

TONIC

Finding Euphoria

A Musical Experience

Book, Music & Lyrics by Richard Ehrlich

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Running Time: 80 minutes

No intermission

CHARACTERS

FEMALE VOICE — warm, expressive, emotionally open

MALE VOICE — grounded, plainspoken, steady presence

ENSEMBLE (6 performers) —

THE ACHIEVER

THE FIXER

THE GHOST

THE HEART

THE FIRESTARTER

THE WITNESS

SETTING

A shared space — not literal, not abstract. Minimal set: circular platform, warm lighting, visible musicians. The space invites participation, not observation.

TONIC unfolds as a continuous experience, with scenes designed to flow seamlessly into one another.

The audience should feel they are IN the room, not watching from outside.

ACT I

SCENE 1: ARRIVAL

(Duration: ~5 minutes)

(The audience enters to curated music — soul, indie, contemporary tracks. House lights stay partially up. The ENSEMBLE is scattered onstage, casually present — some stretching, some sitting quietly, some simply being. They are human, not performing.)

(As curtain time approaches, the music fades naturally. The FEMALE VOICE and MALE VOICE enter casually from the audience — no grand entrance, just two people walking to the stage.)

(They look at each other, nod. A simple acknowledgment: let's begin.)

FEMALE VOICE

We're here.

MALE VOICE

You're here.

(They look at the room — at the people.)

FEMALE VOICE

There's a sound underneath everything.

MALE VOICE

Musicians call it the tonic note. It's the calm, even tone that holds the center of a song. No matter how loud or chaotic the music gets, the tonic is always there — steady, unwavering.

FEMALE VOICE

And you have one too.

MALE VOICE

It's a feeling. A calm, even place inside you that's always been there — even when life got loud.

FEMALE VOICE

Most of us forgot it exists. We've been living in the noise so long, we think the noise is all there is.

MALE VOICE

It's not.

FEMALE VOICE

Tonight, we're going to find that calm, even feeling again.

MALE VOICE

Together.

(Music begins.)

SONG 1: THE TONIC NOTE

(Duration: ~3:30)

(Performed by MALE VOICE, FEMALE VOICE, and ENSEMBLE. Warm, grounding, inviting. The song introduces the central metaphor.)

[Full lyrics in separate document: TONIC_lyrics_12-23.docx]

(The song ends gently. The room breathes with it. Lights stay warm.)

SCENE 2: THE REALITY

(Duration: ~3 minutes)

(The song ends. No applause. The Voices immediately shift into conversation — casual, relatable, human.)

FEMALE VOICE

So that's the idea. The tonic note. The calm underneath.

(beat)

But here's the reality—

(She pulls out her phone, looks at it, puts it away.)

FEMALE VOICE

I spent an entire week convinced I'd ruined my career because I used the wrong emoji in an email. A thumbs-up instead of a smiley face. One week. Spiraling.

(MALE VOICE laughs, shakes his head.)

MALE VOICE

I had a panic attack in a restaurant once because when the server said enjoy your meal, I said you too. And then I spent the rest of dinner convinced everyone thought I was an idiot.

(The audience laughs, recognizes themselves.)

FEMALE VOICE

(to audience)

We are Olympic-level overthinkers. World-class catastrophizers.

(Beat. She looks at the ENSEMBLE.)

FEMALE VOICE

And we're not alone.

(ENSEMBLE members step forward briefly — 10 seconds each, establishing who they are with one punchy line.)

THE ACHIEVER

I get praised for burning out.

THE FIXER

I save everyone but me.

THE GHOST

I mastered disappearing.

THE HEART

They said I feel too much.

THE FIRESTARTER

Someone said tone it down.

THE WITNESS

I watch. I see. I stay quiet.

(The Voices acknowledge them.)

MALE VOICE

Yeah. We all walked in here carrying something.

FEMALE VOICE

And here's what you need to know: you don't have to have it figured out to be here. You don't have to be calm yet. You don't have to pretend.

MALE VOICE

Whatever you brought with you — the worry, the noise, the weight — you can bring it.

(Music begins — grounded, building permission.)

SONG 2: BRING IT ALL

(Duration: ~3:30)

(Sophisticated theatrical ballad. Creates permission for radical honesty. Invites the audience to bring their mess without needing to fix it. The bridge between understanding the concept and experiencing the chaos.)

[Full lyrics in separate document: BRING_IT_ALL_SUNO_Ready.txt]

(The song ends. The room has shifted. Permission has been given.)

SCENE 3: NAMING THE CHAOS

(Duration: ~2 minutes)

(After the song. The energy is different — more honest, more open.)

FEMALE VOICE

Okay. So we brought it. Now let's actually look at it.

MALE VOICE

The noise. The static. The what-ifs that run on repeat.

(ENSEMBLE members each name one what-if — quick, rapid-fire, building tension.)

THE ACHIEVER

What if I said the wrong thing?

THE FIXER

What if I missed my moment?

THE GHOST

What if I don't belong?

THE HEART

What if they think I'm too much?

THE FIRESTARTER

What if I peaked last year?

THE WITNESS

What if no one notices I'm here?

(The Voices look at each other, then at the room.)

FEMALE VOICE

Yeah. Let's sing about it.

(Music begins — building, anxious, chaotic.)

SONG 3: THE STATIC

(Duration: ~2:30)

(The anxiety explodes. Layered what-ifs, comic bridge, cathartic chorus. Ends whispered: You're here.)

[Full lyrics in separate document: TONIC_lyrics_12-23.docx]

(The song ends. The chaos has been named.)

SCENE 4: WHAT WE ACTUALLY CARRY

(Duration: ~10 minutes)

(After the song. The energy is still present but not frantic.)

FEMALE VOICE

Okay. That's the noise. Now let's look at what's underneath.

MALE VOICE

The stories we've been carrying. Some we wrote. Some were written for us.

(Each ENSEMBLE character gets 90 seconds to share a specific, visual, emotional origin story. These are the moments that shaped them.)

THE ACHIEVER

When I was eight, I brought home a report card with all A's and one B-plus. My dad looked at it and said, What happened here? Pointed right at the B-plus. I've been chasing that question ever since.

THE FIXER

My mom used to cry at night. I could hear it through the walls. So I learned to be the happy one. The one who made everyone laugh. If I kept everyone else okay, maybe she'd stop crying. She didn't. But I never stopped trying.

THE GHOST

I was the kid who got called on in class and then told to speak up because no one could hear me. Every. Single. Time. So I just... stopped. Stopped raising my hand. Stopped speaking. Safer that way.

THE HEART

I cried at a movie once. In public. And someone next to me said, It's not that deep. Like I'd done something wrong. So I learned to save my tears for when I'm alone. Which means I'm always alone when I cry.

THE FIRESTARTER

I walked into a room once — full of energy, full of ideas — and someone said, Whoa, dial it back. Too much. So I learned to enter rooms apologizing. Sorry for being loud. Sorry for taking up space. Sorry for existing at full volume.

THE WITNESS

(finally speaks — this is the first time)

I watched all of this happen to all of you. And I didn't say anything. Because I thought if I stayed quiet, I'd be safe. But silence doesn't protect you. It just makes you invisible.

(The Voices witness all of this. They don't fix it. They don't rush to comfort. They simply validate.)

FEMALE VOICE

These aren't problems to solve. They're weights we've been carrying.

MALE VOICE

And maybe it's time to name them. Out loud. Together.

(Music begins — heavy, soulful.)

SONG 4: THE STORIES WE CARRY

(Duration: ~2:45)

(Soulful, heavy, vulnerable ballad. ENSEMBLE sings their truths. None of this is weakness — it's just weight. Lay it down, lay it down. The song ends with a collective breath.)

[Full lyrics in separate document: TONIC_lyrics_12-23.docx]

(The song ends. The room is tender. Heavy but not unbearable.)

SCENE 5: THE FIRST RESET

(Duration: ~9 minutes)

(After the song. The room needs to breathe.)

FEMALE VOICE

(quietly)

That's a lot.

MALE VOICE

Yeah.

(Pause.)

FEMALE VOICE

Let's pause.

MALE VOICE

Not skip. Not fix. Just... pause.

FEMALE VOICE

(to room)

This might feel weird. That's okay. Weird is fine.

MALE VOICE

We're going to breathe. And I know that sounds simple. But when's the last time you actually stopped?

(The Voices model resistance first — they're human too. This builds trust.)

FEMALE VOICE

Honestly? I don't want to stop. Stopping feels like giving up.

MALE VOICE

Yeah. Same. If I stop, I might have to feel everything I've been avoiding.

FEMALE VOICE

Right. So we just keep moving. Keep doing. Keep proving.

(Beat.)

MALE VOICE

But what if we stopped anyway?

(The ENSEMBLE gradually joins — one by one, they find stillness. This is a visual shift.)

FEMALE VOICE

(to room)

If you're comfortable, close your eyes. If not, just soften your gaze.

MALE VOICE

Feel your feet on the ground. Actually feel them. The weight. The contact.

FEMALE VOICE

Breathe in. Nothing fancy. Just air.

MALE VOICE

Breathe out. Let it go.

(They guide actual breath work WITH THE AUDIENCE — simple, grounding, participatory. The room shifts from chaos to calm. This takes time. Let it breathe.)

FEMALE VOICE

Your body knows what your mind forgets.

MALE VOICE

It knows how to reset. How to find center. How to come home.

(Music begins underneath — minimalist, rhythmic, grounding.)

SONG 5: BREATHE IT OUT

(Duration: ~2:00)

(Minimalist R&B groove. Breathe in, breathe out. Feel your feet on the ground. Not performed AT the audience — performed WITH them. The first real reset moment.)

[Full lyrics in separate document: TONIC_lyrics_12-23.docx]

(The song ends. The room is quieter. The energy has shifted.)

ACT II

SCENE 6: SELF-COMPASSION

(Duration: ~8 minutes)

(The room is calmer now, but not resolved. Something has shifted.)

FEMALE VOICE

Question. What would you say to a friend who was struggling?

(Beat. Let the question land.)

MALE VOICE

You'd probably be kind. Patient. You'd tell them it's okay to not be okay.

FEMALE VOICE

Right. Now what do you say to yourself when you're struggling?

(Silence. Recognition in the room.)

FEMALE VOICE

I'll go first. Here's what I'd tell a friend: You're doing your best. You're carrying more than anyone sees. I'm proud of you.

(beat)

Here's what I actually say to myself: Why can't you get it together? Everyone else is fine. What's wrong with you?

MALE VOICE

Yeah. I'd tell a friend: You're allowed to rest. You don't have to earn your worth.

(beat)

I tell myself: If you stop, you'll fall behind. Prove yourself. Again.

(ENSEMBLE members share brief moments of their inner critic vs. what they'd tell a friend. Each gets 45 seconds.)

THE ACHIEVER

I'd tell a friend: One mistake doesn't define you. I tell myself: You should have known better.

THE FIXER

I'd tell a friend: You matter. Your needs are valid. I tell myself: Don't be selfish. Everyone else comes first.

THE GHOST

I'd tell a friend: Your voice matters. Speak up. I tell myself: No one wants to hear from you anyway.

THE HEART

I'd tell a friend: It's okay to feel. You're human. I tell myself: Stop being so sensitive. Get over it.

FEMALE VOICE

So why can't we give ourselves what we'd give anyone else?

MALE VOICE

Maybe because we think we don't deserve it. Maybe because we've been taught that self-compassion is selfish.

FEMALE VOICE

Or maybe we just forgot how.

(Music begins — compassionate, lifting.)

SONG 6: WHAT I'D TELL A FRIEND

(Duration: ~3:00)

(Soulful, compassionate anthem. If you were my friend, I'd never let you talk the way you talk to yourself. The turning point from judgment to compassion. Maybe it's time I heard those words today.)

[Full lyrics in separate document: TONIC_lyrics_12-23.docx]

(The song ends. Something has opened.)

SCENE 7: BEFORE YOU LEARNED TO HIDE

(Duration: ~9 minutes)

MALE VOICE

Question. Who were you before the world told you who to be?

(Silence. The question lands deep.)

FEMALE VOICE

I used to sing in the car. Loud. Off-key. Didn't care. Windows down, full volume.

MALE VOICE

When did you stop?

FEMALE VOICE

(thinks)

Someone made a face. I don't even remember who. But I stopped.

(ENSEMBLE members share childhood memories — specific, visual, nostalgic moments. Each gets 90 seconds to paint a vivid picture.)

THE FIRESTARTER

I used to wear bright colors. Like, every day. My kindergarten teacher called me the rainbow kid. Then someone said I was trying too hard. So I switched to gray.

THE ACHIEVER

I used to play without keeping score. Build things just to see if I could. No winners, no losers. Just... trying. Then someone said, If you're not going to take it seriously, why bother? So I started counting. Everything.

THE GHOST

I used to raise my hand in class. All the time. I had so many ideas. Then one kid laughed when I got an answer wrong. Just once. But I stopped raising my hand after that.

THE HEART

I used to cry when I was happy. Like, full tears at birthday parties, at the beach, watching sunsets. My dad said, You don't have to cry about everything. So I learned to hold it in. Now I can't cry even when I want to.

THE FIXER

I used to ask for help. I'd say, I don't understand, can you show me? Then someone said, Figure it out yourself. So I did. And now I can't ask for anything.

MALE VOICE

You didn't lose that person. You just learned to hide them.

FEMALE VOICE

And maybe it's time to remember. Not to go back. But to reclaim.

(Music begins — tender, hopeful.)

SONG 7: BEFORE THE WORLD TOLD YOU

(Duration: ~2:45)

(Acoustic, tender. You used to dance without mirrors. Before the world told you how you should move, you were enough. And you still are.)

[Full lyrics in separate document: TONIC_lyrics_12-23.docx]

(The song ends. The room is warm, hopeful.)

SCENE 8: THE CHOICE

(Duration: ~5 minutes)

FEMALE VOICE

So here we are. We've named the noise. We've named the weight. We've remembered who we were before we learned to hide.

MALE VOICE

And now there's a choice.

FEMALE VOICE

You can leave here and go back to the noise. Back to the hustle, the performance, the endless proving. No judgment if you do. It's familiar. It's what we know.

MALE VOICE

Or you can choose something different.

(Beat.)

FEMALE VOICE

Choosing yourself isn't selfish. It's the only honest thing.

MALE VOICE

It's saying: I'm allowed to rest. I'm allowed to need. I'm allowed to take up space.

(ENSEMBLE models the choice — each person makes a quiet, powerful declaration.)

THE ACHIEVER

I choose rest.

THE FIXER

I choose to need.

THE GHOST

I choose my voice.

THE HEART

I choose to feel.

THE FIRESTARTER

I choose full volume.

THE WITNESS

I choose to be seen.

FEMALE VOICE

(to room)

What do you choose?

(Beat. Let it land.)

(Music begins — building, empowering, joyful.)

SONG 8: I CHOOSE ME

(Duration: ~3:15)

(Pop-anthem empowerment. I choose me — not the perfect, just the true. Full company, celebratory. One voice steady in a shaky room is enough to retune everything. The PEAK moment of activation.)

[Full lyrics in separate document: TONIC_lyrics_12-23.docx]

(The song ends BIG. The room is activated, empowered, alive.)

SCENE 9: THE DESCENT

(Duration: ~2 minutes)

(After the peak. The Voices guide the energy down. Music begins underneath — gentle, grounding.)

FEMALE VOICE

(quietly, over music)

The work is done.

MALE VOICE

Now we rest.

FEMALE VOICE

You don't have to keep climbing.

MALE VOICE

You made the choice. Now feel it.

(The music swells gently, transitioning seamlessly into Euphoria.)

SONG 9: EUPHORIA

(Duration: ~3:00)

(Gospel-soul transcendence. You don't have to chase it — it's been here all along. Starts quiet, builds gently, includes a cappella moment. Sustained final chord that lingers. The room is steady, not loud.)

[Full lyrics in separate document: TONIC_lyrics_12-23.docx]

(The song ends. Silence. Let it land.)

SCENE 10: THE LANDING

(Duration: ~2 minutes)

(After the song. Earned silence. The Voices speak quietly.)

FEMALE VOICE

(quietly)

This is what staying feels like.

MALE VOICE

Not perfect. Not solved. Just... here.

FEMALE VOICE

You can take this with you. The calm, even feeling. Your tonic note.

MALE VOICE

It's always been there. You just remembered how to hear it.

(Beat.)

FEMALE VOICE

Thank you for being here.

(Lights fade slowly. The tonic note hums underneath — barely audible, just a presence.)

(BLACKOUT.)

END OF SHOW