

Hi there, my name is Daniel J. Watts, I am a 2020 Tony nominee. And I'm a storyteller. This is my new jam. Uh. Uh. Uh. Uh. Uh.

00:26

(Tapping sounds)

00:40

"Maaaaaan ... You don't really let paint dry," one of my mentors said to me one day. He meant it as a compliment. "Yeah, I guess you're right," I grinned back pseudo-shyly, as I took said compliment and placed it on my head like a half-cocked crown. I've always taken pride in being the kind of artist that's always making moves.

01:10

(Tapping sounds)

01:19

We were having one of our catch-up sessions, my mentor and I, July 2019, I, between shooting episodes of "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," and moving into my new apartment uptown in Harlem. I'd just returned from Paris. I was just going out there to hang. You know -- shop a little, take in a couple museums, sit down at cafés and watch the people go by. You know -- très parisien. Laissez-faire and whatnot. Little did I know that my vacation would turn into a work-cation, and I would be asked to perform with my friend Ray as he headlined at the international music festival AFROPUNK. OK, I might have known a little bit. But I wasn't going to let that paint dry. Mm hmm.

02:17

(Tapping sounds)

02:22

Upon my return, Dave Chappelle was making his Broadway debut, followed by an invite-only impromptu jam session. I had an invite. I jammed at the session. Ehhhh! That's all right. A week from then, Tituss Burgess's album will be released, on which I had two features, and two days

prior, "Deadline" would announce "Broadway's 'Tina' Musical Finds its Ike Turner in 'The Last O.G.' Co-star Daniel J. Watts." Ohhhh, wet paint! And I had not yet started painting like this.

03:06

The week before rehearsals, my mother and I would travel to Clarksdale, Mississippi. Memphis, Tennessee, and Nutbush, Tennessee, to see how a younger Ike Turner might have maneuvered through life, then back to NYC to finish shooting "Maisel," then a quick trip to L.A. for an album release concert, then back to New York City to start "Tina" rehearsal. Four weeks of rehearsal, three weeks of tech, four more weeks of previews. And now it's November, and it's opening night. My family, which consists of my mother, my two aunts, my two cousins and my 91-year-old granny fly up to support. They are drenched -- drenched -- in Southern pride and basking in familial glory as Tina Turner pretends to give me a light smacking around at the curtain call, in front of 1,500 people.

04:02

(Tapping sounds)

04:07

It was awesome. Skip over to Thanksgiving, which means it's basically Christmas, so you might as well say it's a new year. Happy New Year 2020! Spoiler alert: things are going to get wild -- fast. But I wasn't about to let that 2020 paint get dry. Yeahhhh.

04:39

First off, performances of my one-man show overlap with my eight shows a week at 'Tina,' fully equipped with no days off and a midnight performance on a Friday night, the night before a two-show Saturday. Wet paint, wet paint, wet paint! Bleeding into February, I'm starting to feel the effects. Everything's starting to blend. I'm only three months into my one-year contract, and I'm already feeling like I need a break, I need a vacation.

05:17

Moving into March, and now taking on the role of Ike Turner has started to take its toll, and I can't tell whose trauma is whose. I can't tell whose trauma is hues ... And there's news of this mysterious illness making its Broadway debut. Uh, but this paint, though. All cylinders are firing, I'm firing all cylinders because there's Tony buzz -- got to pack those interviews in! --

which means suits, purple suits, blue suits, green. Suits you, it suits me. And is that a hazmat suit? Aquamarine.

06:01

And as it seems the paint is beginning to dry, I ask myself: Do I really want all this? I mean, all of this, the fortune and the fame and the celebrity? Because Dave Chappelle said to David Letterman that the more you invest into yourself as a celebrity, the less of yourself you get to own. Hmm.

06:31

And I asked myself: Am I really going anywhere? Like, what's my sense of direction? Because I feel like I'm not going anywhere or like I'm running in place on a hamster wheel that I don't know how to get off of. And it's like I have to ask permission to do the thing that I know that I need to do for myself, and then, and then, and then, and then ... The world finally stops.

07:00

And because everything is in flux, I am forced to take a much-needed reprieve as that mysterious illness has been granted an extension. And though I know the answer is not for a while, I kept asking myself: When's Broadway coming back? Because even though I really, really, really need to take this break, I really, really, really, really, really need a check, and I keep checking the status on this mysterious illness because I need that paint to dry now. And now everyone's dazed and confused, our greys turned to blues. I'm off all of the socials, but I stay glued to the news because I'm watching the paint dry that will not dry fast enough for me to keep going. Hmm.

07:50

Skip to the summer. Skip to the summer, now the country's on fire. I'm back on all the socials, because my one-man show has been revived and revamped for the virtual space so I can comment on the death of Ahmaud, Breonna and George. Broadway still doesn't know when it's going to come back, but now it's in the hot seat for all of its past transgressions. And I think it might be time for me to take a break from the city. Three weeks in North Carolina, two weeks in L.A., one week in Portland. I come back to New York. Broadway still doesn't know when it's going to come back. I need something to take my mind off all these pandemics, and the next thing I know ... I'm painting with my feet.

08:37

I needed something live and in color that wasn't "Live and in color!" And now I realize I'm obsessed with diving in colors. Watching them splatter, swirl and blend and do all the things people shouldn't be doing right now. And as I'm in the midst of my deep dive, I realize I had to learn how to let paint dry. I have to stop and take a break, because if I don't, my yellows and my blues will make green, even if that's not what I really, really want.

09:31

And then I started to think about all the other times when I wasn't letting paint dry, when I wasn't taking time away to let things heal, like when I was still dancing on two sprained ankles, even though the doctor told me I needed to take a break for a while. Or when I was trying to force closure in a newly broken-up relationship because I didn't want to deal with the healing process. Or when I fussed out my reps because ... because Netflix haven't called to offer me a deal a week after my one-man show. All the times when I didn't want time to take the time it takes to reveal itself to me. All the times when I didn't believe that what I had already done was enough and that I didn't have to keep going back in with more color.

10:23

Broadway can't come back. It has to come forward. And when it does, it has to be more expressive with the colors that it uses. And unfortunately, I can't finish this piece for you right now. Because in order for me to do what I really want to be able to do, I have to let this paint dry. Ohhh, and that's something that I'm ... I'm still really, really, really learning to be OK with. But I know it'll be worth the wait.

11:08

Thank you.