

## Would you go to a play by yourself? Theaters are hoping so

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**Warm-up question:** When people go to the theater or a concert, who do they usually go with?

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A MARTÍNEZ, HOST:

Nearly 20% of Broadway tickets are being **snapped up** by people going to musicals and plays alone, all by themselves. Now, that's double what it was a couple of years ago. A theater operator with venues across the U.S., U.K. and Europe is actively encouraging audience members to fly solo. NPR's Chloe Veltman recently **ditched** her plus-one in San Francisco go to find out more.

CHLOE VELTMAN, BYLINE: The lushly romantic Broadway musical "The Notebook" might seem like an odd choice to test out a new initiative aimed at attracting solo ticket buyers.

VELTMAN: But Scott Kane insists Solo Seats is not the same thing as **singles night**. He's with the San Francisco subsidiary of live theater operator ATG Entertainment.

SCOTT KANE: Look, if a meaningful connection happens, that's a bonus. But at the end of the day, it's really about being comfortable going solo to a show and enjoying it with people who have that same experience.

VELTMAN: Sixty people signed up for the **inaugural** Solo Seats event recently. The ticket included a discounted orchestra seat to a performance of "The Notebook" on tour in San Francisco, a preshow mixer with other solo seatsters and a free drink. Some of these theater-goers, like Maria Sakata, say they've never **ventured out** to a live show on their own before.

MARIA SAKATA: I kind of love the idea of going to a show, like, how you would see a movie by yourself.

VELTMAN: Others, like Alejandra Monroy do it regularly.

ALEJANDRA MONROY: I live within walking distance. So usually, I'll just get, like, a rush ticket. I just love seeing whatever it is in season.

VELTMAN: Solo leisure is booming at a time when people are living alone in increasing numbers due to rising economic independence, longer life expectancies and cultural shifts towards individualism. Social psychologist Bella DePaulo writes about the habits of single people.

BELLA DEPAULO: More people are **unintimidated** by the idea of going out and doing things on their own, whether it's dining or theater or museums or concerts.

VELTMAN: Theater audience scholar Susan Bennett says this trend gives theaters an opportunity to capture a fast-growing segment of the market as they continue to struggle to rebuild audiences since the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenge, Bennett says, is that many people still think of attending live shows, and musicals in particular, as a couples or group activity.

SUSAN BENNETT: Things like "Mamma Mia!," "Mean Girls," those are classic girls' night out.

VELTMAN: So, Bennett says, there's a **lingering stigma** associated with going alone, especially for unseasoned theater-goers, and that more theaters should follow ATG's Solo Seats example.

BENNETT: One of the tasks theater has is to sort of take away some of the perceived chance to embarrassment.

VELTMAN: Leah Taylor says she bought a solo seat to "The Notebook" in **a bid to vanquish** those embarrassment demons.

LEAH TAYLOR: This is my year of doing everything that I want to do, whether people want to go with me or not.

VELTMAN: But it's not like everyone with a Solo Seats ticket is here alone. Longtime friends, Joan Brown and Bobbie Lopez purchased separate Solo Seats, but still managed to sit next to each other in the theater.

JOAN BROWN: You know what? Until I got here and saw Solo, I wasn't really sure, were we supposed to be solo, by ourselves?

BOBBIE LOPEZ: Well, you are. You're solo, and I'm solo.

VELTMAN: ATG says its next Solo Seats event is scheduled for a late March performance of "MJ: The Musical." Fittingly, the show is all about Michael Jackson, one of the world's great solo acts.

Chloe Veltman, NPR News.

**Vocabulary and Phrases:**

1. **Snap up:** to buy something quickly because it is in high demand.
2. **Ditch:** to leave or abandon someone or something.
3. **Singles night:** an event designed for people who are not in relationships to meet potential romantic partners.
4. **Inaugural:** the first event in a series.
5. **Venture out:** to leave home and go somewhere, especially somewhere new or unfamiliar.
6. **Unintimidated:** not feeling afraid or nervous about something that might worry other people.
7. **Lingering:** continuing for a long time or remaining present.
8. **Stigma:** a negative belief or social judgment about something.
9. **A bid:** an attempt or effort to achieve something.
10. **Vanquish:** to defeat or overcome something completely.

**Fill in the Blank** Use the correct word or phrase from the vocabulary list.

1. He decided to \_\_\_\_\_ his plans and stay home instead.
2. The bar hosts a \_\_\_\_\_ every Friday for people hoping to meet someone.
3. The company held its \_\_\_\_\_ event to celebrate the opening of the new theater.
4. The company launched the program in \_\_\_\_\_ to attract new customers.
5. There is still a \_\_\_\_\_ around eating alone in restaurants in some cultures.
6. Some people are afraid to \_\_\_\_\_ alone to new places.
7. Many fans quickly \_\_\_\_\_ the limited tickets for the concert.
8. She felt \_\_\_\_\_ by the large crowd and enjoyed the event by herself.
9. The athlete trained hard to \_\_\_\_\_ his fear of failure.
10. Even after the event ended, a sense of excitement was \_\_\_\_\_ in the room.

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. What percentage of Broadway tickets are now bought by people attending shows alone?
2. What initiative did ATG Entertainment introduce to attract solo theatergoers?
3. Why do some people say they enjoy attending shows alone?
4. According to researchers, why is solo leisure becoming more common?
5. What social challenge still discourages some people from attending shows alone?

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Do you enjoy doing activities like movies, restaurants, or concerts alone? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think some people feel uncomfortable going to events alone?
3. Do you think attitudes toward solo activities are changing in your country?
4. What are some advantages of attending events alone?
5. If theaters want to attract solo visitors, what kinds of programs or events could they create?