

# 24 Minutes

a play for voices

by David Dudley

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Draft 4.0

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## The Voices

*Operator*, a woman, sick at heart, searching, 35-50

*Caller*, a woman, mortally wounded, holding on, 18

*Caller 2*, a young man

**The Space:** Open, suggesting a vast distance - or a small one - between two points in space, trying to communicate. A choreographic sensibility may serve the play best, building - and destroying - the space through the relationships of bodies, words, desires and needs.

**Synopsis:** What do you say to someone who's dying? How do you comfort that person on the other end of the telephone? What if that person may be your daughter, whom you haven't spoken to since you learned of her sexual orientation? What if you don't get a second chance? An unnamed 911 Operator wrestles with these questions while trying to comfort Maricella, a mortally wounded young woman trapped inside the Pulse nightclub on the morning of June 12th, 2016. Though the call lasts for 24 minutes, the Operator is forced to confront her own mistakes in life, to wrestle with the differences that separate us all. But first, she must answer the next call.

**History:** This play was written as part of the international theatre action, *After Orlando*. It was presented as a staged reading by Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, in association with NoPassport Theatre Alliance and Missing Bolts Productions, on September 22nd, 2016. It was then presented as a staged reading at KCACTF, in Indianapolis, IN, January of 2017. The play was also named a finalist for the Heideman award at Actors' Theatre of Louisville.

*For those who died at Pulse, and those who share their pain*

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## **Operator**

I've worked as an operator  
for the Orlando Police Department  
for about 15 years.  
I like it  
I like it all right.  
It's fast-paced,  
Sometimes exciting,  
So the time passes pretty quickly.  
Sometimes it's slow which can be nice sometimes.  
I play chess, online, mostly with the computer;  
I don't like to lose to the people on the other end,  
even though I don't know them,  
even though we may never meet.  
It just . . . Ah! You know?  
But tonight's different.  
There's something in the air, I can't . . .  
It's hot, 77 degrees, at night?  
Humidity is 80%.  
It's sticky  
People aren't sleeping right, I know that.  
We know that  
when people can't sleep  
shit happens.  
We're all on edge.  
I sip my coffee - black, lots of sugar.  
Helps keep me alert.  
At 2:02 a.m. the calls started:  
Emergency 911, this is being recorded

## **Caller**

I'm at Pulse, the Pulse Nightclub,  
in the women's  
I'm in the womensbathroom and my and my and my

## **Operator**

Calm down, please  
What's your name?

**Caller**

Please send somebody  
I was shot!  
My body's going numb

**Operator**

Where were you shot?

**Caller**

In the - There's so much blood  
On the tiles  
The tiles are green and burgundy?  
Burgundy?  
In patterns that make up  
Crosses? Or crucifixes?  
With box frames  
and now they're all covered in blood

**Operator**

Where were you shot?

**Caller**

My thigh?

**Operator**

What's your name?

**Caller**

Mari - Maricella.

**Operator**

Her voice takes my breath away:  
My daughter's name is Maricella.  
The Caller's voice is almost identical  
to my daughter's, but I can't quite . . .  
I haven't spoken to her since she  
Since she told me about her  
Problem?  
She said that she likes

Women.  
And I just don't  
understand  
that  
How a woman can like another  
Like that . . .  
I asked her to leave  
A week ago.  
We haven't spoken since.

**Caller**

Hello?  
Hello?

**Operator**

I'm here.

**Caller**

I wore a dress tonight  
I wore it for Alexis;  
She's never seen my legs before, my skin, and I  
Now they're covered in blood,  
And there's a hole, a wound, just above my knee  
On my inner thigh . . .  
Please, please send someone  
to the bathroom.  
There are others

**Operator**

How many others?

**Caller**

I'm laying with two of them,  
Others are hurt but I can't see them.  
The shooter is still  
He's still somewhere in the club.

**Operator**

Can you identify the shooter?

**Caller**

I didn't see his face;  
I pretended I was dead . . .  
There's a guy next to me,  
He has three moles near his right eye,  
Like mi vida loca, you know, my crazy life?  
He's hurt but still breathing.

**Operator**

She called at 2:21 a.m.  
It's now 2:33 a.m.  
The calls just keep coming in, they won't stop.  
She's not well.  
Her breathing becomes more rapid  
Her speech, labored,  
She keeps repeating herself:

**Caller**

Send somebody to the bathroom.  
Sendsomebodytothe  
hhhhhh

**Operator**

I'm supposed to keep calm and cool,  
But sometimes, sometimes this job . . .  
I keep thinking about my Maricella:  
Where is she? Is she safe?  
What if I never get to see her again?  
What if I never get the chance to say:  
I'm sorry  
What if I never get the chance to say:  
I love you,  
No matter what I love you.  
Please, God, please don't let her be  
on the other end of this line . . .  
Maricella?

**Caller**

Yes, don't hang up, please

**Operator**

I'm here

What's your last name?

**Caller**

Have you gotten a call from Alexis Liu?

**Operator**

I'm sorry, I don't -

**Caller**

I wore a dress because I wanted  
I want to be beautiful  
Until I met her, I didn't care;  
But when she looked at me,  
with her bright green eyes, her smile,  
I felt loved, wanted . . .  
I wanted Alexis to say the words:  
You're beautiful.  
Then I was going to say,  
You're beautiful too.  
And then we'd kiss  
and dance, slowly,  
and just hold each other . . .  
I don't want to die today.  
Please, I'm only 18.

**Operator**

My Maricella is 18

Maricella, what's your last name?

**Caller**

I want to be beautiful but  
Hhhh  
I'm bleeding like a lot?  
And this fucking wound

It's ugly!  
O I FUCKING HATE BLOOD!

**Operator**

Can you elevate the wounded leg?

**Caller**

If I put it up on the toilet?

**Operator**

Elevate the wounded leg  
to prevent  
Bleeding

**Caller**

Okay but please send send somebody to the bathroom

**Operator**

Ambulances and police are en route.  
Hang in there.  
Just a little longer.  
She keeps repeating

**Caller**

I don't want to die today.

**Operator**

And I keep thinking about my Maricella . . .  
Why won't she answer the fucking question???  
Maricella, what's your last -

**Caller**

Oh my God: I can't I can't I can't see!  
Please, lady, I don't want to to die today.

**Operator**

Is it wrong, that I can only think of my daughter,  
When this young woman so clearly needs me?

**Caller**

I can't feel my  
Legs I can't feel my arms . . .

**Operator**

Is that selfish?

**Caller**

. . . or my fingers  
I, I, I don't want to die today

**Operator**

I hear moaning,  
in the background;  
it's been there all along . . .

**Caller**

I don't want to die

**Operator**

There's also a song, playing in the background,  
"I can't stop the feeling,  
so just dance, dance, dance . . ."  
Something about that song,  
And the scene in that club.  
I don't think anybody's dancing . . .  
My cellphone buzzes in my pocket . . .  
Do I pick up?

**Caller**

Please come to the

**Operator**

Do I pick up?

**Caller**

Not today, please not today

**Operator**

I let my cellphone ring; I don't pick up  
This young woman,  
Whether she's my daughter or not,  
She needs me

**Caller**

Are you there?

**Operator**

Yes, I'm here.

**Caller**

Tell my mom  
Tell my mom I love her,  
and tell Alexis,  
Tell her I was beautiful.

**Operator**

What's your mom's name?

**Caller**

. . .

**Operator**

Maricella?  
Are you there?  
Maricella???

**Caller**

. . . . .

**Operator**

At 2:45 am  
Maricella's line went dead.  
24 Minutes I shared with her.  
Maricella . . .  
24 minutes I'll never forget.  
Sip my coffee - but it's empty.

Need more coffee - but I can't get up  
I can't move.  
At 2:46 am  
I receive a text from my Maricella.  
It reads:  
"Mama, heard what's happening @ Pulse.  
I'm safe. Home with Tory,  
did not go out tonight.  
Coming to your house in a.m.  
Will bring breakfast and coffee from Keke's."  
Thank God, O Thank God!  
Still, I weep for the others, in the club;  
I weep for the mothers of those in the club,  
I weep for the mother of the shooter,  
And  
most of all  
I weep for the world . . .  
I mean,  
What  
What  
WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON?????

. . .

. . . . .

. . . . .

Then, there's another caller, on the other end of the line:  
Emergency 911, this call is being recorded.

## **Caller 2**

Praise be to God  
and prayers as well as peace be upon the prophet of God  
I wanna let you know, I'm in Orlando  
and I did the shootings . . .

**THE END ~ 11/4/18**