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My approach to building a character

John Emmett Whitney
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MY APPROACH TO BUILDING A CHARACTER

by

John Emmett Whitney

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Theatre Arts in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2015

Thesis Supervisor: Professor John Cameron

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

John Emmett Whitney

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree
in Theatre Arts at the May 2015 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

John Cameron, Thesis Supervisor

Paul Kalina

Anne Marie Nest

To my parents, Ursula and Joe, brother, Sam, sister, Olivia, friends, family, past and present professors, coaches, and anyone who took the time to help me figure out who I already was.

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PUBLIC ABSTRACT

The goal of this work is to explain the process through which I develop a character as an actor. I will explain the crucial elements that I believe great actors exude and also where I have been able—and also unable—to adopt these elements. The act of writing down these ideas is beneficial to myself because it requires me to express on paper what could easily be discussed with any other actor endlessly in circles comparing and contrasting processes and tendencies of practice. I will be able to look back to this particular work in the future and see how I have grown and what principles I'm sure I'll possibly still believe are paramount to great acting. I hope this work will also benefit younger actors who might come across my words and realize that they aren't as clueless and off-the-mark as they might think they are as a result of doing this type of work. I could certainly be the one who is clueless—and only time will answer that question. By exploring and expressing the ways in which I work, I hope I am able to offer some tangible insight to the general public as to what an actor *actually does in preparation* for a role that they might see onstage or in a film.

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INTRODUCTION – PROCESS STATEMENT

My approach to acting is to learn as much as possible about the character I am playing and then let all of that go once the play begins. How exactly I go about this process is much more detailed and cumbersome, but that is the essence of what I try to do each time I act. I will say now that I'm sure my approach to acting will change a bit as my career evolves in the years to come. However, I believe that there are elements I will always strive to discover and blend into in my process throughout my career—the qualities that I regard as the best acting of today: simplicity, vulnerability, presence, risk and play.

During my time at Iowa I have realized the importance of developing an objective eye for acting—that, in order to understand why I believe some acting is better, I must express what has felt true or false to me in my experience thus far as an actor and as an audience member. I will certainly repeat myself while writing my process, but my hope is that, through this expression of ideas, I will come to a greater consciousness of myself as a human being and, thereby, an actor. I will most likely reference several plays during my time here at the University of Iowa and elsewhere in my explanations of my process, particularly the current show I am working on: Luck of the Irish by Kirsten Greenidge. From there I will begin my approach to developing a character.

LUCK OF THE IRISH

I find myself connecting with every character in Luck of the Irish. I believe that the message of this play transcends race: that we all have a right to feel a sense of home despite all the screwed up order of history. I believe that this play shows us that there are good people of all types that are trying to connect with other human beings and see past one's race. There's a value and wealth to Joe Donovan, the character whom I'm playing, that I feel inside me. Joe is such a dreamer and wants to learn about the world and continue opening up his mind. This wealth of curiosity is unfortunately not something that most people value. Joe believes he has an incredible chance to change how people are treated in society. Even as he's standing in a hole of debt from failed business ventures, with six children to feed and a wife who is tired of his "dreaming," Joe opts to ghost-purchase a house for a black family who couldn't get an honest realtor to sell them a house in a racially divided Boston suburb in the 1950s. Joe honestly just needs enough to do what makes him happy and proud to be alive, proud to be human. Every so often he'd love to sit and chat with a friend about life and take in the breeze or a beautiful April afternoon over a cocktail. I feel so incredibly similar to Joe regarding my own life pursuits at times. I intend to affect the audience through my portrayal of Joe as powerfully as he affected me when I first read the play. That is my role: the window/aperture/tuning fork to Joe Donovan's story.

I, personally, would love to be able to afford to live modestly somewhere where I could tell beautiful stories that inspire people to find the human empathy in our very vacuous, self-absorbed, instant-gratification world. I would love to have kids and a family someday. I really wouldn't care for a huge house. I would want to put food on the

table and support them and my community, however that future might manifest itself. I believe that Joe operates from a place of love rather than fear as compared to his wife, Patty Ann, who wants to change the terms of the deal, and quite possibly steal the house from the rightful buyers. The chance to learn from another person and share their company is an amazing experience for Joe, and enough for one day. Joe just wants to be honest, vulnerable and connected with another human being, even at the expense of severe financial woes. This is the kind of human character I want to dedicate my career to sharing with the world—that which offers a glimpse into the way one fights to discover and meet the person they've always felt they truly were, rather than fading into the fray of bystander commonality. I personally have developed a habit of putting off my responsibilities and procrastinating. Even with work piling high at times, I always find myself offering that tiny bit of precious time I have left to a person or friend who just needs to blow off some steam over a beer or a coffee. This has always happened to me, and, somehow, things have always worked themselves out. I find myself, in this mode, incredibly similar to Joe Donovan. This is what I must bring to the play—myself—so that Joe Donovan can live and his story can be heard and felt.

While I feel this uplifting connection to the dreamer that Joe Donovan is, I also have a strange fear that one day I might turn into Joe Donovan; I fear developing a habit of failing to follow up on my dreams and actually do the things I say I'm going to accomplish. I've personally become quite good at starting brilliant, I think, play scripts that I don't touch for months and forget about. When I return to them, I feel this heavy, crippling regret and shame that I haven't made any progress. This feeling of losing track of priorities time and again is very real to me—as I remind myself of the monologues I

have not been keeping as fresh and new as they absolutely need to be, to name one of many things I need to reprioritize in my life. Because of this tendency, I have developed a fear of becoming an unsuccessful actor. Because of this sort of personal experience, I am able to imagine and stand up into Joe's circumstances, fears and frustrations and live there. This fear that I too could let my dreams run away from me, taking me places that the "real world" doesn't care for, and focusing on matters that put myself or my family in real financial instability is what I must play, however paralyzing and "real" that feels to me. I must bring my own personal life experience to Joe's situation and cater to his needs, tweaking details here and there. This bringing *myself* to the *character* and playing in that *space between the two* is where I strive [*and usually fall short*] to play every time I get the chance to act. Not only can I simply focus on Joe's dreams and fears, but I also must explore as many human contradictions that might apply to Joe Donovan. By trusting my curiosities and trying new ways of pursuing my action in a given scene, I work to find the most compelling expression of Joe Donovan, using my body and voice as the medium. This is the place I've searched to begin from all this time – and it took (and will continue to take) diligent, relentless, self-analysis, guidance from my teachers and work to get to this state of awareness. And I didn't always think this way, let me be clear. Looking back, I feel so sorry to the directors particularly in my undergrad experience who had to try anything they could to bridge that gap between myself and the character, piecing together any semblance of the character they could find. The work is exhausting, frustrating, but so helpful to me as a person that I know I can offer an expression of what it means to be human that does inspire the audience to have compassion for themselves and others.

BASIC APPROACH: LEARN AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, TRUST, & LET GO

A friend helped put things in perspective for me this summer with an idea I hadn't really considered before, for whatever reason. I realized that there have been thousands and thousands of actors who have gone before me and there will be many more to come after. Thinking of this massive history of the profession and practice of acting, I realized that I absolutely could connect with any human situation or circumstance, as long as I was open to doing so—which I have not always been here at Iowa. The only reason people are generally opposed to understanding another's behavior is because they fear that they themselves could also behave in that manner, which they have *learned* is “bad.” To find myself, even the slightest bit of my personal life experience, in a particular character is what pulls me in upon reading or hearing a script and hopefully what leads me out to share this character's story with the rest of the play and the audience. I am curious to understand how and why a character might think and feel a certain way because that is the only way I will be able to relate to them personally. Human experiences are so incredibly similar despite their illusionary differences. This curiosity of another's behavior is where the magic happens for me. And this also is exactly where I've been lacking in my work—because I never searched for it hard enough in the past.

I've always thought that the character would somehow *arrive* at some point during the rehearsal process—completely and unconsciously outside of my control; that one day I'd walk into the room and we'd start Act II and there I'd be (as the character)—like a clever game of hide and seek that I'd finally won. I realize now how that will never happen unless I am curious to understand how a particular character feels, how they navigate their world, and not judge them, which is a trap I have fallen into many

times when working on a character that many might label as “shady” or an “a**hole.” I cannot judge from the outside while I am trying to play that character. The extent to which I can play the character depends entirely on my ability, as an actor, to be physically, vocally, and emotionally open and vulnerable.

If I am truly open to experiencing the words on the page—allowing them to affect me—I will have the starting point to build a full expression of a character. However, if I am concerned about myself (how I look, what people might think of me, will I be good, will I be inspiring), I will be literally standing in the way of the character—and the expression will be tainted and vague. I realize now just how much research I personally need to do in order to play from an excited, curious, judgment-free place. I strive to operate from a place where I don’t have to think about anything as the character except what I need in the current moment from my scene partner. I am still very much a heady actor today, worrying about things beyond the simplicity of a particular moment, which causes me to disconnect from my action and partner onstage more often than I’d prefer. When I can say my lines without having to think about them, in any type of accent or rhythm, I am the most prepared to begin playing. For me, this is equivalent to knowing the rules of any game. If I don’t know exactly what is in play and what is not, I will be thinking about it when I should be simply playing. With lines no longer a concern, I can then start to really dig deeper into what makes my character relatable to me. I realized only recently just how crucial it is to trust your own interpretation of the character you’re playing. I must trust my gut instinct as often as possible because I am the only one who can bring life to this character that has only existed through text on a page. I must justify the choices I make in the script; I cannot simply decide to do something because I think it

would “look cool.” There must be evidence in the text as to a character’s tendencies, desires, hopes and fears. *This is a double-edged sword*: do as much research with the text, including dramaturgical, historical, and contextual work, to fully understand the words, the social context of the time period, and my GOAT (which I will explain thoroughly below), while *simultaneously trusting* that work *is enough* for me to then play and rehearse with. At times during the rehearsal period I will certainly need to check back to my director and/or the dramaturgical information to clarify an impulse or a reason for saying a line in a certain way. I want to be as familiar with the character’s life as possible so that I can believe that my personal impulses and feelings are truthful and responsive enough to be expressed by the character on stage. If someone were to play me in a performance, I’d want them to learn my mannerisms, habits, tone of voice, sense of humor, greatest fears, way of moving, etc.—the same applies to any character I am given the opportunity to play.

RESEARCH & JOURNAL

Research entails a lot of things for me, including, but not limited to: reading the play several times (in my opinion that number can never be too high), asking questions about a character's behavior, background details, GOAT [given circumstances, objectives, actions, tactics], words/phrases that knock me off my feet, etc. Sometimes I will remind myself before I read the script a particular time to watch out for a particular moment, or to clarify another character's opinion about me, but there are other times when I feel doing this can take me away from the simple meaning of the words. This is when I notice I'm getting into my head. When this happens, I have to figure out if my intention is character or actor driven? Am I, the actor, worrying how I may sound saying a particular line and want to change it? This is a concern about me as the actor worrying how I might be perceived, not about what my character is trying to say or what he needs right now. The focus must always come back to the character's wants and needs. I must, of course, work to maintain a clear, audible, flexible body and voice on my own time, but not at the character's expense. Despite my heady tendencies, any time I can come back to the script is another opportunity to step more fully into the character.

Doing my research and documenting it with a journal is what allows me to feel ready and excited to walk into that first blocking rehearsal. As I said above, if someone were to act out a story of my life in a play or movie, I'd want them to take as much time as possible to understand me: my fears, hopes, habits, favorite drink, etc., so that they are able to tell my story as truthfully as possible with conviction. Knowing that there is an inevitable limit to the amount of time I can commit to research before I have to begin physically embodying the character in rehearsal does not deter me from trying to research

as much as possible. The research work is *absolutely fundamental* to better acquaint myself with the given circumstances of my character's life and *the world they see*. I don't want to be hesitating on stage because I haven't clarified how my character feels about another person. We don't do that in daily life; we grow and establish relationships. We understand how we feel about people we meet and interact with. We don't have to analyze it as much as heady actors do. My sister and I, for example, have a history of shared experiences together. When I see her, I know where we've been together in the past and what things we disagree about. Because I don't have to sit there wondering about all that, I simply respond to her in that experience. That's where I need to get with my character's research before we hit the rehearsal room. I need to know as much as possible about the world (stage environment), given circumstances (time, year, relationships to others), and what my character wants and needs (objectives) from each person/thing they interact with in the course of the play as well as in their past and future. After I learn as much as possible in that regard, I have to then *not think about any of it...the worst Catch-22 ever*.

I believe people come to the theatre to see people like them trying to work through life's many problems and recognize their similarities with the characters. Hopefully by going through this exchange of experience, they are able to appreciate and navigate their lives in a more aware and enlivened manner. We are constantly in a cycle in life, navigating our way through the ups and downs of a wave. We all need rejuvenation to continue on, which is where theatre and film can heal and revive people. Because of this very inspiring effect that the theatre can have on people's lives, I feel an incredible responsibility and privilege to do my work to the best of my ability whenever I

get the opportunity to do so. I also feel an incredible amount of shame when I don't put my best work forward. This is why the research phase is so critical.

LINES

While in the research phase of my process, I also memorize my lines. Getting “off book” (completely memorized for the layman) is simply necessary in order to use your rehearsal time to the best advantage. I was once the last person in the rehearsal process to get off book and it was one of the most humiliating experiences of my life. When you are not completely memorized, you are literally holding the life of the play hostage until you get your lines memorized. The other actors are not able to play with their characters as they’d like to because they’re talking to an unprepared actor, not the character in their scene. It is a frustrating situation to be in and not a reputation I want to be known for, which is why it’s become such a priority/complex for me to get my lines memorized as soon as possible.

I have several ways in which I approach getting off book and I believe rotating through them is the best way so that I know them in different environments. The first thing I do is make flash cards for my lines. I’ll write the cue line, the line that precedes my line, in one color and then on the back I’ll write my line(s) in a different color. I stack them in order and go through them a few times just reading them. Then I’ll number them on the bottom right corner to get an idea of the arc of each scene in terms of length. I also do this so that if they accidentally get out of order, I can get them back without having to go through the whole play—which isn’t a bad thing, honestly. I’ll usually tackle one scene at a time and go stack by stack, scene by scene, until I have those memorized pretty well. After I’m confident doing the lines for each scene in order, I’ll scatter them on the floor and shuffle them. I do this so that I know my line(s) just based off the cue line in the event that my scene partner or I forget a line during rehearsal or performance.

After the flashcards are made, I'll leave them for a bit and try memorizing a more traditional way—reading line by line, not advancing too far without returning to the beginning. This I've noticed is most helpful to me later on in the process because it forces me to slow down the urgency of my memorization complex and *really hear* what the words are saying. I'll also write out my lines several times in a row. I like to see the cluster of all of my lines for a particular scene to, again, get a sense of the scene's length. I'll usually write my lines out without punctuation so I don't assume a particular mood for a scene based on what the punctuation might allude to. I want to make the most of my discoveries on my feet when I'm fully playing off my partner and recognizing what emotions emerge out of the conflict between my partners and me.

I have noticed that I can do much of my memorization on my own, but eventually I need to run the lines with real people, hopefully my scene partner, if available. I like hearing different voices read the same lines because it restrains me from anticipating how the line will sound. Because I've done the flashcard work already, I often catch myself recognizing my partner's whole line when it starts and I'll start thinking of my response line. It feels like I can see all of the words in front of me on a screen as if I were Iron Man and, unfortunately, I've also "pulled up" my line that I know responds to that line onto my metaphorical Iron Man screen while they're talking. This is right about the time when I go back to the traditional line-by-line method and slow things down. Out of this fear of being the last person off book, I am very conscious of memorizing my lines. Because of this, I tend to speed up the process and begin to *anticipate* my follow-up response—and that's not what my character would be doing if he were indeed hearing these words for the first time. I was just recently in this state with my showcase scene and it's terribly

frustrating because, yes, I was prepared, but I'd also taken out the life and spontaneity and variation of all my lines.

Another way that I like to memorize is by recording myself saying my lines. I'll record my line and then leave silence in what would be the time that my partner would respond to me and then continue. This is helpful because I can hear the line and then repeat it in that silence before the next line. This is very helpful for me if I'm on the road somewhere and can't read a script. I have to be careful to try not to replicate the vocal quality because that too can become limiting when trying to add flexibility to my expression once in the rehearsal room. I also like having my lines recorded this way because I can go for a run or work out and express the lines while exhausted, which can help get the words beyond my brain and into the rest of my body.

Lastly, once I have the lines fully memorized, I like to put my iPod on shuffle or skim the radio quickly and sing my lines to whatever tempo the current song is. This also plays with giving a different voice to these words that I've already given an expectation as to how they should sound when they're said. This process is all about knowing the lines so that I can say them mindlessly during scene work, which puts my primary focus not on the lines, but on pursuing my action, listening and responding to my partner. Noticing when I fall into a pattern is crucial to shake things up and rediscover new meanings to phrases and particular moments in the text.

IN THE REHEARSAL ROOM

I love coming into the room and seeing what my fellow actors bring to the table. This is the first chance to see how the other actors, and the director, interpreted the text and how it affected them. Only until recently have I realized that personally and for most of the casts I've been a part of, we tend to get comfortable and repetitive way too early, limiting the opportunities of discovery to the first few times we run a scene. I've told myself show after to show that my motto is going to be "let it rip, be gigantic in your presence, and let the director reel you back in to fit what they want." I journal about this idea constantly, but, since I have yet to be told to do that, that is still what I challenge myself to do every day in rehearsal. I find that if I have a goal for the rehearsal, such as "find out why your wife bothers you so much in this scene" or "don't anticipate!—hear the words for the first time, like your character actually is doing," I am more likely to discover why my character acts a certain way. I like to write down these questions at the top of the journal entry for each rehearsal day and then come back to them at the end and see if I can answer that or maybe another point of confusion I ran into during the night. I'll often write down poignant lines that I hear my scene partner say and tell them that there was something about it that had an affect on me. This way, I can maybe help myself understand a piece of text as well as let my partner know that I'm aware of when they surprise me with the same words night after night. By helping my partner understand a piece of the scene, I end up clarifying or discovering an error in my own character analysis. Being amongst a supportive director and fellow actors who want to work on the more vague and less polished sections of scenes is very fulfilling. Trying to mold together the story in a way that can have as profound an affect on the audience as it did

when I first read it. This is the part that I love watching and being a part of in the rehearsal room the most. I feel like a detective.

I like to try to incorporate as much of the performance elements into rehearsal as soon as possible to try to alleviate the technical rehearsal reorientation. I love to wear shoes that are similar to what I'll be wearing in the show to work to ground myself to the floor and have a command of my movement. I will also try to replicate my costume style if it is noticeably formal or fitting to see how it begins to affect my breath and voice work. If there are audio or visual elements that are going to be involved in the performance, I've been blessed to have those introduced to me as soon as possible. This idea that you are performing the play well in advance of the actual opening is something I learned working with Mario Mendoza on and i will hold you, when you are broken. We were able to run the show probably twelve times before our actual opening performance. This allowed me to rehearse as if I were in front of a live audience with all the elements of the show. I felt that my acting improved drastically during this process because my endurance of the show expanded as well as my aesthetic feel of the whole show, in which almost all four of us actors never left the stage. I was able to try out new ideas and answer more questions I was curious about than ever before, thereby inching me that much closer to understanding Branch, my character. This way of rehearsing reminded me of football or lacrosse practices in high school and college. The sports cliché of “practice like you play” is absolutely true as well for my process of creating a character. This experience with Mario gave me the confidence to admit wholeheartedly that I was an artist—finally. I had always thought that term was weird and artsy for the sake of being offbeat, so I never embraced the idea that I was an artist. I really only felt comfortable associating

myself with the word “actor,” because my hero, Matt Damon, was an actor. “Artist” felt weird and too much for me at the time. I also avoided the term because so much of my life had *not* been in the arts. I felt somewhat ostracized when I first began acting because there were hardly any fraternity, jock guys in the theatre department. I was a dual-athlete in college and turned to theatre after a back injury sidelined me from football. I flirted with acting classes during my sophomore and junior years and then decided to finish the major my senior year, only after spending an amazing summer in New York City assisting a film financier and acting on my own via Craigslist submissions. This flirtation was *really* just a hesitation to explore what else I could be other than an athlete, which is how I had defined myself for most of my life. I was also a fraternity guy at the time, which definitely was a formidable part of my identity. The rehearsal process with Mario was very much a personal exploration that utilized my own childhood videos and photos. I found that this connection sparked a new meaning and drive for me to come to rehearsal that I hadn’t felt before. I began thinking about *why* I was coming to rehearsal in the first place...why was I pursuing acting? It was in that rehearsal room that I felt the love and compassion that can be given and shared with a community through theatre. I was hooked. I believe that because of being excited, prepared, and curious to understand myself and my similarities with Branch, along with a fantastic director, now confidante, and fellow actors/production team, I discovered the untouchable effect that rehearsal can have on my performance and growth as an actor and, most importantly, on my life and outlook on being human.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS TO GREAT ACTING & HOW I MATCH UP

The five elements that I believe are present in a great actor are: simplicity, vulnerability, presence, risk, and play. I strive to incorporate all of these as much as possible in my work. I absolutely need to strengthen all five of them, but have also felt each of them fully in brief moments. Reconnecting with these elements is what pulls me back to the journal and script again and again. I value these elements because, when they are incorporated, they allow an actor to give life to the character in the closest way in which we operate daily as humans, not actors. As humans, we go about our days trying to accomplish a certain set of obligations and pleasures. We learn to socialize with others as we are raised, and navigate the scary, yet, wonderful world we inhabit. We do things. We see people. We speak to one another, or maybe we don't. But we definitely do not think about the architecture of our spine or the placement of our vocal posture and/or articulation in order to get what we need as much as an actor might. Things happen to us and we respond instinctually most of the time. For example, if we touch a hot stove, we pull back quickly and probably swear and yell at the stove for being so hot. We experienced something new and responded without thinking about how it might be heard in the back of the theatre. We haven't rehearsed the way we walk down the hallway of a new office building when we have a job interview. We respond to what is in front of us. We don't know what the person we are talking to is *actually* going to say. We also don't know what is going to happen today as an actor does because he's read the script. Simply put, our life is not scripted, though we might feel that way. It is experienced in the moment. This dichotomy between knowing what is going to happen to the character you are playing and working to make every performance *the first time* you're character has

ever said his words is why these elements are so important. If I don't strive for these elements, I can put on a pretty crappy performance that is simply a recitation of words and some movement.

Keeping my work simple means that I just do the action my character is pursuing in the moment. This notion of action comes from the teachings of Konstantin Stanislavski in which an actor must understand the characters environment, objective, action and tactics to be played in order to allow him to play as the character. The "objective" is what the character needs (always a noun) from the other person in the scene. What they do (always a verb) to get what they need from the other person is called their "action." How they go about pursuing their action is called a "tactic" (also a verb). Figuring out exactly and simply what each of these is for my character during any particular unit of time during a scene is what has to happen in order to simplify my acting. I cannot play a bunch of actions at any given time because it will be unclear and vague—the worst kind of acting. If my objective were, for example, a commitment of love from a girl, my action could very well be to convince her to say she loves me. I would try playing with this and possibly substitute different action verbs instead of convince in order to figure out what action is the most fun and compelling to me to play. Words have different meanings and affects on all of us, so "convince" might be stronger than "beg" depending on the actor. My job is to try this section of the scene with different approaches and different actions *fully* in order to figure out what resonates with me. I then have to do this for every moment in which I am written into the script, on or off stage. This is your job as an actor: to figure out what you need to do and then just do that. Don't show the audience that you're waiting—just wait. By simply doing the action, I can allow myself to quiet my

mind, and then respond off of my partner. By simplifying these parts of the Stanislavski approach, I can enter a scene just thinking about what I need from the other person and how important that is. If I am uncertain what my action is, I will literally be talking to my partner simply because I know the lines but also trying to think about what the hell my action is, thereby not actually hearing what me or my partner is actually saying to me. I will have removed myself from the meaning of the words and the audience will most certainly lose interest and I will be frustrated onstage. I will probably then try to make something dramatic happen because I can feel that nothing is happening and the audience is not engaged, thereby artificially forcing an emotion (probably frustration and anger) on my partner and the words of the scene. This is the worst place to be. And I still play from this place way too often. I absolutely need to simplify my GOAT and listen to the words. I usually attach the first action I find and run it into the dirt. I have to bring my curiosity forth even more to *committing* to trying new actions and tactics. It's very easy to not commit. When I don't commit, it's because I am holding onto too many actions in my head at once. We don't do this in real life. We respond based on what happens to us. This is the simplicity I strive for.

Vulnerability means letting go of control and being open to your partner having an affect on you. This is a very hard thing to do because we *hardly* do this in real life as much as is needed when acting. If I am trying to control a moment or a scene, I am predetermining my moves as if I were playing chess. I cannot think about the moment coming up in ten seconds, I have to live in this moment. When you predetermine how a line should sound or how you should come across to someone, you prevent something unexpected from happening. You are usually waiting to say your lines, rather than

actually listening to your partner. I still do this and I think it has to do with the flashcards/Iron Man memorization complex mentioned above—I try to control moments because I’m afraid that I might f*** up the scene. I usually recognize this or my teacher/director can point this out during a run that feels flat. Because of this control, I become more focused on myself and what *I can* do or say to *provide* conflict and action to the scene—often unconsciously. The idea that I can provide something is very self-concerned and safe. Being vulnerable means letting go of how the scene is going to work itself out and allowing your partner to lead you. If you have identified the elements of GOAT, taken a calming breath, and opened up to what your partner is doing, you will be affected by them and have a greater variety of truthful responses – more than you ever could have manufactured on your own. This idea of letting go of control is unfortunately not something people, myself included, like to do in their daily lives. If anything, people are becoming more and more motivated by fear and, therefore, try to control their lives harder. I had to reflect a lot about how I did this in my life—and how I still do. To this day, I still get nervous before going out to do a scene that I know the lines and GOAT for. I doubt that I’m enough—that the work I’ve put in is *not* captivating, truthful and/or funny enough to be worthy of acclaim. When I try to control a scene, it actually reveals a lack of trust in my work and myself. This has been something I’ve been slowly but surely discovering for the past two and a half years here at Iowa, especially recently. It is amazing how much I have been controlling the past few weeks in all phases of my life because of the stress of writing this thesis, our MFA showcase and the show I’m in. However, last week during rehearsal, I used the frustration and fear and allowed it to lead me and I let go of how the cocktail scene was going to go—and it was undoubtedly the

best I'd ever felt running that scene. It had everything to do with consciously saying, "It's going to be fine...just f*** it and see what happens." That made all the difference last night.

Presence means activating as much of your body so that you can affect the space you are playing in as powerfully as possible. Presence is what you feel when someone walks into a room and immediately changes the vibe and dynamic that was there before. Presence is the vibrations that you send out to the playing space, your acting partners, and the audience when you are acting. I like to think of it as a bubble that surrounds me spherically in all directions. This is a concept my movement professor, Paul Kalina, taught us. I imagine a thousand strings coming out in all directions from the center of my core (pelvis, abdominal area). By activating my core by loosening up the abdominal muscles and the spine, I can allow myself to breathe/take in the space around me. By doing this, I can have an affect on the audience and my partners by simply being there. I also like to think of presence as that lasting affect that an actor has on an audience so that when they leave, the audience leaves with them and wonders where they went and when they are going to come back. By extending out in all directions, I can become aware of all parts of the playing space that I wouldn't have noticed beforehand. By becoming aware of the space and the bodies, structures, and objects within it, I can begin to have a relationship with it all and be affected by it all. Much of this part of my technique is due to our work with Paul in loosening up the blocks in our bodies. We would connect with our classmates—oftentimes just seeing them and allowing ourselves to be affected by them—while Paul would start digging into our deeper muscles that had been holding on habitually for years. As we grow up and life happens to us, we develop ways in which we

can protect ourselves, particularly from emotions. We are told not to cry in certain situations or to brace against impact. Because of these and many other psychological and physical traumas in our upbringing, we begin to protect ourselves when there is no threat out of fear of a repeat experience, thereby holding and tensing muscles deep inside us, the neck, shoulders, hips, and core being the worst. This tension keeps us from expressing those emotions and expressions that never had the right to speak up for us. By connecting with another person and letting go of holding onto what wants to be expressed, we all had floods of emotion that needed to be heard and witnessed and acknowledged. Through this work, we were able to identify, and become more aware of, our blocks as we navigate the world. This work was by far one of the most transformative parts of my experience here at Iowa. I came in weighing two hundred and five pounds and had big bulky neck and trapezoid muscles. I had spent the spring of my senior year at Hamilton College working out and enjoying my time with my friends, a habit I continued into the summer. By the time we had finished our Movement Foundations first year, I had shed twenty pounds and an immeasurable amount of unnecessary tension and clenching in muscles that didn't need to be engaged anymore. There is still an incredible amount of bodywork ahead to maintain this new flexibility and longevity of motion. These parts of my emotional core that have been unlocked and brought to my awareness are a priceless asset I will use as my work continues. And the best part is...there is always another layer to peel back and explore. By opening up these blocks in the body and then learning how to build a character's architecture, my ability to activate the playing space is drastically more articulate than when I arrived at Iowa. More of myself is alive and aware of what can be at play, which provides me with new ways to shape the space that I play in. A goal of

mine is to always be that actor that the audience follows off the stage and is thinking about when I'm gone. I believe this is one of my best qualities as an actor.

One major struggle I have to work through daily in terms of presence is my herniated L5-S1 disc in my low back. Because this is the disc that connects the spine to the sacrum—the bone we most consciously try to ground to the floor to connect ourselves—I have to work extra hard to keep my spine as flexible as possible. Because that area is behind the pelvis, the emotional center of the body, my core will habitually want to clench and tighten itself to protect this weak area. I re-ruptured the same disc at the beginning of this school year and I could hardly walk for a week. I have to constantly poke my core and dig into the stomach to stay loose because if my core is tight, my emotional flexibility will be very constricted. “The spine is the emotional barometer of the body,” as Paul says, so any hesitation of my part coming from the spine is something I have to be extra conscious of to be able to let go and open up to my partners. I think that I have lately held back a serious amount of sadness and fear I've felt because of my back potentially affecting my career and I think it's time to let that part be heard.

Risk is where GOAT meets a good scene partner. When I am in a scene with a great partner and we are both clear on what we want from the other person and we go for it *fully committed*, risky work happens. This is how I felt last week in rehearsal for the cocktail scene. Risking sitting in a few moments of silence because someone lost their place in the scene (there are four of us in it), and actually listening to each other while we figure out where to go was the most exhilarating thing to be a part of in a long time, especially this semester being so stressful and regimented. Risk is a byproduct of being simple, vulnerable and present because you are able to push your partner and surprise

them—and not worry about unnecessary concerns, like whether the scene sounds compelling or not. During Clown class this past fall with Paul, I remember my classmates Keyla and Chris had an entrée (short scene for the layman) in which Keyla had to climb to the top of a very high ladder to get a donut they were both racing to get. Keyla is terribly afraid of heights and Chris' clown was a very slow, caveman-like, simpleton wearing boxing gloves. Chris made a motion to do something and, because of his huge gloves, he bumped the ladder and it noticeably shook. Keyla moaned in pure fear and we all were so worried for her. Once the entrée was over, Paul pointed out that if he were her partner, he would definitely play into her fear of heights when rehearsing. By doing so, he would be encouraging more of Keyla to be fully present in their work—which was what was missing at the time—and he would also surprise her. By actually surprising your scene partner, you will knock them off their rhythm and they will not be able to anticipate what you are doing. You will be forced to simply listen to each other because, when the stakes are that high where physical harm is one slip away, you are in the heat of the situation and your acting is simple, specific and responding directly off what your partner is giving you. Playing at this level of risk helps me *figure out how I play* with a given cast because everyone responds uniquely to being frightened, or surprised, or (hypothetically) exposed as a fraud. By *committing fully* to whatever you are doing, you risk changing how the scene was imagined to go. Because you cannot do anything exactly the same way twice, every moment will be new for your partner to respond to. However, if you are not risking the moment, you are playing it safe, which your character will almost always never do.

Play is the most important and, for me, most easily forgotten element that makes great acting. Play is what people miss out on for most of their daily lives and what they crave to see onstage—people actually playing hard. I finally found out how I play (for now) this fall in clown. We were playing a game of Marco/Polo with our eyes closed in the classroom. The moment I closed my eyes and began to stay away from Marco, I became the happiest kid in the world. I was excited and began to quickly get away from Marco whenever he would call out his name. I was also worried that my big, loud construction boots, which were part of my clown’s costume, would give away where I was in the room. On a side note I used to play hide-and-seek as a kid with light-up sneakers...it didn’t go well. I was always caught rather quickly, despite my best efforts to be sneaky. Same story, different place. I squirmed, jumped through the air, and eluded Marco so freely that you would hardly recognize it was my same heady actor I usually am in the classroom, worried about messing up the exercise or getting it “wrong.” There was one game in particular where I was running away from Marco and I turned left and ran full tilt right into the wall and bounced right back, laughing in hysterics—not judging myself, but reveling in the discovery of the wall and sharing the joy of doing that with the class. That was the most truthful and free I have felt here at Iowa, and interestingly enough, I had my eyes closed. I couldn’t look at other people and think about what they saw—yet I still could hear and feel how I made everyone who was already out with their eyes open watching on the sides, erupt in laughter. I felt that. I didn’t need to see them. I knew. It was true. It was my purest form of play: happy, big, goofy, simple, and without judgment. And it was fully committed. I didn’t shy away from the joy.

I've noticed that when I find myself frustrated with a moment in a scene or when I'm doing a cold reading for an audition and it feels stale, I have to consciously find the joy in what I'm doing. This entails the joy I feel as John, the actor, being able to spend my days acting in plays, the joy of expressing some character's need from another person, and, most importantly, the joy of not knowing what's going to happen. When I can come back to this state of play, I tend to get back on track to curiously discovering something new about my character or scene partner. That sense of fulfillment only furthers and strengthens my work on stage by encouraging me to play more and more.

WHAT WORKS & WHAT'S MISSING FROM MY WORK

I believe that the best actors out there, such as Meryl Streep, Michael Fassbender, Tom Hardy, Bradley Cooper, Jessica Chastain, are able to use their body, voice and emotional capacity to be the vessel through which their character comes alive and fights for what they need in the given world where they exist. I want to keep this idea as simple as possible because I believe the best acting is simple and specific. An actor that can offer their body as a medium for their character's expression without worry about how they, the actor, might look is the bravest gift an actor can offer their partner, which includes the audience. I have started to really welcome and incorporate this practice into my work in my recent performances in Luck of the Irish and it has been the biggest missing link for me up to this point. I mentioned above that "play" was the element of acting that I forget most frequently and that is because I, as the self-concerned-I-want-to-feel-validated actor, get in the way of my character's expression too often, thereby turning "play" into frustrating "work." This tends to happen because I haven't *played enough* within my character's architecture or speech pattern to be able to explore their world with mindless ease. This assumption that I'm not a good enough actor impinges on whatever my character is trying to fight for. This lack of confidence in myself might be the most crippling habit of any actor because it immediately and absolutely puts something else in front of what your character is trying to pursue. The given circumstances of any play are already hard enough of an obstacle for your character, so this added lack of confidence separates your character even further from their goal, thereby creating unnecessary, exhausting tension that you cannot afford to focus on. This habit ends up turning great impulses into a vague, safe and frustrated performance. I need to stop doing this and

realize that no amount of preparation will ever get me *completely ready* for any performance and it will always be imperfect...which is what makes it human. By acknowledging my imperfections, flaws, shame, fear, uncertainties, I can actually be able to discover these facets for my character and my similarities and surprising closeness to them. I am a human and my character (for the most part) is also a human. I still start off the rehearsal process assuming that my character is far away from me and I must embark on this long, arduous journey to find him, suffering along the way. I realized this past weekend through sheer exhaustion that I was so much more similar to Joe Donovan than I originally thought—and just from this perception shift of how similar/closer I am to my character, instead of how different/far away they were, I was able to find the joy of play that I had been missing. By releasing into this, I had one of the best, most illuminating experiences and performances in my career without question. And all it took was a slight perception shift. This shift is what I need to reconnect with more frequently *during* my process as I continue to work. What I need to do more frequently is to take the moment to breathe, step back, and ask myself some questions. What is my character's essential need in this moment? What is happening right now? What am I really doing? Keeping it simple and letting go of all the research and being able to answer these questions has allowed me to connect with the human being I'm talking to on stage, my scene partner.

My strengths as an actor include being able to recognize inconsistencies with the big picture or a scene and having a strong presence onstage. I have always had a good eye for what is missing aesthetically. I credit this skill to my sports background, particularly playing safety in football and defense in lacrosse. Playing both of these positions, I developed a strong sense of being able to recognize open teammates or formations from

the other team. I could be able to see right in front of me, the streaking midfielder getting free from his defender, or the wide receiver crashing down the line to crack my linebacker. I had an incredible ability to make these long clearing passes across the entire lacrosse field because I knew what my teammates on the other side of the field were trying to do with their defenders to get open for a passing lane. In this way, I have a very sensitive sense of spatial energy on stage and with the audience. I can tell how things are going with me and my direct scene partner, the other people onstage chatting on the other side of the stage, the first few people in the second row and the people way in the back making noise opening a bag of Skittles. While this is an asset of mine, in the same instance, I tend to not use this awareness to my advantage. Instead of expanding my bubble presence outwardly in all directions and connecting with the space, I tend to let the space cave in on me, becoming nervous and overwhelmed by the audience and others onstage. I need to bring confidence to this area of my work and know that I have this awareness.

Having a strong stage presence is also something that I have great capacity to use to my advantage. I'm a large man and have a strong, deep voice. However, when I become aware of this size—and frequently feel apologetic for it—I turn into a gentleman and begin playing smaller than I actually am...which is another expression of my lack of confidence. This confuses the audience because they see a guy with huge presence underplaying his size that could be gigantic—and it often comes across as arrogant, as if I don't want to share *all of myself* with the audience. It took me a very long time to feel what that truly meant. I have yet to be told to reign it in by a director in terms of size on stage, so I will continue to be bigger than what I think is big and own it.

Aside from the effects of my assumed inadequacy as an actor, my major weaknesses as an actor are vocal diligence, holding onto one image of my character, and trying to get it right (operating from a place of fear). Using the tremor work of Catherine Fitzmaurice that our voice professor, Anne Marie Nest, taught us as a *daily* check-in must become as routine as brushing my teeth at night. Tremor work has been the easiest way for me to find a much-needed emotional release, reveal a controlling technique I had been holding onto or simply warm up my body and voice before rehearsal. Making a habit of speaking in my daily life as if I were onstage is also something I need to work on right now. I need to speak with the confidence as if I were onstage when I am serving coffee at the Bread Garden Market or when I am on the phone with my mother. This will help me more easily let go of caring about *how I sound onstage* when I am in rehearsal—it will become second nature.

Once I discover something new about my character, I tend to hold onto that until I squeeze it to death. This habit tends to limit my vocal and creative expression and make my sound very “one note.” I need to keep playing fully, especially in the early days of rehearsal so that I can discover multiple things about my character to play with and, thereby, not focus on just one thing and drive the scene off the road. This weakness of mine leads into my last major weakness because it operates from a place of fear. Trying to make sure I am not the actor that ruins the show is something I’ve battled since I started acting sophomore year of undergrad at Hamilton College. I always felt that I was the non-theatre outsider. I wanted to be a part of the theatre group because I was fascinated by the performances and wanted to feel what it was like onstage. Because of this esteem I had for my fellow actors, I wanted to fit in. I made sure that I didn’t screw

up the play by trying to figure out what would “fit” for my character to go along with the rest of the play. I realize now that what I was really doing was just trying to get it right—my character and relation to the rest of the cast. This approach comes from a place of fear of being illuminated as the idiot, unprepared, disconnected actor in the group. It is a crippling fear that comes up whenever I try to stretch myself artistically and step out of my comfort zone. Anytime I challenge myself physically or vocally, like incorporating a painful, crippling walk in and i will hold you, when you are broken, or trying out a British RP accent in She Stoops to Conquer, I tend to play it safe and latch onto the first thing that feels “right.” If it doesn’t get a note from the director, I’ll usually stick with it, rather than keep exploring something else that could unlock an entirely different understanding of my character. Because of this entrenched fear of sticking out like a sore thumb, I latch onto the first thing that works and then just find new ways to do the same thing. This needs, and has already begun, to change. Reminding myself just how *similar* I am to my character helps me find more specific tactics and expressions in my character. Because of my weaknesses, my acting tends to be quite heady, which is the opposite of being present. I struggle to let go of all the research work. I struggle to find the physical manifestation of how my character sees their world and play in that enough to the point of mindless muscle memory, which is weird because I come from an athletic, weight-lifting, very muscle memory past. Whenever I’m not entirely connected with my work, I’m not sharing the character enough because I do not feel liberated to play—something is *standing between* the character and me. The reason this disconnect happens is because I have worried so much about accurately understanding the character through research, line work and dramaturgy, that I feel I have to compress all of the research work into the

actual performance—as if I am showing all the work that I did to create the character. The work of the actor should be revealed through the performance, yes, but it should not be noticeable that I—the actor—am trying to show my work *while I'm performing*. My work will be regarded as specific and truthful once I can do the simple action of whatever my character is doing at the present moment—and only that moment—not the previous one or the next one! I cannot be thinking of what my character needs at the moment and also wondering how a particular line or director's note was executed. Rehearsal is the time for working and thinking like this to shape the show in a way that propels the storytelling. Once the show starts, however, I need to simplify things down to two questions: *where am I coming from* and *what do I need from the other person in this moment?* I have felt the most liberated when I can simplify things as much as possible in this way. The reality is that I have *struggled to trust* that the work and preparation that I've done up till that moment is enough to play with.

THE SHOW OPENS

I like to think that if I am playing fully and risking every moment as best as I can in rehearsal, I will be practicing for the eventual performance that the audience pays to come see. Bringing myself to the state that every rehearsal is a performance getting me ready for the *actual* “opening performance” is the kind of rehearsal I thrive off of. This is exactly the same as practicing any sport or instrument: practice how you want to play. If I believe that the rehearsal room is my audience for the few weeks we have until we get into the actual theatre space, I will have already begun the performance. I say that I thrive off of this mentality because it helps me play as close to the level of being in front of a live, new audience. Playing there in rehearsal can offer me the chance to respond to someone forgetting a line or a crucial prop and being able to stay in the heat of the moment and then *find a new way* to get what the scene requires. It is at this place that I play at my highest stakes and I am truly listening to my partner. I want scene partners who don’t waste rehearsal time and treat it with the same level of respect. I’m certain I won’t always work with like-minded actors, but I have noticed how my attitude and respect for playing at this level has rubbed off onto my scene partners and, thereby, lifted the collective ensemble. I love having that affect on a group.

There are, of course, things that can only happen when you adjust to a live audience such as letting the audience laugh in places you never heard a laugh before and bringing them along with you if you sense they are losing you. This connection with the audience is like adding another scene partner to what you have already been rehearsing, making you commit even more fully to your action and play even bigger. An audience wants to be taken on a journey. I believe that the rehearsal process is about figuring out

what story we want to tell and in what way. Whether the audience likes, dislikes, or understands what we were going for is out of our control. But we have to always include them.

At the end of the day, finding joy in this work for my profession and my life is the most important thing to remember. This is the joy that will touch my scene partners and the audience. The joy of life in all its emotional forms and manifestations is what can still be experienced at the theatre, when done well. To be able to share a completely new human experience with a live audience is the most fulfilling work I've encountered so far in my life and I intend to share as many stories with as many people as possible to rejuvenate a sense of compassion and universal connection to all people and life. I have recently come to an incredible realization about the universe and myself through the work of the British philosopher, Alan Watts. I will end my process statement with one of his quotes that touches upon the entire transformation of my notion of acting from my flirtation with theatre in my undergrad experience to my outlook on life, acting and the universe today. I discovered that my flirtation with theatre in undergrad was really just a hesitation from trying to define myself in a new way aside from sports. This is something that has had an affect on everything I can imagine:

“You do not know where you're decisions come from. They pop up like hiccups. And when you make a decision, people have a great deal of anxiety about making decisions. ‘Did I think this over long enough? Did I take enough data into consideration?’ And if you think it through, you find you never could take enough data into consideration. The data for a decision in any situation is infinite. So what you do is, you go through the motions of thinking out what you will do about this. But worriers are people, who think of all the variables beyond their control of what might happen. Choice is the act of hesitation that we make before making a decision. It is a mental wobbling. And so we are always in a dither of doubt as to whether we are behaving the right way, doing the right thing, and so on and so forth, and lack a certain kind of self-confidence. And if

you see you lack self-confidence, you will make mistakes through sheer fumbling. If you do have self-confidence, you may carry get away with doing entirely the wrong thing. You have to regard yourself as a cloud in the flesh, because, you see, because clouds never make mistakes. Did you ever see a cloud that was misshapen? Did you ever see a badly designed wave? No—they always do the right thing. But if you will treat yourself for a while as a cloud or wave, and realize that you can't make a mistake, whatever you do, 'cause even if you do something that seems to be totally disastrous, it'll all come out in the wash somehow or another. Then, through this capacity, you will develop a kind of confidence, and, through confidence, you will be able to trust your own intuition. But this is the middle way of knowing it has nothing to do with your decision to do this or not—whether you decide that you can't make a mistake or whether you don't decide it—it's true anyway: that you are like cloud and water. And through that realization, without overcompensating in the other direction, you will come to the point where you begin to be on good terms with your own being and be able to trust your own brain.”

ANNOTATED PERFORMANCE HISTORY

Luck of the Irish

Author: Kirsten Greenidge

University of Iowa – Mainstage

Director: Tlaloc Rivas

Asst. Director: Maritza Pineda

Set Designer: R. Eric Stone

Lighting Designer: David Thayer

Costume Designer: Melissa Gilbert

Dialect Coach: Anne Marie Nest

Stage Manager: Kathleen Hains/Melissa L.F. Turner

Asst. Stage Manager: Alisha Lemon

Cast:

Divinn Huff

Aneisa Hicks

Kevin Burford

Sasha Hildebrand

Lesley Geffinger

Regina Morones

Morris Hill

Ruben Lebron Villegas

Shane Nielsen

Alice Doherty

Bennett Ruhinda

Venue: Thayer Theatre

Dates of Performance: 3/5/15 – 3/14/15

Role: Joe Donovan

The Designer

Director/Creator/Writer: Mario El Caponi Mendoza

Designers/Co-Creators: Ray Ockenfels & Melissa Gilbert

Stage Manager: Dony Kim

University of Iowa – Gallery

Cast:

Kylie Jansen

Alyssa Hitchcock

Maritza Pineda

Robert Seigrist

Alosha Robinson

Julia-Kaye Rohlf

RJ McGhee

Christina Sullivan

Alyssa Cokinis

Michael Hamlett

Tim Mizones

Katy Karas
Venue: Theatre B
Dates of Performance: 11/20/14 – 11/22/14
Role: New Jesus

Tecumseh!

Writer: Alan W. Eckert
Director: Jenny Male
Producer: Marion Waggoner
Master Electrician: Forrest Shane Trimble
Fight Choreographer: Raymond Speakman
Fight Captain: Mark Lamont
Dance Choreographer: Jenny Male
Dance Captain: Christopher Sylvie
Costume Designer: Julia Speakman
Head Equestrian: Liz Loar
Prop Master: Trevyn Cunningham
Makeup Designer: Ashley Marie Pifer
Wig Master: Kaite Coffey
Head Pyro Technician: Raymond Speakman
Production Stage Manager: Alex S. Freeman
Asst. Stage Manager: Amanda Conkey
Asst. Stage Manager: Ashley Marie Pifer
Cast:
Michael Siddell
Andy Wyant
Taryn Carmona
Ellen Johnson
Richard Neal
Graham Morgan
Matthew Craig
Chris Ambrose
Evan Jackson
David Joel Rivera
Andrew Willis
Daniel Bragdon
Chris Creane
Carly Magnuson
Mike Lee
Holly Allen
Susan Leist
Kaite Coffey
David Warwick
Carlton Warnberg
Anthony Genovese
Daniel P. Sukup

Elisha Bryant
Ben Donnel
Daniel Stevens
Joshua Lucero
Cheney Morgan
Zach Page
Ashley Marie Pifer
Natalie Martzial
Benjamin Jacobs
Christopher Sylvie
CR Mohrhardt
Nate Ruleaux
Adam Thatcher
Phillip George
Liz Loar
Edmarie Montes
David Bennett
Trevyn Cunningham
Thomas Lee Parsons III
Stevyn Carmona
Matt Baldoni
Sara Jane Palmer
Casey North
Amelia Rogocka
Jacob Laitinen
Venue: Sugarloaf Mountain
Dates of Performance: 6/6/14 – 8/30/14
Role: Chiksika/Chaubeenee / Tecumseh Understudy

and i will hold you, when you are broken

Writer: Lisa Meyers
Director: Mario El Caponi Mendoza
Dramaturg: Madison Colquette
Stage Manager: Amber Lewandowski
Asst. Stage Manager: Mathias Blake
Scenic Designer: Josh Christoffersen
Costume Designer: Jae Hee Kim
Lighting Designer: Cassie Malmquist
Sound Designer: Ray Ockenfels
Stage Manager: Amber Lewandowski
Asst. Stage Manager: Mathias Blake
Asst. Director: Hiram Alexander Orozco
Asst. Video/Projection: Cece Sullivan
Cast:
Allyson Malandra
Ashley Sorensen

Jordan Corpman
Venue: Thayer Theatre
Dates of Performance: 5/6/14
Role: Branch

Medusa Undone

Playwright: Bella Poynton
Director: Ariel Francoeur
Set Designer: Marisa Ramos
Lighting Designer: Bri Atwood
Costume Designer: Lani Engstrom
Makeup and Effects: Josh Christoffersen
Stage Manager: Kelsey Petersen
Cast:
Melina Neves
Aneisa Hicks
Keyla McClure
Suzy Culbertson
Venue: Theatre B
Dates of Performance: 10/17/13 – 10/20/13
Role: Poseidon

She Stoops to Conquer

Playwright: Oliver Goldsmith
Director: Kristin Clippard
Music Director: Doug Roberson
Choreographer: Alexandra Jennings Bush
Dialect Coach: Anne Marie Nest
Scenic Designer: Andrew Nelsen
Lighting Designer: David Thayer
Asst. Lighting Designer: Cassie Malmquist
Costume Designer: Melissa Gilbert
Production Stage Manager: Melissa L.F. Turner
Asst. Stage Manager: Ashley Pettit
Cast:
Allyson Malandra
Luke Millington-Drake
Amelia Peacock
Samuel Hawkins
Sasha Hildebrand
Nate Wasson
Aaron Weiner
Adam Phillips
Kevin Argus
David Freeman
Katie Boothroyd

Lily Henderson
Molly Brown
Venue: Mabie Theatre
Dates of Performance: 4/19/13 – 4/27/13
Role: Hastings

Spring Awakening

Writer: Steven Sater
Music: Duncan Sheik
Lyrics: Steven Sater
Director/Choreographer: Nathan Halvorson
Dance Captain: Peggy Mead-Finizio
Musical Director: Eugene De Luca
Stage Manager: Amber Lewandowski
Asst. Stage Manager: Kathleen Hains
Asst. Stage Manager: Kristine Moffit
Cast:
Aneisa Hicks
Ali Borchers
Jessie Traufler
Haley Courter
Amelia Peacock
Andrew Wilkes
Ben Rausch
Kevin Argus
Josh Ollendick
Michael Sotelo
Thomas Eslinger
Sasha Hildebrand
Venue: Mabie Theatre
Dates of Performance: 11/9/13 – 11/17/13
Role: Adult Men

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