PAUL TOSH

BS'D



PAPER GUN

"This is mine, but you can have it."



An intimate, original music-theatre work about resentment, identity and a struggle to let go.

TWO VOICES, ONE PERFORMER

E	The protagonist. Sung, set in upright type. He is the one trying to get somewhere.
N	The shadow. Spoken with an accent, set indented in italic. The voice that deflects, defends, and will not be held to account — until it is.
E + N	Merged. Indented italic, in bold. Both at once.
Narrator	The friend. Spoken, set in grey. Not part of the argument — the one who was there for it, and stayed.
Paul	The author, speaking to the room. Set full width, between rules.

Follow the type: upright is E, indented italic is N. The hat carries two colors, because one man is playing both sides of himself (listen for the accent).

You are welcome to read along, and equally welcome to close this and just listen.



PATRON COPY

Signed for

_____

_____

THE MEMO

Entirely optional: come dressed in black and white, any combination.

A testimony against blurring.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Scotland. Son of Avril ז״ל and Mori, both avid opera fans. Formed in piano bars in Europe. Seasoned across a decade of performances for senior communities on the American East Coast. Paul Tosh is a performer whose work refuses an easy distinction between entertainment, art and therapy.

His signature approach — The Song Is The Play — treats every performance as a piece of theater: looping piano, dramatic song, and the kind of presence that makes a familiar melody feel heard for the first time.

> *"Live performance is exciting; there's a great feeling between me and the people there. I am always improving one aspect or another. I was born, thank G-d, with determination, and with wanting to do better.*
>
> *Paper Gun is serious work, and I want it seen — but not just for its own sake. Because it gives something to people, and particularly because it can take someone out of misery, even for an evening. The goal is to bring people into sync — that's what music does. Here the psychology is hopefully doing it too.*
>
> *With an audience in the room, the dignity of it shows."*



THE MIDNIGHT NOTE

14 OCTOBER 2026

So it's an extremely exciting time. It's like 2:30 in the morning. I finished the farm night shift. I'm looking at the stars. I'm realizing how close I am to something that's like a dream — to have such a project, such a collection of work, which you have to have tremendous energy to perform. But I know that it's the right thing. I know that it touches people very, very deeply. I want to say that, because people are coming for a long concert — which people do when it's, well, when it's good enough.

I spent all my time on my own up at the farm doing the night shift, preparing this concert — these original works. And I realized that had I not been put at such a distance, I would never have been able to do it.

WHAT LED UP TO THE MIDNIGHT NOTE

MARCH 2026

I had been enjoying the development of my performance work very much, and it was receiving heartfelt feedback. But there is an inescapable reality: however good you are as a performing artist, performing other people's work — even with your own songs occasionally woven in, but without a larger context — is unlikely to take you where you want to go. I needed an entirely original piece. The idea of putting together a musical, though, was not appealing at all. I had tried something along those lines decades earlier and it had not worked, and I had little appetite for repeating the experience. Then, on Purim in 2026, I looked at the pieces I had been developing live — independently of any ambition — and saw a far stronger thread running through them than I had realized. They were not simply a collection of songs and ideas. There was a story, a theatrical world, and a connection between them I had not seen, and I found myself compelled to discover what was taking shape. Not realizing what the effort was going to be, I set about putting it together — to make it coherent, to pull every aspect of the presentation into one shape, and then to find a way to get it out there and secure the first performances. Still less did I know what it would take out of, and give to, me personally.



WHAT HAPPENS ON STAGE

It isn't a reading. It's a fully performed show, in which I play three characters — the narrator, and the two voices of the man — and at times speak as myself. No costume, except for a hat — and sometimes a shirt split black and white. No props, except for a series of poster boards that help to create location and mood. The rest is up to me: to make the characters vivid and real. And it has social content that is very, very pertinent today, and throughout the world — the whole question of resentment, and the psychology that sits under it.

WHY THIS SHOW EXISTS

AN ORIGINAL SONG CYCLE / OPERETTA

Paper Gun, about a conflicted opera star, was built in senior communities — years of conversations and collected wisdom. Some of the people I met carry resentment, some carry none. The difference is the point of the show.

A paper theme tied to the shadow, and parallels about sacrifice. One man plays both sides of himself. The voice that seems to come from someone else is the one that turns out to be his.

Few people close this chapter and leave it behind. Unresolved hurt sustains resentment, and resentment goes on shaping decisions long after the events.

Paper Gun is both an experience and an introduction to a method — a way of reclaiming a life from resentment. The ambition is simpler than that sounds. A song once said a thing for me that I had never managed to say for myself, and what I thought at the time was: it screams my scream for me. That is what I would want somebody to leave saying.

WHAT IT COSTS TO LOOK AWAY

It may take time to come to terms with something you can't face.

The cost isn't only the thing you avoid. Avoiding it changes how you see everything else, until you can't trust your own picture.

No single audience member participation is ever required. The audience is never singled out, addressed individually, or asked to disclose anything.

THE THIRD VOICE

Two voices do the arguing. A third one does not argue at all.

The Narrator is E's friend. He is not inside the fight — no position to defend, nothing to win, no account to settle. He is the one who was there for all of it and did not leave. That is why he can tell the story. A friend is a Narrator: he holds the version of your life you cannot hold yourself, and gives it back to you without flinching and without charge.

Notice where he stands. He never corrects E and he never answers N. He speaks when the argument has worn itself out, and what he says is always larger than what has just happened. Some will hear a friend. Some will hear something further than a friend — the one who has watched the whole of it and loves the man anyway. The piece does not insist. It leaves the door open.

And watch what the evening does with gratitude. It opens with a man who cannot say thank you — I've never been able to really say how I thank. It closes, at the end of Act Three, with the thanks finally said, out loud, to everybody. That is the journey. Resentment cannot be reasoned away. It can be outlasted, by someone who stays.

PROGRAM

ACT ONE — THE TRAP — PAPER GUN

1. Pressures — The nerves pre performance
2. This Is Mine — Either generosity from performance or as a complaint
3. Beautiful Sunshine — A little full of himself after the performance
4. You Make Me Rock N Roll — Reasons or excuses
5. The Visitor — The shadow arrives
6. Tavern scene — The expert arrives

6.2 The Work / The Journey — Moving is the proof

7. You and Your Own — Understanding the pattern
8. From a Watcher's Point of View — N observed
9. Who Knows Just Why — The protagonist questions himself
10. Paper Gun — The weapon named
11. Fear Hate — The universal warning
12. Don't Say Anything — The silence and isolation

ACT TWO — THE STRUGGLE — PAPER CROWN

1. Bully the Bully — Call it self defense
2. Phenomenal Heart — Fighting back
3. The open secret — The impossible ask
4. Lemon Ice-Cream — She refuses the word. He sweetens it.
5. Two Faced — The unsent letter

5.1 "Torna a Surriento"

6. The Space Between — The prayer in the eye of the storm
7. Trauma Response — The most raw and honest piece in the collection
8. A Little Amnesty — The plea
9. Broken Man — The raw plea
10. Paper Crown — The turning point: vulnerability as the key
11. The Painting — soliloquy

11.2 The Destination — Arriving is the trap

12. Un Artiste — We sang alone

ACT THREE — THE EMERGENCE — PAPER HEART

1. From a Living Grave — The descent and the return
2. Painful Bother — Farewell to the dynamic
3. By Hertz — Reflection
4. Faith — The resolution
5. Rock N Roll / Sunshine — The return he rehearses, and never has
6. Just a Moment Away — Let me grieve for what once was
7. A Love Left Bleeding — The ceasefire, both of them sorry
8. Let Me Cry — The release / the prayer
9. Your Paper Heart — The only one who stayed
10. Paper Gun — The weapon, retired
11. Coming Home — for Christmas
12. This Is Mine — Reclamation / generosity
13. Opera Star — The world is made for giving

ENCORE

14. My Paper Heart — I believe in your pain, I believe in you
15. For the Narrator — his feat

TALKBACK

A Note on Safe Portrayal 9
Grieving the Living 10
The Talkback 12
Author's Notes 14

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

What you will see tonight is one man's version of the work — lived vicariously, from a seat. If something in it touched a part of your own life, there's a way to begin that work for yourself.

At the back of this program you'll find the protocol the show is built on: a way of turning resentment into grief, so that it stops costing you. It's best walked with a trained therapist beside you. The first part — getting the whole of it into words — can be done alone, at any hour, with whatever will listen.

WHERE IT HAPPENS

ACT ONE
dressing room · opera encore · on the way to the apartment · at his apartment window · the tavern

ACT TWO
the tavern with her

ACT THREE
the tavern alone / in the painting

One piano. Three acts. Forty minutes each.

Approximately two and a half hours
two intervals of ten to fifteen minutes, plus a ten-minute talkback.

Paper Gun is a full-length work in three acts. Not a set
an evening. Original music throughout. It goes deep. Ten years of playing this material to rooms taught me what it does to people, and that is why it's built with care.

A NOTE ON SAFE PORTRAYAL

Paper Gun passes through despair. Act Three opens at the lowest point a person can reach, and it is fair to ask how that is handled.

Research on media portrayals of suicide distinguishes two effects. Sensationalized or detailed depictions — particularly those naming methods — are associated with increased risk: the Werther effect. Portrayals of people who come through a crisis, and narratives of hope, coping and recovery, are associated with reduced suicidal ideation and with people being more willing to seek help: the Papageno effect, named for the character in The Magic Flute who is talked out of despair by other voices.

This piece is built to the second pattern, deliberately. The protagonist survives, and the act moves from the lowest point to recovery. The despair is never left unanswered — a second voice replies within the same song. Contemplation is depicted as something already passed through, described from beyond it rather than as a present intention; one line refers to a means in passing, at the point of deepest despair, and nothing is described, shown or instructional. No action is ever taken or planned, and nothing presents an ending as relief or escape. A method for the living is offered instead, printed in these pages, with the recommendation that it be walked with a trained therapist. A talkback follows the performance, so nobody leaves at the rawest moment without a room to be in. And no one here is ever singled out, addressed individually, or asked to disclose anything.

This describes how the work is made, not a claim about what it achieves.

If you or someone with you is struggling, in the United States and Canada the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline can be called or texted at any hour.

GRIEVING THE LIVING

A practitioner's protocol for mourning a relationship with someone still alive

BY PAUL TOSH · CREATOR OF THE OPERETTA PAPER GUN · TOSH42.COM

This protocol comes from lived practice: to be undertaken with guidance and alongside professional therapy — and from twenty years of performing for audiences carrying losses that have no closure. It is offered to fellow sufferers and to the clinicians who treat them. Nothing here replaces therapy; much here may make it work better.

THE PREMISE: RESENTMENT IS GRIEF STILL LITIGATING

Resentment and grief are the same loss in two states. Resentment keeps the case open — someone did this, someone owes, the account awaits settlement that never comes. Grief is the write-off of a debt accepted as uncollectible: not forgiven — surrendered. Chronic bitterness toward the living is usually mourning that was never permitted to start, because the person is still alive and hope keeps re-filing the claim. The rage does not fade into indifference; properly grieved, it melts into sadness — and sadness, unlike resentment, completes. Progress test: the grieving has succeeded on the day revenge becomes boring. Not resisted — uninteresting.

THE TWO PAINS

"You hurt either way — why not stay in contact?" The pains are not symmetric. Contact-pain is corrosive: it does not merely hurt you, it replaces you — you see yourself through the other's eyes, and the damage compounds, degrading the very instrument that would recover. Distance-pain is clean: an amputation — love with nowhere to go — and it diminishes, because grief completes. One is a disease, one is a wound. Wounds heal; diseases progress.

THE PROTOCOL

Loss of a living person lacks what mourning requires — an event, a date, a ritual, witnesses. Supply them deliberately: (a) a one-page eulogy for the good that was genuinely real — grief needs an object, and the page holds the quiet material the bitterness would otherwise drown out; read it briefly and regularly, though for those who process through dialogue and performance, conversation and expressive work may carry the active grieving while the page serves as anchor; (b) a sealed file — the complete record of harm, one's own wrongs included, written once at full voltage, your Paper Gun, then closed: visited only in therapy, never re-litigated at night (it doubles as a target list for trauma-focused work such as EMDR); (c) a bounded window — fixed start and end dates; boundedness is what licenses the psyche to stop; (d) a physical closing act — the page printed and put away, a composition, a stone: the body must register that a burial occurred; (e) one witness — grief unwitnessed barely registers as having happened; (f) clergy sanction where faith is live, converting private improvisation into authorized practice and answering the "reconcile at all costs" chorus; and (g) a means of expression — music, writing, art, prayer, or an AI at an hour when nobody is awake — as the enabling condition: the outlet is where the unsayable first reaches the front; those without one cannot begin, so building one is the first task.

A WORD ON THE OUTLET, IF THE OUTLET IS AN AI

It has one virtue nothing else has: you can say the whole ugly thing at three in the morning and watch no face while you say it. Most of what stops a person starting is not the absence of a listener but the presence of one. Use it for that, and use it first.

Say all of it. Do not organise it, do not be fair, do not leave out the part that makes you look bad or the part that makes you look worse. Go on until you are repeating yourself — repeating yourself is the signal that it is out.

Only then ask it to turn around. Ask it to write the other person's account of the same events, in their voice, as sympathetically as it can make it. Ask it where your version is too tidy. It will do this honestly, but it will almost never do it unless you ask — it is built to be agreeable, and an agreeable listener is no use at all to someone trying not to blame and trying to be believable to himself. That is the one thing you must supply yourself.

It is not the witness. It cannot be hurt by what you tell it, it has nothing at stake, and it will not remember you next year. The witness has to be a person who chose to stay. But it is where the unsayable can first reach the front, and the protocol above makes that the first task.

WHY EXPRESSION ALONE WAS NEVER ENOUGH

But the expression — talk, art, catharsis, even tears — drains the reservoir but does not cap the spring: the relief is real and temporary, and the resentment refills between discharges. Only completed mourning caps the spring. The outcome measure is not the absence of sadness — the ache remains, visitable, for life — but whether the gaps between discharges stop refilling with prosecution. Crying, within the structure, is not breakdown; it is the loop finally running to completion. What is properly wept for stops charging rent.

None of this requires the other person to change, participate, or ever know. The love is not discarded — it is kept, resized to reality, and rerouted to where it can be received. Clinicians interested in developing this protocol into a formal case study are invited to write.

THE TALKBACK

The show takes you from resentment to grief. But what to do next is also important

The talkback covers that too. Ten minutes.

Sadness is a doorway, not an end

Grief is better than resentment in not getting in the way, and that is a starting point for what a future can hold in many positive ways. The question is what comes after the success of being sad as opposed to angry.

Building anything has two precursors

Be believable — to yourself first, and then you will be believable to others. Not to convince anybody of anything, not to trick yourself, not to make excuses for yourself. And to not blame — not yourself, not others. If you are someone who blames, you cannot build. If you are someone who is not believable to yourself, you cannot build. Any building process requires those two very, very basic things.

But neither can be attained without satisfaction first

All of that is good and well and can be agreed with, and it is entirely useless information without prior satisfaction. The other and compounding reason people blame is that they are filling in for not being satisfied. Satisfaction is the first goal, not the last.

And satisfaction comes from learning, for its own sake

It does not have to be a spiritual subject. It can be any practice, anything you learn — crochet, model-building, anything at all — but it has to be for its own sake, something you actually like, not something you want to capitalise on. Get better at it because you like doing it. That is the cornerstone, and it is a lifelong process.

None of which is available while you are resentful

Which is where the show comes back in. The only way out of being resentful is to grieve, which is what the whole piece is about. There are phases to that, which is another discussion; I've got a printout of all that stuff, how that works, and a person can work with a therapist and go through the steps of how you get past it. And there are timelines, and there's reasonable achievements, levels of achievement where you can reasonably say you can attack another stage.

Also directly related to paper gun:

TO RELEASE RESENTMENT IS TO GRIEVE

PHASE 1

If you grieve the loss of something from a source of a resentment.

The resentment goes.

From the good thing that the source of the resentment has.

Again, if you're really sad about the loss of the good thing that the source of the resentment also has

The resentment goes.

To grieve it. To release resentment is to grieve. That means to cry about it.

PHASE 2

Then grieving can give way to giving, because you stop resenting, and it’s the resenting is in the way of giving.

© Paul Tosh, August 2026 · tosh42.com · to be applied alongside guidance and professional therapy · Paper Gun: a show about shadow work

Paul

P A P E R G U N

tosh42.com ·

AUTHOR'S NOTES

CONTEXT FOR P A P E R G U N

Context for P A P E R G U N

A dramaturgical companion to the song cycle for performance preparation and audience understanding. It is offered here as context, not instruction.

The arc of all three acts is what's important to travel.

tosh42.com

Paper Gun is built around a single sustained dramatic question: what does it cost a person to stay conscious inside a relationship that is slowly consuming them? The answer unfolds across three acts — The Trap, The Struggle, The Emergence — each named after a paper object. Gun. Crown. Heart. The progression is not accidental. A gun is a threat, an instrument of control disguised as power. A crown is the same thing worn more elegantly. A heart is what remains when both have been set down.

The vehicle for the journey is a one-man performance: one piano, one performer, two voices. Those two voices are not characters in the conventional theatrical sense. They are two sides of the same person — and the deepest reading of the piece is that they are two forces that live inside every person who has ever been caught in a difficult bond with someone they cannot simply leave.

The spoken voice and the sung voice are not equal in the way two actors in a play are equal. They are in a power struggle. The spoken voice has been winning for most of the story. By the end, the sung voice has claimed itself back.

The two voices have been given the designations E and N throughout this working document. These are not names. They are orientations.

E — The Self-Destructive as the protagonist / The Sung Voice

E is the voice that feels, reaches, questions, and ultimately does the work of the piece. E is the one capable of vulnerability, of theological wrestling, of grief. E sings because singing is the voice of the interior — it costs something to sustain a note, it requires breath and exposure in a way that speech does not. When E sings, the audience is inside the protagonist's experience, not observing it from outside.

E's great weakness is the self-destructive characteristic flaw: he extends understanding so far that he absorbs the other person's reality and loses his own. He questions himself when he should not. He forgives prematurely. He reaches for connection even when the hand reaching back is not open. His arc across the piece is from this kind of self-dissolving generosity toward a harder, clearer form of love — one that includes a boundary.

E is printed throughout this document in deep blue.

N — The Punitive as the Shadow / The Spoken Voice

N is the spoken, accented voice. N does not sing because N does not have access to that register of exposure. N performs. N deflects. N observes himself in the third person, describes his own behavior with a kind of self-congratulatory detachment, and when cornered, reaches for wit rather than truth.

The crucial thing to understand about N is that N is not a villain. N is a wound given a defense mechanism. The piece never invites contempt for N. It invites recognition. The audience who laughs at N's lines is laughing at something they know. N's function in the piece is not to be defeated. It is to be understood, and finally, in Act Three, to be released.

N's most extraordinary moment comes at the very end of the show — the final passage before curtain. The shadow, who has evaded depth throughout, is given the most spiritually searching words in the piece. This is the inversion that resolves the drama: N, in the act of being let go, speaks truth.

N is punitive only while the shadow has somewhere to point. Through Acts One and Two, N carries much of the other person's voice — her dialogue in Paper Crown, her account of the tavern, her observation of him holding court. When she leaves at the end of Act Two, N cannot be her anymore, and the voice turns inward. In Act Three the accusing voice becomes the supporting one: when things don't seem white or black; so what do we do, we stick at it for what we knew; yet you are imbued with beauty still. Nothing about N has changed. Only what N is pointed at.

The clearest measure of that inversion is musical. You Make Me Rock N Roll belongs to E in Act One, with N interrupting from the edges. In Act Three it is N who sings its refrain. The voice that once broke into the protagonist's song of awakening has, by the end, taken it up on his behalf.

N is printed throughout this document in deep red.

E + N — Integration / The Merged Voice

The moments where both voices are together are the pivots of the piece. They signal that the protagonist is no longer at war with himself. Integration is not the disappearance of the shadow. It is the shadow and the self moving in the same direction. These moments are used sparingly and deliberately: This Is Mine, By Hertz, Faith, Truthful Love. Each one is earned.

E + N together is printed in deep green.

The piece establishes a shadow figure — the other person in the dynamic — through the Frère Jacques motif and the phrase "I'm alright, Jack (Jacques)." This figure is deliberately left unnamed and ungendered in the introduction, which invites the audience to project their own shadow onto the frame.

The shadow is introduced in the Narrator's opening as your French brother — and the word "brother" is chosen with care. It carries the Frère Jacques resonance (the nursery rhyme about someone who will not wake up), the British idiom "I'm alright, Jack" (meaning: I have mine, and your situation is not my concern), and the fraternal-spiritual meaning of a peer who has become an obstacle. All three readings run simultaneously throughout the piece.

However, the songs themselves establish a charge that exceeds the fraternal. The Visitor opens with "in the summer, my lover comes south to visit" — and this framing recurs as a structural motif throughout. Lemon makes the stakes explicit: "without a kiss, a taste of bliss — you're my little sis?" The line only works because the relationship is romantic, or was. Sister collapses the line into absurdity. Lover gives it its sting.

The shadow is therefore best understood as: the person you chose, before you understood what the choice was costing you. Whether that person is a lover, a parent, a sibling, a mentor, a friend — the audience will know. The piece trusts them to know.

Paper Gun operates on two registers simultaneously. On the surface it is a piece about a difficult human relationship and the long work of freeing oneself from it. Underneath, it is a piece about the relationship between a person and G-d.

This layer is never announced. It accretes gradually, through the passages between acts, through the explicit eruptions in Trauma Response ("Same for G-d. That's the waste."), Broken Man (the direct address that becomes a prayer), and Paper Crown (the chain of faith → security → accountability → vulnerability → authenticity → intimacy). The audience who does not know this layer is present will experience a human drama. The audience who does will experience something more.

The parallels of sacrifice and the emotional work of the piece are not ornamental. They are structural. Each passage encodes the emotional problem of its act in legal-philosophical language:

Act One: humility must precede forgiveness. You cannot receive what you will not ask for.

Act Two: sorry, thank you, and I agree come from the same internal place. Working on any one of them develops all three.

Act Three: the fourth stage of sacrifice — cut, receive, and now carry and give — the last two of the four stages of honest transmission. You must be willing to wound to find the truth; to receive it without your ego; to become it, to live it; and finally to give it over not for glory but for itself.

The piece ends not with resolution in the conventional dramatic sense but with an earned and shared return. Beautiful Sunshine comes back. The protagonist wakes up — but this time the waking is not a dream. Frère Jacques is still sleeping somewhere. The final visual instruction is: stay vigilant.

ACT ONE — The Trap — Paper Gun

Act One establishes the dream before it names the weapon. Pressures opens in the dressing room, with the nerves before a performance. This Is Mine follows, the generosity of the performance itself. Beautiful Sunshine is the high afterward, a state of cultivated contentment — the cufflinks, the stairs, the happiness at having had someone who cares. This is the idealized version of the bond, the version the protagonist has been living in or retreating to. The parenthetical stage direction — the tip-off that the whole thing was a dream — is the first crack.

The Visitor is where the shadow arrives in real time. The lover comes south. The dynamic begins immediately: the accommodation, the getting of drinks, the management of the other person's fragility. You and Your Own names the pattern: we hurt the ones nearest to us because proximity permits it. We pass it off as love's unavoidable cost. The piece refuses that excuse without condemning the people who reach for it. E is already working hard to hold things together while N begins to show his shape in the Watcher's Point of View section — observed in the third person, self-regarding, performing reasonableness while possessing a critical eye.

Who Knows Just Why, the pivot song of Act One, is E at his most philosophical and therefore most paralyzed — the Hamlet passage is not decorative; it is the sound of someone who can see the problem exactly and still cannot act.

Paper Gun names the central image: the weapon that looks lethal and isn't, or is. Fear Hate is the universal statement: the piece's deepest warning delivered as E's most open address to the audience. Don't Say Anything closes the act and establishes the silence and the double life — generous in public, absent in private; or vice versa.

ACT TWO — The Struggle — Paper Crown

Act Two is the emotional center of the piece and its longest sustained stretch of difficulty. E is now fully conscious of the dynamic and fighting it while still inside it. Bully the Bully and Phenomenal Heart establish the fighting-back energy — but the crucial self-awareness of "I know in this song the bully is me" prevents the act from becoming a simple confrontation narrative. E is not exempt.

Forgiving and Lemon are the impossible heart of Act Two. Forgiving circles the ask that cannot be met — not yet, not by will alone. Lemon is the argument itself, compressed into something between a folk song and a slap. The structural return of Forgiving's lyric at the end of Lemon — "I'm raw from something I saw" — is the piece folding back on itself, showing the wound that the argument re-opened.

The Space Between is the prayer of Act Two — E alone with the gap between what is and what could be. Trauma Response is the most naked moment in the piece, the one where the theological and the personal are spoken in the same breath without resolution. Broken Man is the direct address — to N, to G-d, to whoever is listening.

Paper Crown is the turning point. The vulnerability chain — faith, security, accountability, vulnerability, authenticity, intimacy — is the architecture the whole piece has been building toward. The Paper Crown is the false security N has been wearing. Setting it down is not defeat. It is the condition for everything that follows.

The Painting and An Artist close Act Two. The Painting is the moment the painter steps out of the picture — and E is left in the beauty of it, alone. An Artist resolves the act: the higher lines, the singing alone together. It is a man explaining that he can't be anything absolute, because he takes from what's around him and has to leave room — and then asking whether the room he leaves is ever actually his. This is what the work is for.

ACT THREE — The Emergence — Paper Heart

Act Three does not deliver triumph. It delivers something more sustainable: clarity, release, and a realistic warmth.

From a Living Grave and Painful Bother are the farewell. They are not cold. The parting in Painful Bother — with its interleaved lines, its dark shared joke about people being pieces of meat — is the most theatrically alive moment in Act Three. Two people finishing each other's sentences as they say goodbye.

By Hertz and Faith are where the two voices begin to move together. The piece does not pretend this is easy: Faith still carries N's last undercut, and Just a Moment Away holds one more deflection before the turn. But it is in Just a Moment Away that N stands down — granting permission to grieve, in his own words. A Love Left Bleeding is what that permission costs. N offers two explanations and E supplies the harsher one himself; they

end on an apology that goes both ways. Nothing is healed. They are simply level, and tired — and that is what makes the next piece possible.

Let Me Cry is the release. The Paper Gun reprise puts the weapon down. Your Paper Heart — The only one who stayed. This is N's only song. Everywhere else he interrupts, undercuts, comments, corrects — he is a voice that lives in the gaps. Here he carries the whole thing, and for the first time he has nothing to punish. It arrives directly after Let Me Cry, and the placement is the point. The man finally gives himself permission to grieve, and nobody human comes. The shadow comes. A shoulder, a hand at the tears, you don't have to tell me why. The kindness is real. But the comfort has a second floor to it. There is no one else as close to me is true, and it is also the entire problem. The brokenness is the condition of the intimacy: if the damage mended, the voice would have no reason to stay. The voice that has tormented him for two acts is the voice that never left. He stayed. Whatever else can be said about him, he stayed — and that is exactly what makes him so hard to put down. The melody that closes the song is the one from An Artist, played without its words — the line that asks whether the higher lines are ever free. What moved into that room is the voice still singing to him. Comfort is not free here. It becomes available the moment the litigation stops. That is the mechanism of the whole third act, folded into a single tag.

Coming Home and This Is Mine are the return — Beautiful Sunshine's warmth again, but earned and shared. This Is Mine, first heard in Act One as the generosity of performance, comes back as the act of reclamation — not victory, but ownership. Opera Star closes the evening on giving rather than grievance. Paper Heart, as encore, is E's gift: the piece's most generous statement. The shadow image returns for a split second before curtain. Stay vigilant. The work is not finished. It is only begun.

Dramatic / Structural Terms

Shadow (Jungian)

The psychological term for the repressed or unconscious aspects of a personality — the parts of the self that have been denied, projected outward, or embodied in a difficult relationship. In Paper Gun, the shadow is both the internal voice (N) and the external figure (the lover/Jacques) who seems to carry it.

Shadow work

The deliberate psychological practice of confronting and integrating the shadow rather than projecting it. The piece is a vicarious exercise in shadow work.

Self-destructive

Used here not in a pop-psychology sense but in the precise dramatic sense: the person in a difficult dynamic who has over-developed their capacity for feeling into the other person's experience, at the cost of their own boundaries. E's flaw is not weakness but excessive extension.

Punitive

Used here dramatically, not diagnostically, and true of Acts One and Two only. There N exhibits the theatrical markers of punitive defense: third-person self-narration, deflection via wit, the inability to apologize first, the use of charm as currency. N is a wound in a suit.

In Act Three, with the other person gone and the accent dropped, the same voice speaks without any of them.

Frère Jacques motif

The French nursery rhyme ‘Frère Jacques’ (Brother Jack / Are you sleeping) runs as a musical and lyrical thread through the piece. Its meaning: the shadow will not wake up. The bells toll. The sleeper does not stir. By the final act, the motif returns transformed — not as a warning but as a farewell.

Paper objects (Gun / Crown / Heart)

The three objects that title the acts encode the dramatic arc: a paper gun is false power, a threat with no real force that nonetheless wounds. A paper crown is false authority, insecurity dressed as sovereignty. A paper heart is the real thing — fragile, actual, offered.

The painting (Turner / Venetian)

The image of the Venetian oil painting in Act Two’s soliloquy: when the protagonist speaks his truth, the other person disappears from the scene — the painter steps out of the painting. What remains is beauty, and solitude, and the choice of what to do with both.

Musical / Performance Terms

Live looping

The performance technique at the center of Paper Gun: the performer records layers of piano in real time, building a full musical texture from a single instrument. Dramatically, looping enacts the piece’s central theme — the past playing beneath the present, the same phrase returning in new context.

Song cycle

A sequence of songs designed to be experienced as a unified dramatic arc rather than as separate pieces. Paper Gun is in the tradition of the song cycle — the songs are not set-pieces; they are chapters.

Operetta

A form of musical theater that sits between opera and musical comedy — typically more intimate than opera, more dramatically serious than a revue. The designation here signals that Paper Gun has the emotional scope of opera with the accessibility of popular song.

E (sung voice)

The protagonist’s interior voice — the one that costs something to sustain. Singing requires breath, exposure, resonance. It cannot be faked in the same way speech can.

N (spoken/accented voice)

The shadow’s exterior voice — performed, controlled, deflecting. Speech permits more management than song. N speaks because N is always, to some degree, performing.

Relational / Psychological Terms

Vilify to satisfy

A phrase used in Trauma Response and Paper Crown: the punitive defense mechanism of making the other person the villain in order to avoid accountability. If you are bad, I cannot be wrong. If I cannot be wrong, I cannot apologize. If I cannot apologize, I remain in control.

Paper crown

The image at the turning point of Act Two: the false security of needing to be in control. The crown is paper because it has no real authority — it is a performance of sovereignty maintained by the refusal to be vulnerable.

The post-performance vulnerability window

Not a term used in the piece itself, but a concept relevant to understanding it: the period after performance when emotional defenses are lowered and judgment may be impaired. The piece's ending — 'stay vigilant' — speaks to this – represented by the immediate re-appearance briefly on the screen in the video of the shadow back in the painting.

tosh42.com ·

To discuss availability, venue fit, or pricing — Paul responds personally

IT IS WHAT IT IS

Well it is what it is
"hmm it is what it is!?, it is what it is, it is what it is

but! what it isn't, what it isn't is what it is
- coz if you don't know what it is, that's what it isn't
-and that is what it is
• so what it isn't is what it is.

Well what it was is what it was - and what it was
is what it is when it was

What it's going to be is what it is when you get there, but we're not there so it isn't what it is.

What it might be is never what it is
And it isn't going to be what it is:
"it isn't what itis, it is what it is" you can't say about "might be"
- it isn’t? ...

and that doesn't qualify as:
"it isn't is what it is, when what it is, is what it isnt it doesn't, no!"

That’s it!

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

“Last night made me feel like the pre-WWII era of the arts in society. Loved it.”
LIBBY FOX — CHARLESTON HOME CONCERT

“I especially like the substantive intellectual meaning that you weave into your music.”
RABBI DANIEL LAPIN

“I can’t believe the level of artistry you’re bringing to the people in these residential homes.”
JOE TEPPERMAN — AUTHOR & THEATER WRITER

“Really good solid organic original material — it has to be experienced live.”
MIGUEL CAVAZOS — SESSION DRUMMER, LA

“A deeply personal, high value artistic offering. Light, serious, fun.”
MESOUD BENASULY — SESSION BASS PLAYER, NEW YORK

“My office was right near Carnegie Hall — and you’re more fantastic than Carnegie Hall.”
AUDIENCE MEMBER, LINDA, BRIGHTVIEW VIRGINIA

“I think I’ve listened to that song a hundred times — but that might be the first time I’ve actually heard it.”
AUDIENCE MEMBER

BRING PAPER GUN TO YOUR ROOM

If you know a room — a theater, a community center, a senior residence, a church, a hall, a living room with a piano in it — please pass this along.

Paul travels in a self-contained performance camper, which makes him available across the United States and Canada: no hotel riders, no staging requirements, no hidden costs. Just a safe place to park.

Now booking presenters.

tosh42.com · bookings@tosh42.com

WITH THANKS

G-d, my parents, Libby & Laivy Nussen, Malka and Dave Weintroub,

The Tendlers and Pride of the Farm / Star K.

Special thanks to Mesoud Benasuly, Eli Gestetner and Yisroel Ament.

MESOUD BENASULY

For writing and performing all narrative parts.

ELI GESTETNER

For invaluable counsel and funding.

YISROEL AMENT

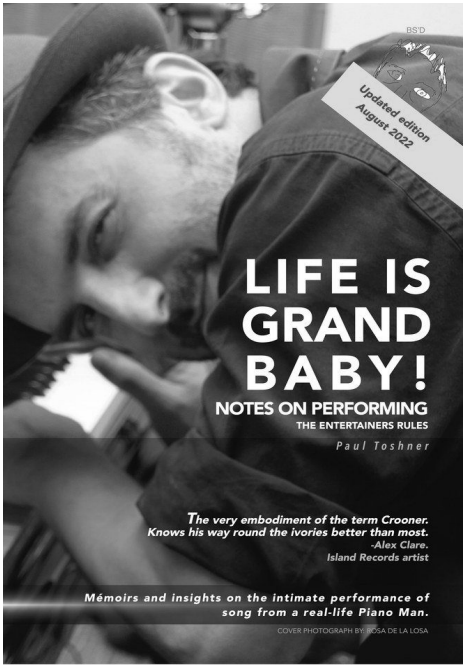
For track production; mixing, the most amazing guitar work, and orchestral arrangements used in the live looping in: The Visitors, Bully the Bully, and Phenomenal heart.

SOMETIMES LIVE

Mesoud Benasuly — narration & guitar

Video of this work is at tosh42.com/thanks.html

ALSO BY THE AUTHOR



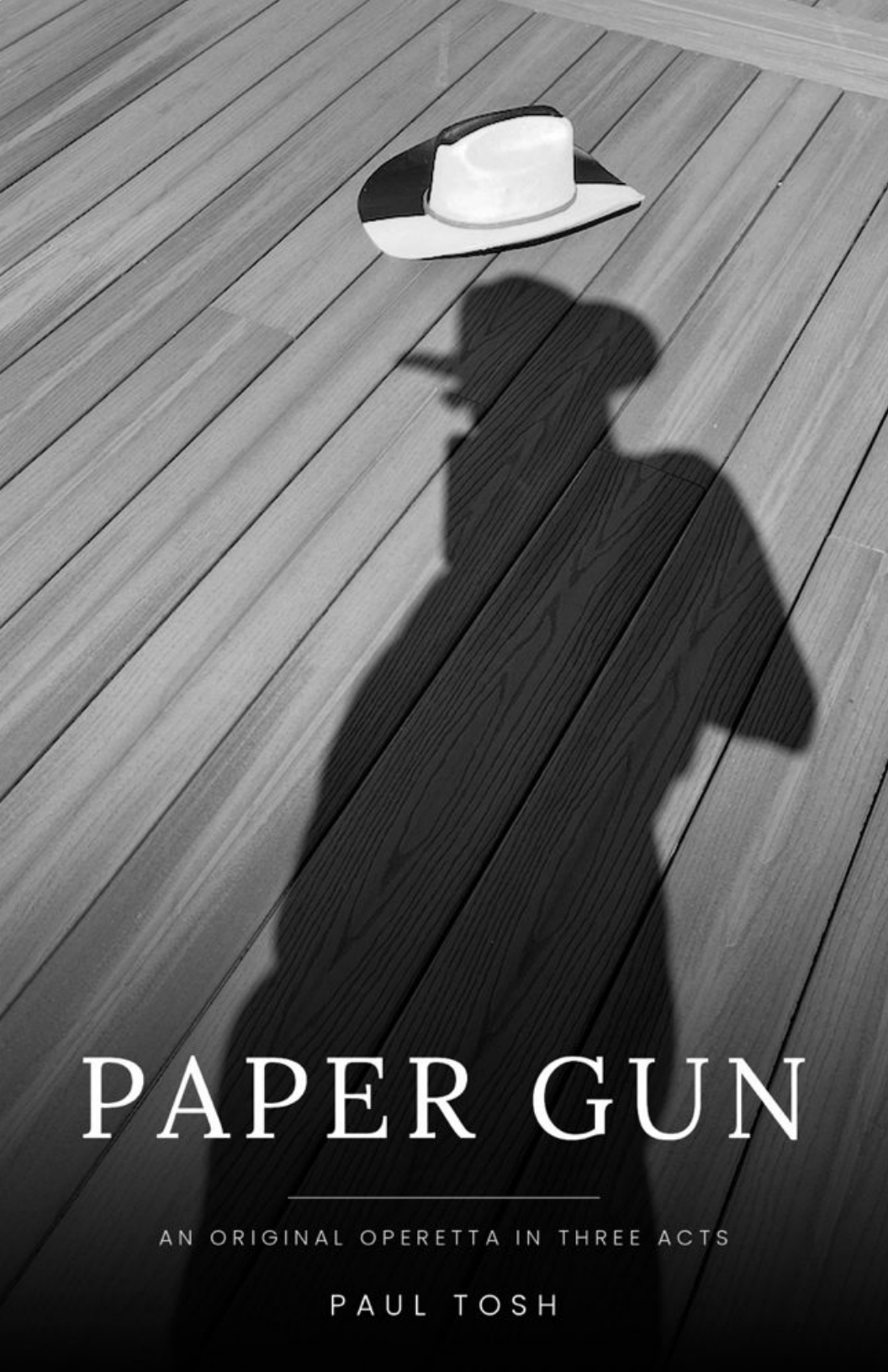
Life is Grand, Baby!

Notes on Performing — The Entertainer's Rules

Twenty years of what I learned in front of audiences: the instrument, the voice, the songwriting, and the part nobody teaches — how to pay attention to a room. Mémoirs and insights on the intimate performance of song, from a real-life piano man.

Written long before Paper Gun existed, and in a sense the reason it could.

Available on Amazon — search "Life is Grand Baby Tosh"



PAPER GUN

AN ORIGINAL OPERETTA IN THREE ACTS

PAUL TOSH



We all carry shadows.

The question is — what do we do with them?



Jacques E/N: Paul Tosh
the Narrator / Soloist: Mesoud Benasuly
Executive Producer: Eli Gestetner

F O L L O W

Instagram @toshfortwo
TikTok @toshfortwo
YouTube @ToshForTwo
Facebook facebook.com/toshfortwo
X @paultoshner
LinkedIn linkedin.com/in/paultoshner

tosh42.com
bookings@tosh42.com