

AUDIENCES WANTED

'Grief ... A Comedy' heads to television as Alison Larkin closes a transformative chapter

By Matt Martinez, The Berkshire Eagle 5 hrs ago



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Editor's note: This story was updated June 5 to reflect that the June 13 performance is at 2 p.m.

GREAT BARRINGTON — When viewers boot up [Alison Larkin's](#) latest television special, "Grief ... A Comedy," she hopes its introductory sequence will strike the right homegrown chord.



Author and comedian Alison Larkin will perform "Grief...A Comedy" for the final time onstage June 12 and 13 at the Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center.

RAY BURMISTON

The special, based on Larkin's one-woman show and subsequent book of the same name, details her whirlwind romance with a renewable energy engineer named Bhima Nitta after their meet-cute at The Red Lion Inn over the hotel's last copy of a New York Times Sunday edition.

Larkin will tell that tale onstage for the final time at the [Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center](#), 7 p.m. June 12 and 2 p.m. June 13, immortalizing the show for good with the special, as she brings this particular era to a close. As attendees begin filing into

the Mahaiwe, they might see the camera operators and crew getting into position to capture the last live performances of the work.

The story begins when Larkin, the author, comedian, prolific audiobook narrator and Stockbridge resident, was in her 50s, in the throes of a "comical" online dating scene in the Berkshires and some years removed from her divorce with her "was-band," and reinvigorated her belief in the kind of romantic love she'd been yearning for after years of avoidance, stemming from a fear of abandonment as an adopted child.

The two hit it off immediately, bonding over their shared sentiments as immigrants in their chosen home (Larkin came to the United States from England, Nitta from India) and a keen sense of humor that propelled them through adventures in the Berkshires. They spent months dreaming up "glorious plans", making travel arrangements and plotting out life together; Nitta asked Larkin to marry him in 2020, to which she happily agreed.



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Five days later, [Nitta](#) died unexpectedly. The worst had happened, just as she'd feared for all those years that it might; she had lost someone she truly loved in a way that should have been final.

But the love, she found, didn't stop; it endured, changed form. Where she expected to "hide under the bed and never come out again" in a situation like this, she instead emerged with a sense of clarity and an appreciation for the time she still has. That mandate for living life fully partly comes from Bhima himself, after he showed up at her kitchen table six weeks after his death to encourage her to love again, as it's told in the book.

The entire tale is, ultimately, a Berkshire love story, tinged with comedy, tragedy and healing, and she wants the forthcoming special to reflect that. In contrast with more typical openings — she pictures "Dave Chappelle or some cool dude" clad in a leather jacket stepping out of their taxi in some major American city, sparking a cigarette before processing onstage to uproarious applause — Larkin wants her entrance in the forthcoming project to be uniquely local and authentic to her attributes as a storyteller and human being.

"I will be on my yellow bicycle, biking through the Berkshire Hills past Tanglewood, past The Mount, and it's kind of the opposite of cool," Larkin said with a grin. "I'm not hip, I'm hop — and that's okay. There's not many stories that are told by women who are older; there are not many real love stories — which this is — about finding true love later in life."

The undertaking comes with the support of director [Scott Floyd Lochmus](#), who previously worked in the Berkshires on the 2008 television special "Yo-Yo Ma & Friends: Songs of Joy and Peace," featuring the famed cellist and James Taylor. The film is also produced by Lochmus, Jonathan Gray and Berkshire Film and Media Collaborative Executive Director [Diane Pearlman](#).

"It certainly isn't a one-woman show anymore," Larkin said, "This is a whole team of very talented, committed people who have joined to help tell the story."

LOCAL AUDIENCE WANTED

Of equal importance, she said, is the presence of an enthusiastic local audience to ponder the mysteries of love, to cry, to laugh and to share their own stories with her in grand fashion. As she has in the past, Larkin plans to interact with the audience in a sort of "to and fro" where she can, posing questions about true love and its hallmarks.

To that end: If you're reading this, she hopes to see you there, preferably with "20 of your closest friends."

"It feels like it's going to be a party, if you want to know the truth," Larkin said with a laugh. "I think we're all going to have a lot of fun, and also afterwards, we'll be talking about things that actually matter."

MOVING ON

The special will serve as a swan song for the one-woman show that Larkin has been performing in different iterations since its debut with [Great Barrington Public Theater](#) in 2022, when she first brought it to life under the title "Grief, the Musical ... A Comedy" in its earliest version.

After that, she reworked the show dramatically, staging the revised version at [Barrington Stage Company](#) in 2024 before it headlined at [Edinburgh Festival Fringe](#), was picked up by the [Soho Theatre](#) in London and taken to other stages across the globe to great reception.

Eventually, the show had grown popular enough to garner an offer for a New York City run — but given the opportunity, Larkin decided to pass. While performing the show was often cathartic and revelatory, it had also taken its toll on her. The prospect of staging it eight times a week was daunting, she said, besides the fact that she feels it's time to move on to other projects.

"It costs me to perform it," Larkin said. "We all go on a journey, the whole audience and I, and we come out at the end feeling uplifted and affirmed and clear that we are not going to waste a minute of whatever time may come yet. However, it's quite hard for me personally to relive some of it."

That's where the special comes in: In making it, Larkin saw an opportunity to perform the show just a few more times but have it remain accessible forever — and more widely — for those who need it. Years of performing the show, and having conversations with others who had lost their loved ones, informed her of the necessity to keep that going.

Looking forward, and looking back, Larkin thinks about the people that the show has already touched; the people who have come up to her afterward and spoken about their relationships with their late spouses, and the things they had to do to move forward again. She recalled one woman who approached after a performance to tell her that she had been emboldened to go out and love again three years after the death of her husband; "I thought, wow — if it's just for her, it's been worth it."

When it's available on film after the Mahaiwe dates, she relishes the thought that people the world over might have that experience.

"If it doesn't hurt, it's not going to be funny," Larkin said. "That is true of all the best comedy, I believe: if it doesn't hurt to write it, it won't be funny, because you've got to go to somewhere real within yourself, and then it's going to resonate with people. If you just skim the surface, who cares? But if you go to where it really matters, I think you can reach people, and I think that's what's been happening with this show."

IF YOU GO

What: "Grief ... A Comedy" featuring Alison Larkin

Where: Mahaiwe Performing Arts Center, 14 Castle St., Great Barrington

When: 7 p.m. June 12 and 2 p.m. June 13

Tickets: \$25-\$100

Reservations: 413-528-0100, mahaiwe.org

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