



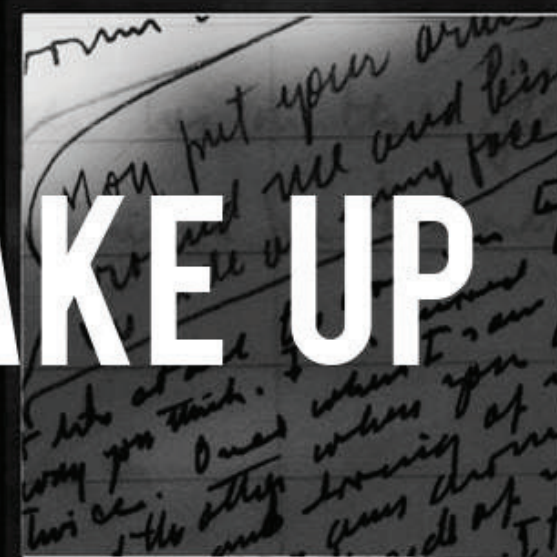
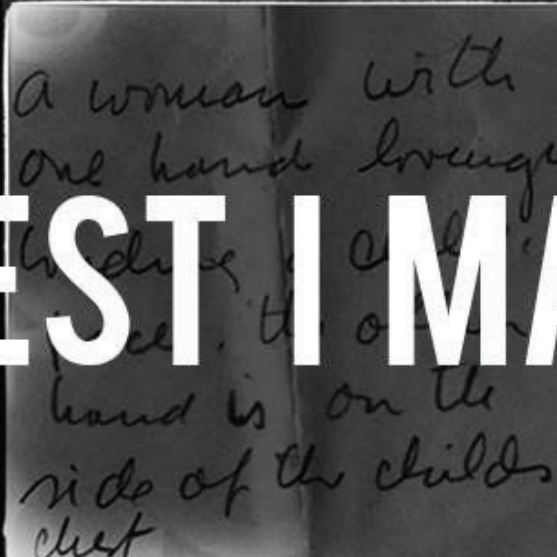
I KNOW  
EVERYTHING



HALF OF IT  
I REALLY KNOW



THE REST I MAKE UP



MARIA  
IRENE  
FORNES





**“INTIMATE AND EXHILARATING.”**

*The New Yorker*

PIECE BY PIECE PRODUCTIONS

P R E S E N T S

MARIA IRENE FORNES

# THE REST I MAKE UP

A FILM BY MICHELLE MEMRAN

USA | 2018 | 1HR19 | 1.77 | COLOR | 5.1

## SYNOPSIS

Maria Irene Fornes is one of America's greatest playwrights and most influential teachers, but many know her only as the ex-lover of writer and social critic Susan Sontag. The visionary Cuban-American dramatist constructed astonishing worlds onstage, writing over 40 plays and winning nine Obie Awards. At the vanguard of the nascent Off-Off Broadway experimental theater movement in NYC, Fornes is often referred to as American theater's "Mother Avant-Garde." When she gradually stops writing due to dementia, an unexpected friendship with filmmaker Michelle Memran reignites her spontaneous creative spirit and triggers a decade-long collaboration that picks up where the pen left off.

The duo travels from New York to Havana, Miami to Seattle, exploring the playwright's remembered past and their shared present. Theater luminaries such as Edward Albee, Ellen Stewart, Lanford Wilson, and others weigh in on Fornes's important contributions. What began as an accidental collaboration becomes a story of love, creativity, and connection that persists even in the face of forgetting.

## HOW IT BEGAN

"Little camera," Irene said, "I tell you things I didn't even know I knew."

In 1999, the incomparable Cuban-American dramatist Maria "call me Irene" Fornes agreed to meet a young aspiring writer (director Michelle Memran), to be interviewed for *American Theatre* magazine. After a six-hour lunch, most of the interview questions remained unanswered but their friendship had begun.

Over time it became clear that Irene, then in her 70s, was suffering from some form of dementia. Irene told Michelle that she had stopped writing and didn't know why. Michelle told Irene that she wanted to write a play but didn't know how.

One afternoon, more than a decade ago, they ventured to Brighton Beach with bathing suits and a never-used Hi8 camera. "Irene, does the camera make you uncomfortable?" asked Michelle, in a noisy beachside café. "Don't you understand," Irene answered coyly into the lens, "the camera to me is my beloved, the one who wants me always, and I give everything ... I have ... to a camera."

This is how the film began. *The Rest I Make Up* reveals a creative spirit continuing to thrive even as the ability to create is compromised, and celebrates the fierce, unquenchable spontaneity that is Maria Irene Fornes — a virtuosic artist and educator whose plays and writing workshops helped shape the American theater.







## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"I didn't decide to become a playwright," Irene once said. "It decided itself. When something happens by accident, I trust it."

Just as Irene didn't set out to become a playwright, I never set out to become a filmmaker. No, that day on Brighton Beach was a glorious accident. Irene's response to the camera and my response to filming her was a beautiful surprise for us both.

Today I am able to see that the reason I stayed committed to the project years after I stopped filming due to Irene's advancing dementia, why I kept combing through hours of footage, why I refused to turn away, is that there was a story I knew I had to tell: a story about the power of friendship and creativity, and what it means to remain an artist through all the vicissitudes of life.

That story is at the film's heart. But I am also making this film to challenge our society's pervasive attitude about aging and Alzheimer's disease — the one that says that people who lose their short-term memories also lose their value. This assumption confines multitudes of elders still capable of meaningful relationships to lives of invisibility and isolation.

*The Rest I Make Up* counters that view by inviting us to live for a while with an irrepressibly vital and generative playwright who — even in the face of eroding memory, even as she no longer formally writes and teaches — is experiencing a remarkably creative period of her life.

The film's title, *The Rest I Make Up*, is taken from lyrics to one of Irene's songs in *Promenade*: "I know everything. Half of it I really know, the rest I make up." It is a testament to the way life can creatively increase even as it is cognitively disappearing, and to the way a teacher can continue to lead a student even as the student begins to lead the teacher. Over the past fifty years, there have been thousands of artists and writers who have worked with Irene or taken her legendary workshops. And each of them has an Irene story to tell.

*The Rest I Make Up* is mine.





## ABOUT IRENE

Maria Irene Fornes has been called the greatest and least known dramatist of our time. She's written over 40 plays, won nine OBIE awards, and taught thousands of playwrights across the globe. Off-Broadway's Signature Theatre devoted its entire 1999 - 2000 season to her work, and her epic *What of the Night?* was a finalist for the 1990 Pulitzer Prize. As a teacher and director of INTAR's Hispanic Playwrights-in-Residence Lab in the 1980s, she mentored a generation of Latinx playwrights, including Cherrie Moraga, Caridad Svich, Migdalia Cruz, Nilo Cruz, and Eduardo Machado. "We all felt of her like the mother of our writing," says Migdalia Cruz in the film. "Irene's children - we used to call ourselves."

Irene's influence is boundless and boundary-less. Over the years, we've spoken to dozens of her colleagues, students, collaborators, friends and family members who credit her as an inspiration. "I think of Irene at a time when we actually gave ourselves permission to think about theater as art instead of commerce," playwright Paula Vogel told us. "I think of her if not daily, at least weekly. What would Irene do?"

Fornes celebrated her 88th birthday on May 14, 2018. She currently lives at Amsterdam Nursing Home in New York City, and visitors are always welcome.





**“TO ME THE ONLY SUBTEXT IN IRENE'S PLAYS IS  
THAT LIFE IS BEAUTIFUL AND FLEETING.”**

Gabriel Berry, Costume Designer

From *The Danube*  
by Maria Irene Fornes  
(Photo by Anne Militello)



# OUR TEAM

## MICHELLE MEMRAN

Director/Producer MICHELLE MEMRAN is a journalist, artist and filmmaker. *The Rest I Make Up* is her first film, for which she has received funding from countless individuals and major foundations, including the New York State Council on the Arts and the Frameline Completion Fund.

## PIECE BY PIECE PRODUCTIONS

Executive Producer PIECE BY PIECE PRODUCTIONS is a not-for-profit organization that was started in 1999 by Wendy vanden Heuvel. Its mission is to produce film and theater that is socially, politically, and spiritually relevant to our times.

## JENNIFER FOX

Executive Producer JENNIFER FOX is an internationally acclaimed producer, director, writer, and camerawoman, whose award-winning films have traveled the world. She recently completed the fiction feature *The Tale*, which premiered on HBO.

### Producers

MICHELLE MEMRAN  
KATIE PEARL  
SHELBY SIEGEL  
HEATHER WINTERS

### Editor

MELISSA NEIDICH

### Composer

MAX AVERY LICHTENSTEIN

### Associate Producers

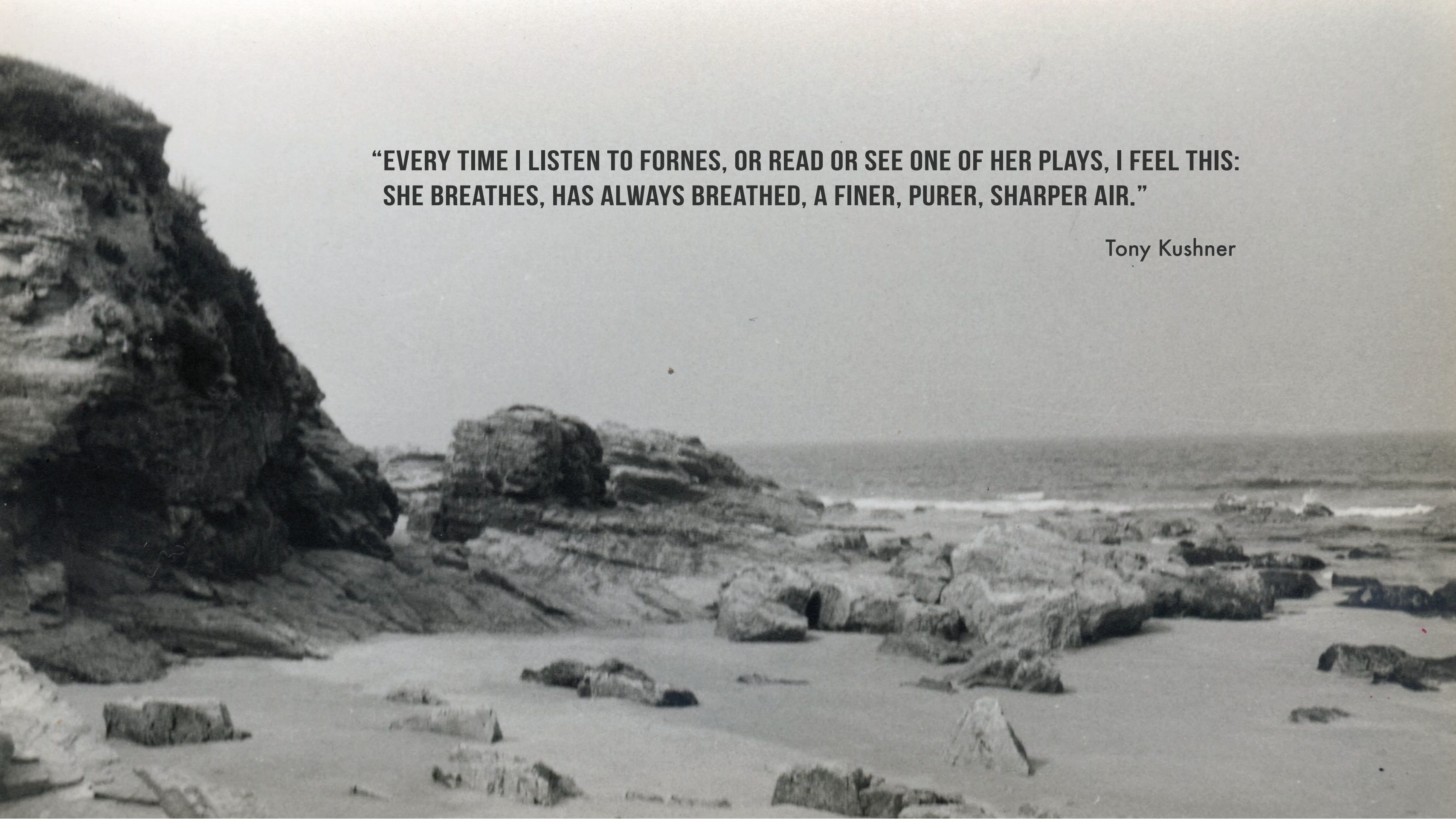
STEFANIE DIAZ  
ALISON FORBES  
NYKIA HERRON











**“EVERY TIME I LISTEN TO FORNES, OR READ OR SEE ONE OF HER PLAYS, I FEEL THIS:  
SHE BREATHES, HAS ALWAYS BREATHED, A FINER, PURER, SHARPER AIR.”**

Tony Kushner



A woman with curly hair is shown in profile, looking out over a city from a balcony. She is wearing a red sweater. The background shows a cityscape with a body of water and hills under a blue sky with clouds. A green metal railing is visible in the foreground.

## KICKSTARTER

In October 2016, our successful Kickstarter campaign raised \$54,263 with a total of 577 backers.

## TRAILER

[vimeo.com/181778589](https://vimeo.com/181778589)



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## PRESS

*An Avant-Garde Theater Artist Gets Her Due*  
*The New York Times*, August 2018

*An Extraordinary Documentary Portrait of a Playwright Facing Alzheimer's Disease*  
*The New Yorker*, August 2018

*Goings On About Town - Review: The Rest I Make Up*  
*The New Yorker*, August 2018

*Review: In 'The Rest I Make Up,' a Playwright's Life as Memories Ebb*  
*The New York Times*, August 2018

*Meet the best playwright you've never heard of*  
*New York Post*, August 2018

*7 Things You Never Knew About America's 'Greatest and Least Known Dramatist'*  
*Playbill*, August 2018

*Miami Film Festival Opens Friday with 'Tully'*  
*Miami Herald*, March 2018

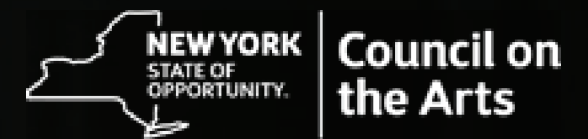
*Film Follows the Face of the 'Mother of Avant-Garde Theater'*  
*Artburst Miami*, March 2018

*One of our best American playwrights, María Irene Fornés is featured in new documentary*  
*NBC News*, February 2018





piecebypiece  
productions



Frameline  
Completion Fund

WMM WOMEN MAKE MOVIES



MacDowell  
FREEDOM TO CREATE

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