



My Brother Was a Vampire: Flying Backward Through Queer Grief and Gothic Memory

Description

Salt Lake City, UT Currently playing in Salt Lake City, *My Brother Was a Vampire* returns for a limited engagement before heading to **Edinburgh Fringe 2025**. Written by **Morag Shepherd** and originally developed with **Plan-B Theatre Company**, this genre-blurring horror comedy first stunned **Salt Lake** audiences with its fearless emotional architecture and brazen theatricality. In this remount produced by **Immigrant's Daughter Theatre** and **Lil Poppet Productions** the play soars while burrowing deeper into grief, and tangled sibling trauma.

Context: Stripped Down, Amped Up

After speaking with director **Stephanie Stroud** post-show, I learned that this version is nearly half the length of the original staging at **Plan-B Theatre**. That earlier production was fully costumed and staged, while this one adopts a more minimalist, bare-bones approach. The streamlined format allows for a quicker pace and a fluid sense of movement that fits their upcoming run at the Edinburgh Fringe. However, the downside of this stripped-down presentation is that audience members unfamiliar with the reverse structure may feel disoriented at first.

The team has been preparing for the much smaller venue they'll be using in Edinburgh, and their adaptation is already evident at Fellowship Theater, where they use only a fraction of the available space. The restrained staging builds atmosphere and focus, but it also places greater demands on the audience's attention and interpretive effort.

Though billed as a horror comedy, *My Brother Was a Vampire* leans far more into horror both psychological and emotional than laughs. That tension is present throughout the show, but the balance often tips toward unease. Lurking dread not punchlines drives this play, and while there are flashes of dark wit, what lingers is the ache of something just out of reach, something unspeakable haunting the edges of the stage.



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A Wound Told in Reverse

My Brother Was a Vampire unfolds in reverse chronology, but this narrative structure isn't immediately evident within the production's minimalist frame. We're given few, if any, concrete markers—a tangible setting, time period, or even clear location—to ground us. Recurring motifs emerge—grief, codependency, flight, vampirism, foxes, The Smiths—but many of these threads don't cohere or gain clear meaning by the end. Without program notes or framing devices, and with minimal shifts in costume or space to signal temporal movement, the play's emotional and narrative architecture risks getting lost. Is this disorientation intentional? Possibly. After all, trauma doesn't unravel linearly, and memory rarely comes with timestamps. But the cumulative effect leaves the

audience in the darkâ??perhaps deliberately so, or perhaps to its own detriment.

Shepherd uses backward chronology not as clever gimmick, but as a mirror of how grief functionsâ??obsessively, circularly, always spiraling back to the origin of pain. As Daisy Blake remarked in the original premiere, *â??This piece in particular is rather like a choose your own adventure or a hall of mirrors in that it really depends on each individual audience member to decide for themselves what the dominant themes areâ?•* (Gephardt Daily). That ambiguity is part of the showâ??s unsettling power. Is the monster a father? A symptom? A shared delusion? Or is it just the aching, unnamable bond between two damaged siblings?

Performances That Hover, Ache, and Break

Ariana Farber (Skye) and **Tyler Fox (Callum)** deliver blistering, intimate performances. **Farber**â??s **Skye** is searing and sarcastic, simmering with suppressed grief. **Fox**â??s **Callum** is steadier, softerâ??his pain is more controlled, but no less raw. Together, they evoke the volatility of siblings who have been through unspeakable trauma together.

Their physicalityâ??enhanced by **Meghan Durham Wall**â??s choreographyâ??creates the illusion of flight without spectacle. The movement feels at once instinctual and stylized, evoking a ghostly weightlessness that mirrors the charactersâ?? dissociation. Rather than relying on overt theatrical effects, the choreography leans into gesture, balance, and repetitionâ??building an expressive vocabulary of collapse, reach, and resistance. The flying sequences feels more like dance-theatre than traditional blocking, subtly communicating emotional rupture and strained connection through the body alone.

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Direction, Design, and the Logic of Loss

Director Stephanie Stroud brings emotional clarity to the play's nonlinear architecture, allowing silence and surrealism to coexist. **Griffin Irish's** sound design's ghostly resonance and monster sounds evoke memory distortion, layering tension and unease beneath the dialogue. Lighting and spatial clarity crafted by stage manager and lighting designer **David Knoell** reinforce this emotional focus. Knoell's use of shadow, light, and negative space heightens atmosphere and subtly indicates shifts in time and tone. His restrained, intentional design guides the audience's attention without overwhelming the minimalist staging, though it demands heightened attentiveness from the viewer.



Photo Credit: Morag Shepherd on Instagram [@mogsiepogsoe](#)

Queer Time, Vampire Time

This isn't a play about recovery; it's a play that stays with the ache. Shepherd reimagines the vampire not as a supernatural threat but as a metaphor for emotional entrapment, codependency, and dissociation. The horror is intimate, relational. What threatens the characters isn't an external monster, but the way they cling to each other through mutual wounds.

Flight becomes a metaphor for escape and denial—not a magical gift, but a dissociative response. The idea of rising above is replaced with a deeper descent into memory and myth, where reality slips and blurs.

This is gothic horror at its most internal: not the terror of the unknown, but the unbearable closeness of those who've seen you break. Vampirism in this play doesn't grant immortality; it exposes the pain of enduring, especially when what you share is a legacy of trauma.

The play's structure enacts this ache as much as its content. As Jos  Esteban Mu oz writes in *Cruising Utopia*, queerness is not simply an identity but a mode of being in the world marked by ephemerality and longing (Mu oz, 2009, pp. 21-22). *My Brother Was a Vampire* lives in this queer temporality: recursive, fragmented, unresolved. While not all characters are not explicitly queer, the play's logic embraces Mu oz's aesthetic of the ephemeral where loss echoes and closure remains just out of reach.

The relationship between Skye and Callum defies normative ideas of sibling closeness. It feels emotionally transgressive, entangled in ways that resist tidy definitions. The refusal to move forward becomes a radical act: the play insists that some grief cannot be resolved—only witnessed, fragmented, and felt.

In this way, *My Brother Was a Vampire* aligns with Mu oz's vision of queerness as a politics of the not-yet-conscious—a space of affect and survival rather than resolution. It asks us not to fix what's broken, but to linger in what remains.

Not Your Average Vampire Story

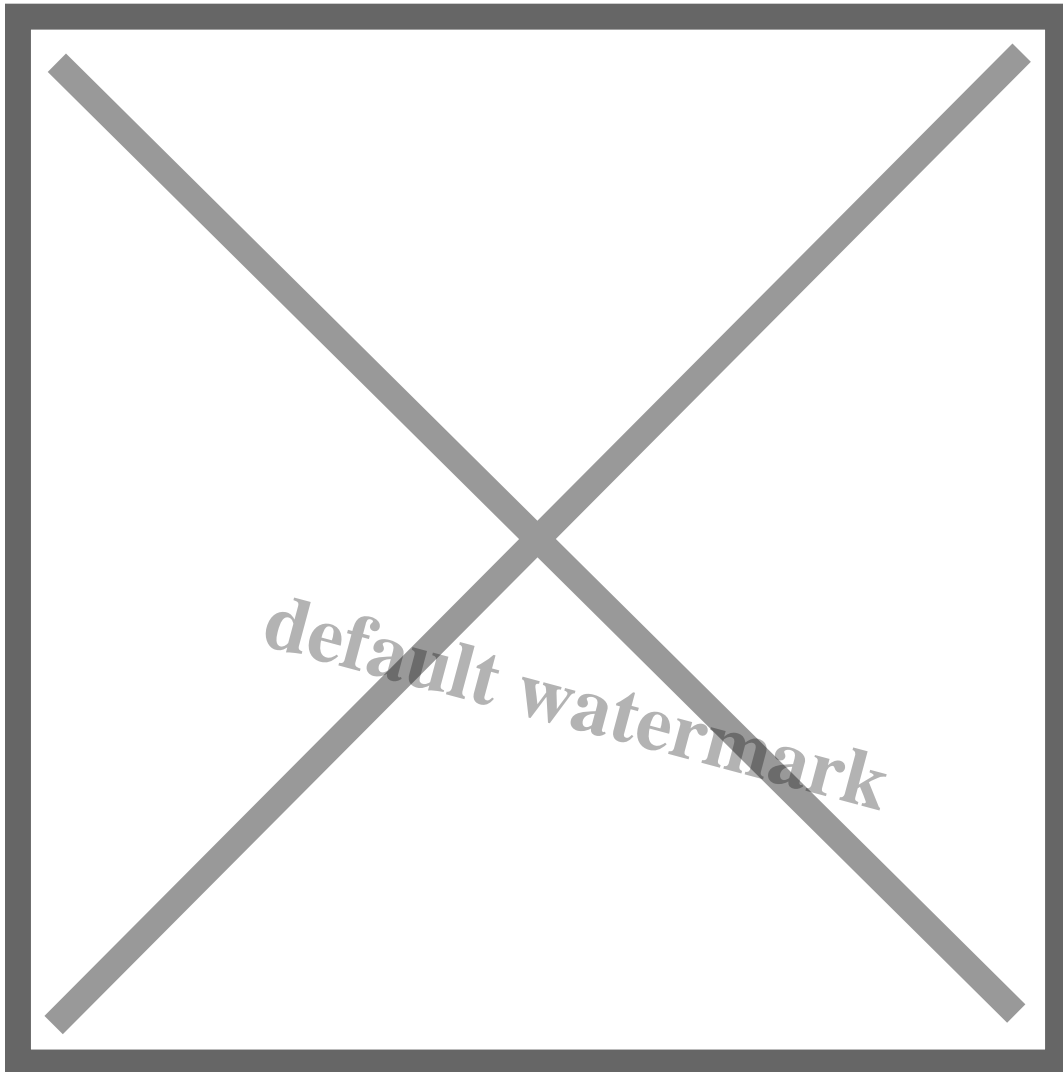
My Brother Was a Vampire unfolds in reverse—a structure that reveals itself slowly, with few visual cues to guide us. The first scenes feel more like fragments of a psychological thriller than a linear narrative. But this may be intentional. After all, trauma doesn't announce itself in order; it seeps backward, much like this play.

The opening image—a suspended moment, characters literally and metaphorically midair—sets the tone. Over the next 45 minutes, the production unspools their shared past, scene by scene, year by year, drawing us deeper into the trauma they couldn't outrun.

Still, as the show descends further into the past, it may benefit from eventually circling back—visually or thematically—to its starting point. Without a full return or emotional anchor, the production risks leaving some audience members uncertain about its ultimate purpose. As powerful as the structure is, I found myself yearning for a clearer throughline or resolution—not closure, but orientation.

The final line—*I'm just gonna take it, okay? I think I can do that! I'll just take it for you! It doesn't even matter how it ends*—is evocative in theory, suggesting surrender or acceptance. But in practice, it undercuts the emotional momentum the show has built. Most audience members *do* care how it ends; we crave meaning, shape, and transformation, especially after a journey structured in reverse. One possible revision might be to bring the play full circle—to reintroduce visual or sonic motifs from the opening scene. Even a single moment of emotional clarity or confrontation could give the ending more resonance, without betraying the show's commitment to ambiguity. This could be achieved through sound—*The Smiths* is already used in the show, and the melancholic irony would offer a final emotional anchor that is currently lacking.

I'm a big fan of these theatre makers and the daring work they continue to produce, and I'm genuinely excited to see how *My Brother Was a Vampire* evolves.



Conclusion: A Wound in Reverse

My Brother Was a Vampire doesn't ask us to fear the dark—it invites us to sit with it. As it prepares to leap across the ocean to Edinburgh, Salt Lake City audiences are reminded why fringe theatre matters: it's where myth meets memory, where time fractures, and where the deepest wounds refuse to close. More than anything, this is a story about the trauma of loving someone—how it can feel like both flying and falling, like giving yourself over to something that might save you or drain you dry.

PLAYBILL INFO

My Brother Was a Vampire

By Morag Shepherd

Originally workshopped and produced by [Plan-B Theatre Company \(2022\)](#)

Fellowship Theater, Salt Lake City Fringe Festival (July 2025)

Edinburgh Fringe Festival (August 2025)

Creative Team

Director: Stephanie Stroud

Stage Manager & Lighting Designer: David Knoell

Sound Design: Griffin Irish

Choreography: Meghan Durham Wall

Graphic Design: Mitchell Shepherd

Photography: Ashley Thalman

Produced by: Immigrant's Daughter Theatre & Lil Poppet Productions

Performed by: Ariana Farber (Skye) & Tyler Fox (Callum)

About the Playwright: Morag Shepherd

Morag Shepherd is a Scottish-born, Utah-based playwright known for her bold experimentation with form and emotionally charged storytelling. Her work blends sharp dialogue, poetic imagery, and nonlinear structures to explore themes of identity, dislocation, family, and the body. She is the co-founder of Immigrant's Daughter Theatre and the author of acclaimed works including *Burn, Do You Want to See Me Naked?*, *A Brief Waltz in a Little Room*, *Cherry Wine in Paper Cups*, and *The Big Quiet*.

Shepherd's plays have been produced by Plan-B Theatre, Sackerson, Pygmalion Productions, and others. With *My Brother Was a Vampire*, she adds a horror-drama twist to her signature style, crafting a tale that is both fantastical and raw.

Shepherd's voice continues to shape the Mountain West theatre scene and beyond—unsettling, resonant, and unforgettable.

Show & Ticket Info

©, *My Brother Was a Vampire*

Written by **Morag Shepherd**

Directed by **Stephanie Stroud**

Performed by **Ariana Farber (Skye) & Tyler Fox (Callum)**

Presented by **Immigrant's Daughter Theatre & Lil Poppet Productions**

Originally developed with **Plan-B Theatre Company**

Salt Lake City Fringe Festival

- **Venue: The Alliance Main Hall** (Trolley Square)
- **Showtimes:**
- **Friday, July 25 @ 10:30 PM**
- **Saturday, July 26 @ 9:00 PM**
- **Sunday, July 27 @ 4:00 PM**
- **Content Advisory:** References to self-harm, addiction, and emotional trauma
- **Tickets:** \$15 single, \$35 (3-pack), \$85 (10-pack)
- [Reserve Seat Here](#)
- *Audience members are encouraged to arrive early; seating is first-come, first-served at Fringe venues.*

Run Time: 60 minutes (no intermission)

Content Advisory: Themes include self-harm, addiction, and emotional trauma

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Edinburgh Festival Fringe

Venue: theSpace @ Niddry St Studio

Dates: August 2025

Run Time: 60 minutes (no intermission)

Ticket Price: £12 (£10 concession)

Tickets & Info: [Edinburgh Fringe Listing](#)

References:

Muñoz, José Esteban.

Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer

Futurity. NYU Press, 2009

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qg4nr>

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1. Reviews
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1. Ariana Farber
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5. Dark Comedy
6. David Knoell
7. Dissociation in Theatre

8. Edinburgh Fringe Festival
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10. Experimental Theatre
11. Fellowship Theater
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15. Gothic Theatre
16. Griffin Irish
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25. Nonlinear Narrative
26. Plan-B Theatre Company
27. Queer Grief
28. Queer Theatre
29. Reverse Chronology
30. Salt Lake City
31. Salt Lake City Fringe Festival
32. Sibling Relationships
33. Stephanie Stroud
34. Surreal Drama
35. Theatre Review
36. Trauma and Memory
37. Two-Hander Plays
38. Tyler Fox
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40. Vampirism as Metaphor

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