

# How writer Bess Wohl and director Whitney White created a play about feminism that feels joyful

With Broadway's "Liberation," Wohl crafted a world where the 1970s and today collide to provide comfort, hope and humor to audiences.



“I wanted it to feel buoyant,” Tony Award-nominated director Whitney White told Broadway News of molding Bess Wohl’s new play

“Liberation.” The play toggles between present day and the 1970s as a woman named Lizzie imagines what her mother’s consciousness-raising group during feminism’s second wave might have been like. A theatrical piece on this topic could feel heavy, but Wohl’s script and its mounting have a glow and a lightness to it.

“Also it’s the characters,” Whitney added. “They’re hilarious.”

Wohl, a Tony-nominated playwright, has assembled a group of wildly different personalities that join the consciousness-raising (CR) group of Lizzie’s imagination. There’s Margie (played by Tony-nominated actor Betsy Aidem), an older housewife who is ambivalent about the idea of the CR gathering. Dora (played by Audrey Corsa) is a young, white woman trying to make way in her limited career and contemplating her romantic relationship. Lizzie’s mom (Susannah Flood) is a journalist. Celeste (Kristolyn Lloyd) is stoic and professional and the only Black woman in the group. Isidora (Irene Sofia Lucio) is an Italian immigrant who married for a green card. Susan (Adina Verson) is an out lesbian and currently unhoused, living out of her car.

“I wanted a very diverse and multifaceted group of people, but I also didn’t want it to feel like I was ticking off boxes of one person like this, one person like this,” Wohl noted. “The thing that really broke that

open for me was talking to actual women from the time, and they're all so singular."

"I did a ton of research, I interviewed a lot of women and so many little details of things that they told me found their way into the play," Wohl continued. "And the minute you're talking to real people, [the character you're writing] no longer feels like an archetype. They feel like a person."

As White said, "This play really stood out because the women were so 3D."

The melting pot of women who all share a common desire makes for heated discussion and beautiful camaraderie, frustrated debate and impactful vulnerability as they share stories from their everyday Ohio lives. Wohl and White have aimed to mine the humor and the intensity of their experience.

"I think what happens in the talking is moments of revelation where someone's consciousness is raised. It's like a moment of realizing," Wohl said. "It's actually an incredibly dramatic moment of the stars realigning or, Whitney calls it, 'seeing the matrix.' Seeing the way your life is working. And those are the really dramatic moments to sort of elevate the talking beyond."

Those moments of revelation often come with relief and laughter. “So many women, even going through the hardest times of their lives, aren’t completely head-bowed. That’s a stereotype of what anguish, suffering or dealing with an obstacle might feel like,” said White. “I just think about when I’m with my mother and her friends, just how much laughter is in the room. So I wanted the audience to feel that too.”

“Here are these women, center stage, they’re telling real stories about real women’s lives,” said Wohl. “That is how we get through the time that we’re in. That is really hopeful for me.”