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Spring 2018

## Divine dissatisfaction: an actor's process

Natalie Dickens Lurowist  
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Divine Dissatisfaction:  
an Actor's Process

by

Natalie Dickens Lurowist

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 2018

Thesis 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

Natalie Dickens Lurowist

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

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To the directors, playwrights, stage managers, dramaturgs, designers, and actors  
(especially the Women+) that have driven forward  
great monster trucks of theatre and let me ride shotgun.  
To my mother, a driving force of life, love, humor, elegance, and support,  
and for driving me absolutely everywhere so that I could be in plays.  
To my father, for driving me across the country (twice)  
so that I could get to graduate school.  
To my teachers, for driving me to break through my imagined barricades.  
To my students, for driving me to a new chapter of my life.  
To my classmates, for driving me to tears with laughter and wonderment.  
And to Eli, for driving me crazy and to be a better, more loving person.  
Thank you, all.

"On the assumption that my technique is either complicated or original or both, the publishers have politely requested me to write an introduction to this book.

At least my theory of technique, if I have one, is very far from original; nor is it complicated. I can express it in fifteen words, by quoting *The Eternal Question And Immortal Answer* of burlesk, viz. "Would you hit a woman with a child?—No, I'd hit her with a brick." Like the burlesk comedian, I am abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement.

If a poet is anybody, he is somebody to whom things made matter very little—somebody who is obsessed by Making. Like all obsessions, the Making obsession has disadvantages; for instance, my only interest in making money would be to make it. Fortunately, however, I should prefer to make almost anything else, including locomotives and roses. It is with roses and locomotives (not to mention acrobats Spring electricity Coney Island the 4th of July the eyes of mice and Niagara Falls) that my "poems" are competing.

They are also competing with each other, with elephants, and with El Greco.

Ineluctable preoccupation with *The Verb* gives a poet one priceless advantage: whereas nonmakers must content themselves with the merely undeniable fact that two times two is four, he rejoices in a purely irresistible truth (to be found, in abbreviated costume, upon the title page of the present volume)."

*is 5*  
E.E. Cummings

## PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Written to fulfill a partial requirement for a Masters of Fine Arts degree in Acting, this thesis explores Natalie Lurowist's continued evolution as an actor during her time at the University of Iowa. In the spirit of "the verb," she attempts first to *philosophize* about acting by questioning, categorizing, defining truths, and briefly discussing its personal meaning and implications. She then ventures back in time (with a nod to her undergraduate training) to *process* her process as it has evolved over the course of three years of graduate school. Similar to the students' M.F.A. plan of study, the elements of process are broken down into the foundational subjects of movement, acting, and voice. In the final section, university productions are examined for their opportunities, challenges, and the corresponding exploration, struggles, and successes in regards to Lurowist's evolution. Inevitably, the past leads up to the present moment and future outlook in her persistent endeavor to *grow*.

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## **A: TO PHILOSOPHIZE**

### **Art and Craft**

Acting is a craft, and a worthwhile one, in my estimation. Like any craft, it involves an accumulation of skills gained by study, frequent practice, experimentation and so on, usually done in the pursuit of mastery. If mastery in acting is possible, I believe this is a lifelong pursuit and that more than likely, the closer one gets to it the further away one might feel. Or, to put it in terms of my recent graduate school experience: the more you do it, the more you realize how much you have to learn. I'll later defend my risky position on why I believe acting to be worthwhile. But I like to think that acting is an art, which luckily is not always defined in terms of its usefulness. It may not even be a pursuit of required skills. Instead, I believe anyone with thoughts and feelings can make art, because it inherently stems from the less tangible ingredients of an individual's worldview, taste, or sensitivity, which lead to unique expression. Art does not need a utilitarian or objective purpose other than to exist in this moment and be experienced by others. Therefore, I believe that acting, as both an art and a craft, is essentially about creation and the expression of our humanity.

That's all pretty cerebral, and certainly there are a lot of specific ways I've learned to look at acting from studying and teaching acting at the University of Iowa,

studying acting and musical theatre at Syracuse University, and taking part in a few other training programs that I had the opportunity to do at night or over a summer. There is also what I learned in-between universities (sometimes horribly referred to as “the real world”) while living life as a professional actor in New York City for five years. And, for that matter, there’s what I learned from high school and middle school theatre, all the community theatre I was fortunate to do, and even what I learned from standing up and singing “Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah” to my classmates on the first day of Kindergarten (an experience that would echo itself in a very different way this year in Clown class, when our clowns were asked to sing). Upon reflection, that last (or rather first) lesson was simply: if there is any kind of light inside of you, and you feel the impulse, share it! Or, as my undergraduate Professor Gerardine Clark advised me at the end of my freshman year (in a succinct and folksy way): “Don’t hide your light under a bushel.” That advice has had a long time to sink in, and it’s still sinking.

Sometimes I question everything I’ve learned. Sometimes, I’m struck by how I’m able to oscillate from the fulfillment of knowing things about theatre to wishing I could forget everything and go back to that lack of inhibition and state of courage and joy of a kindergartner singing because she liked to sing— an arguably ideal place from which to start acting. Sometimes I hear about people in casting wanting to hire pedestrians so that “they’re not doing a bunch of acting.” I wonder what the point is, in this case, of treating acting like a craft if that’s becoming a demand... and whether there’s any

truth to it. Sometimes, I'm very moved by a performance that somebody else hated, or vice versa, and I wonder what the point is of working so hard to be a better actor if it's art and therefore so much of it is entirely subjective. On top of that, I have come to believe that most people can act if they desire to. I've especially found this to be true through teaching undergraduate non-theatre-major students during my time here. Most of the students were previously inexperienced in acting, yet revealed themselves to be gifted and interesting and capable, and therefore it's hard for me to say if my class (or any formal instruction) would be a necessary entrance into acting for them.

However, as it stands, I have been fortunate to have a good number of experiences with acting and learned a great many truths from smart and gifted actors. What I've come to believe about acting is my own total, the addition and subtraction of it all so far, and it's all potentially moot in terms of success and survival. But I made the choice to pursue acting as a teenager, and now it is my craft and my art. The five following acting truths are most heavily influenced by the theories of Konstantin Stanislavski, Sanford Meisner, Jerzy Grotowski, and the ensemble of actors responsible for the trusty *Practical Handbook for the Actor* (which I'll abbreviate as PHFTA). The title of this section refers to E.E. Cummings's bold assertion in the epigraph of this thesis. Without further ado, this is what I believe to be true about acting at the age of thirty-two, living in Iowa City and reflecting near the end of a long winter, and even longer journey of graduate school and everything that came before:

## 2x2=5: Five Acting Truths

- 1) Be active. To act is to do. Therefore, for the majority of classical and contemporary Western theatre, acting requires intention and action.
  - a. You must know what your character wants – *an objective* – based on the given circumstances of the play, some analysis, and tested through trial and error. An objective works best if it's something that the other character(s) can give you in the moment.
  - b. You must also have something to do physically – *an action* – in order to get it from the other character. According to *PHFTA*, an action works best when it's fun, specific, physically capable of being done, in line with the intentions of the playwright, not an errand, not manipulative, does not presuppose any physical or emotional state, has a cap, and has it's test in the other person. These guidelines are known as the "9 Requirements of a Good Action."
  
- 2) Be truthful. Acting actually requires that you be truthful. While in some ways you're playing pretend, you can't lie about what is happening in the present moment to yourself, the other actor(s), or the audience. *PHFTA* gives the useful definition: "Acting is living truthfully under the imaginary circumstances of a play." Therefore:
  - a. *Plan, then Play*. During rehearsals, table work, and other preparation, you should do your analysis, make your choices, build your character, and discuss. But in performance, you must let go of that plan, in a way, in order to live truthfully within the previously agreed-upon framework.
  - b. *Don't settle*. Don't accept half-truths or approximations about the reality of what is happening within yourself and/or what you perceive is happening in somebody else. No matter how good the tricks, denials, or controlled performances may be, they won't be as interesting as what happens when you respond to the actual truth of the moment.
  - c. "*You can't be a lady or a gentleman and be an actor.*" You must let go of your own defenses and masks in order to best serve the character and the play. Forget your socialization, including inhibitions, defense mechanisms, gender roles, and the need to be liked. Break out of patterns of editing, fixing, or presenting yourself, which can result in concealing the truth of your thoughts and emotions. Instead, "release the affect" to respond fully and truthfully.
  
- 3) Be present. In order to recognize the truth of the moment, you must be present. Being present means being able to observe, listen, and respond truthfully to the present moment. Also, on stage, we must always be seeing, hearing, and

experiencing *as if for the first time*. This can be difficult. It requires letting go of the past and future. It requires breath and acceptance. It requires placing all your focus on the other actor(s), with the ability to quickly notice the subtle physical and emotional changes. *"Every little moment has a meaning all its own."* Or, every moment that we share with another actor (or the audience) has it's own meaning, and we must be able to notice and respond to that meaning. In order to do this, you must be able to *get out of your head*. This is a constant striving. If you cannot be present or truthful as an actor, you'll likely deliver a pre-determined, presentational, polished performance (probably verging on acting auto-pilot). I use alliteration of plosives to adamantly warn you against this type of acting. To me, it is uninteresting and self-serving (rather than serving the story), and yet I've found that this is idea of acting is commonly what non-actors assume actors do.

- 4) Be committed. Acting requires daily practice to achieve the habits (i.e. relaxation, imagination, play) and un-learning of unhelpful habits (i.e. editing, denying impulses, defense mechanisms) necessary for the previous tenets. Also, daily practice is necessary in order to achieve physical and vocal freedom from habitual pedestrian tension. It is necessary, thereby, to expand your range. And finally, it is necessary to prepare you for doing the work. In the same way that you must commit to a character, action, scene, or moment, you must commit to the actor's daily practice. This thesis will discuss what that can entail.
- 5) Be full. Breathe fully. Invest in the imaginary circumstances as fully as possible. Do emotional preparations (offstage) until you are emotionally full. Commit to the stakes, urgency, and your action fully. Follow your impulses and do tactics fully to the end of impulse. Respond fully, both physically and vocally. Play fully, like a child plays. Take risks and fail fully. Off the stage, live fully. I believe that being a great actor requires you to have a versatile life, and a range of experiences outside the world of theater. This gives you a well of experience to share and from which to draw for your acting. It also allows you to study human behavior in a variety of situations, which is our life's research. The more full your life, the more full your acting, I think. Ideally you find a balance.

## **Meaning**

The idea of balance may work to segue out of some of my philosophical acting beliefs, which are arguably specific in reaction to what I've recently learned in graduate school,

and into what acting can mean more broadly for myself and others. First of all, I believe that acting is actually helping me to become more fully myself, and perhaps that alone is worthwhile. I've found that it wakes me up, and makes me feel more alive by being more able to see, hear, feel, and respond to other people and my environment more easily and without controlling, lying, freezing, or changing. It certainly helps with teaching. Following my impulses more often, without exercising constant judgment, has been very freeing. It allows me to be more myself in the world, allows others to see me better, and helps me to be more understanding and accepting of others.

In terms of what I can get and give back through acting, I've looked at it this way for a long time: acting is a combination of what I love to do and what I feel I'm best at. So, to honor that gift or lucky coincidence (however you look at it), I think I'm doing what's best right now by going after my objective within my given circumstances. My hope is that I can participate in and reach the world best through this medium. It might sound convenient, but in my undergraduate college application essays I wrote (and still believe today) that I can make a difference by doing theatre. I would argue that the creation and expression of theatre arts continues to provide an important outlet for our society and makes an impact that can eventually lead to social change. That's what I hope to do through theatre: engage, move, challenge, and inspire an audience to think and feel, and ultimately to impact the world one production at a time.

## **B: TO PROCESS**

Over the course of our three-year M.F.A. program studying acting at the University of Iowa, I have been developing a process to become a better actor. This process is constantly evolving, adding and subtracting tools, tweaking and improving old and new ideas, sometimes leaning into more depth and complexity, while at other times, clarifying, boiling down, and simplifying. It requires the right brain and the left brain. It involves discussing, analyzing, and even methodically approaching text with a learned technique (known by the endearing acronym "GOAT"), then allowing the spontaneous, immediate, irrational and (as acting theorist Jerzy Grotowski refers to them) "spiritual" impulses to happen when bringing that text to life.

The process involves my preparation for, approach to, and practice of acting, voice, and movement in my daily life, at home and in class, and for productions. The process has allowed me to grow as an actor, and it's where my work will remain going forward. Growth was my primary goal in returning to school. Having turned the milestone thirty-years-old just before making the move from Boston to Iowa City, it felt like it was "now or never" to delve back into learning. I felt a need to buckle down again. I knew I would need to let go of some things learned in the increasingly distant past to make room for new ideas and perspectives, commit to improving my skills and understanding, expand my range of possibility, and move forward. I strongly desired to

renew my confidence in my craft as well as my identity as an actor. In this section, I will discuss my process in its early and more recent development.

### **Backstory**

I attended Syracuse University for my B.F.A. training, which was an intensive, conservatory-style program at a large private university. I paid dearly for this education, despite the substantial financial aid they offered. I bring this up to admit (or possibly warn) that the development of my process has come at a cost. I often struggle with whether or not my eighteen-year-old self made the right decision to commit to an expensive, well-reputed program, rather than a relatively unknown program that had offered me a “full ride.” Of course, I have to trust that my education was worth it and the choices made me who I am today. But my advice to a young actor might be: every journey is different, and most paths are likely worthwhile in some way. Realizing this truth has been part of my process. I was also narrowly focused on musical theatre prior to college, which the free program didn’t specifically offer. Yet, ultimately, I graduated as an Acting major— in my final semester, I chose to take classes that I was interested in at that point, rather than what I was supposed to take, and that led to the major-change. And, because I’ve learned again and again now that acting is my true passion, it’s a decision that I never question.

For the majority of my time at Syracuse, the musical theatre training influenced my process heavily. I increasingly combined warm-ups and ideas learned from acting, voice/verse, singing voice, musical theatre performance, and even dance classes. Something that had a crucial effect on my process regarding warm-up was taught in a Voice/Verse class by Associate Professor Elizabeth Ingram, in which we explored freeing the voice and worked specifically with verse as text. Ingram stated that she wanted students to have the ability to warm ourselves up before every class and rehearsal, and so she taught a twenty-minute vocal/physical warm-up, which I believe was largely based on the Linklater technique. The sequence was as follows:

- 1) Alignment
- 2) Tension Release
- 3) Readiness
- 4) Breath Awareness
- 5) Stretching
- 6) Open Channel
- 7) Vibrations
- 8) Voice Forward
- 9) Range
- 10) Articulation

I used this sequence as the foundation of my personal warm up for almost everything, mixing in other exercises that worked for me. To this day, I certainly use elements and exercises from this sequence, if not in the same order or to completion, as over time this warm-up became overly thorough and started to exceed an hour. When warm-ups do that, they can exhaust more than they prepare, in my experience.

In terms of a physical warm-up, the above sequence, if done well, could probably satisfy the physical needs of some plays. But I know this wouldn't suffice for the advanced movement work we've done at the University of Iowa, and I've since learned the importance of a good physical warm up for most work. In terms of my early process at Syracuse, I was mostly influenced by a few dance classes (Ballet, Tap, and Jazz) and some Pilates training early on. I incorporated strengthening and stretching exercises into my process as a result. One often sees a lot of stretching outside audition rooms, and it helps, but unfortunately this doesn't really encourage real physical freedom and readiness, which Associate Professor of Movement Paul Kalina refers to as the "state of play." It also isn't likely to get the body ready to connect to character and physical action in a scene, which I've learned is necessary for full and truthful work. So my process was certainly lacking in the physical realm.

Acting was considered to be the paramount focus of our training, surpassing singing and dancing, though the faculty often encouraged students to aim to be "triple threats" (good at all three fields). My first year, we were told that we were chosen largely because of our unique qualities, and that the training was geared towards embracing our individuality as actors, rather than molding us into sellable "cookie-cutter" types. I appreciated that freedom. I learned many helpful tools and "rules" and methods and approaches to acting, practically a smorgasbord of different perspectives from different teachers over my four years, including a semester of training by masters

at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre in London. I'm grateful for everything I was exposed to and hopefully absorbed into the recesses of my mind and heart. Right off the bat, I learned a new theatre vocabulary. I learned the importance of personalization, observation of human behavior, scene/play analysis, objective, action, and verbs, respect for the text, how to prepare and rehearse a scene or a song or even a musical scene. This was all part of my process of learning to act.

But I don't know that I graduated with a cohesive, organized way to talk about acting, which is something that the University of Iowa faculty and my teaching experience here has since given me. Also, the discipline of constant practice had not been instilled in me. Outside of warming up for rehearsals and classes, and doing homework for the latter, which included a lot of scene study and song rehearsal, I mostly relied on the classes I was taking for daily practice. I was singing constantly in voice lessons, musical theatre performance, and even in a cappella group, and so I never worried about keeping up with that skill. But once I graduated and moved to New York City, I made a big mistake. I didn't take any classes to keep my voice, mind, and body in shape, which I now know, as a rule, is anathema to performers. I auditioned one to four days a week, sometimes four times in a day, and would warm up for auditions either at home (sometimes four hours before travelling to the audition and actually getting into the room), in a hallway (not very productive), or in a rehearsal room I had to rent for 15-30 minutes. I'd get to act, sing, and dance in the auditions

and shows (when cast), but that was mostly where my practice ended. Money was an issue, so even the occasional voice lesson or dance class was a luxury. I considered, but never did a “pay to play” workshop with a casting director because these were typically hundreds of dollars for a day or two of renewed learning and practice.

Later, when I worked as a production singer for two contracts on cruise ships, my process centered mostly around the voice and the acting challenge of doing the same shows over and over. According to Stanislavski, you must create the “illusion of the first time” and act as if everything is happening for the very first time in each moment. When attempting to act out pop songs, which typically have a repetitive chorus rather than a clear journey from start to end, this was admittedly difficult. Moreover, the shows weren’t really artistically fulfilling for me, and I knew that I couldn’t lay down my hat for ship life. After two seven-month contracts, I moved home to the Boston area, attempting to return to theatre in a new market. In a tale as old as time, I didn’t have immediate success. I let the struggle discourage me, and I let go of my practice completely. Eventually, I felt that my acting and singing were stale, and the longer it went on like that, the more anxiety surrounded doing the things I loved, and the more disconnected I felt to who I was as an actor. Falling into this trap of discontinued practice was an extremely important experience and lesson for me— one that I hope forever fuels the continuance of my process. Unexpectedly, though, I filled this void with physical work— namely, exercise. I began a strict but rewarding practice of

exercising every day, initially as part of an eight-week challenge, and I have continued to exercise to *varying* degrees ever since.

## **Movement**

That sudden shift in my process brings me to my current work and the reality of having been in graduate school for almost three years. To begin, I'll focus on my physical process. Gradually over my first year, I let the exercising decrease, because I found that there's just not enough time for that every day with classes, homework, rehearsals, and the incorporation of my new "floorwork" (for movement and voice class, mostly). But having strength, stamina, flexibility, availability of and relaxation in the body is important to our movement work and, in my experience, is benefited by exercise. My second year, I sought to do something physically engaging every other day, but cut out most abdominal exercises that could lead to core tension.

Simultaneously, and more profoundly, I decided to further my yoga practice through university classes, and have integrated that work into my life more and more ever since. Yoga encourages physical as well as mental and emotional health, which I've learned is a very important aspect of my process. It promotes breathing, relaxation, good alignment, positivity, non-attachment, and appreciation for the present moment (similarly important in acting), among a multitude of other benefits. Rather suddenly, I developed lower jaw tension during a production in my second year, and while I

attempted to tackle the problem with vocal warm ups, eventually I found that increasing my connection to the breath and the mental relaxation of yoga and meditation helped me more than anything.

Through Paul Kalina's movement instruction, I've added physical floor work before shows, auditions, and if I can, daily practice, for total-body alignment and relaxation of the abdomen, back, and iliopsoas muscles. For instance, I lie on a dowel, which encourages lengthening of the spine and relaxation of the surrounding muscles. I also use the dowel under my feet for better grounding. An Alexander Technique workshop with Tommy Schoffler also stressed the importance of warming up the feet, increased awareness and visual mapping of the alignment of bones in the body, and a non-doing approach to relaxation and alignment (i.e. constructive rest). This, too, helped with my jaw tension during the workshop, and he suggested practicing constructive rest daily, which I may incorporate into my process in the future. I've learned that awareness is extremely important to furthering one's work, and that when I grow lax in my observation and daily focus on my physical being (known as proprioceptive-awareness), I lose connection to my practice. So, I'm always thinking about alignment, specifically:

- 1) Grounding my feet.
- 2) Bending (not locking) my knees.
- 3) Tucking my pelvis under slightly.
- 4) Stacking my ribcage on top of my pelvis.
- 5) Lifting (not collapsing) my chest.

- 6) Letting the crown of the head float up.
- 7) Feeling the dynamic opposition.

In our first and second year, we learned about storytelling techniques and the physical process of building a character's architecture and range through mimetic dynamics and mask work, which I've since brought into my rehearsal process as a good starting point for character choices. In our final movement course, we studied Clowning. It was, perhaps in contrast to popular opinion, an intellectually and philosophically inspiring experience, though most clowns would probably say I'm thinking about it too much. Clowning taught me, first and foremost, about the importance of not "doing" in order to make things happen, but rather trusting in the moment, your scene partner, and the audience. I learned that I am a "do-er" when I am uncertain, and that this can lead to rushing through potentially great moments. It taught me about failing, badly, and sitting in the uncomfortable moments. Also, taking away the words and even face in order to respond fully with the entire body was a challenge. Finally, there was the lesson of slowing things down to live and discover moment-to-moment. This leads us to the perspective of the clown, which is a fresh, innocent, loving way of looking at the world and the audience. Even if the clown gets mad or upset, it is because they desire to give love (and perhaps are failing to do so).

I learned valuable lessons from clowning, and this perspective is one that I want to try to bring to all of my acting— specifically, thinking of performance as a way to give

love. University of Iowa Lecturer Megan Gogerty's one-woman show *Lady MacBeth and her Pal, Megan*, also leaves us with this idea, that the way to succeed in performance is to love the audience. I hope I'm not over-simplifying or even complicating her argument, but that was my take-away. To love the audience: it is profound and satisfying, as well as a solution to so many problems with performing. I can't say I've found a way to always maintain this poetic, clown-like perspective so far, but I will continue to try.

### **Acting**

I've gradually been incorporating into my process elements of the Stanislavski, Meisner, Grotowski, and Shakespeare study we've done. The study of Konstantin Stanislavski's approach to acting brought an overall awareness and analysis of people's everyday objectives, actions, and tactics, as well as other human behavior. Acting was defined as performing a physical action. *The Practical Handbook for the Actor* further defines acting as "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances," which felt more encompassing, and leads us to Meisner. Sanford Meisner developed a method of acting that was taught to us by one of his former students, Professor John Cameron. To act in this class was to "live truthfully" within crafted exercises, such as "Meisner Repetition" and "The Door," and truthfulness became the main focus of my process. We did repetition constantly with classmates, taught "baby repetition" to students, and

this exercise revealed so much about myself as a person and an actor. My “masks,” tendencies, and habitual tactics became apparent, and I began to experiment with living truthfully from moment-to-moment in daily life as well as in repetition. In this way, the Meisner effect on my acting process has been practical and psychological. I am constantly fighting the compulsion “to be a lady,” to accommodate others or try to meet their expectations... for me, this means to be sweet and polite and reserved. Those tendencies have, in the past, felt tied into my personality, and so I think there will be a constant process of “letting go.” But I am actively trying to replace these tendencies with an emotional freedom, vulnerability, and bravery. This is perhaps the least tangible part of my process, but also very necessary. I’ve since also found Meisner repetition to be useful before walking into an audition room, as it’s very grounding and takes the focus off of the self. We also learned to do emotional state “preparations” before scene work and in shows. Cameron encouraged us to daydream and use our imaginations whenever possible, as well as embracing a “child-like” sense of play (similar to Kalina’s “state of play”). This is something that came relatively naturally, as I was a pretty bold kid who was very into playing pretend.

But I clocked the real difference in my ability to imagine and play as an adult by learning Grotowski technique with former University of Iowa Professor Eric Forsythe. Also psychologically freeing and enlightening, Grotowski immediately affected my process, though I feel the lessons will continue to reveal themselves in layers of

profundity as time goes on. Furthering my work from Movement and Meisner training the first year, the amount of focus being placed on *others* and the state of play was taken to a whole new level. To do so, we participated in "jams," in which we played without inhibition, using our voices and bodies fully (which was a lesson in its own). Some of the playing was remarkably difficult for me due to inhibition, though in time I improved, and wished that someone on the outside could have seen our class of adults play like children on the day of our final exam. As a result of Grotowski, I often ask myself the following questions during or after working with another person:

- 1) Is (or was) my focus really on the other?
- 2) Is something happening between us?
- 3) Am I using all of myself (physically and vocally) to do what I'm doing?
- 4) Am I taking turns, both leading AND following?
- 5) What is most important in this moment?

In our third year, we left the world of naturalism (as we knew it) and dove into Period Styles, taught by John Cameron. Of course, styles change, and we learned that style is actually the naturalism of its time. So, luckily we didn't need to throw out truthful acting or GOAT in order to act in style. But we learned that there is a vocabulary of movement and gesture (with fans, staffs, and curving lines, etc) that could add a lot to a scene. And for our graduate showcase, my scene partner and I ended up using elements of style in a modern-day scene, which I wouldn't have been able to do before. Finally, Acting for the Camera class (also taught by Cameron) has reminded me to trust my instincts, that less is more, and "the camera picks up

everything." Overall, the third year classes have provided us with further technical skills and techniques to approach various styles of acting. These may be very necessary in the future depending on the genre of show or acting. Finally, I feel I need to mention Patsy Rodenburg's "Circles of Energy," a concept that was brought to our attention by a classmate, Greg Delany Walker. Rodenburg's theory is a fascinating lens through which we can view human behavior and be cognizant of our energy and attention on stage and in life. Since researching her work more, I have used it in my journaling, teaching, and I believe subconsciously in my process.

### **Voice**

In addition to my vocal training at Syracuse, I was unusually fortunate to have had private voice lessons since the fourth grade. I still use some of my old vocal warm ups, depending on what I feel I need to focus on in the moment. But I have also incorporated some wonderful new exercises and ways of thinking about the voice due to my training here. Right away, I reinstated private voice lessons as a (hopefully) permanent structure in my life, because I've found the practice of singing is quite linked to my identity. My voice instructor, Professor John Muriello, and I work on everything from alignment to relaxation to vowel formation to merging technique with intention. At the start of this year, Muriello was instrumental in helping me prepare and offering positive reinforcement for my vocal work in the musical *Fun Home*, which I'll

discuss more in the final section. In terms of non-musical voice work, Kris Danford, a former instructor at the University of Iowa, taught us about Catherine Fitzmaurice's "tremoring," poses, which have been fascinating and very effective for me, especially prior to shows or auditions. I have incorporated tremoring into my process as a way to relax, open the vocal channel, and get in touch with the breath. I've found that being connected to (and free with) my breath is hugely important for me, as it impacts all three elements of what I do onstage (my acting, movement, and voice). It's a foundational concept that likely takes a long time to master, practically, and the concepts of de-structuring and restructuring help with this. I also commonly warm up the "Five Floodgates" (neck, jaw, tongue, soft palate, and lips) which Assistant Professor Anne Marie Nest has emphasized in our voice classes, and they've been valuable tools in my teaching as well. Our Accent and Dialect work last year with Nest has prompted me to study and listen more to the vocal and language patterns of others, and consider the eight Laban Efforts used in speech. In Voiceover class this year, I've been reminded again of the importance of warming up before performing (or in this case, recording) for vocal range, variety, and overall freedom of expression. And, similar to the camera, the microphone picks up everything, an important lesson. Our Shakespeare work with Professor Alan MacVey has also focused my work on language and text (i.e. paying attention to operative words, rhythm, stress, imagery, etc). I have attempted to apply *all* of these new skills to various productions at various stages.

## **C: TO GROW**

### **Opportunity**

Part of my process has been the increased comprehension that there is daily work that I can do to practice my craft, prepare my instrument (mind/voice/body), and to engage in the world as an artist *even* if I'm not in a play. Still, I've said "yes" to nearly every opportunity I've had to act at the University of Iowa. It might seem like an obvious philosophy, but that doesn't make it any less important. To preface my resolve, I wasn't cast in a play until my senior year at Syracuse. There were various factors at play beyond my control, but I think that all the classroom training with no real production outlet contributed to a delay in my progress up to that point. But then the scale somehow tipped, and I played principal roles in five different pieces my final year. One of them was a two-person musical that I put on with a friend, a student director, and student pianist over graduation weekend, and that was the first and last musical I ever did at Syracuse. Upon coming to Iowa, I was determined not to waste any time and to get as much work done as possible. It's amazing to me that we're technically required to be in productions, because that implies a student might not want to do at least one show per semester in an (*ideally*) supportive, non-product-oriented, or financially-motivated learning environment. But it's all essential work for the actor:

classroom study and practical application to a full-length production. And it's one of the greatest gifts that the University of Iowa has given us: Opportunity.

Having taken an eight-year hiatus between undergraduate and graduate school to attempt to live as an actor in that rumored "real world," I learned that Stephen Sondheim was correct in his lyrical claim that "Opportunity is not a lengthy visitor." For actors, the ability to practice their craft and express themselves through their art largely depends on getting cast in a production. As I mentioned earlier, doing monologues in your home and at auditions doesn't satisfy this need. The audition (and the callback and the second callback, etc, etc) acts as a gateway to the work, and the effort made is not typically rewarded with validation, but rather, repeated rejection. And I don't believe this is generally due to a lack of hard-working or talented actors, but to the overall oversaturation of the profession; more supply than demand. We all knew this, going in. But it can feel as if you're constantly asking permission to do the thing that you love, and understand, and have been trained to do... unless you undertake to create and/or produce your own work. I plan on taking this alternative much more seriously in the future, because too often I've found myself unintentionally estranged from acting. But by saying "yes" to opportunity as an actor starting out in NYC, many of my roles were last-minute replacements that involved dropping everything. Or, I did unpaid workshop after concert after staged reading after additional training in the hopes that something would lead to a real gig. Eventually, it did. But really, it was an

important philosophy because that way, I was acting. And by saying “yes” to a children’s theatre tour of *If You Give a Pig a Pancake and Other Stories*, I was able to join Actor’s Equity Association, and a year after that, I was offered my first official equity contract. All of this is to say that I believe my progress has been inextricably linked to my work in productions over time, and at the University of Iowa, I feel like I’ve gotten to learn and perform equally. This has been invaluable.

### **Past Productions**

My process, which used to involve a lot more subconscious pre-planned acting, unfortunately, underwent a great shift in perspective my first year, I think as the result of a combination of Meisner training and a lesson learned from my first show at the University of Iowa. It was a new play titled *Known*, written and directed by Michael Tisdale. It explored the predicament of Mimi Ford, an actress living in New York City, recently turned forty-years-old and wanting to be “known” but, in the end, losing the offer of a dream role to someone else. To be honest, this part came easily in many ways. Despite the newness of Iowa, the size of the role, the fluctuating text, and the ten-year age difference between myself and the character, I empathized with Mimi’s situations and emotional journey throughout the play. The text felt very natural to me, and the personalization work was enjoyable. I used a memorization technique known as “Dropping In,” which was taught to me by Syracuse faculty member Nicole Ricciardi. It

entails memorizing the text slowly using images, which helps with personalization, as well as preventing vocal patterns and “seeing the words on the page” while acting. I attempted to apply some of the new ideas about action and objective that Paul Kalina and John Cameron were teaching at the time, but I think it was too early for me to really put them into action. My physical process was still quite lacking, and there was a struggle in rehearsals to free myself up, to be able to play, to go “too far” in order to be pulled back, if necessary.

After the show ended, the director reached out to the cast to ask if we could speak to a lesson or two that we’d learned from doing the show. I wrote about the importance of not putting imaginary limitations on how far I can go as an actor. For instance, in a scene that alludes to Mimi’s noticeable drunkenness, I was so scared of going overboard and getting the feedback that I was “playing drunk” unbelievably, that Mimi probably never seemed more than a little tipsy. Instead, it would have been better to really go for it, to risk being over-the-top in rehearsal in order to explore all the possible levels and manifestations of her physical state. Later in the play, Mimi finds out that she will not be offered the dream role that she thought she’d already gotten. I was encouraged to have the full negative reaction to this worst-case scenario before composing myself enough to lock the door of the apartment and eat an entire apple pie, eventually with my hands. This could absolutely happen, but right up until opening night, my left brain had decided that it couldn’t. I thought that the pie-eating beat was

the climax of the scene, and therefore nothing else could happen that was dramatically close to that sequence. But why did I place this limitation on myself? What was I afraid of— that it wouldn't be the “correct” choice dramaturgically or directorially? That should not be my concern. Was it that I wouldn't be able to have painful emotional outbursts twice in one scene? I shouldn't make safe choices as a result of second-guessing my abilities or connection to the given circumstances. The director suggested that in this moment I throw my cell phone, and then maybe start throwing other things, or punching things, etc. etc.... and my immediate reaction was that it would feel wrong because I, the actor, wouldn't likely do that. But that didn't end up being the case. Not only can I actually see myself doing this behavior (if even slightly devastating circumstances presented themselves), but I've also learned that I am, of course, not the same person as the character, and cannot hold the character hostage to my own personal rules. Lo and behold, when I finally committed to having and exploring that reaction, I think it was successful. The limitations were lifted, it felt right after all, and consequently it contributed to the build of the scene, finally culminating in the apple pie. Therefore, thanks to some extreme moments in *Known* and being challenged by the director, I learned the importance of challenging my own preconceptions, boundaries/limitations, and possibly overactive left-brain analysis getting in the way of right-brain impulse.

I won't go into as much detail here-on-out, but would like to briefly touch upon changes to my process and lessons learned from my following productions at the university. While performing in *Food and Fadwa*, a relatively new play by Lameece Issaq and Jacob Kader, I began to incorporate Meisner truth-of-the-moment and emotional preparation work. My classmates and I would do "preps" as well as some Fitzmaurice trembling backstage before scenes. I also focused on "bubble" work we'd learned in movement, in which you expand your energy out as if it formed a bubble around you. When playing a scene, you can imagine using your bubble to compress or expand the connection between yourself and your scene partner, by either pushing or pulling them towards or away from you. This allows your energy to fill the space and reach the other actors, rather than collapsing in on yourself in a pedestrian state. Jacques Lecoq's "eclosion" also aids in this idea of entering the room with a heightened state of projecting energy out and around oneself, yet being open and "with" everything and everyone in the room, rather than "for" or "against." The eclosion was often the last thing I'd do right before entering for a scene. As the character Hayat Johnson, I played the antagonist, perhaps the first time I've ever done so. In a way, it was difficult to play a character that I knew would be so unpopular, but we had learned from John Cameron that you simply can't worry about being liked on stage. You have to play your part as it best aids the storytelling. Luckily, the play itself gives Hayat various facets that left me room to create a three-dimensional and

vulnerable character that I empathized with, and every character's colors and moments of humanity need to be recognized and explored. But a large part of the challenge of this play was learning to play the villain. And I found that to be fun and freeing in many ways, which explains why many actors love to roles like these, and I played more even villains over the course of my time in Iowa.

The Iowa Playwright's "New Play Festival" (NPF) is a beautiful thing, and I've had the pleasure of being involved every year, including my upcoming and final show at the university, *The Age of Innocence* by Nina Morrison. In my first year of NPF, I was lucky to be cast in *Doxxed*, written by Sam Lahne, as the character of Carol Keynard, a Midwestern nurse obsessed with "Precious Moments" figurines as well as the wife of an unfaithful high school soccer coach. While I didn't share much in common with this character's attributes/situation, I immediately connected to her way of thinking, feeling, and sense of humor, and the character came easily. Because of this, I was able to focus mostly on Action in this play. While Carol's actions and motivations may not have been clearly outlined or stated, I made sure that I knew what I was doing and trying to get from the other character (who, in most scenes, was an unwitting Catholic priest-turned-administrator). I tested a wide variety of tactics in rehearsal and performance, and did my best to remain focused on actively affecting my scene partner.

The varied production experiences of my second year led to the integration of my process with more stylized pieces, the first of which was the Q Brothers' *Rome*

*Sweet Rome*, an “ad-rap-tation” or hip-hop retelling of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*.

For most of us, the focus was on learning to rap (and potentially freestyle) while acting in a scene at the same time. Rapping and acting, referred to as “rapping,” was a brand new skill on it’s own, and we combined that with some singing and dancing. As Senator Casca, another villain, I played a manipulative and somewhat masculine Southern woman who loved sandwiches. As Soothy Sue, I was as an old, unstable, fortune-predicting homeless woman. These were both fun parts that pushed me to expand my playing field of choices, range, and risk-taking. I learned that the bigger the choice, the better, while staying as truthful as possible within the style. I also began to differentiate between my habitual physicality and that of the character, by discovering when I could make a different physical choice than what felt normal or comfortable.

Following this production, I was cast in another musical play that was not exactly a musical, known as *Mr. Burns: a Post-Electric Play* by Anne Washburn. Also a reasonably new play, it deals with the Simpsons, the apocalypse, and what happens to a consumerist society post-electricity. With sprawling group scenes, musical numbers, and many mysterious given circumstances, I incorporated more of my movement work at the time than the analytical GOAT approach. While we spent a good deal of time improvising and creating back-stories for our characters, much was left to interpretation and our own internal direction. I personally attempted to apply our simultaneously learned mask techniques for the third act, in which we played masked townspeople

playing archetypal Simpsons characters. We sang and I rapped and therefore incorporated more of a vocal warm-up for this show. I experimented with expressing everything physically (since the face is taken away) and vocally, and played with my character's more extreme personality, vocal register, and psychical architecture and movement as the bully Nelson. In this section, I focused on telling the story and taking risks. In the second act, I played another villain with fewer redeeming qualities, and did my best to go for that unapologetically. I channeled my cruise ship performance experience to sing a presentational torch song, which one faculty member said led to a power in my work that he hoped to see more of. This has since been a goal of mine, specifically to find how to bring that power to spoken text and my physicality.

Other feedback that I received from a faculty member was that the second act character, Quincy, seemed "mannered" in a way similar to my character in *Food and Fadwa*, and once again in my following play, *Aurora Fra Bergen, or, IBSANITY* by Nina Morrison. In all three cases, I played powerful, stylish, and intelligent women accustomed to high-society rules, and I tried to incorporate a reserved yet commanding physicality with gestural and vocal mannerisms I thought appropriate for the characters. Much of this work was subconscious and not exactly planned, and the characters varied in their range of feminine/masculine, graceful/awkward, confident/insecure movement, but were otherwise similar in many attributes. Gradually, I'm learning that while the characters might want to be in control of the way they

present themselves, the actor can't be too in control in this way. It would have been better if I'd had the full range of movement and expression available to me in any moment, so that I wouldn't get boxed in, or have to work as hard. This was another way of limiting myself, albeit in the name of defining the character, but I think that anything should be possible for any character in any given moment, so that a performance can breathe and grow and surprise. That was my take-away from this feedback.

In *Aurora Fra Bergen, or, IBSANITY* as part of NPF, I played a character that originally felt quite far from myself: Sonja, a 45-year-old Norwegian vice president of a bank married to a much younger woman. I saw my main work in this play as bridging that gap in age, experience, choices, and cultural influences, and ultimately I believe I was successful in that I brought as much of myself to the character as possible, rather than focusing on playing someone entirely different from myself. This probably sounds obvious, but involves trusting the actor adage that "you are enough." Somehow, I felt that all I had learned up to this point (the end of my second year) aided in exciting, fulfilling, challenging rehearsals and performances. For the single day of shows, we were encouraged by the director/playwright to continue to raise the stakes/urgency and heightened style while maintaining our organic, truthful responses. Unfortunately I sabotaged myself by not doing a proper vocal/physical warm-up beforehand, and I was given the feedback that my voice was strained, I wasn't breathing freely, and the work seemed overly controlled at times. So I learned once again the importance of never

skipping over the basics. But I still feel extremely proud of what I did in that show, especially in terms of our Meisner training, and during that rehearsal process I felt the first signs of real progress.

This leads me to my final year of graduate school, in which I've done two productions so far. The first was *Fun Home*, a new musical adapted by Lisa Kron and Jeanine Tesori, based on the graphic novel by Alison Bechdel. I played the title character in the process of writing and drawing her novel. It was a gift to be able to do this show, which I felt such a strong connection to after first-read. Part of my work, maybe surprisingly, involved disconnecting from the emotional reactions to the work, in order to best serve the story. My character appeared to be more intellectually analytical than emotionally expressive in most instances, and a strong emotional reaction can get in the way of singing. I was happy to incorporate some of my former musical theatre training for this role, and worked closely on songs with John Muriello, my voice teacher, Janelle Lauer, our music director, and John Cameron, our director for this production. Inherently, my process was more collaborative in this regard, getting more immediate feedback more often on technical musical choices and execution, and the acting work that impacted these. In the end, it was a joyful experience to be able to perform this role in this musical.

With a greater budget and advertising reach, a cast of student and community actors of all ages, and a faculty (rather than student) director, the experience was

significantly different from my others at Iowa. Playing artist Alison Bechdel, a real person, was a new additional challenge that I'll need to face again in my upcoming NPF production, *The Age of Innocence*, in which I'll play the poet Eileen Myles. Because of this, much of my work was character-focused in the beginning. I drew constantly, as my own skills as that kind of artist are quite limited. I watched many interviews and videos on YouTube to research Bechdel, though Cameron and I agreed that I wouldn't be impersonating Bechdel as much as finding my own version of her within this story. Some of my cast mates and I listened to a faculty member speak about her research on Bechdel, her own experience growing up in a similar time and place, and the experience of identifying, coming out, and living as a "butch" lesbian. I experimented with a more masculine style of dress, speaking, and physicality in rehearsals, eventually developing a more distinct character voice and walk/posture than I typically do. This will also likely be necessary in my upcoming production, in which I'll play an exaggeratedly masculine-presenting non-binary self-identified lesbian artist.

And while, as the narrator, I couldn't seem to apply traditional GOAT scene objectives and actions to *Fun Home*, much of my action on stage involved drawing, listening, observing, and narrating – literally telling the story – and I found this very involving, even exhausting. At the time, I felt I had a lot to prove, and that perspective probably wasn't helpful. If I could go back, I'd relax even more and try to trust that my actions and choices were evident. I think the lesson might be that you must commit to

your action fully, but without working so hard as the actor. A lot of this depends on breath, relaxation, and ownership of the character/text/work, and I will keep this in mind in future work. While warming-up, I did yoga with controlled “ujjayi” breath, trembling, a vocal warm-up that included some singing (though I tried to not exhaust the voice prematurely, as I was also sick for most of the run of the show), spent a little time on stage warming up (which I found was best if we were able to run through a song full-out before the show), checked props, and arrived backstage to “places” with enough time to: get acclimated, sing through parts of songs and speak lines to keep my various vocal registers warmed up, do spine undulations, relax my pelvic muscles and take deep, relaxed breaths, and just before entering, a short emotional preparation. This is all a bit technical, but I’m still in the process of figuring out what works and what doesn’t in the time leading up to a performance.

In *Found*, a new play by Margot Connolly that I most recently completed, I made a few more steps evolving my process. This was probably the most text-heavy play I’ve done since *Known*. As a result, my process adapted. I did my analytical GOAT work, research, and a lot of discussion and table work with the production team and cast. I built a character that felt sufficiently similar and dissimilar to myself (especially given her profession as a cadaver-dog handler), and again found that my emotional connection to the work came easily, but in memorization made sure that I had images for most of the words I used so that my personalization was specific. I still began my warm-up with

some yoga and lying on a dowel, but trembling became very important as the beginning of my vocal warm up, since I was looking to really open the channel and relax the core muscles that may try to get involved in speech. I would do those exercises at home, go to the theater, fix hair and makeup, and then head down to the stage to finish my warm up. I'd start physically again (rolling up and down the spine, doing isolations, etc), and then would warm up the five floodgates, resonances, and articulators in the actual space I'd be speaking. I'd run through long monologues as fast as possible and go through some of the motions, or try to surprise myself. If there was time, I'd run the opening scene with my scene partner. All of this preparation led to my feeling confident about the text (which was a bit of a concern with this production), feeling grounded on the stage and in the space, and having focused, centered alone-time (as myself and my character) before heading up to the dressing room to engage with the rest of the cast.

### **Present Moment**

During *Found*, I was reminded of the importance of being present in all areas of life, off-stage as well as on. At the risk of sounding like a robot, I made a conscious effort to converse with my cast mates and the production team normally and freely before the show. The ability to do this kind of pre-show socializing – without an eye on the clock, feeling looming stress or the need to shut people out while racing to put on

makeup, for instance – helped me to feel confident and more prepared, and was a good sign that my warm-up had been effective. I've found that a large part of my process now lies in preventing the "fight or flight" fear response from kicking in before a show. Of course, everyone gets nervous to an extent, but I find that fear is the thing that gets in my way the most in performance. As a result, I've developed a kind of anxiety about getting anxiety, and then feelings of frustration and helplessness surface when the anxiety becomes noticeable. And despite all that I've learned and a myriad of ways to deal with nerves, I've not found consistently reliable solutions. But I think that remembering to be present in the moment and truly "with" the other people in the room is always a great idea. I also plan to continue to find ways to prepare, accept, breathe, let go, and find the fun and joy of what I do. Ideally, love can surpass the fear that inevitably arises. I am optimistic that this is something I can overcome with more experience, wisdom, an embracing of the audience, a letting go of control and expectations, and a desire to get better. Acting is inherently kind of a messy craft, and within all the imperfection lies the beauty of it.

To summarize, perhaps the greatest part of my process in my first year of graduate school was becoming aware of myself, my habits, my tensions, my guards, my strengths, my weaknesses, and my potential. As a result, I feel that I've become more awake and conscious of my voice, body, and mind. This self-awareness was expanded upon in my second year, and as a result I challenge myself to do everything more fully,

honestly, specifically, with more relaxation and attention to others. I have a large toolbox of techniques, now, with which to approach text, character, style of theatre and so on. All of this will continue to guide my process in the future. I'm still processing my process in my third and final year, but I know that I've grown and simultaneously know how much I have to grow. And similar to the ability to be present, this knowledge requires breath and acceptance. Along with everything new that I learn, I must always remember that I have instincts, a brain, a heart, a working body and voice, and acting isn't exactly "life or death." So the new addition to my process has become: *to trust myself*. Going forward, I hope to always keep this in mind.

Acting gives me joy and purpose, though not all the time and not all at once. The "rewards" are not always immediate and may not come at all. And in the process of perfecting my process, I've found I get less satisfied with outcomes the more that I work. That feeling of "I killed it!" is fewer and far between, though I can also acknowledge that my acting is better than it used to be in many ways, and perhaps there was naïveté in my youthful confidence. As Martha Graham allegedly declared to Agnes De Mille: "[There is] no satisfaction whatever at any time. There is only a queer divine dissatisfaction, a blessed unrest that keeps us marching and makes us more alive than the others." I don't want to claim any kind of superiority for experiencing this level of "divine dissatisfaction," but I can attest to the truth of that statement the more that I act. And it feels right— to be left wanting to do more, to act more, to live more.

## ANNOTATED PERFORMANCE HISTORY

### ***The Age of Innocence***

By Nina Morrison

University of Iowa New Play Festival

Playwright: Nina Morrison

Director: Sarah Lacy Hamilton

Scenic Designer: Rob Petrie

Costume Designer: Chelsea Regan

Lighting Designer: Rachel Sather

Sound Designer: Ryan McElroy

Choreographer: Jesse Factor

Dramaturgs: Merric Bower, Micah Ariel James

Tortoise Designer: Melissa L.F. Turner

Stage Manager: Marguerite Sugden

Assistant Stage Manager: Olivia Leslie

Cast: Miriam Randolph, Natalie Lurowist, Andrea Warhurst, JT Hooven

Location & Run: Theatre B, May 3, 2018

Role: Eileen (Leading)

### ***Found***

By Margot Connolly

University of Iowa Gallery Series

Playwright: Margot Connolly

Director: Morgan Grambo

Scenic Designer: Lindsey Kuhn

Costume Designer: Zamora Simmons

Lighting Designer: Courtney Gaston

Sound Designer: Bri Atwood

Dramaturg: Luke Daniel White

Stage Manager: Olivia Leslie

Cast: Sydney Speltz, Natalie Lurowist, Jared Fisher, Hannah Frame, Yannik Encarnação

Location & Run: Theatre B, February 15-18, 2018

Role: Tabitha Haskel (Leading)

### ***Fun Home***

Music by Jeanine Tesori

Book and Lyrics by Lisa Kron

Based on the Graphic Novel by Alison Bechdel

University of Iowa Mainstage

Director: John Cameron

Music Director: Janelle Lauer

Scenic Designer: Nic Wilson

Costume Designer: Lindsey Kuhn  
Assistant Costume Designer: Zamora Simmons  
Lighting Designer: Bryon Winn  
Assistant Lighting Designer: Courtney Gaston  
Sound Designer/Mixer: Bri Atwood  
Assistant Choreographer: Jenna Smithson  
Stage Manager: AJ Near  
Assistant Stage Manager: Nic Steffes  
Assistant Stage Manager: Mariana Tejada  
Cast: Natalie Lurowist, Scott Bradley, Mia Fryvecind Gimenez, Holly Grum, Chase  
Horning, Leela Bassuk, Deucalion Martin, Sawyer Speltz, Austin Wicke  
Location & Run: E.C. Mabie Theatre, December 1-9, 2017  
Role: Alison (Leading)

### ***Aurora Fra Bergen, or, Ibsanity***

By Nina Morrison  
University of Iowa New Play Festival  
Playwright & Director: Nina Morrison  
Assistant Director: Miriam Randolph  
Scenic Designer: Savanna Genskow  
Costume Designer: Lindsey Kuhn  
Lighting Designer: Alex Casillas  
Sound Designer: Elin Dejus  
Violence Designer: Lukas Brasherfons  
Dramaturg: Molly Winstead  
Stage Manager: Sophie Katz  
Assistant Stage Manager: Jacob Sikorski  
Cast: Eileen Campbell, Taylor Edelle Stuart, Andrew Berger, Natalie Lurowist, Elyse  
Fisher, William Asmus, Lindsey Francisco, Marc Saladino  
Location & Run: Theatre B, May 4, 2017  
Role: Sonja (Supporting)

### ***Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play***

By Anne Washburn  
Score by Michael Friedman  
Lyrics by Anne Washburn  
University of Iowa Mainstage  
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: Miles Gatrell, Holly Grum, Danny Whiskeyman, Rubina Vidal, Greg Walker, Natalie Lurowist, Catie Councill, Will Callan, Leela Bassuk, Yannik Encarnação  
Location & Run: E.C. Mabie Theatre, February 3-12, 2017  
Role: Quincy/Willy/Nelson (Supporting)

### **Rome Sweet Rome**

By the Q Brothers Collective (GQ, JQ, Jax, Pos)  
University of Iowa Mainstage/Partnership in the Arts  
Directors/Choreographers: Q Brothers Collective (GQ, JQ, Jax, Pos)  
Scenic Designer: R. Eric Stone  
Assistant Scenic Designer: Kenton Jones  
Costume Designer: Brittany Dee Bodley  
Assistant Costume Designer: Lindsey L. Kuhn  
Lighting Designer: Bryon Winn  
Assistant Lighting Designer: Forrest Tallbull  
Live Sound Consultant: Andrew Stewart  
Stage Manager: Samantha Paradis  
Assistant Stage Manager: Meg Sugden  
Cast: JaMaya Austin, Leela Bassuk, Tempestt Farrar, Holly Grum, Randryck Lewis, Natalie Lurowist, Christopher Ray Matheson, Sydney Speltz, Sage Spiker, Chris Walbert, Greg Walker, Shelby Zukin  
Location & Run: David Thayer Theatre, September 29-October 15, 2016  
Role: Senator Casca/Soothy Sue (Ensemble)

### **Doxxed**

By Sam Lahne  
University of Iowa New Play Festival  
Playwright: Sam Lahne  
Director: Marina Bergenstock  
Assistant Director: Christopher Matheson  
Dramaturg: Lukas Brasherfons  
Scenic Designer: Rubén A. Lebrón Villegas  
Costume Designer: Erica Cole  
Lighting Designer: Christian Hahn  
Sound Designer: Rob Bergenstock  
Video Designer: Alosha Robinson  
Stage Manager: Alison Kochman  
Assistant Stage Manager: Adam Koob

Cast: Zachary Twardowski, Natalie Lurowist, Taylor Edelle Stuart, Nate Hua, Skyler  
Matthias, Hannah Adamson  
Location & Run: Theatre B, May 5, 2016  
Role: Carol (Supporting)

### **Food and Fadwa**

By Lameece Issaq and Jacob Kader  
University of Iowa Mainstage  
Director: Marina Bergenstock  
Dramaturg: Alison Ruth  
Scenic Designer: Kevin Dudley  
Assistant Scenic Designer: Christian Santiago  
Costume Designer: Jenny Nutting-Kelchen  
Assistant Costume Designer: Hiram Alexander Orozco  
Lighting Designer: Joshua Hinden  
Assistant Lighting Designer: Hoejeong Joanne Yoo  
Sound Designer: Rob Bergenstock  
Dialect Coach: Kris Danford  
Assistant Dialect Coach: Sambit Misra  
Music Director: Frankie Rose  
Stage Manager: Nathan Brauner  
Assistant Stage Manager: Fiona Zachel  
Cast: Catie Councell, Sambit Misra, Holly Grum, Randryck Lewis, Zach Twardowski,  
Natalie Lurowist, Tempestt Farrar  
Location & Run: David Thayer Theatre, February 4-13, 2016  
Role: Hayat Johnson (Supporting)

### **Known**

By Michael Tisdale  
University of Iowa Gallery Series  
Playwright & Director: Michael Tisdale  
Scenic Designer: Michael Tisdale  
Lighting Designer: Christian Hahn  
Costume Designer: Hiram Alexander Orozco  
Sound Designer: Guadalupe Flores  
Stage Manager: Bre Anna McNeill  
Assistant Stage Manager: Lindsey Francisco  
Cast: Natalie Lurowist, Mathias Blake, Morgan Jones  
Location & Run: Theatre B, November 5-8, 2015  
Role: Mimi (Leading)

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