from the theater gods, and you have to see her at work. She projects an authenticity one would not see outside of an actual asylum. At 55 minutes, this tough, raw, beautiful and compassionate play is never heavy-handed in its depiction of people with pathologies.

In the world we now live in, giving care and attention to mental health is essential. That is why Ms. Mozer’s performance is exactly what we all need. Far from exploitative, it offers humanity and understanding. Understanding: something of which you will gain a great deal by the very end of this masterwork.

[“The Asylum Project”](#)

Written and Performed by Elizabeth Mozer

October 12 at 6PM

Photo: courtesy of the production

2019 United Solo Theatre Festival

Theatre Row

410 West 42nd Street

New York City

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ALEX MILLER, a Chicago native, has been a professional writer and editor for 6 years. He joined the Navy in 2004, and served for four years in such places as Haiti, Iraq, and Somalia. He has a degree in Public Engagement from The New School, and has written for The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Guardian, Forbes, The New York Daily News, and QZ, among others. He lives in Harlem.

<http://unitedsolo.org/us/the-2019-united-solo-awards-have-been-announced/>
(*The Asylum Project* was awarded BEST DRAMA)