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## Embracing failure: the life between polite and pushed

Greg Delany Walker  
*University of Iowa*

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EMBRACING FAILURE:  
THE LIFE BETWEEN POLITE AND PUSHED

by

Greg Delany Walker

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts  
Degree in Theatre Arts (Acting) in the  
Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2018

Supervisor: Associate Professor Paul Kalina

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Greg Delany Walker

has been approved by the Examining Committee for  
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree  
in Theatre Arts (Acting) at the May 2018 graduation.

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## **PUBLIC ABSTRACT**

My name is Greg Delany Walker. I'm an MFA candidate in Theatre Arts with a specialization in Acting at the University of Iowa. The following is my thesis that addresses my artistic process as an actor. My main focus in this thesis is to unpack my beliefs about what makes good acting and how I personally achieve that. I detail many schools of thought that pair well together to seek out vulnerability in actors. Vulnerability is my chief struggle as an actor given that I have a tendency to overthink things and rely more on intellect than on passionate expression in my daily life and in my work. That tendency leads me to be polite as an actor, which has gotten in the way of my being able to reach my full potential.

I discovered time and time again how important it is to understand and embody acting techniques so deeply that I can let them go. All the different techniques of analysis, physical and voice work are essential, but they need to transition to being second nature. The techniques outlined in this thesis, learned in my life and through the program at the University of Iowa, have to be so ingrained that I don't need to think of them in the moment on stage. The key to being present on stage seems so simple in a way, but it has been a great challenge for me to fully let go of control to allow for my potential public failure and humiliation. The times that I've embraced failure have been the strongest moments for me as an actor because of the power of risk.

My hope is that by detailing my own process and experiences, with that idea of building technique and releasing into the present moment, that others could be further empowered to do the same in acting or in life.

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## **PART I : IDEOLOGY**

### **WHAT IS GOOD ACTING?**

I've had a long journey of artistic development at the University of Iowa. I've struggled with a number of different things in my process and my overall work as an actor. A big area in which I have struggled is one that I characterize as 'the apology'. It manifests itself in acting in many different ways, but it's always grounded in an awareness that what is happening is a performance.

The most powerful theatre, in my opinion, is the theatre that pulls you in emotionally and goes all the way, unapologetically. In other words, it is the opposite of safe theatre. This applies to all types of acting and it is the type of acting that I aim to do in my career. Safe theatre would be theatre that is approached on the surface level. It could be very well done technically, but it lacks heart. Of course, the performance style and the space in which it is being performed will have an impact upon the size or scale of the choices that the actor can make. On the other hand, if the choice is grounded in the truth of the world of the play, then most choices can be supported and interesting to watch. My issue with a lot of musicals is that they would veer towards safe theatre, having the sense that by being big and bold that it is truthful. That is not always the case. If we separate theatre into two categories, one that is safe theatre, the other being theatre that I call visceral. The following is both my analytical and experiential blueprint to acting and creating visceral theatre.

## VISCERAL

First, it seems vital to elaborate what I mean by the word visceral when speaking about acting. When it comes to live performance, I think that there is the potential for a much more physical, visceral, immediate response from an audience when the things that are being talked about or the actions done on stage are full and unapologetic. Theatre that is not visceral is veering towards the pedestrian, easy, safe theatre that might make an audience laugh or be interested for moments in the play, but there is nothing beneath the surface because the content isn't full. People going to the theatre should be given an opportunity to love or hate what they saw and be drawn to talk about it because it wasn't like every other overdone production that they've ever seen. I'm not interested in seeing a bunch of actors show me a 'good' insult delivery, I want the actors to be connected to their visceral need to tell the other off because their connection to the text, the character, the scene partner, etc. is deeper than simply understanding. It's not just sympathizing, it's empathizing. This can be especially important for actors playing characters with darker motives, motives that some less experienced actors might label as evil or psycho and leave it at that surface level. It's easy to see Iago as a guy that's off his rocker and has turned to evil and play him as some caricature that has an evil laugh and moves around kind of like a serpent. It's infinitely more interesting to see a man whose desire for power and recognition is so great, that when he is unfairly denied it, that he feels so wronged after everything he's done to deserve it that he has no choice but to exact revenge to make everything right in the world again. The latter is grounded in the truth that can then have physical and vocal choices layered on, but that visceral connection is what is most important.

Theatre that remains pedestrian and safe is what drives people away from the theatre. It's boring and pointless. If theatre isn't visceral and current in some way for the actors, because if

the actors can't relate; they won't really care and so why should an audience? Audiences may not know that this is what they want, they may have misconceptions about theatre that lead them to believe that it can't offer them these visceral truths, but I believe that everyone wants to experience these things. Everyone, on a gut level, can understand that you must experience the visceral pain and sadness to be able to fully experience sheer joy. Theatre can and should be a place for communities to experience these things together so that reflection and dialogues can be opened up. If theatre strives to go to these dark places in the human experience it can be a tool for change while also being a form of entertainment. The truth of our current world is that people are seeking out easier and easier forms of entertainment, distancing themselves from the notion that they do, deep down, want to experience things viscerally.

The productions of Shakespeare's plays or any plays that are worthwhile now are the ones that seek to find the aspects of these human experiences that are still current and relatable both for performer and audience. Leave the education to the documentaries. Why would I go see a production that tries to reproduce Othello exactly as it was done in Shakespeare's time? We are not in Shakespeare's time. No one today really knows what it was like then and the beauty of the theatre is that it is immediate and ephemeral. Some things in the Elizabethan world order are not relatable today and thus should be left to the historians. Productions that are worth seeing need to offer something other than the text. Simply delivering the lines as they were 'meant' to be delivered is meaningless. Why is this relevant today? How do I empathize with these characters? I'm not saying that Shakespeare needs to be modernized (though it can be very interesting if it is) I'm saying that in order to be worthwhile, it must be approached from the current perspective in order to be able to reach the visceral truths that actually are meaningful. Play scripts approached as sacred relics is completely contrary to the point of theatre. Theatre must be active! Theatre has

always been meant to be three dimensional and the script is literally two dimensional. It's written on flat pages that need to be brought to life through a production team and actors that can bring a new truth to it.

Now looking at all of this in the positive, what makes a play a good play? How can we tell that it is truthful? I believe that it comes down to the palpable connection to the stakes for the actors. When an actor is really committing to their truth as the character, things get messier in a sense. Things feel dangerous because their collective commitment to getting what they want gives the audience the sense that they don't know what will happen next. In acting, we refer to a character's action, meaning the overarching thing that the character is doing in order to get what they want. When the actors have put in the work to make their actions as important as they can for themselves, that's when it gets exciting. When the need supersedes the desire to be liked, to look good, to be cool; that is when the theatre gets good. There are levels to this, of course, because not everything is life and death, but there is a palpable difference between an actor understanding what they are fighting for and an actor being truly connected to this. It goes from a want to a need and we arrive in visceral territory. Some scripts are much less active, which brings forward additional challenges to the actor, though ultimately an actor's work is to find that visceral connection for themselves and do the work to express that fully to the audience.

## TERMINOLOGY

Before we go too much into each aspect of the process itself of acting, I feel that it is important to establish some of the terminology that will be used moving forward in regards to the acting process.

**GOAT** is an acronym for the 4 main categories for foundational acting scene analysis. If these four categories are understood and explored for any given role, the actor is well on their way to a strong, visceral performance.

G is for **Given Circumstances** which refers to all of the facts (who, where, when and what) that can be found directly in the text itself or can be defined by the actor and production based on their interpretation and vision of the script.

O is for **Objective**, which is what the character wants. It is a clear goal that should be worded as specifically and concisely as possible, i.e. freedom, key, engagement ring. Ideally it is a one word noun, something that someone can concretely know if they've achieved it or not.

A is for **Action** which is the way of wording what the character is literally doing in order to achieve their objective. There is a specific way of wording this in order to structure it actively, in a way that is achievable, i.e. to break out of prison, to convince Beatrice to let me borrow her car, to steal the one ring from Frodo. These actions were chosen in conjunction with the examples listed for the objective. Essentially, an action is phrased : To active verb + partner + cap , so 'to get Catherine to agree to go out on a date with me' could be an example of this. I emphasize the importance of this, because acting is action, not showing, which means that the actor needs to know concretely, specifically what their character is doing. The majority of the time in a play, the characters' actions will depend on other character, which will make the actor

rely on the other actors to either succeed or fail in their action. That engagement of the actor in their action is what makes theatre relatable and compelling.

Finally, the T in GOAT is for **Tactics**, which are the moment to moment choices that the actor makes in relation to their scene partner to get what they want. It is an active verb, such as: beg, attack, seduce, scold, demand, entice, plead, etc. The tactics used are somewhat embedded in the text, but the spontaneity of the actor comes into play here because their tactics must change based on whether or not they feel that they are closer to achieving their objective.

All these parts of GOAT comprised a huge part of our foundation at Iowa as they are hugely helpful in shifting my focus as an actor from ‘showing’ to ‘doing’, which is what lies at the center of Sandford Meisner’s wonderful definition of acting being: “Living Truthfully under imaginary circumstances.” John Cameron, our acting professor who studied with Sandford Meisner, spoke often about the ‘reality of doing’, which is what I want to see as an audience member. Of course there are other levels to it, but at the foundation, if the actor isn’t behaving as if he/she were really doing it, then I won’t be able to immerse myself as much in the suspension of disbelief. As an actor, I hope to be able to do that for the audience.

**Shaping space** is something we worked on through a lot of our movement classes with Paul Kalina. It is terminology that aims to define the challenging subject of full, economical physical engagement. It is difficult to describe in words, while it is a palpable thing to be felt in the space. I equate it to the work of Patsy Rodenburg and her three circles. Patsy Rodenburg, in an effort to describe or debunk the idea of an ‘it factor’ found that she was able to most frequently find people with ‘it’ when she was working with prisoners in jail. This led her to defining that ‘it’ as a form of physical and mental presence that is fully open. She calls it ‘**second**

**circle**', which is when a person is fully opening themselves in their emotional vulnerability as their personal expression and listening are balanced.

On either side of second circle, there are the first and third circle respectively. The first circle is the circle of introspection and closing off from the outside world. The body tends to close in on itself more, the voice is softer or pulled back, the engagement with surroundings is lessened. Third circle is the pushing out of energy and expression. The body tends to be rigidly protruding into space, the voice is bursting out into space without sensitivity to listeners, the engagement with surroundings is forceful. Second circle is the harmonious presence that exists in between first and third circle, when the heart is open to receive others and willing to risk expressing itself without agenda to those around them.

These circles have many manifestations and I feel that they directly correlate to this idea of shaping space that we worked on in our movement classes. Shaping space is meant to help actors fill large theatres. One of the ways that Paul shared this shaping of space with us was the concept of eclosion. This was taught to us based on Paul's studies in Jacques Lecoq's mimetic dynamics. Essentially the eclosion is the economical expansion of a person's presence in the space. It is the palpable difference between walking across the space as a pedestrian or as a person connected to his/her surroundings. The reason that I felt the need to emphasize the parallel between this eclosion and the three circles is the fact that it must be economical and sensitive. I have to engage my muscles in expanding into the space equally in all directions, feeling for the connection with all my surroundings. If I am not engaged enough, my space shrinks down as I pull in towards first circle. If my musculature is too engaged to the point of superfluous tension, then I am pushing myself out into a third circle presence. The economical balance between those two is where the eclosion lives.

The eclosion felt intangible at first, but once I'd experienced it enough to draw parallels in my own life to when the space is so charged with energy. The tension right before the first kiss in a relationship. The pressure between two people during a confrontation. The vibrancy that permeates across a room that just shared a big laugh. All of these things I'd experienced, which made bringing it into performance and aiming to include the audience made a lot of sense. If an audience is going to the theatre to experience life in its rawest form, then it only makes sense to try to identify that palpable sensation, to work on finding it and honing it to be able to bring that truth to the stage.

**Structuring** is a principle that comes from Catherine Fitzmaurice and her aptly named Fitzmaurice voice work. Her work and approach was brought to us by Anne Marie Nest and Kris Danford. The beauty of this voice work is the fact that it allows the actor to first and foremost embrace the chaos. The foundations begin with tremoring, which is the practice of using body positioning and muscle stretching to induce a tremor sensation that can help the actor release tension in the body that could get in the way of movement and voice. Body and voice are so intrinsically linked that it is natural that this voice work is the one that I've found most helpful in connecting my voice and body. The tremoring helps to release both simultaneously, then comes the work on structuring the sound. Structuring is the practice of prioritizing the use of the transverse muscles in the abdomen as the source of the impulse to speak. When the actor begins the impulse to speak from that lower abdominal area, they allow for the lungs to reach greater expansion as the diaphragm releases fully downward in the torso, making room for maximum breath capacity. This is a better alternative than to use rib squeeze, which is dangerous for vocal extremes and is grounded in the need to control, an area that I've struggled in. Not only that, but the impulse beginning from the transverse is a key factor in making sure that I don't create sound

by mainly focusing the physical strain on my vocal folds. If the breath is only being activated in my throat, that will create a great deal of strain when trying to fill a large theatre.

## FAILURE

When I made the connection between Second Circle and the eclosion it helped me immensely in my own work. I had long been defined as an actor who was good at committing to character, but that level of commitment had a tendency for me to veer towards a forceful third circle physicality. The recalibration that happened when I made that connection was tremendously helpful because I would then allow myself to lead with my heart rather than with my head.

Beforehand, I would often lock my breathing and hold tension in my body as I contorted myself to show what I thought was the character. That is primarily gearing all aspects of performance to the audience rather to my fellow actors. It isn't living truthfully under imaginary circumstances because it is covered in artifice. That effort towards the subconscious 'Hey, look at me!' is a deterrent to truth, because it lacks sensitivity and responsiveness. It stemmed from a defense mechanism that I will reference frequently wherein I tense my abdomen and I hold my breath as a means to control. It is a habitual tendency that I had and that I still deal with today. Knowing that I have that tendency, I can actively engage in the release of that tension and holding. It's a tendency that I'm sure I learned to help me cope and protect myself in stressful moments.

I've had many experiences of failure and for a long time I saw them as moments of shame and regret. I would let them have power over me by fixating on them and how horrible it was, rather than taking a proactive stance on how I can learn from that failure.

Before coming to the University of Iowa, I worked on a show called *Rose Quartz* in which I played a private eye that was helping a woman find her missing husband. On our closing night I wanted to up my commitment by adding depth and intensity to my preparation before

going on stage. This made me miss my cue to enter and I let that failure get in my head and pile up as the show went on. I ended up blanking and improvising a section of the scene because I was so caught up in what went wrong that I couldn't release into the moment and find my way. I was so focused on the 'shape' aspect that I was acting against myself. This moment was important to me, because it was an indication to me that I wanted to improve my craft, but that I lacked the precise tools and skills to do so. One of the big things that I've learned is in the power of failure. I failed on that stage back in Montreal as the private eye, and a great lesson came from that failure. Revving myself up backstage is a recipe to play energy rather than living truthful and being responsive.

Many of my failures in the past were results of me feeling the need to over complicate things and make them heady. Being an intelligent person had always been something that had been an asset to me, but it is vital in my acting that I divert my priorities to emotional intelligence instead of intellect. The ultimate failure is to play it safe and not be open to try something spontaneous. In our movement classes Paul would refer to the state of play. In our Meisner with John Cameron we spoke of listening and responding. In our Grotowski class with Eric Forsythe we did countless events using this. We would often falsely identify these events as exercises, but they were to be called events since they were entirely spontaneous. Time and time again the importance of the present moment was re-emphasized. Whatever the moment is on stage or where ever, it's important to let it be. You can't make a moment something that it isn't. All the failures and spontaneous shifts, everything that is happening right now is what is most important. To live in fear of that on stage is to keep yourself from truly and fully experiencing. I believe that fear was a guiding force for me for a long time, it still can be in moments, but it doesn't need to be. Ultimately the choice to step on stage is a huge leap towards failure that

should be celebrated. What better way to celebrate that bravery than to accept that all of the preparation that I've done to get on stage is enough, to then put all my energy in that specific moment and opening my heart to all of these possibilities and living that out as if it were the very first and very last time all at once. Human beings fail, characters fail, actors fail too, but we get the luxury to fail over and over again and keep learning from it. That has been one of the big takeaways of my studies, though most often mentioned in the context of our clown course.

We read about countless clowns failing over and over again. What differentiated them from all the clowns that would never be written about in books is that they would live in that failure and learn from it. Most importantly, they would get back up there and try something else, be it scrapping their old material entirely or making adjustments and listening once again to the audience. In scripted plays the ability to scrap things that don't work doesn't seem as doable since the script must be followed. That being said, an audience can be helpful in reflecting back what moments are working and what moments aren't. That isn't to say that following the audience's responses is justification to derail the performance, we have a responsibility to focus on the world of our characters to be living truthfully. Audiences can respond however they wish to the performance and that isn't reason for us to blame them for not responding the way we want or to beat ourselves up, but it can be an extension of our inner world connecting us to our success or failure with our action in a play. A clown can always interact directly with an audience so those failures are more direct to respond to. In scripted theatre there are still ways to take that feedback in; as a means to fuel me as opposed to having the failure shut me down.

In our movement classes we would work frequently on accessing the state of play, which is a term used to describe the full engagement into something from an open place. Starting from second circle and bringing in a childlike commitment to things as if it were a game. It's not

personal or pedestrian anymore because, like a child on the playground, I'm fully invested in this game of tag. From this state of play, if I fail and get tagged; I express my response to this failure. I stay in the state of play instead of shutting down and beating up on myself. This state of play has been a crucial development in my ability to remain constructive in the harder times. It's the place from which I need to operate from in rehearsal in order to make discoveries in the moment based on what's actually happening in the present. It's the place from which I need to operate to take in a director's notes to engage with them and process things with an open mind and heart.

If I use this state of play, I keep myself from shutting down when there's negative feedback from audience, cast-mate or director. It's a better way to learn and a better way to respond. In the past, when I lost a line, I might shut down and stop breathing to try and think. It's a learned human response that is common today, but it's very ineffective. I need oxygen to think, so I need to breathe to find the line, I need to stay in the state of play, as though I'm leaning forward to engage with the world and find the answer. If I shut down, leaning away internally, distancing myself from the present, I'm only making it more challenging for myself.

Characters can fail and do fail frequently. If that happens, the character might feel defeated, but I still need that internal engagement in the state of play and in the eclosion so that my experience is shared with the audience. That's one lesson that I still struggle with at times because my posture tends to be slightly closed in on itself, particularly in the shoulders. I'm still working on maintaining my physical engagement in the present moment to fully experience what is currently happening, failure or otherwise.

All in all, this thriving through failure is vital in acting because it is not a medium of absolutes. Unlike in math, where there might be only one correct answer, in acting there are infinite possibilities that I can only access if I commit fully to what I'm doing and I risk failure.

This concept is somewhat ironic to me, given that I've spent so much time acting in an academic institution where I will be attributed a grade. That notion has at times taken me away from the core principle that my truth being expressed is more important than how I think a scene should go. I have to risk opening my heart rather than forcing with my brain.

## **PART II: PROCESS**

### **UNDERSTANDING**

I will now detail the different parts of my process and how they apply to different contexts like auditioning or acting in a play. It is important to note that these are the aspects of my process that are most often recurring. Some roles have different demands, which leads me to go about my process differently, though these steps are ones that are almost always useful. I made an effort to place the steps in an order that is most common for my process, although the timing of them can shift based on the needs and context of the project. They may also be happening simultaneously with others.

The first thing I have to do every time is to understand. If I'm going to play someone on stage, I need to first have a deep understanding of the plot and the text of the characters. This needs to come first for me because going straight into making character choices or even memorizing before I understand the work as a whole can be detrimental to my work and can waste valuable time. If I try to memorize before understanding why I am speaking, the text will lose meaning and be much more challenging to memorize.

I must first get to know as much as I can of the given circumstances from the play itself. There's so much to learn about the who, where, when and what that I can usually find directly in the text in what the characters are saying and in the stage directions. It's crucial that I'm looking at all of the given circumstances, not just for my character, so that I don't have subconscious blinders to my perspective on the work. For some plays, this first layer of understanding comes quite quickly due to the style of the writing being closer to my own speech and the world of the play being more easily identifiable. Others, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* require more time to research the definitions of words and phrases. Thankfully, Shakespeare's plays have a lot

of scholarly resources to help deepen my understanding. He is a playwright that will often write things that have multiple meanings and it's pertinent for me to know all those meanings because the character is most often deliberate in using these multiple meanings as part of their rhetorical wit. I can't necessarily play all the meanings, but the irony that can exist in plays, such as Shakespeare's, is important not to gloss over. Other plays may not have as many resources to help me understand the play, so I stay curious in my investigations into the text. Part of what I'm trying to understand at this point is the style of the play. Some of the style will come out in rehearsal as we define it together, but I like to discover what I can for myself to help me know what world I am acting in.

Understanding what I can about the style helps me to connect with the need to speak for the character. This is particularly useful in heavily stylized pieces like *Rome Sweet Rome*, which had me need to rap the words of the text to a beat. Understanding that style and knowing that I need to find truth within that style is crucial. The style will shift the whole world of the play, so shifting the lens through which I view the reality of the play is important. This understanding may deepen or shift as rehearsals occur, but it's never too early to find a love and connection for the world I'll be inhabiting.

## MEMORIZATION

I then go into the memorization portion of my process. Some productions will demand that I come in fully memorized for the first day of rehearsals. I haven't experienced this before, other than in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. It's an interesting dilemma to me, since it allows me to deepen my personal understanding of the character and the play before things are being imposed in the rehearsal room. On the other hand, I might find myself more tied to choices that I've made on my own or patterns that I've established in my preparation and memorization process. Ultimately, I feel that the pros outweigh the cons in doing as much work as I can on memorization and understanding before rehearsals begin. It's been an important realization to know that there are layers of memorization. At first, I know the lines in my short term memory, they are there as I have my script and I know them more or less. I might have a tendency to paraphrase at this point because I'm initially connecting to the overall meaning and thoughts. After that I start to know the text, I gain a connection to the need to speak and the different tactics that exist in the lines. That continues to deepen until I fully know the lines. I used to often stop and that second layer of memorization, thinking it was enough. Now I know that I have to keep working to get to the point where I don't even need to think about what the line is, it's just there. The way that we developed this was by using breakdowns in class, which we do by doing something very physically demanding or something that requires a lot of focus. If I start losing my line here, then I'm not sufficiently memorized and I need to go back to the text and work on that section. I can do breakdowns alone by doing physical activity like running, juggling, washing dishes, etc. The more energy and focus the activity demands, the better a test it is for me.

I have different approaches to memorization that work. I usually go back and forth between memorizing with the text in hand and using a recording of my cue lines to respond to. When I have the text with me, I'll start with the beginning of a scene and repeat the first sentence or thought until I can internalize it and memorize it. Then I continue to add one more thought, and running it all together from the start. My other memorization method is to record my cue lines with gaps in between that are just long enough for me to say my line. This forces me to respond immediately and I will often veer towards an Italian run of my lines, meaning that I'm saying them as fast as possible. I will go back and forth between doing that Italian run and connecting to the words to the tactics that I'm using in the scene.

Memorization is something that I also need to keep working on, like a daily workout. If I have any doubt about my ability to remember my lines, it will get in the way of my presence with my scene partners and it will increase my stress in a way that isn't helpful to me as a performer. Without full memorization, I'd be more so reciting lines than actually performing and living truthfully.

## ANALYSIS

Now I bring in a more in depth analysis of the text. This can happen naturally alongside the earlier parts of my process. However, the more complex works have greater demands for this analysis and I respond accordingly by delving deeper into the text and into the character. For character work, I've been trying more and more to stop myself from imposing my own ideas too early and instead giving attention to what is in the text. Information can be gathered from what my own character says, but there is often clues in the text about my character that is written into other characters' text as well. For Chater in *Arcadia*, there was a lot of things that were said about him, some were more telling than others because they weren't assumptions made two hundred years in the future, but everything was valuable in painting a picture of what kind of a person Chater is, how he is perceived by his peers and how he is perceived by people who research him hundreds of years after his death. Truths, lies, contradictions and misconceptions are all useful to note whether I chose to use them or not because they can inform character and/or relationships. Most of the perceptions of Chater being negative led me to further understand his sense of inadequacy and need to compensate with a more theatrical persona as a means to rise up in the court. That helped me to justify choices for his physicality and voice, which I will address later.

Finding out that information can lead me to better understand the most important element to my analysis: the objective and action. These are the central two portions of GOAT that clarify to me as an actor what I am doing at any given moment. This was one of the hugely beneficial lessons that I have repeatedly re-learned during my studies at Iowa. As a human being, I may not always be fully aware of why I am doing what I am doing, but as an actor it is vital. Some objectives and actions are less important, but they can always inform acting choices and help me

focus my energy and attention on what is most important; the play. I won't fully play or live truthfully, unless I understand what I want. As a character, I will likely not be aware of an audience's existence, which means that focusing on them and pre-planning how I will say a line to get a laugh is detrimental to my performance. So I dig into the text to figure out what I want in any given moment that I am on stage, my objective, and I also examine what I am doing in order to get that objective, my action.

I spent a large portion of my time teaching this in my basic acting courses, because of how crucial it is for the foundation of living truthfully under imaginary circumstances. We use a book outlining David Mamet's teachings about action that establish a very clear way to choose a good action<sup>1</sup>. They help to word these actions in a way that is doable, reliant upon your scene partner, specific, not manipulative, not grounded in emotion, not an errand having a cap, in line with the intentions of the playwright, and fun. Essentially, it all boils down to choosing actions that are concrete in shifting the focus on what I am doing rather than what I am showing. It's a sort of checklist to make sure that I can concretely do this on stage and that it will be as compelling for me to do as possible. An example of this could be in *Mr. Burns: a post electric play*, in act one my character Gibson was doing everything he could to join the group. There were several steps to get to that point due to the savage nature of the world, those steps comprise the actions I had in that act. I first needed to convince them that I wasn't a threat. Once I had that I could move onto the different steps to convincing them that I could be a valuable member of the group. Within all of that, there's constant assessment of whether or not I am succeeding or failing in my efforts, which would then force me to adjust if it wasn't working or move on to a new action if I am fully successful. Once I've done this aspect of the analysis, I'm well on my way to fully commit in rehearsals and in performance.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruder

Another aspect of analysis is in deciphering the clues that the playwright might be sending my way in the text. There is no better example than Shakespeare to explain the need for this part of my process. I've grown to really enjoy the work in Shakespeare to look for the literary tools such as alliteration, assonance, ladders and antithesis to be help discover how the text can come alive. Those things can help me make sense of the text to be able to communicate it better, while also being able to memorize it more easily. As I work through this analysis, I'm not only analyzing for myself, I'm also analyzing to find ways to help articulate the text clearly for an audience understand. It's important to note that these things have all been written into the words that are spoken by the character. Knowing that my character speaks grounded in some sort of a need, means that everything they say is intentional. Thus, all of these literary tools operate as an extension of the tactics that I use as an actor. If I ignore these things, I might miss out on some of my character's wit, intelligence and skill.

Alliteration and assonance happen when the playwright repeats vowels or consonants in quick succession. If I find these, I can explore how that affects me as an actor when I accentuate these tendencies. Perhaps I will find that repeated 's' sounds make me sound serpentine, which could lead me to understand the conniving tactics that my character could be using.

Ladders are the points in the text where there may be a list of things or statements that can naturally build on top of one another. Identifying these moments can help accentuate the text using pitch in order to bring the audience on the journey of the ladder as each element builds together, being an identifiable and separate rung in the ladder. This happens in a lot of modern texts as well, so it's always something to look for as it can help in communicating the dramatic intentions of both playwright and character.

Antithesis is the juxtaposition of two things in opposition to one another. These happen a lot in drama since we tend to experience things in the form of battles between two opposing forces; heaven vs. hell, good vs. evil, etc. When a character juxtaposes two things against each other, it makes it clear that they are struggling between those two or are at least aware of someone's struggles with them. As an actor, when I identify these things, I need to set them up vocally to make sure that listeners understand that I am highlighting these two elements in opposition to one another. Again, these antithetical statements are being spoken for a reason, so I have a responsibility to articulate them clearly in the scene as a means to be understood and to get what I want.

## RESEARCH

Once I have a thorough understanding, I need to work on developing a connection to the character and the world of the play. Some of this will be greatly influenced by the director's vision and what happens in rehearsal, while having my own work can serve that to fill it all the more. I've already begun to delve into the character past the surface level because of my understanding of the text, but I can now take time to do research into source material or history that pertains to the play. Seeing myself as a detective in this section of the process is a parallel that I like to make, since it puts the onus on me to be actively searching for those connections. Understanding the context is important. I have found that personal research is always helpful such as reading books or watching movies, television or documentaries that are accurate depictions of the time or place or situation. I'm a very visual person, so I greatly appreciate the luxury of access to the multitudes of resources of videos as inspirational source material. These sources allow me to deepen my imagination work and connection to the world of the play.

I won't use recordings or videos of previous productions of the play I'll be performing. My belief is that it would get in my way because I would be subconsciously comparing myself to the other actors' performance. It can happen that I have already seen a production of the play, like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and thus might need to keep myself from making those detrimental comparisons. This is yet another reason to do research into source material, read what I can about the period or region in which it takes place. If I delve more into the character, developing my personal connection to their life and circumstances, I can trust that the performance is my own.

## REHEARSALS

Rehearsals are very rewarding in that I get to be playing off of the other actors and have the director and production team to support the creative process. Many of the other aspects of my process happen simultaneously with rehearsals. Addressing the rehearsal itself is important because it is a time to explore together with the rest of the team. Early on, I try to remain open to see what I discover in the space with the rest of the cast. Times that I've gone too far into character work at this point could play a detriment to my ability to be able to be flexible in my listening and responding. It's finding that balance between doing my own work, while keeping myself from pre-planning and controlling my work in the rehearsal room.

The hope is that my cast-mates will also be continuously developing their refinement of character work and the moment to moment details, while it is also possible that my cast-mates have a tendency towards establishing one way of doing things and sticking to that for the most part. That is one of the reasons why I find it particularly exhilarating to bring in ideas to the scene or things to try for rehearsals. Sometimes I'll speak to my cast-mates about this, other times I'll try it out in the moment to see what happens. I might get a response from the director or my cast-mate or I might need to gauge for myself whether that tactic or choice was beneficial or not. We spoke in Meisner class about the fact that 'nothing is something', meaning that the moments when I feel that my scene partner isn't responding to me, that perception of a lack of response is, in itself a response. Thus, there's always something for me to respond to and I believe that wholeheartedly after the extensive practice that I've had with the Meisner repetition activities.

Another important lesson was to 'never do anything until something happens to make me do it', which refers to a tendency to pre-plan things. I used to be guilty of this and I likely still

can to a certain extent, but I've certainly improved in my ability to live in the present moment. If I'm living this moment as if this is this first time, I'd have no way of knowing that, in *The Crucible*, John Proctor is about to tear the warrant in half that I've just presented to him, so I have to live in that moment and take in each thing he does. First he grabs me off his wife, then grabs the warrant, then I try to get it back from him and then he tears it in half. Every little moment has a meaning all its own. If I respond to all of those things the same way, the moments will lack specificity. If I take in each moment, one at a time, responding to each of them as they come, I will be more truthful and compelling.

## **CHARACTER WORK:**

### **MOVEMENT**

Another hugely important part of my process is in the work on physicality. This has become more and more inspired by our work with movement dynamics, the shaping of space and trying to connect it all to voice. A good starting point can sometimes be finding a movement dynamic that speaks to me viscerally as the red Jell-O that I worked on in movement class for Bobby in my scene from the play *Tough!*. Voice and body affect each other and different characters have different demands, but I generally find it more effective to work on the body first. I think that this is a good way of avoiding getting into a vocal pattern and allowing myself to be more full and responsive. The movement dynamic principles are a tool that can help me tap into inspirations for character that are purely based on my physical explorations of a character. All of the prior analysis work builds a psychological understanding that I now work to pair with physical experiencing. The red Jell-O example that I referred to was a particularly effective movement dynamic as it seemed to connect me most viscerally and directly to Bobby's frantic and vulnerable behavior. It enabled me to move in a way that is not my own. It gave me ownership over my physical explorations to bring them to the greatest extreme, while still being grounded in my informed truth. This movement dynamic isn't always going to be apparent to an audience, but it can serve me as a sort of under current that can be increasingly exposed as my character's tactics get more and more heightened. Those levels of how I use any one movement dynamic are referred to as scaling. I can scale my use of dynamic to the style of play and to the specific moment for me as the character. Most of all, it serves me as a tool to be less in my head and more in my body.

Another possibility that I explore to find physicality is to draw inspiration from an

animal. In *Arcadia*, I was inspired by the physicality of a peacock for my character Chater. Seeing how he presents himself as this grandiose, beautiful, artist man, but when threatened he is easily swayed to close his plumage and hide away. Each character will have a different image, animal, element or combination of things that will be an apt way into character exploration and discovery. I find it essential to practice the physicality a lot, to the point where I feel comfortable and it feels second nature. The less I need to think of the physicality, the more truthfully I can respond in character. The struggle I had with Chater's physicality was finding a balance between what will serve the character and what will serve me as an actor. Specifically, the jutting forward of my chest as a character choice was difficult for me as it is quite contrary to my habitual, comfortable posture. I struggled in finding the balance between the tension that I experience in this peacock chest display and my ability to access by full breath capacity and vocal support in speech. Early on in my work at finding Chater's physicality I found myself waking up with shoulder tension as I was imposing tension on top of pre-existing tension. Since then, I've worked more on maintaining the integrity of the spine, since that is a vital part of the balance to fill the space as the character. If I'd had more of an emphasis on finding the ease and economy in this physicality, I think I would have been able to do a better job listening and responding in my work as Chater. I've continued to work on that during my time at Iowa and I know that I've made progress in finding that balance between pushing too hard into the physicality or being pedestrian and collapsing the space in my work.

Through all of the work on physicality, it's always important for me to check in with my use of the eclosion. I can find the eclosion much more quickly now, but I do still find myself dropping out of it at times. My tendencies to push too much, to the point of superfluous tension, are most frequent in more heightened style work. It occurs when my impulse is to impose too

much physicality without the internal need and justification. It all has to be grounded in truth, no matter how big or small the style demands. It's much easier for me to make some big bold choice as I had done back in high school improv. However, it is much more compelling for audience and performer, when that size is connected to a truth and a need in the actor. This means that although I'm working on finding the physicality of the character, the understanding and connection is an essential foundation. For me, my growth as a performer up until recently was a cultivation of my ability to control and show something 'interesting'. I've always wanted to let go of that control to express the underlying truth, but I lacked the physical training to support that. I've experienced the great power in the release of physicality in the red Jell-O. That's the only way to get to the visceral theatre I spoke of previously. Once control is released, the basest truths can be expressed. If left unexpressed, my underlying anger and sorrow are things I will continue to be suppressed and be detrimental to my work. This isn't to say that theatre needs to be a therapy session for me as an actor, though I have needed to expand my range of truthful emotions on stage by releasing the control that I hold in my body.

The movement dynamic work was one way that I trained myself to express a broader range, while it can also be found from the state of play that I addressed previously. I categorize it physically due to the fact that the initial physical investment into whatever I'm doing will force my voice and mind to follow suit. If I have no time or ability to work in movement dynamic principles in my character work, tapping into the state of play as we did in our clown course can be the express route for me to be able to most quickly tap into my presence.

## VOICE

I enjoy working on physicality and then building to voice. This approach is more predominant for me because of how I feel that the way I carry myself as a human being will inevitably affect my voice. As an actor that struggles more so with control and being 'heady', the attention to the body coming first is most often a beneficial practice for me. Thus, rushing to voice first could be a waste of time and could have me battling against myself in my character work.

What if a show requires a dialect? That demands earlier attention to voice. The reason for this being that the memorization process will be easier if I first identify the key sound shifts and try to integrate them right from the get-go. On top of the sound shifts, many dialects have distinct features like an intonation or pitch range that is equally important to integrate early, like I did for Chater in Arcadia. In his case, I think that the voice is what came first. As I spoke, I found that I seemed to bring this pompous attitude and peacock-like width and sharpness that I felt really helped me play in the character. I've always had a passion for dialects and my time expanding my knowledge and skill in dialects at Iowa has been wonderful. While broad, more stereotypical dialects are a lot of fun, I feel that I can now find more truth in these other dialects. We developed tools to help find dialects using things like Laban efforts, which connect to both physicality and voice. The efforts separate movement into three categories: direct vs. indirect, sustained vs. sudden, strong vs. light. Choosing those for the dialect and character lead to one of eight Laban effort actions that can serve as a good foundation for the voice. It serves me in a similar way to the movement dynamic work, since I make informed decisions that can then be fully explored without me needing to be self-conscious or self-critical in the moment of what I am doing or how I am sounding. These Laban effort actions have certainly been a good tool for

me, even when I am not using a dialect. If nothing else, they can serve as an exploration of possibilities to see what might land. The voices for many of the characters I've played have been more in line with my own voice, so my focus vocally was centered more around structuring.

Structuring is an area I still need to consistently work in order to be good to my voice, audible and also to be truthful. There has been time when I've found that structuring and truth work in opposition to one another. That isn't necessarily true because I again need to connect to the need to speak. The need to speak connects the chaotic release of tremoring (or de-structuring) and the economical effort of structuring. My vocal work does carry over to character work when the character's physicality seems to demand something different than my own natural voice. If I don't sense a need for that, I'll most often keep it simple and my work on voice will be in the form of vocal warm-ups for rehearsals and before performances. I have a tendency to de-voice in my daily life a lot and that habit might be getting in the way of fully supporting my voice in my acting. It comes out in the form of vocal fry, which is definitely an unhealthy habit that I do my best to adjust in my daily life. It's important for structuring to be integrated into my habits in order to have a healthy voice and better breath capacity so that I can act all the way to the end of that long line of Shakespeare.

## IMAGINATION & IMPROVISATION

Another aspect of my character work is my work with imagination. This manifests itself in different forms depending on the needs of the piece. The further the life experience of the character that I'm portraying from my own, the more work I need to do with my imagination. Of course, this pairs itself well with the analysis and research work that I've done and it's equally useful for me to pair it with my physical and voice work. One way that I can bridge these together is by doing active daydreaming wherein I envision myself living the life of the character. This is expanding upon the concept of sense memory from Stanislavski and Meisner work. Using this, I can also draw from my own life to help me in finding analogous experiences that This can pair itself with my research if I've seen images to fill in the gaps for my imagination, though I find it very helpful to have a personal experience that I create all in my own imagination with as much detail as possible. The reason why I mentioned pairing this with physical and vocal work is that if I go into imagination after finding the physicality and voice, my perspective could have shifted. This might be a subtle shift, but it connects me more to the physical experience than just the idea or the image. I struggled for a while in regards to imagination because I would get in my own way by trying to make sense of things and be too analytical. It's not about getting it right for anyone else, it's discovering what this world is for me. That's one of the reasons that I also like to discover things here that can be my little secret. Having something that I know about my character that no one else knows is a reminder that I'm a human being. I can't show my whole life experience in every moment of my life, so it's unrealistic to think that a character should show it all in a moment. So that secret serves as a reminder of this and a way for me to connect personally a viscerally with my character.

Another use of this imagination work is for emotional preparation, the thing that helps

me to be full from the very first moment I come on stage. I've been trying to find one that worked for me both physically and mentally. I think that this is a big thing for me to keep constantly working on and refining. It could be as simple as connecting clearly and simply what is happening for my character in the moment before I go on stage, or it could be a more elaborate physical preparation. I think that my most successful preparation thus far has been my preparation for *Mr. Burns* when I enter in act 1. I had the luxury of time backstage to listen to preparatory music to sing along with once my warm-up was finished and then I went underneath the stage in a search for my daughter and ex-girlfriend, which finally brought me in an earshot of the group by the fire. The journey of this preparation really helped me reconnect with the given circumstances of the play before each performance. I think that it was immensely helpful in allowing me to remain focused on my objective and to be more open to listening and responding. I want to keep enhancing my preparation work by working on active daydreaming to find specific ways into the moment before in a more immediate manner. I think that this will help my performances to be more full and responsive to the moment.

Improvisation is a great tool for me to be able to actively bring all the work that I've done together with body, voice, imagination and all the research as well. It allows for me to discover things free from the constraints of the script. The work in improvisation won't necessarily ever be seen by an audience, while it can still have a profound impact in my opinion. I've had the pleasure of studying Grotowski work which has a strong emphasis on improvisational exploration. To me it embraces the idea that the actor should take out our own personal blocks rather than building technique. This central idea of removing blocks manifests itself as a number of different physical and vocal explorations that can allow me as an actor to escape the confines of what I deem conventional or right. Running my scene with my scene partner as we wrestle as

bear cubs for instance can be a great way to explore the physical extremes that could be possible for the scene or at the very least to inform the subtext. I won't necessarily have cast-mates that also use Grotowski, but I can sing my lines as an opera to the punching bag in my basement, anything to tap into my sense of play to discover the possibilities that exist, even ones that seem like they are utter contradictions to the text. This type of improvisational work is equally helpful when I find myself in a rut when I get too caught up in what I think is 'right' for the scene.

I also find it beneficial to use improvisation in the world of the play without using the text itself. One of my helpful imagination improvisations was in *Mr. Burns* rehearsal when we had a chance to live out our meeting with the other characters with our packed survival gear. These improvisations may not be part of the rehearsal process, but I found this to be a gratifying exercise to connect to my character Gibson's mentality in the play. I carried this into further explorations as I went for walks around Iowa City as though I were searching for my wife and child. The isolation that I felt and the mental image of this search was a great thing to help me with my emotional preparation before each performance. These are a couple examples of the type of exploration and improvisation that I want to continue to play with in my process for future plays. Using active daydreaming for this imagination work is also useful when the outside world is very incongruous to the reality of the play. With those improvisations, I discovered a deeper connection to my character, which I believe carried forward into my performance as I had more real experiences to draw from to find my truth on stage.

## AUDITION

I've had ample opportunities to practice the art of auditioning over my time at Iowa, which has helped me to develop a strong approach for auditioning. Everything already mentioned is applicable to the audition setting. In addition to this, an element that we were frequently reminded of is the entrance and the exit, when the directors and production staff get a chance to see who you are when you are out of character. This is an important opportunity for me to let them know what kind of person I am to work with. They are not only asking themselves if I'm good for the role, a good actor, they are also asking 'Is he a person that I would like to work with?' Knowing that makes me aware that my approach to an audition should also include my awareness of warmly taking them in at the beginning and end of the audition.

Bryan Cranston said that in an audition "You're not going there to get a job. You're going there to present what you do, you act... The decision of who might get a job is so out of your control that really when you analyze it, it makes no sense to hold onto that." I think about that often when preparing for an audition, because I have had a tendency, in moments like these, to get caught up in my head overthinking things. So that means that my preparation needs to, like in all other acting moments, focus my energy and attention on the things that are within my control and not on the things that aren't. This goes hand in hand with the idea of embracing failure. If I don't risk the failure of fully committing to my work as an artist, trusting my choices, then I'd be selling myself short.

The pieces that I chose are also an important part of the audition. I should choose a piece that gives me an opportunity to tap into that visceral acting that I spoke of. This means that the monologues chosen need to have a clear action that I have worked in order to have a personal connection to it. Essentially, it should be fun for me to do, or else the auditioners will be able to

feel that and that would deter them from working with me. Something that helps me with that is to keep everything as succinct as possible. This is especially important when the auditions are being timed. I've made the mistake to try to put too much in a short timeframe and that's a recipe for stress and for my focus to be off of what is most important, what I'm literally doing as the character. Having this time to spare then allows me to give time for the shifts in the monologue as my imaginary scene partner responds to me. I've felt most successful in an audition when I'm most engaged with that 'scene partner'. Part of the success with that engagement is that I've done a good job of playing with different tactics in my rehearsal process to be able to arrive at the strongest choices that remain in the world of the piece. A good deal of simplicity goes a long way in these choices because the logistical conundrum of an audition is that they want to see your ability to connect and be truthful, when in actuality some of the best choices are the most simple.

During our time at Iowa, we went on a trip to Chicago to do a mock audition for Henry Wishcamper, a director with the Goodman theatre. In that audition, for some odd reason, my nerves got the best of me and my first run-through my monologue featured me playing a lot of energy. When that happens, there's less responsiveness coming from me because it's as if I'm riding a wave of adrenaline that is more based on my awareness that it's an audition and to 'get through it' than to breathe and take the time to respond to my imaginary scene partner(s).

Auditioning, like all other acting, is a balancing act. It's vital to find the balance between allowing all my preparation and work to be at play, while also allowing myself to release into the present moment. All the preparation leads me to the knowledge that I have applied my artistic techniques that I must now release into the moment to find my spontaneous truth. Here, like in a

play, nerves can often be present, which can be used productively to serve the character, but I shouldn't allow the nerves to overpower me. Again, breathe and release the abdomen.

## PERFORMANCE

Now I get to the end of rehearsals and I've done everything that I can to prepare myself for performance. On the night, there are several things that I habitually do as my pre-show ritual, but the order and specific needs will always vary slightly in conjunction with the needs of the role and the play. I always like to get to the theatre roughly two hours early. First, I'll get into makeup pretty quickly. I usually do this first as a sort of meditative way to enter into the skin of the character. I am not a method actor that think I need to believe I am the character and to remain in character, while I do feel that in the lead up to the performance it's useful to re-enter the world of the play.

Generally my pre-show will be casual as I relax and put the make-up on, allowing myself to shed the daily concerns to focus on my work. Once I finish that, I get my body and voice warmed up. I am at a point now where tremoring is always in my vocal warm up to bring some tension release and productive chaos. Then I use the floodgates vocal warm-up to loosen my neck, shoulders, jaw, tongue, lips and soft palate. I occasionally need to give more special attention to my abdomen and my shoulders to address their more recurring tension. After that, I'll do some stretching as needed and get into costume.

I find it very helpful for me to get grounded, present and relaxed to play some sort of game with cast-mates once I'm in costume. It can be as simple as zip-zap-zop or some other game to tap into the sense of play that is so vital to performance. Sometimes group vocal warm-ups or bonding exercises like passing the pulse can be a nice opportunity to come together as the nerves and fears could be setting in as the start of the show approaches.

In the moments before I go on stage, I always like at least a brief moment to myself. I reconnect with my breath and my moment before, which often includes some quick reflections

on my action for the first moment in the scene. That action may end within a few seconds of going on stage, but I get myself psyched out if I think too far ahead at this point. Having expectations as a character entering the scene is fine, while thinking ahead to my acting choices is not. All the work that I've done up until that point is enough, now I need to get out of my head and into action. For that reason, I like having space to move or walk on stage so that I am not simply standing there. I might have only a few seconds backstage between scenes and I've come to enjoy those quick transitions to keep me from overthinking things.

When on stage, I'm doing my best to live truthfully in these imaginary circumstances. It still can happen that I find myself drifting from the present moment by either retreating inward when I am not the focal point of the scene or pushing in my acting. I've gotten much better, however, at catching myself when I sense this happening and the main thing that I do to get myself back in the present and shaping space economically is simply by dropping my breath. As I mentioned previously, breathing is essential to thinking and thus my acting, so reconnecting with it will enable me to find my way back into my presence.

### **PART III: CONCLUSION**

My process has been developed and refined tremendously over my time at the University of Iowa. I've gotten a chance to understand much more specifically what it is that I believe makes good theatre. The visceral nature of that theatre draws in the audience due to its connection to the truth in the heart. I developed tools for myself to help with my script analysis, using GOAT, with particular focus on action. I expanded my tools for character work in regards to movement and voice using eclosion, movement dynamics, Laban efforts, and by embracing more of the chaos with Fitzmaurice voice work and Grotowski improvisation.

Through all of those things I found more love and appreciation for all my failures. Although it can be hard at times to live life positively and constructively, finding the play in the work is paramount for me. Now, I see that failing can be fun if we express it. I tell my students time and time again to celebrate failure because we live in a world that's often structured to push you down and shame you for your failure, when in actuality no one is perfect, everyone fails. If you've never failed, then you've never tried. Theatre is a space to celebrate those imperfections and I will do everything I can moving forward to empower myself and others in their failures- to continue to fail, to breathe, to learn and to succeed.

## ANNOTATED PERFORMANCE HISTORY

### A Midsummer Night's Dream

#### Production Information:

Written by: William Shakespeare

Adapted by: David Lee-Painter

Produced by: The University of Iowa- Department of Theatre Arts

#### Principal Collaborators:

Director:	David Lee-Painter
Assistant Director:	Hunter Menken
Dramaturg:	Morgan Grambo
Scenic Designer:	Nic Wilson
Costume Designer:	Cathy Parrott
Lighting Designer:	Ted Brown
Sound Designer:	Wade Hampton
Stage Manager:	Ellen Kane
Assistant Stage Manager:	Brilliant Qi-Bell

#### Cast:

Titania/Hippolyta	Catie Councill
Oberon/Theseus	Randryck Lewis
Bottom/Pyramus	William Goblirsch
Quince/Egeus	Will Callan
Hermia	Leela Bassuk
Helena	Maya Bassuk
Lysander	Miles Gatrell
Demetrius	Greg Delany Walker
Puck/Philostrate	Nicole Gabrione
Snout/Wall	Marquis Jackson
Starveling/Moon	Rob Petrie
Flute/Thisbe	Ben Sulzberger
Snug/Lion	Vinnie Doud
Puck's Fairy	Marda Rude
Blythe	Emmy Palmersheim

Ensemble: Shelby Zukin, Gracey Murphy, Jivani Rodrigues, Maddie Voss

#### Location & Run:

Mabie Theatre - April 20-28, 2018

#### Role:

Principal Role - Demetrius

**By the Way, Meet Vera Stark**

Production Information:

Written by: Lynn Nottage

Produced by: The University of Iowa - Department of Theatre Arts

Principal Collaborators:

Director	Tlaloc Rivas
Scenic & Lighting Designer	Jess Fialko
Assistant Lighting Designer	Alexander Michel*
Costume Designer	Hayley Ryan
Assistant Costume Designer	Chelsea Regan
Sound & Projection Designer	Wade Hampton*
Projection Designer	Ted Brown*
Dramaturg	Luke White
Assistant Dramaturg	Clara Reynen*
Dialect Coach	Greg Delany Walker
Stage Manager	Samantha Paradis
Assistant Stage Manager	Jacob Sikorski

Cast:

Vera Stark	Emelia Asiedu
Gloria Mitchell	Catie Councill
Lottie McBride/Afua Assata Ejobo	Tempestt Farrar
Mr. Slasvick/Brad Donovan	Eli Jolley
Leroy Barksdale/Her Forrester	Randryck Lewis
Anna Mae Simpkins/Carmen Levy-Green	Miriam Randolph
Maximillian Von Oster/Peter Rhys-Davies	Zach Twardowski

Location & Run:

David Thayer Theatre - February 1-10, 2018

Role:

Dialect Coach/ Supporting Role - French Documentarian

## The Crucible

### Production Information:

Written by: Arthur Miller

Produced by: The University of Iowa- Department of Theatre Arts

### Principal Collaborators:

Director:	Doug Scholz-Carlson
Music Director:	Erik Doucette
Scenic & Projection Designer:	R. Eric Stone
Costume Designer:	Hayley Ryan
Lighting Designer:	Jess Fialko
Sound Designer:	Jacob Sikorski
Dramaturg:	Clare Moore
Stage Manager:	Katy McGlaughlin
Assistant Stage Manager:	Adam Norrish

### Cast:

John Proctor	Zach Twardowski
Elizabeth Proctor	Emelia Asiedu
Reverend John Hale	Eli Jolley
Reverend Parris	William Goblirsch
Betty Parris	Olivia Williams*
Tituba	Alexi Bolden*
Abigail Williams	Cora Lassen*
Susanna Walcott	Mackenzie Elsbecker*
Mrs. Ann Putnam	Marda Rude*
Thomas Putnam	Yannik Encarnação*
Mercy Lewis	Jivani Rodriguez*
Mary Warren	Sydney Kuhel*
Rebecca Nurse	Madeline Ascherl*
Giles Corey	David Priebe
Francis Nurse	Marquise Jackson*
Ezekiel Cheever	Greg Delany Walker
Willard	Jacob Glass*
Hathorne	Hunter Menken*
Danforth	Elijah Jones*
Sarah Good	Crimson Wood*

Ensemble: Anthony Davis, Shakira Del Toro, Kaylen Luttenegger, Aiden Page,  
Kyle Schindler, Shelby Tippling, Ethan Walleser

### Location & Run:

Mabie Theatre - October 6-14, 2017

### Role:

Supporting Role - Ezekiel Cheever

**Cross Examined**

Production Information:

Written by: Margot Connolly

Researched by: Leslie A. Schwalm

Produced by: University of Iowa- Arts Share Department

Principal Collaborators:

Director:

Tempestt Farrar

Cast:

Mary Jane Dove

Tempestt Farrar

Charlotta Smith

Emelia Asiedu

Lawyer One

Greg Delany Walker

Lawyer Two

William Goblirsch

Location & Run:

Touring Iowa - June 2017-Present

Role:

Principal Role - Lawyer One

**“...among other things...”**

Production Information:

Produced by: The University of Iowa - Department of Theatre Arts

Principal Collaborators:

Playwright

Michael Tisdale

Director

Taylor Edelle Stuart

Cast:

Anya

Hannah Adamson

Theo

Greg Delany Walker

Lee

Vince Doud

Bobchinsky

Bre Anna McNeill

Dobchinsky

Connett Croghan

Stage Directions

Caitlin Rose Edwards

Location & Run:

Room 172 - May 1, 2017

Role:

Principal Role - Theo

**A Desert Fugue**

Production Information:

Produced by: The University of Iowa - Department of Theatre Arts

Principal Collaborators:

Playwright	Charles Green
Director	Emma Genesen
Sound Designers	Dante Benjegerdes, Jacob Prall
Stage Manager	Gwyneth Forsythe

Cast:

Jack	Greg Delany Walker
Alice	Sydney Speltz
Doxa	Elijah Jones
Don	Jonathan Parker
Fortuneteller/Gambler/Cable	Clara Reynen
Cowboy/Doctor/Stump	Ryan Gallardo
Clown/Gunslinger/Bug	Yannik Encarnacao
Stage Directors	Rob Petrie

Location & Run:

Room 172 - May 5, 2017

Role:

Dialect Coach/Principal Role - Jack

**Mr. Burns; a post electric play**

Production Information:

Written by: Anne Washburn

Score by: Michael Friedman

Lyrics by: Anne Washburn

Produced by: The University of Iowa- Department of Theatre Arts

Principal Collaborators:

Director	Tlaloc Rivas
Music Director	Jason Sifford
Scenic Designer	Nic Wilson
Costume Designer	Brittany Dee Bodley
Assistant Costume Designer	Lindsey Kuhn
Lighting Designer	Alex Casillas
Assistant Lighting Designer	Christian Hahn*
Sound Designer	Jacob Sikorski*
Choreographer	Michael Sakamoto
Fight Choreographer/Weapons Consultant	Lukas Brasherfons
Dramaturg	Molly Winstead
Stage Manager	Katy McGlaughlin
Assistant Stage Manager	Aubrey Near
Assistant Stage Manager	Nic Steffes*

Cast:

Matt/Homer/Scratchy/Flanders	Miles Gatrell
Jenny/Lisa/Bart	Holly Grum
Sam/Bart/Troy	Danny Whiskeyman*
Maria/Marge/Lisa	Rubina Vidal*
Gibson/Sideshow Bob/Marge	Greg Delany Walker
Quincy/Willy/Nelson	Natalie Lurowist
Colleen/Homer	Catie Cuncell
Edna/Chorus Leader	Will Callan*
Itchy/Apu	Leela Bassuk*
Mr. Burns	Yannik Encarnaçao

Location & Run:

Mabie Theatre - February 3-12, 2017

Role:

Principal Role - Gibson/Sideshow Bob/Marge

## **Rome Sweet Rome**

### Production Information:

Written by: Q Brothers (JQ, GQ, Jax, Pos)

Produced by: The University of Iowa- Department of Theatre Arts

### Principal Collaborators:

Directors/Choreographers:	Q Brothers (JQ, GQ, Jax, Pos)
Scenic Designer:	R. Eric Stone
Costume Designer:	Brittany Dee Bodley
Lighting Designer:	Bryon Winn
Live Sound Consultant:	Andrew Stewart
Stage Manager:	Samantha Paradis
Assistant Stage Manager:	Meg Sugden

### Cast:

Cassius	Greg Delany Walker
Brutus/ Chuck D	Randryck Lewis
Julius Caesar/ Octavius	Sage Spiker
Purny	Tempestt Farrar
Tony	Chris Walbert
Casca/Soothy Sue	Natalie Lurowist
Tilly/Cicero/Anne Marellus	Holly Grum
General Metta	Christopher Ray Matheson
C Pimp	Sydney Speltz
Tre-Bone/Lucy	Jamaya Austin
Portia/ Flavius Flav	Leela Bassuk
DJ Zukes	Shelby Zukin

### Location & Run:

David Thayer Theatre - September 29-October 15, 2018

### Role:

Principal Role - Cassius

## Quiz Out

### Production Information :

Produced by: The University of Iowa - Department of Theatre Arts

### Principal Collaborators:

Playwright	Margot Connolly
Director	Alison Ruth
Stage Manager	Aimee Townsend

### Cast:

Harper	Elena Bruess
Hannah	Marda Rude
Matthew-Mark	Lukas Brasherfons
Faith	Rachel Bennett
Hope	Nicole Gabrione
Simon	Greg Delany Walker
Aunt Kate	Catie Councill
Coach Pastor Kirk	William Goblirsch
Stage Directions	Christ Byrne

### Location & Run:

Room 172 - May 3, 2016

### Role:

Supporting Role - Simon

## **Lady from the Sea**

### Production Information:

Written by: Henrik Ibsen

Adapted by: Rolf Fjelde

Produced by: The University of Iowa- Department of Theatre Arts

### Principal Collaborators:

Director:	Nina Morrison
Dramaturg:	Sam Collier
Scenic Designer:	Kevin Dudley
Costume Designer:	Catherine Parrott
Lighting/Video Designer:	Lucas P. Ingram
Sound Designer:	Kassia Lisinski
Props Master:	Nic Wilson
Vocal Coach:	Kris Danford
Stage Manager:	Melissa L.F. Turner
Assistant Stage Manager:	Erin Durian

### Cast:

Wangel	William Goblirsch
Ellida	Emelia Asiedu
Hilda	Miriam Randolph
Bolette	Niki-Charisse Franco
Lyngstrand	Will Callan
Arnholm	Miles Gatrell
Ballested	Greg Delany Walker
The Stranger	Eli Jolley

### Townspeople-

Jason Grobstich, Anna Tonsfeldt, Lily Larsen, Erica Eiben, Nicholas Wang,  
Aurora Green

### Location & Run:

Mabie Theatre - April 15-24, 2016

### Role:

Supporting Role - Ballested

## Arcadia

### Production Information:

Written by: Tom Stoppard

Produced by: The University of Iowa- Department of Theatre Arts

### Principal Collaborators:

Director:	Ariel Francoeur
Dramaturg:	Lukas Brasherfons
Scenic Designer:	Nic Wilson
Costume Designer:	Angie Esposito
Lighting Designer:	Josh Hinden
Sound Designer:	Kassia Lisinski
Vocal/Dialect Coach:	Anne Marie Nest
Stage Manager:	Sam Paradis
Assistant Stage Manager:	Katy McLaughlin

### Cast:

Hannah	Catie Councill
Valentine	Eli Jolley
Bernard	William Goblirsch
Chloe	Taylor Edelle Stuart
Gus/Augustus	Ari Craven
Thomasina	Caitlin Edwards
Septimus	Miles Gatrell
Captain Brice	Matt Smith
Lady Croom	Elyse Fisher
Noakes	Hunter Menken
Chater	Greg Delany Walker
Jellaby	Connett Croghan

### Location & Run:

Mabie Theatre - November 21- December 1, 2015

### Role:

Principal Role - Chater

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