

# Midlife Monologues 2.0

*Maneuvering through menopause*

BY SARAH ROSE

After hosting World Menopause Day at the Gibbes Museum in October 2022, essayist and founder of Hot in Charleston, a community for women in the midlife space, Kerri Devine knew she wanted to further examine those in-between times when women tend to struggle. After surveying a group of women ages 35-65 to learn whether they felt prepared for perimenopause or menopause, she learned 99% were not. Further research revealed that 75% of women in that demographic wanted to hear stories from others who were experiencing similar changes to the ones they were going through. Determined to reach across generations to help women in all phases of life feel more seen and supported, Devine decided the best way forward was to take the conversation to the stage.

Inspired by memoirist Patricia Hampl's mantra, "You tell me your story and somehow, I understand mine," Devine compiled a multi-genre entertainment event called "Midlife Monologues." From page to stage, the performance first launched at PURE Theatre in 2023 with two sold-out shows featuring an ensemble of award-winning authors, artists and creatives. Accordingly, "Midlife Monologues" earned acclaim from both the arts and medical communities for the raw honesty, humor and insight with which the program highlighted women's milestone moments.

Building on this success, Devine, in partnership with Sharon Graci, artistic director at PURE Theatre and Polly Buxton of Buxton Books, curated the production of an expanded "Midlife Monologues," which debuted March 12 at Charleston Music Hall for an audience of nearly 1,000 women spanning multiple generations. Giving voice to these "Midlife Monologues" were bestselling authors Kate Baer, Mary Laura Philpott and Tara Stringfellow; 2024 winner of American Idol, Abi Carter; Woman of the Hour and Pitch Perfect actor and singer, Kelley Jakle; rising pop star, Hayes Warner; two-time Grammy winner, Quiana Parler, PURE Ensemble actor Joy Vandervort Cobb as



Joy Vandervort Cobb.

well as many more local luminaries. This star-studded cast of nationally renowned artists and Charleston treasures performed a creative blend of words, music and artistic expression that capture the entire arc of a woman's life — the bright lights of girlhood, the confidence of young women in their 20s and 30s and the complexities of motherhood and midlife's next chapters that continue to unfold.

"Women of all ages are finally being more vulnerable about the emotional and relational challenges they face in their life's journeys, especially in perimenopause and menopause, which comprise one-third of a woman's life," Devine said. "That's positive for women of the current and the next generations who won't have to struggle with the physical and emotional challenges that come with change. The arts are a powerful vehicle for bringing these conversations out into the open so that women of



Abi Carter.

all generations can see that they are not alone. I'm really proud that Hot in Charleston and other local creatives are part of the conversation."

"This performance of Midlife Monologues has truly been an intergenerational conversation with an ensemble who convey a candid and raw dialogue confronting a range of subjects like love, loss, family and identity profoundly affected by feelings," Devine continued. "It's not uncommon to lose the sense of self during these all-encompassing life phases. The craven irony is that perimenopause and menopause can last for a decade or more, happening at the same time as ruptures in a woman's life, such as coping with an empty nest, going through divorce, changing careers and/or caring for aging parents. Women and society must examine who we are when unbound from the roles we hold for others."


As a solution to that profound question, "Midlife Monologues" suggests midlife is a period for taking a creative pause in which to reconsider next moves and enlisting support for pivoting to the future with confidence. Writer and author of "Veranda: At Home in the South," Stephanie Hunt, who read from her essay, "Ma'amed," in the first "Midlife Monologues" and will be returning to the stage in the upcoming version, echoed that sentiment. "The dialogue about perimenopause and menopause is generating momentum as part of a broader conversation that's gaining traction," Hunt said. "Women are getting more vocal because we must be advocates for our daughters. This movement needs to continue by engaging, enlightening, energizing and educating.

'Midlife Monologues' does exactly that by celebrating and embracing a life stage despite its challenges and bridging the chapters of life," Hunt continued, "Sharing the stage with such incredible talent is a huge honor. I am blown away by the level of professionalism. 'Midlife Monologues' is a real asset to Charleston's literary arts scene, on par with the Charleston Literary Festival and the Library Society's programs."

Buxton added, "This event demonstrates how exciting it is to have Charleston as a catalyst in this conversation and to be part of this groundswell of literary and artistic expression. We are seeing the transformative power of storytelling in the books we read and the monologues performed on stage."

Graci agreed, "In our nearly two decades here in Charleston, we at PURE Theatre have been proud to ignite dialogue and contribute to the exchange of ideas, aspirations and inspirations of our community. 'Midlife Monologues' is a marvelous example of that experience."

Devine concluded, "The most gratifying part of this creative process is when women seek me out to tell me the lasting impression 'Midlife Monologues' had on them, especially the power of feeling validated and seeing their lives reflected in the stories of others."

Event sponsors include Longevity Club, Croghan's, Oliphant, Menopause Solutions, Rising Tide Wellness, Bleecker Family Law and *Charleston Women* magazine. Event donations will support nonprofit organizations addressing women's mental health, including The Jed Foundation for adolescent mental health, Postpartum Support SC and Mugs for Moms for maternal mental health and MenopauseMandateUS, chaired by Naomi Watts, for menopause education. 

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