

open mic

A freeform larp by Sam Liberty and Brandon Sichling

This is a freeform LARP for 2-20 players about addiction and sobriety. It is played in a public space such as a coffee shop, restaurant, or bar where an open mic or karaoke event is already happening. In the game, players take on the role of a sober person who is performing a work that is meaningful to them in a shared experience with other sober people.

Materials:

Per player:

- This document
- Name tags
- Markers
- One [buddy poppy](#) per player, plus a few extra in case some are lost

Content Warning:

This game deals with topics of addiction, alcoholism, and sobriety. Although it is designed to include networks of support and to focus on help and healing, these issues are complex and can be painful. More to the point, this game is meant to be played in a public space where alcohol may be served. If this makes you feel unsafe, please do not put yourself at risk by playing.

Facilitator: If you have players who you think will not be safe in this environment, instead choose a venue like a coffee shop where alcohol is not served.

Procedure:

Before the game - Each player should curate a short list of performances for

themselves, which will also serve to generate their character (see Appendix A). Players will choose one song* from each of four columns, plus a bonus song from Column D. These will be the songs that they may choose to perform during the game. Players may wish to take time to practice their performances before the game, as they will really be singing in front of a live audience.

*Future versions of the game will include other performance options such as poems and short stories.

After you choose your five songs, note the letter/number of the songs you chose and flip to Appendix B, Characteristics. Record the five characteristics that correspond with your chosen songs, and if they suggest a question, answer it for yourself. These five characteristics form your character, but you may choose to flesh it out more in any way you desire. After you have recorded this, choose a name for your character.

The last thing you will do is determine an order restriction for yourself. This will depend on your own personal preferences and the venue of the game. You should choose a substance (in addition to alcohol) to abstain from that is served at the venue

and you would normally be the most inclined to order. Choose one or two of these to abstain from and record it:

- Caffeine
- Sugar
- Fruit and Fruit Juice
- Dairy
- Dairy substitutes

Facilitator: Find a suitable location for the game (see Content Warning above). This can be any open mic or karaoke night at any venue that is convenient to you and your players. It's OK if the venue is a bar -- in fact, for some players, the presence of alcohol will make the decision not to drink more meaningful. However, if you know you will have players who will not feel safe or comfortable, consider a different venue. You should let the venue know ahead of time you are bringing a group to play a game so they know what to expect.

The day of game: Show up to the venue 10 to 15 minutes before the open mic event is set to start. Look for your facilitator, who will have a name tag on and will be wearing a buddy poppy on their clothes. They will give you a name tag and a buddy poppy to put on. Write the name of your character on the name tag and affix it and the poppy where they are easy to see and read.

Stopping Play

If you want to stop playing at any time for any reason, all you need to do is take off your poppy. You can remain to observe the game, but players will no longer speak to you in character. If you see a player

remove their poppy, it means they have voluntarily exited the game.

Facilitator: Be at the venue 20 minutes early. Find the organizer of the karaoke or open mic event and introduce yourself, explaining what will happen. Players will approach you. Give them name tags and a poppy. Make sure you have markers so players can write their names.

Ordering guidelines

This is a sober open mic, so no player is permitted to order alcohol, smoke cigarettes, or consume drugs (except by prescription) while playing. Additionally, players should have before the game selected one extra restriction for themselves. Do not order any items that contain the restricted substances. Although these substances will be present, this game is not intended to be about relapsing.

That said, we encourage you to order something from the establishment and to tip your servers well. They are allowing you to play this game here, so show them you appreciate it!

During Play: The game officially begins when the open mic or karaoke event officially begins, and ends when the event ends. For the first 30 minutes of play, players should socialize and get to know one another in an unstructured way. You should start thinking about the motivation characteristic of your character during this time and how you might achieve it tonight.

During this period you will also decide on which of your five songs you will actually perform. Sign up with your character name and your song choice before the deadline. This may be at the very start of the night, or might be rolling. You should sign up before the first 30 minutes of play is over.

Performances: After the first 30 minutes of play, all players should have signed up to perform at least one song, and no more than two. Optionally, players may elect not to perform at all, but instead only socialize and watch the performances of others. This decision may be made after sign-ups. If you are called up to perform and for whatever reason don't feel like performing, just tell the out-of-game event organizer. They won't mind.

When you perform, you should perform in character. While other players are performing, you should stop your conversation and give your full attention to their performance. You may talk during non-player performances, but please do so respectfully.

In between performances, you should socialize in-character with as many other players as you can and learn about their characters and song choices, as well as share and learn about your own character.

The game ends when the open mic ends. If you haven't achieved your motivation by the end of the event, don't stress out. Life is full of disappointments, after all. What matters is how we deal with them.

After game end, proceed to debrief with your facilitator.

Debrief

After the game the facilitator will lead the group in a debrief. Players can share or hang on to experiences however they wish. Facilitators should ask these questions and allow players to answer them:

Whenever we perform, we don a metaphorical mask. Masks let us reveal our true selves, but conceal other parts of our personalities.

- What did your performance reveal about your character?
- What did your performance conceal about your character?

A LARP is a special kind of performance.

How is LARPing like performing before an audience?

How is it different?

Performance, roleplaying, and drinking and drug use are all kinds of play, and all ways of temporarily becoming someone we're not.

- How is drinking similar to roleplay and performance?
- How is it different?
- If you ever drank, why did you choose to do it? Were the reasons similar to the reasons you roleplay?

This game was about performance, but it was also about addiction. You were required to abstain from certain things, discuss certain topics, and make personal choices as well as character choices about your performances.

- What did you learn about addiction and sobriety through play?

Facilitator: After the debrief, you should let players know that if they are struggling with addiction that there are resources available. Point them to the resources section of this document.

Appendix A: Songs

Pick one from each column, and an extra from Column D

Column A	Column B	Column C	Column D
1 Sweet Caroline	1. These Boots Were Made For Walking	1 Du Hast	1 Bring on the Dancing Horses
2 Under the Bridge	2 We Can't Stop	2 Saturday Night's Alright For Fighting	2 Dog Days are Over
3 My Way	3 Chandelier	3 YMCA	3 Interstate Love Song
4 Purple Rain	4 Enter Sandman	4 I Wanna Dance with Somebody	4 Black Hole Sun
5 Welcome to the Jungle	5 Good Times, Bad Times	5 The Mother	5 No Need to Argue
6 Big Poppa	6 I'll Make A Man Out Of You	6 We Share	6 Fire and Rain
7 Suffragette City	7 Fast Car	7 The A Team	7 Blank Space
8 Escape (The Pina Colada Song)	8 Enjoy the Silence	8 Electric Lady	8 Mr. Brightside
9 Respect	9 Defying Gravity	9 Girls Just Wanna Have Fun	9 Phantom of the Opera
10 Rebel Girl	10 Dancing on My Own	10 What's Up	10 Fuck tha Police
11 Play That Funky Music White Boy		11 A Man Needs a Maid	11 Tied to the Whipping Post
		12 Bridge Over Troubled Water	12 Goodbye Yellow Brick Road
		13 You're My Best Friend	13 Don't Stop Believin'
		14 Shoop	14 Don't You Want Me
		15 Love Stinks	15 Let It Go
		16 Royals	16 Man, I Feel Like a

			Woman
		17 White Wedding	17 Don't Think Twice It's All Right
		18 Dancing Queen	18 It's the End of the World as We Know It
			19 Folsom Prison Blues

			20 I Want it That Way
			21 Born to Run
			22 Mr. Blue Sky
			23 Since U Been Gone

Appendix B: Characteristics

Note the Line and Column of your song choices and then find your characteristics below. You should have five total.

Column A

Why did you decide to become sober?

1. I drank too much at a sporting event and got thrown out.
2. I actually, I kid you not, passed out in the gutter.
3. I thought I was the lovable drunk, then my best friend told me I was just an asshole.
4. I got drunk and made a pass at a teenager.
5. I puked on the subway home. Twice. In one night.
6. I was hooking up with the person I went home with after the bars closed and fell asleep during.
7. I got drunk one night and yelled at my significant other.
8. I saw my significant other on Tinder and didn't get mad until I swiped right and we didn't match.
9. I saw how my kids look at me.
10. I realized I didn't have any friends, only drinking buddies. I didn't have any friends because I only had drinking buddies.
11. Woke up in the hospital with alcohol poisoning

Column B

How long have you been sober for?

1. Decades
2. Days
3. Almost a year
4. A few years
5. It's been a while. Not sure how long.
6. This time? A few months.
7. A year today.
8. A few years for me, and the person I'm sponsoring just hit one year.
9. Today.
10. I've lost track.

Column C

Motivation:

I want to find somebody to _____

1. mentor
2. debate
3. hook up with
4. ...guess.
5. commiserate with
6. talk me out of it
7. tell me I'm ok
8. tell a joke to
9. talk about the news
10. scratch this spot right between the shoulder blades
11. explain myself to
12. hug

13. reminisce with
14. help with their problems
15. make plans with
16. impress
17. dance with

Column D

Quirk (find two)

1. I like dressage
2. I post dog memes
3. I'm convinced the 90's were the best
4. I like astronomy
5. I play psychologist whenever I can
6. I like woodworking
7. I'm a serial monogamist
8. I've seen my favorite Kate Winslet movie 12 times

9. goth as fuck
10. such an anarchist
11. Exhibitionist
12. I'm bi
13. I collect something.
14. I sell things for a living
15. My mother is sick
16. I have an eating disorder
17. I'm really introverted
18. Never had to try in school, should have tried harder in life
19. I have three kids
20. I have trouble taking credit for my achievements
21. My car died and I had to take the bus here.
22. I'm a film buff
23. Recovering from a bad break up

Appendix C: Resources

<https://nordiclarp.org/2017/03/10/blue-ribbon-collective/>

<https://www.publichealth.org/resources/addiction/>

<https://www.aa.org/>

<https://www.grammy.com/musicares/programs/addiction-recovery>

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

Artists' Statement

Games and drug and alcohol use have a lot of the same conventions, so we wanted a game to explore the intersection of social rules and fun, why people drink differently under different circumstances, and why they might do so to excess. While we haven't directly suffered from addiction, interviewing people while making this game was invaluable in understanding people's experiences of it. There's a powerful connection here for someone who's lost a loved one to addiction, and there's a more mundane value in abstaining when you don't have to most of the time. We wanted to play through that fraught space through the scariest of social plays: public singing.

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