

THE FAREWELL TOUR

By Nathan Christopher

SYNOPSIS

The greatest music legend in the world is dying. As a final gesture of gratitude to her fans, she embarks on The Farewell Tour. Although there's no singing and no band, this global goodbye could well be her greatest performance. Told by three people each connected to the star in a different way, this is a story about lighting up the stage, falling off the charts and what happens when our heroes turn out to be human.

BIOGRAPHY

Nathan Christopher (www.thenathanchristopher.com) writes plays about the universal truths of everyday life. Through the exploration of familiar moments—falling in (and out of) love, the death of a loved one, an act of violence, the slow decline of age—his work offers new perspectives, questions the conventional, provides comfort, allows us to laugh and, most of all, ask us to look inward rather than outward because that's how we start changing the world.

Christopher is the author of seven plays: PICKING UP, THE FAREWELL TOUR, A MAN WALKS INTO A BAR, CLAIREVOYANT, EVE: A PALINDROME PLAY, TO REMAIN SILENT, and SORRY (NOT SORRY).

A MAN WALKS INTO A BAR was published in the Smith & Kraus *Best Ten-Minute Plays of 2021* anthology.

[PICKING UP](#) was a winner in the “Script” category of the 86th annual *Writer's Digest* Writing Competition. A musical version of the show, created with lauded singer-songwriter [Gregory Douglass](#), made its off-off-Broadway workshop debut to a sold-out house as part of the Emerging Artists Theatre's Fall 2019 New Work Series. It was also featured in Undiscovered Works at Dixon Place's Monthly Storytelling Series (NYC) in April 2020, and celebrated in a special broadcast on [Musical Theatre Radio](#) in October 2020 to mark the one-year anniversary of the show's creation.

Christopher is a member of the Dramatists Guild, and has supported the Atlantic Theater Company, founded by David Mamet and William H. Macy, since 1999. Follow him on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#), and read his work on [National New Play Exchange \(NPX\)](#).

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

<u>THE DISCIPLE:</u>	A true fan. Late-40s or older. Any gender.
<u>THE APOSTLE:</u>	The tour manager. Mid-50s or older. Male-identifying.
<u>THE SKEPTIC:</u>	A bartender. Mid-20s to early-30s. Female-identifying.

THE TIME

Now.

THE PLACE

- I. The Assumption: An airplane
- II. The Ascension: A diner
- III. The Dormition: A bar

NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The same setting should be used for all three monologues. The environment should be kept simple: no visual or aural suggestion of each specific location nor should the set change for each scene. Although each character is speaking to an unseen companion, their remarks should be directed at the audience, not at an imaginary character onstage. The only prop should be one unlit cigarette for the Apostle in “II. The Ascension.”

While each monologue stands on its own, do not rearrange the order of the pieces (if performing them together) as that will disrupt the arc of the story.

Regarding the titles and length of each scene:

- **The Assumption (approx. 32 minutes)**: In Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic theology, the notion or (in Roman Catholicism) the doctrine that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was taken (assumed) into heaven, body and soul, following the end of her life on Earth. (Source: Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Assumption-Christianity>)
- **The Ascension (approx. 25 minutes)**: In Christian belief, the ascent of Jesus Christ into heaven on the 40th day after his Resurrection (Easter being reckoned as the first day)...The meaning of the Ascension for Christians is derived from their belief in the glorification and exaltation of Jesus following his death and Resurrection, as well as from the theme of his return to God the Father. (Source: Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ascension-Christianity>)
- **The Dormition (approx. 23 minutes)**: The term expresses the belief that the Virgin died without suffering, in a state of spiritual peace. This belief does not rest on any scriptural basis but is affirmed by Orthodox Christian Holy Tradition. It is testified to in some old Apocryphal writings, but neither the Orthodox Church nor other Christians regard these as possessing scriptural authority. (Source: Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dormition_of_the_Mother_of_God)

I: THE ASSUMPTION

Scene: An airplane

THE DISCIPLE:

“The Farewell Tour.” That’s what it’s *actually* called!

That word: “Farewell.”

Goodbye.

The last.

The end.

You don’t really think that your idols, your *favorites*, are ever going to die, like *real* people do. We’re so removed from them, aren’t we? Maybe it’s because we experience them in such distinctly unreal ways – in our ears, on our screens and, once in a while, in real life along with 50,000 other screaming fans who all exist in the space between you and that person. None of that is real. You don’t think about your idols taking a dump or having to speak to customer service “*right now* and *no*, I don’t want to use the automated system!”

I just said “idol.” *Twice*. I sound like one of those weirdo people who runs the official fan club or knows every b-side and demo track by heart, don’t I? To be clear, I’m not. Honestly, I’m not. Those crazies who show up to chant and sing in front of the hotel she’s staying at? Or the ones who cry like babies when they catch a glimpse? That’s not me. So “idol” isn’t the right word. That also skates pretty close to “matinee idol” or “*American Idol*.” Two things: One, I’m not *that* old, and two, I have standards. No disrespect meant if you identify with either of those. Regardless of our taste, this is a safe space for you, for me, for all of us.

Speaking of space, here, take my armrest. The person in the middle should have both. It’s the unwritten rule, right? No, not at all. Go ahead! Of course.

So this one, this Farewell Tour, is unprecedented. You know the story, right? Of *course* you do. I mean, *everyone* knows and, come on, you have to admit it’s unbelievable: She’s dying. She wants to circle the globe one more time to say goodbye to her fans. But no music. No singing. No dancing. No band. No performance at all. Instead, just one-on-one time with anyone lucky enough to snag a ticket. Five minutes, just the two of you. To do what? Talk? Pray? Make out? I guess it’s a kind of performance after all. Or maybe you call it – what’s the opposite of a performance? An anti-performance? Reality?

More than a hundred cities, two-hour window in each, which I guess is about the length of a typical concert. One night only. I mean, they always say that but more dates were added because of the demand. Sounds bananas, doesn’t it? So let’s do the math: Five minutes per person with a two-hour max, which would be 120 minutes...that’s 120 divided by 5 per...so that’s what, 24 or 25 people? I’m not good at math. Yeah, 24 people. Crazy, right? Oh, and anyone who wants to go – never mind the stress and chaos of trying to actually get a ticket – pays \$10,000 for the privilege. *Ten thousand dollars*. Per *ticket*! And none of that two-people-at-a-time nonsense, which I guess makes sense since wouldn’t everyone want those five minutes for themselves? She said the money would all go to charity but the press still went crazy. *Everyone* went crazy:

“How dare she!”
“Greedy bitch.”
“She never could sing anyway.”
“I’ll get a ticket just to tell her to her face that she sucks.”
“I thought she was dead already.”

That kind of thing. Typical. Even so, there’s no hotter ticket. *Also* typical.

You like music? I haven’t been paying much attention to music lately, if you want to know the truth. I’ve always been the one to dive into a new album and listen to it – I mean, *really* listen to it: go song by song, read the lyrics and the liner notes, all that. I have lists of singers and bands I want to check out but just haven’t gotten to yet. I will eventually. All kinds of music. Life should have a soundtrack, you know?

If you do it that way – no distractions, really sit down with an album – you have to pick the right moment to get into it. It’s not something you put on in the background. Not for me. Front and center, smack-me-in-the-face, feel it in my bones – *that’s* the way. And I’m not one of those people stuck on what they listened to in college, the nostalgia and all that. There’s too much good stuff out there now – or you could be cynical and say it’s all been recycled but with a new beat. Either way.

Want to feel *really* old? Ever find yourself scanning channels on the radio, like in the car or somewhere, and you catch one of your favorites or maybe a song you haven’t heard in a while? You get into the groove of it, the lyrics still sound clever, the harmonies all come back and you’re like, “*Damn!*” I mean “*Wow!* This was a really good song!” The hook worms its way back into your head or there’s that one moment with the drums where everyone lost their minds back in the day. And then they do the station identification and it’s the *oldies* station? That hurts. *Bad!* How’d *that* sneak up on you? It feels almost criminal.

Great songs don’t have an expiration date on them. Even so, some stuff does *not* age well. Like the synth-heavy pop stuff from the 80s. And the smooth harmonies of the boy bands – so many boy bands! Those are definitely of their time and they have their place. No disrespect. But I’m talking about music you can put on now, *today*, and it still moves you. Songs that make even your ass that – oops, excuse me! – your pain-in-the-you-know-what 13-year-old nephew perk up and ask who’s singing. *That* kind of music.

If I stop to think about all the hits she’s racked up, that actually does make me feel old, maybe just a little bit. She pours her life into 3-and-a-half-minute songs and many of them have become timeless, immortal. Just think about how many moments in people’s lives those songs underscored. Moments of all kinds! And I’m sure if you piece all those songs together, they’ll tell you everything about her life and so much more. You just have to listen! Unless, of course, they aren’t even *remotely* personal. We think all these artists are pouring out their hearts and telling us their secrets, but are they? That’s not why people write songs, is it? To put their personal lives out into the world? Take, I don’t know, a song like – like the “Hokey Pokey.” That can’t be autobiographical, can it? At least I hope it’s not autobiographical. But then again, the lyrics do say, “That’s what it’s all about.” So who really knows?

II: THE ASCENSION

Scene: A diner

THE APOSTLE [*keeps his hands busy with a cigarette throughout*]:

My life is NUTS. It's nuts! Literally.

Almost thirty years together, on and off but mostly on, except for those two years when one of her backup singers cut that album. Yeah, that surprised everybody but it was pretty good! It got some attention so I jumped aboard to help cobble together a tour. Strike while the iron is hot, right? Thirty years but it's always the same. Still to this day. No matter where we are – LA, New York, Omaha, Tokyo, London, wherever – it's like clockwork. You can set your watch by it. We roll into the venue, we're not there ten minutes and I get my ass handed to me. Every time. Goddamn *nuts*.

You think that's changed this time around because of her...her...condition? Oh, no way. No way, my friend! It doesn't matter what I do – call ahead, have the advance team make a sweep, do it my-fuckin'-self. *Thirty years*, never changes. If the history books don't say anything else about her, if *you* don't say anything else about her – her contribution to the cannon, her cultural impact or political influence, whatever the hell else – you need to know that she *always* finds that *one* and only one goddamn needle-in-a-haystack off-limits pain-in-my-ass son-of-a-bitch in the mixed nuts. Never fails. It's uncanny. *Always*.

You've heard all the crazy stories about riders: no green M&M's, only white flowers, pillows made from angel-wing feathers and blankets made of unicorn manes, all that shit? Contrary to popular belief, *she* never had a complicated rider, no out-of-left-field requirements. Even now – on this weird-ass tour which isn't even a tour, let's be honest – the only thing that's been in there since day one – and I know because I was there, I wrote it in, for Christ sake! – is no *Brazil* nuts. That is – let me be accurate here, crystal clear – that is if catering *decides* to put out mixed nuts. There nothing in the rider about “must have nuts” or only “macadamias from Hawaii” or some shit. Just nice and simple: if there will be nuts, please no Brazil nuts. That's it. Not complicated in any way, right? And every time – last night, again last night! – she's the one who finds it. And then she threatens to fire me – every fucking time. Last night, I finally told her to go ahead. You bet your ass I did! She just looked at me, all this rage on her face. “Go ahead, you washed-up witch, do it,” I'm thinking. It's *your* Farewell Tour, after all, and I don't mind heading home early. I was hoping she'd do it. I knew she wouldn't. She *couldn't*! Are you kidding me? Doing this job is like being married. You know *way* too much about each other. The romance is gone but *you* don't want to be the one to walk away first, right? To quote a lyric: “We've come too far together, walking hand-in-hand forever.” I know but, hey, I didn't write it. You get my point.

Fucking Brazil nuts. She's not even allergic! I could see it being an issue if even being in the same room with some Brazilians would give her hives or a heart attack or something. Like those kids who can't even look at a jar of peanut butter without going to the ER? Like that. But she's unbelievably healthy. Except for the dying thing, I mean. Which is too bad. She takes amazing care of herself: no drugs, no fatty foods, no smoking, none of that.

She never liked that I smoked, from way back. We'd have words about it from time to time but always ended up at a truce with me saying, "Hey, it's my life." But the *nagging*. I guess all women have that gene whether they have a husband or not, right?

At the start of *this* tour, though, shit got real. She gave me an envelope. Now, this was no ordinary white business envelope. Oh, no. This was a hot-pink number. Totally on brand. As she handed it to me, she gestured to what she scrawled on it.

"Read that," she ordered.

And she stood there, not quite letting go as I'm trying to take the damn thing from her. It was like a little tug-of-war situation and she's staring into my eyes with that look, that piercing gaze you sometimes see in her videos. She means business when she looks at you like that. She finally lets go and I squint at the writing – the pink is searing my eyeballs.

I read back to her like a good little schoolboy: "Open *this* instead of a pack of cigarettes."

She's obviously one for grand dramatic gestures – I mean, that's an understatement, right? So I'm about to tear the thing open and, I gotta be honest, I'm not sure it's proper to do it in front of her. I mean, it's not a birthday present or anything. I'm not obligated to do the show-and-tell, am I? But before I can make a decision one way or the other, she ruins the surprise anyway.

"There's a check inside, and it's a lot of money," she told me. "But that's not the point. Do *not* betray me by lighting up."

She's bribing me into quitting smoking! And I shit you not, I think it's working. All I can say is that I've been successful this far, nine cities in. Eighteen days and counting. I mean, I could sneak one here and there if I wanted to but it wouldn't be respectful. Such is the power she holds over me, over everyone. Somehow she'd know. Like with the nuts. The goddamn *nuts*! And I know what would happen if I disappointed her because I've seen that shit go down so many times. You've heard of high expectations? Well, the sky's the limit with her. Most people don't even try. So I'm not gonna fire one up. We're shooting for 19 days, breaking one record at a time, right? Baby steps. Plus, I already cashed the check.

There was this big magazine cover story she did a while back, something we squeezed in between shows, I don't know how. It was a big-deal thing: wardrobe changes, something like 70 people on set, wind machines, the whole nine. The PR people are hassling the lighting guys and running around barking at the PAs. I'm there just for the hell of it. This wasn't my jurisdiction but she asked me to come so there I was. The editor and I were shooting the shit, waiting for her to get out of makeup. I had taken a pack of smokes out of my pocket, was probably fiddling with my lighter. He turned to me and asked, "Know what the best prop is for any photo shoot?"

I took a minute, thought about it. Totally obvious. I said, "A pet. A *dog*." Then I started getting a little panicky thinking about how in holy hell we'd get her two dogs onto the set. At that time, they traveled everywhere with her. Designer dogs, you know the kind. Would they even behave?

III: THE DORMITION

Scene: A bar

THE SKEPTIC:

“Groupie.”

I never heard that word before. Sorry, I don’t listen to rock-and-roll or whatever. And these days I can’t imagine *any* woman getting all hot and melting into a puddle just to jump on some dirty, drugged-up drummer. Or rapper. I guess those skanks who hang around the hip-hop guys could be “groupies,” too? Wow, I sound so – *old*.

But not as old as him, the tour manager dude who taught me about groupies. He said they used to fall all over him – and he’s not even in the band – but now there was just little ol’ me. I didn’t laugh at that. I don’t know if that was even a joke. But that’s how the word came up. They’re called other things, too, according to him:

Fanatics.

Minions.

Disciples.

Starfuckers. That one, I’ve heard.

After we were done and I was cleaning myself up, I asked him if *she* had any groupies. He told me that guy fans aren’t called that, that it’s different for women. Something about the power dynamic, I think? You’ll never see guys in the front row begging to have their hands touched or hordes of men banging on the stage door, he told me. Well, unless they’re gay. Then it’s like your birthright. But men aren’t lining up to be used and abused like the women are, he said. I feel bad about that because – honestly? – these superstar chicks are like goddesses, all fierce and confident. Especially her. I don’t want to think about her all alone after a show, coming down off that performance high, adrenaline all out of control from leaving everything on the stage, and then no one wants to fuck you.

But he said that’s never been her thing. She’s very disciplined after a show: directly off the stage and into a car, back to the hotel or onto the plane. Maybe a small party or a meet-and-greet once in a while, but that’s it. Always has been. So, I asked him, *she’s* the one who doesn’t want to fuck? That’s not very rock and roll! I’d be all like, “Hell yeah, let’s party! Get naked! Who’s got the blow?” All that. I guess I admire her discipline. That’s probably how she’s stayed the queen for so long. Mad respect.

Plus, he told me, this tour in particular is so draining that it’s all she can do to get out of the room and into the car. Lately, he’s had to help her, he said. It’s like she’s starting to fade away before his eyes. He said he couldn’t believe this was the same woman who smashed a guitar, wailed on the drums and crowd-surfed around an entire arena – all during one song on her last tour. That’s so badass. Not the dying part! *That’s* kinda sad. He thinks they’re gonna have to cancel some dates.

When I was in the room with her, all I felt was...curiosity, I guess? Like how you'd feel if you found out your grandma was a gold-medal Olympian or something. You know? I've never been a fan but when he told me he could get me a ticket, what was I supposed to say? I guess he felt he needed to pay me back somehow because he couldn't get me off. I wasn't going to tell him that the only reason his dick ended up in my mouth was because I was bored. And drunk. What a cliché, right? A bartender who drinks on the job *and* goes home with a customer. The two Golden Rules and I'm always breaking one. Or both. Usually both. Go figure. But he told good stories! I guess I got swept up.

So if he was gonna offer that, of *course* I was going to take him up on it. Wouldn't you? It's not like anything much happens around here. And it just so happened that it was on my night off anyway. From what he told me, she hasn't been here in like a decade so when they announced this whole Farewell thing, *this* was the first place in the country to sell out. Like, in minutes. Can you believe that shit?

Not New York.

Not LA.

Here.

Like it used to be, he said.

So if he's giving me a \$10,000 ticket, yeah, I'll take it. That's how much cash per minute to sit with her for, what, five? I think it's...I don't know, I don't know math. But I *do* know it's two minutes longer than *he* lasted.

To be completely honest, I kinda freaked out a little because I don't really know her music. Okay, like, *at all*. I know who she is – everybody does! But if you were to put a gun to my head and tell me to sing a few notes, my brains would be...*boom!* Hell, ask me to just *name* one of her songs? You'd shoot my tits off. She's had more hits than anyone except the Beaters, he told me. No! What are they called? It's something like that. See? I'm not really a music person. But maybe, I told myself, we could just talk about her being a strong, independent woman who took over the world. And I could get some advice on how to do it. *That's* the kind of inspirational shit I can get behind.

I mean, I *have* to get back in the game. I haven't done anything with that degree and the bills don't pay themselves. That's a hint to tip better, you cheap bastard. I'm kidding! I keep telling myself all this is just temporary but I'm creeping up on two years now – I know, right? – so now it sounds like I'm just fooling myself. I guess I could call up that temp agency again – yeah, the one on Warren Street – they always hooked me up with pretty sweet gigs – well, except for that last one. Which is part of the reason I stopped chasing the ladder for a while. *Climbing* the ladder, sorry. Obviously my degree isn't in English, is it?