

Blood/Sugar



created and performed by Diana Wyenn

"As many as 1 in 3 U.S. adults could have diabetes by 2050 if current trends continue, according to a new analysis from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. One in 10 U.S. adults has diabetes now."

— U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, October 2010

After more than a decade of working professionally in the theater and simultaneously living with Type 1 Diabetes, I read the above quote and immediately turned all my skills as a storyteller toward creating a theatrical response that could dispel the lies, mystery, and shame surrounding diabetes in all its forms.

The result is *Blood/Sugar*, an evening-length performance performed by me and my husband about diabetes that uses contemporary theater techniques to explore the realities of this growing epidemic and challenge the binary of health and illness.

Thank you for your interest in this project and in facilitating a much-needed public conversation about the "mysterious" disease currently impacting more than 422 million people worldwide, and the people who love and care for them.

— Diana Wyenn, professional theater artist and Type 1 diabetic



/ ABOUT *BLOOD/SUGAR*

Historical perspectives and staggering statistics collide with personal narrative, live-feed video, Shakespearean texts, and original movement to give embodied expression to the complexities of living with a chronic illness. Creator Diana Wyenn, who has Type 1 diabetes, places her story and body at the center of the work, as both a carrier of disease and a vehicle for theatrical transmission. Co-written by Wyenn and Guy Zimmerman, *Blood/Sugar* challenges the binary of health and illness to create a vivid account of the life-sustaining self-care that diabetes demands of 1 out of every 10 Americans.

Diagnosed in London at the age of 20, Wyenn's first response was to resist immediate treatment in order to make it to the theater on time. Now, after more than fifteen years of grappling with diabetes, her relationship to her illness has progressed from denial to a powerful authority over her own well-being. *Blood/Sugar* weaves the personal with the existential, and the historical with the expressive, to illuminate the day-to-day choices that shape the lives of more than 422 million people worldwide.

Each performance is immediately followed by a conversation between Wyenn, the audience, and diabetes educators and nutritionists that Wyenn helps identify and source from the venue and presenter's own surrounding community.

Blood/Sugar can take place as a full theatrical production for a proscenium stage or black box theater, or as a simplified lecture/performance at convenings, conferences, auditoriums, student centers, or classrooms.



/ POST-SHOW DIALOGUE & WORKSHOPS

With a running time of sixty-five minutes, *Blood/Sugar* is designed to be followed by a twenty to thirty-minute conversation between Wyenn, the audience, and local experts in the field of diabetes management and nutrition. Experts can come from within your own organization or we can engage our network of professionals to identify leaders in your community.

Statistically speaking, more than 25% of any audience is living with some form of diabetes, so this conversation is never abstract. We have learned that it is a rare and powerful opportunity for open discussion of what is commonly an unnecessarily private experience for patients, friends, and family. The guest speakers also serve as a recognizable link between your audience and local resources that can be accessed for future support.

Wyenn is a sought-after creator and director, with extensive theater and opera credits and a long history of creating arts education programming for students of all ages. She can work with you to create a variety of additional workshops and artist engagements for your community that support and expand existing curriculum and/or goals. The following are a small sampling of past workshop topics: creating original work, solo performance, Shakespearean acting techniques, post-modern movement for performers, and using “dis-ease” as the catalyst/inspiration for storytelling.

/ VISION

Without insulin I will die, painfully. Too much, and I can die within hours.

Diabetes kills someone every seven seconds—five million each year. More than 400 million people worldwide have diabetes; 1 in 10 people in the United States. Shockingly, 46.5% of adults with diabetes are unaware of their condition. The Center for Disease Control projects that if current trends continue, in 2050 as many as 1 in 3 adults in the US could have diabetes. Currently, we spend 12% of the global health expenditure on diabetes annually. Of that nearly \$700 billion, over 1/3 is spent in the US alone. What will it cost us in 2050?

I set out to create *Blood/Sugar* in order to share what the numbers don't—and can't—show: what it feels like to live with the set of circumstances brought on by diabetes. My life as a theater artist began before my diagnosis, and the capacity of performance to connect, to engage empathetic response, is exactly what is at play in *Blood/Sugar*.

Most people living with diabetes work to conceal their chronic condition. I did myself for nearly a decade. This means that despite the incredible number of people who are coping with chronic illness and disability, the impact is often not understood, even by loved ones.

Medical professionals and advocacy organizations work tirelessly to raise awareness and understanding, but information and statistics are not enough. The power of theater—which places the body of the performer in direct dialogue with audiences—allows me to reveal the profoundly personal nature of living with illness in a contemporary culture that would like to deny its reality.

The complexities of every decision around self-care and treatment shapes the lives of individuals and impacts our planet. With *Blood/Sugar*, I harness theater's capacity to gather people together to create an open space for dialogue, one that can generate greater understanding and compassion.

I hope to inspire all of us, myself included, to take personal authority over our own bodies and how we treat them, speak openly about our circumstances, and collaborate vigorously with one another to live fully with disability and illness, whether visible or not.

— *Diana Wyenn, creator and performer*





/ PRESS

"Watching *Blood/Sugar* could save your life ... An actor, dancer, and vivid storyteller, she weaves the experience from her body, voice, and soul ... In an hour, those of us who don't live with a chronic deadly disease come as close as humanly possible to understanding how it feels. Those of us who do wrestle daily with mortal illness feel, "Ah! Someone knows what we suffer." ... *Blood/Sugar* is a powerful, harrowing, joyful piece of theatre — true theatre. Created from suffering, it brings us together, our souls trembling as they touch." Mark Hein, *Theatre Ghost* ([Read full review](#))

"Through Wyenn's fine acting and expert writing, I feel as though I've learned a tremendous amount. I will look at my own afflicted family members now in a new light. What better compliment can I give except I think I need to get checked." —Waeza Jagirdar, *Drama Queens Review* ([Read full review](#))

"First, I squirmed. Then I squiggled. I crossed my legs, then re-crossed them. Drawing a deep breath, I wondered at one point if I might faint. Talk about visceral theater! ... *Blood/Sugar* is half lecture, half performance, half college class, half call to action. Yes, that adds up to four halves, all of which she packs into her one intensely compelling hour of recitation, self filming, dancing, unloading, educating, reliving — and taking her rapt audience along for the ride." —Debra Levine, *artsmeme* ([Read full review](#))

"RECOMMENDED – A fascinating mixed media approach to raising awareness ... Diana Wyenn's descriptions of the autoimmune disease she has been battling for 15 years are haunting ... Her show is a political stance against insulin's rising prices." —Lara J. Altunian, *Stage Raw* ([Read full review](#))



/ AUDIENCE RESPONSES

"She's literally performing not only her own illness but the disease itself, and it's breathtaking."

"More than ever, theater has become a tool to disseminate important information on health and when it's in the hands of artists like Diana Wyenn, one can be confident that the information will be disseminated with utmost care, sensitivity, accuracy and above all else, deep artistic integrity. I hope Diana will be given ample opportunity to continue in her timely mission."

— Fred Frumberg, Deputy Director and Program Manager, CAP UCLA

"A very inspiring performance, not to mention educational in the best possible way."

"After struggling with denial and defiance of my diabetes diagnosis for three years, I finally was able to confront my illness after seeing Ms. Wyenn's show and brought my A1C down from a 9 to a 6.1 in under three months. Her knowledge, compassion and theatrical creativity literally saved my life."

— J. Goldstein, was living with Type 2 Diabetes, but has reversed it and is now living with Prediabetes

"*Blood/Sugar* is part TED Talk and part performance art and features the best of both. I'm always touched when I hear audience members during talk-backs after a show say, 'This is the first time I've seen my story on a stage.' I heard a number of audience members with diabetes in L.A. say just those words. I was entertained while learning more about the personal issues of being a person with diabetes. I talked to medical researchers afterwards who confirmed that the field is only now coming to grips with the psychological impact of the disease. We all can benefit from seeing this play." — Michael Alexander, Interim Director of Campus Programs, Caltech



/ AUDIENCE RESPONSES (CONT.)

"What I loved about it was it perfectly expressed how I KNOW my patients feel, but don't always have the words to use to articulate it. I'm always so humbled when one of my patients shares something private with me, it's an honor." —*Lauren Decker, Medtronic Diabetes Clinical Manager*

"I just wanted to reiterate how much it 'spoke' to me. I have had so much shame and fear about my disease, which started about eight years ago. I haven't even been calling it a disease until I saw this show!"

"As someone who's lived with, battled, come to peace with, battled, and finally accepted a life with type one diabetes, Diana Wyenn's show was like a bomb going off in my heart and my head. It's a wonderful and artistic look at a bewildering disease. *Blood/Sugar* was like many things diabetes: funny, complicated, frightening, sad, and ultimately... rewarding.." —*Jim Turner, Actor and Diabetes Advocate*

"A deep show with layers of insights, complexities, and contradictions. I've thought about it a lot and will continue to do so."

"As a type 2 diabetic I received more info on diabetes from Diana Wyenn's *Blood/Sugar* than I have from any doctor I've seen in the 3 years since my diagnosis. I (finally) have more clarity now which is saying a lot because diabetes is truly confusing & overwhelming on many levels. It was healing for me to see that people of all sizes struggle with this illness."

"A smart, gripping show that truly leaves you thinking about what it is to have this particular chronic disease and about the very human struggle to cope/not cope/transcend/not transcend illness."

"It was so full of information, history, personal upset and triumph, mixed with great movement and Shakespeare. Oh, yeah!"



/ AUDIENCE RESPONSES (CONT.)

"Diana's show accomplishes what no billboard or pamphlet ever could. Every healthcare provider working in cardiovascular disease treatment or prevention—or anyone wanting to improve our collective health—should see this show to begin to understand what it's like to live with a chronic illness and grasp that there is hope for change through our food choices." —*Matt Ruscigno, MPH, RD, Chief Nutrition Officer at Nutrinic*

"A hurricane of a performance!"

"Diana's powerhouse educational memoir theater piece brings to light how this disease is deeply affecting millions of lives. Not only does she make the facts and data about diabetes digestible, her courage to tell her truth has now enabled me to ask questions about her disease that I was once uncomfortable to ask before. Everyone should see *Blood/Sugar...* for whether we know it or not, every single one of us is connected to a person with diabetes and we need to be informed." —*Award-winning playwright Jami Brandli*

"My husband and I went to see *Blood/Sugar* when it was here in Los Angeles and we were amazed. Not just by the complex (and flawless!) multimedia presentation, but by the emotion and real experiences involved in having diabetes on a day to day basis. We really loved the question-and-answer period after the show. You are a special person to be able to open yourself up as you've done!" —*Debbie Nemecek, RN and Certified Diabetes Educator*

"The show was awesome - not only did I learn a lot but found it tragic, funny, entertaining, infuriating, inspiring and empowering all at the same time - thank you for that gift."



/ AUDIENCE RESPONSES (CONT.)

"I've been diabetic for over 23 years now, but I still struggle to express what it means or how it feels to loved ones and the rest of the community. *Blood/Sugar* is a statement to all of those living with diabetes that you are not alone and that this work of art can start a healing dialogue between you and everyone around you. I wish that everyone gets to experience this work at least once." —*Audience Member with Type 1*

"Entertaining and educational, I laud Diana and the team for the amount of research they put into *Blood/Sugar*. It's one of the best live performances that I have ever seen. Type 1 diabetes is not talked about enough. *Blood/Sugar* is a must-see!"

"*Blood/Sugar* is a testament to the power of theatre to entertain, engage, educate, connect, and motivate an audience. Diana's performance and presence captures you from the minute you walk into the theatre and leaves you with an empathetic understanding of what it's like to walk through life with an invisible disability."

"Thank you for an amazing performance. It has changed me! I see it all from a different perspective. This morning already, my approach was different because of your life testimony. Thank you for having me. It was a great experience." —*Diabetes Educator*

"Life changing! I was enlightened, moved, and impressed! Such a creative, life affirming way to share such a painful experience. Audience members lined up [after the performance] to to thank her and share their own stories." —*Bryn Fillers, teaching artist*



/ AUDIENCE RESPONSES (CONT.)

"Wyenn takes diabetes from the realm of the individual and draws connections to a collective reality we all must engage. For this reason, *Blood/Sugar* is the best piece of live theater I've ever seen about diabetes. For me, it answered the question: Why use theater to talk about living with diabetes? Wyenn uses the tools of the performing arts—light, sound, images, movement, poetry—to create a totally engaging experience for her audience that film, tv, or pamphlets cannot match. Her performance conveys the experience of a diabetic body, while also makes connections to broader concerns like healthcare justice, global warming, and what it means to inhabit a mortal body." — *Bianca C. Frazer, PhD*

"I was blown away by *Blood/Sugar* and Diana's performance. Having lived with T1D for the past 35 years of my life — I had never seen anything like this — she really captures what it is like living with this disease for those of us that struggle with it every day to those that want a glimpse into our reality. I am grateful that she is giving life to our generally invisible disease and educating anyone lucky enough to experience this very meaningful work." — *Katrina Johnson, Living with Type 1 Diabetes*

"Resonant, compelling, informative, and powerful. *Blood/Sugar* made me feel understood and showed me aspects of my own disease that I've never considered before. Diana Wyenn's performance is raw and full of power and strength. She navigates the highly traumatic topic with ease and grace and has created a piece that is easily digestible yet unsettling and provocative at the same time. *Blood/Sugar* is a magnificent example of the intersection of art and science and represents and recognizes a highly misunderstood population. *Blood/Sugar* is a tour de force and is a must see for anyone who seeks to understand the complexities and nuances of not only T1D, but chronic illness in general; both diabetic community and mainstream audience members will feel the magnetic pull of this piece." — *Allie Marotta, Living with Type 1 Diabetes*

/ ABOUT THE CREATOR



Diana Wyenn is a Los Angeles-based director, choreographer, dramaturg, and curator of contemporary performance, who—whether working on large spectacles or more intimate performances—consistently challenges and inspires audiences to see beyond the usual.

She has collaborated on projects with The Walt Disney Company, Lincoln Center, the LA

Philharmonic, Center Theater Group, REDCAT, SummerStage, Grand Performances, CAP UCLA, Chalk Repertory Theatre, and Ghost Road Ensemble, among others. In addition to her freelance work, Diana is the co-founder of Plain Wood Productions with her husband and former pro-skateboarder turned music video director LABAN; a member of Vice President Al Gore's Climate Reality Leadership Corps; a producing steering committee member of Directors Lab West; and Artistic Director at TIOH Arts & Culture.

Diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes at twenty years old while studying acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, Wyenn spent the next decade hiding her disease before she finally embraced her own disability and, instead of being in denial of the disease, became a diabetes advocate who denies its limitations. Inspired to find ways for her disability and her work to converge, she produced a series of daily video blogs called "Life By The Numbers" aimed at raising awareness and understanding of diabetes. Building upon her success as a director of several award-winning solo performances, she recently returned to the stage in *Blood/Sugar*, an autobiographical work exploring the significant impact of living with a chronic illness, while confronting and illuminating the diabetes epidemic America faces. Currently touring, the production won Outstanding Performance of a Solo Performance and Outstanding Playwright of a Solo Performance at the 2018 Planet Connections Theatre Festivity, as well as The Planet Activist Award for its informative talkbacks with local diabetes educators after every performance.

She is the recipient of a 2018 National Arts and Disability Centers Arts and Accessibility Grant, a 2017 Woman's Building: Animating the Archives Fellowship, a 2016 Inquiry Fellowship from the American Jewish University, and a 2016 Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation Observership.

Wyenn's work, ideas, and words have been featured in the Los Angeles Times, the Daily Beast, Fast Company, American Theatre magazine, Howlround, and on NPR. She received her BFA in Drama from New York University and is a proud member of the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society.

www.DianaWyenn.com

/ LINKS

Blood/Sugar
WEBPAGE

<https://www.dianawyenn.com/blood-sugar>

Blood/Sugar
VIDEO EXCERPTS

<https://vimeo.com/dianawyenn>

Diana Wyenn's
WEBSITE

<https://www.dianawyenn.com>

For a link and password to view the full production, email request to diana.wyenn@gmail.com

/ PRODUCTION HISTORY

New York University's Educational Theater Forum: Health & Performance, April 2019, New York, NY

Bootleg Theater, March 2019, Los Angeles, CA

Planet Connections Theatre Festivity, July 2018, New York, NY

Winner: The Planet Activist Award - Outstanding Production - Outstanding Playwriting; Nominated:

Outstanding Performance - Outstanding Direction - Outstanding Projection Design

New York University's Educational Theater Forum: Performance As Activism, April 2018, New York, NY (20-minute version)

REDCAT's Studio Series, December 2017, Los Angeles, CA (20-minute version)

Cornerstone Theater Rehearsal Hall, May 2017, Los Angeles, CA (workshop production)

American Diabetes Association's Tour de Cure Kick-off Event, Los Angeles, CA (5-minute excerpt)

Highways Performance Space, February 2017, Los Angeles, CA (workshop production)

/ PRODUCTION CREDITS

Diana Wyenn, creator, performer, co-writer

Guy Zimmerman, co-writer

John Zalewski, sound designer

Jason H. Thompson, projection designer

Joey Guthman, lighting designer

Rebecca Carr, costume designer

Lauren Campedelli, voice overs

Laban Pheidias, stage manager, performer

Plain Wood Productions, producer

Developmental support for Blood/Sugar was provided in part by the California Arts Council, a state agency, the National Arts and Disability Center at the University of California Los Angeles, with funding from the City of Los Angeles, Department of Cultural Affairs, LADADSpace, and individual donors.

/ CONTACT

To learn more and book a performance, contact:

Diana Wyenn, (310) 702-5280

diana.wyenn@gmail.com