

PERFORMING JASON ROBERT BROWN'S *THE LAST FIVE YEARS*:
AN EXERCISE IN COMMUNICATION ON STAGE AND OFF

by

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ABSTRACT

Communication, in its most basic sense, is foundational for any personal, human interaction and relationship. As theatre artists, we are charged with communicating complex story lines, conceptual ideas, and emotion to an audience. Sound communication is paramount to every aspect of a musical production, be it communication between actors/characters, actor and director, amongst the production team, and arguable the most important, between the actors and the audience. My years of education as a Masters in Fine Arts candidate in Musical Theatre have been spent polishing my ability to communicate physical and emotional choices with greater accuracy, depth, and truth.

By staging Jason Robert Brown's musical *The Last Five Years* and performing the role of Jamie, this performance thesis will explore, develop, and examine my mastery of the aforementioned varied forms of communication, all of which are necessary in building a successful musical production. Research will be conducted to gather information on relevant topics, including the history of *The Last Five Years*, the life of Jason Robert Brown, and his musical and theatrical influences. By further understanding Brown, his life, and his ideas about his works, I hope to more fully understand and communicate the message of the musical itself. A dramatic and musical structural analysis will provide further depth and insight into the piece, with the hopes of informing my production and individual performance. A thorough character analysis will provide connective tissue that will allow myself, as the actor, to more effectively communicate the psychological and emotional make up of the character Jamie. Lastly, the thesis document will culminate with a production journal, documenting the pre-production, rehearsal, and performance process. Through the journaling process, I will document and address the

journey that I have experienced with the production, giving focus and attention to its many obstacles and discoveries, successes and failures, all of which have contributed to my personal growth as a young theatre artist.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Jason Robert Brown has been praised as being "a leading member of a new generation of composers who embody high hopes for the American musical" (www.theater.nytimes.com) and "one of Broadway's smartest and most sophisticated songwriters since Stephen Sondheim" (www.Philly.com). Conversely, others have criticized his work for being "elegiac," "excessively cerebral," and largely disconnected from the interests of the American Musical Theatre audience and fan base (Bryor and Davison). In spite of this, Brown prides himself on not writing for the current, increasingly commercial trends in American musical theatre composition, which he demeans as "surface entertainments," and will continue to "sacrifice of mass public acceptance in exchange for a real definable integrity" (Brown 2003). In response to his critics, he's written:

"The people who reflexively toss that out seem to think that musicals should be completely brainless and glitzy, but plays are allowed to be whatever they have to be to express what they want to say. I don't think of a musical as a lower form of theater and I refuse to 'write down' to it, but some audiences (and critics!) prefer their musicals to be as challenging as, say, an episode of 'Hee-Haw,' and I can't really expect them to get behind my work –nonetheless, I get furious when it's suggested that my shows are cold" (Brown 2003).

It was bold statements such as this and confidence in his artistic vision that initially piqued my interest in Jason Robert Brown. When I was introduced to his song-cycle, *Songs For A New World* in my undergraduate years, I was not particularly moved by his songs or their stories; To me, they sounded very similar and none stood out as unique. My appreciation for his composition and song writing began in the spring of my first year with University of Central

Florida Conservatory Theatre when I was cast in his first major musical *Parade*, for which he wrote the music and lyrics alongside Director Harold Prince and book writer Alfred Uhry. Soon after, in looking for a small musical to produce for my Masters Performance Thesis, I listened to the Original Cast Recording of *The Last Five Years* for the first time. Immediately, its complex melodies, sophisticated lyrics, emotional story line, and witty humor struck me. I was suddenly pulled into and fully, emotionally invested in the complicated and heart-breaking relationship. What is more, I found, in some ways, it mirrored my own life and recent relationships. Jamie's personal struggles, character arc, and journey resonated with me in a very deep and intimate way; I found myself connected to him and understanding him in a way I hadn't with a character in a long time. All at once, it was a piece of art that spoke to me not only as an actor, but also as a human being.

As I continued to explore the musical by analyzing the music and lyrics of *The Last Five Years*, it eventually started to represent, for me, everything that a piece of musical theatre should be and, unfortunately, an exception to what the art form is becoming. Jason Robert Brown's primary and only focus is to communicate a rich and complex story of two characters, Jamie and Cathy, over the course of their five-year relationship. While the two characters live out the relationship in chronological opposition and the musical is almost entirely sung through, with all major plot progression happening within the songs, the details of the story are all strongly grounded in reality and every aspect of the musical works towards the communication of the story. Current trends on Broadway show the art form being taken over by the likes of corporate producers and multi-million dollar budgets that yield productions concerned primarily with spectacle, polished effects, and celebrity. Weekly Broadway box office grosses prove that the

successes of sensations such as *Mamma Mia*, *Jersey Boys*, and most recently *Spiderman: Turn Off The Dark* are prime examples of how musical theatre relies on fantasy, pure entertainment, and escape before story. While other current Broadway musicals such as *Chicago*, *The Addam's Family*, and *How to Succeed In Business Without Really Trying* have marketed their shows solely on the names of their celebrity performers. Yet, as Jason Robert Brown explains, they should never be the primary focus and purpose behind musical theatre:

“I love flash and glitz and tap dancing and all of that stuff, really really really love it, but it's so hard to do it in a way that feels genuine and organic as opposed to either the manufactured tits-and-teeth crap that's always coming down the pike or the tongue-in-cheek sort of thing that spends the whole time apologizing for being a musical. I don't think it's bizarre for people to sing their emotions, that's what songs are, and I don't find it odd when someone who has been having a conversation finishes the conversation by bursting into song, that's what it sounds like in my head all the time. So when I see a musical, I ask that the music be amazing and the singing be amazing and the comedy be funny and the dancing be spectacular and the sets be beautiful and the pace be blinding, but I don't want any of that to happen at the expense of the story being told or the dignity of the characters, and very few, really a miniscule number of musicals can do that”
(Brown 2003).

While *The Last Five Years* is not without its challenges, it speaks to its audience, I believe in large part because it steers clear away from a dependence on the glitz and glamour that define so many contemporary musicals. Instead, all aspects of the production focus towards the simple display of a relationship between two people who love each other deeply and have given

themselves over to the other person fully. The characters are discovered to be flawed and imperfect, each with their own downfall, which are presented with a bittersweet beauty. Further, by examining their troubled and collapsing relationship from the prospective of both characters in chronological opposition, the audience is distanced from bias and blame and hopefully can appreciate their story with greater emotional substance, insight, and depth. By doing so, the audience is opened up to many universal themes, including marriage, its expectations, and unspoken competition that accompanies it, jealousy, individual self worth, success and failure, the concept of need versus want in a relationship, and the pursuit of happiness. Jason Robert Brown does not want his audience to think about the relationship and its characters; he wants them to feel with and for them.

I chose to perform Jason Robert Brown's musical *The Last Five Years* for my Masters Performance Thesis because I, too, believe strongly in the singular focus of communicating the story by creating honest, committed, and believably connected relationships on stage. The story line and the character arc of Jamie spoke to me on a very personal level and I felt a tremendous responsibility to tell his story and give it the emotional depth it deserves. I knew that performing this piece would challenge me in many ways as an actor and a singer. However, and perhaps more important, I felt like this was the perfect piece allow for depth of personal growth as a theatre artist, as a culmination of all of my learning at University of Central Florida Conservatory Theatre. In keeping with Brown's thoughts on the treatment of his musical, I have made a concerted effort to focus all aspect of my production singularly towards the communication of the characters and story to the audience. Effort was made to keep the rehearsal process highly collaborative and experimented in methods to developing meaningful and tangible relationships

between two characters that never appear in the same time and place. The scenery consisted of rehearsal cubes and stools, orchestrations were limited to a single piano accompanist, the lighting design was simplistic, and costumes were understated and timeless. By doing so, I intended to focus the audience singularly on the story arc of the two characters Jamie and Cathy, in order to create a meaningful and emotional experience for the audience.

CHAPTER TWO: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Biography of Jason Robert Brown

Jason Robert Brown was born in the suburbs of New York City in 1970 to Jewish parents, Stuart and Deborah Brown. He spent his childhood summers attending the French Woods Festival of the Performing Arts in Hancock, New York. He attended the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York, studying with Samuel Adler, Christopher Rouse, and Joseph Schwantner. After two years, he dropped out and moved back to New York City to pursue a career in theater. He began his career in New York City as an arranger, conductor, and pianist, most notably as the musical arranger for William Finn's *A New Brain*, and playing at several nightclubs and piano bars in the city. In a chance meeting, he befriended Daisy Prince, the daughter of director/producer Hal Prince. Together, they developed his first show, *Songs for a New World*, which Daisy Prince directed at the WPA Theater in New York City for 25 performances, opening on October 10, 1995. A song cycle of Brown's pop-rock-influenced compositions, it featured the song "Stars and the Moon," which has since become a cabaret standard and Brown's best-known composition to date (www.jasonrobertbrown.com).

Through his partnership with Daisy Prince, Brown was introduced to Harold Prince and was hired to write the music for the Broadway musical *Parade*, which was in development. Directed by Hal Prince and with a book by Alfred Uhry, the historical musical *Parade* based its plot on the trial and lynching of Leo Frank and the people of Marietta, Georgia. It premiered on December 17, 1998 and was very well received by most critics. However, it was not able to gain commercial success and closed after a run of eight-five performances (www.IBDB.com). That year, Brown received the 1999 Tony Award for Best Original Musical Score (www.IBDB.com).

Brown again collaborated with Daisy Prince for his third major show, *The Last Five Years*, for which he wrote the book as well as songs. The semi-autobiographical work was inspired by his failed first marriage to Terri O'Neill, Prince's secretary. *The Last Five Years* received mixed critical reviews and was not a commercial success, lasting only two months off-Broadway. In spite of this, Brown received two Drama Desk Awards for music and lyrics (www.IBDB.com).

Since, Brown contributed several songs to the Broadway flop *Urban Cowboy: The Musical*. He was nominated for the 2003 Tony Award for best Musical Score, losing out to *Hairspray*'s Scott Wittman and Marc Shaiman. In June 2005, Brown released a solo album, entitled "Wearing Someone Else's Clothes" (www.jasonrobertbrown.com). His most recent musical, *13*, written with Dan Elish and directed by Todd Graff, premiered at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, CA on January 7, 2007 to rave reviews. Subsequently, it played at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre on Broadway on October 5, 2008 and closed on January 4, 2009 (www.IBDB.com).

He is currently working on several projects, including serving as the orchestrator and arranger of Charles Strouse and Lee Adams's score for a proposed musical of "Star Wars." He has conducted for and created arrangements and orchestrations for Liza Minnelli, John Pizzarelli, Tovah Feldshuh, Laurie Beechman, and Lauren Kennedy. He is working on music for the highly anticipated musical version of the hit movie *Honeymoon in Vegas*. On July 18, 2010, Brown stated on his twitter webpage that he was working on a new show with Daisy Prince (www.jasonrobertbrown.com). Brown teaches courses in musical theatre performance and composition at the University of Southern California and tours, playing his own music, with his

band, the Caucasian Rhythm Kings. He is married to fellow artist Georgia Stitt, who was the conductor for the tour of *Parade*. They have daughter named Molly.

Production History of *The Last Five Years*

The Last Five Years was written by Jason Robert Brown and originally produced by the Northlight Theatre at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie, Illinois. It opened on May 23, 2001 under artistic director B.J. Jones and executive director Richard Friedman before closing on July 1, 2001. Directed by Daisy Prince, the production team included set and costumes by Beowulf Boritt, lighting by Christine Binder, sound by Rob Milburn and Ray Nardelli, casting by Mark Simon, musical direction by Thomas Murray, and stage manager Patty Lyons. Norbert Leo Butz performed the role of Jamie Wellerstein, joined by Lauren Kennedy as Catherine Hiatt (www.IBDB.com).

It was subsequently produced Off-Broadway at the Minetta Lane Theatre, once again with Norbert Leo Butz in the role of Jamie, joined by Sherie Rene Scott, who replaced Kennedy due to previous commitment to a role in *South Pacific* on London's West End. The production opened on March 3, 2002 and closed May 5, 2002. The designers remained the same as in the Chicago production, except the sound designer, Duncan Edwards. It was nominated for several awards, including a 2002 Outer Critics Circle Award nomination for Outstanding Off-Broadway Musical and two Lucille Lortel Nominations for Outstanding Musical and Outstanding Actor, Norbert Leo Butz. It received five Drama Desk nominations: Outstanding Musical, Outstanding Actor (Musical), Norbert Leo Butz, Outstanding Actress (Musical), Sherie Rene Scott, Outstanding Orchestrations, Jason Robert Brown, Outstanding Set Design, Beowulf Boritt. The

production received two Drama Desk Awards for Outstanding Music and Outstanding Lyrics, both to Jason Robert Brown (www.IBDB.com).

Since its Off-Broadway premiere, the musical and its songs have found a cult following among theatre enthusiasts around the world. The musical has been performed in almost every major regional theater in the US, as well as countless educational and community theatre productions. It continues to be produced internationally in Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Spain, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and England (Wikipedia contributors).

Synopsis of *The Last Five Years*

The Last Five Years tells the story of a relationship between Jamie Wellerstein and Cathy Hyatt over a period of five years, yet their stories are told in chronological opposition. As the musical begins, Cathy begins telling her story from the end of the relationship, while Jamie starts at their first meeting. As the two alternate scenes, Cathy and Jamie act out watershed moments in their relationship, with Jamie moving forward as Cathy moves backwards.

In the first song "Still Hurting," Cathy has just found a note on the table from her husband Jamie stating that their troubled marriage is finally over. She struggles with her feelings of loss and abandonment as she attempts to pick herself up from the man who left her and moved on, seemingly, so easily.

Jamie is introduced five years earlier, after he has just met Cathy. He sings the song "Shiksa Goddess," professing his love for Cathy and exclaiming his excitement that she is nothing like the various Jewish girls of his youth, whom he dated.

Jumping forward in time four years, Cathy is surprised to find that her husband has come to see her perform in Ohio on her birthday. Over the course of the song “See I’m Smiling,” she realizes he is not there to spend time together and work on their damaged marriage, as originally thought. Rather, he is there just to make a quick visit and return to New York City for a social party.

After their first date, Jamie follows a lead for a potential literary agent, whom he was put in contact with through a college professor. The agent is very interested in his work, and Jamie finds his career skyrocketing at the age of twenty-three with the song “Moving Too Fast.” He moves in with Cathy, and the two start to build their lives together.

Cathy’s acting career is struggling after having been turned down by a theatrical agent. In the song “I’m a Part of That,” she discusses what it feels like to have her career coming up flat while being married to the famous Jamie Wellerstein and his career. Even though he goes through periods, because of his writing, where he completely shuts her out emotionally then randomly lets her back in, she tries to find contentment in the fact that she is in some small way responsible for a part of his success.

Jamie sits Cathy down to give her his present for their second Christmas together – a story he wrote for her, “The Schmuel Song”. He weaves a perfectly crafted story about Schmuel, an old Jewish tailor, who is shaken when the clock in his shop begins to talk. After some initial resistance, the clock guides him through building a magical dress that transports him through time so he can once again be with the woman he loves. In telling this story, Jamie hopes to inspire Cathy to leave her job at the bar and pursue her dream of becoming an actress. He closes his story by telling Cathy, “Have I mentioned today how lucky I am to be in love with you?”

Cathy, singing “A Summer In Ohio,” imagines what her life would be like at her newly acquired summer stock job in Ohio. While the situation is less than desirable, she does her best to have a positive playful attitude about the situation. At the same time, Jamie remains in New York City. As his latest book has just reached the best seller list, she writes to him in the hopes he will be able to make a visit to see her.

“The Next Ten Minutes” begins with Jamie preparing for and proposing to Cathy. She then joins him, as the two share their only moments on stage physically together. They exchange wedding vows and their wedding kiss – the only moment of physical contact in the show. After, Cathy experiences the proposal as she continues her journey backwards from the wedding.

Immediately following, we see Jamie, now married, as he begins to experience the stresses of marriage life paired with the temptations that accompany his success and status. Through it all, he reiterates his love for Cathy in "A Miracle Would Happen." While Cathy is auditioning "When You Come Home To Me," Jamie promises to meet her as soon as he is able to escape work and meetings with his publisher.

Cathy shares with her father the stress and difficulty of the auditioning actor’s lifestyle along with the daily rejection she faces in "Climbing Uphill". Often her mind wanders about the inadequacies of her life, yet she is determined to build her own career, independent from the life she has in the shadow of Jamie.

Jamie and Cathy are in the middle of a fight over whether or not he should attend a party hosted by his book publishers. In “If I Didn’t Believe In You,” he decides that he will be going to the party with or without her. He lets out his feelings, saying he doesn’t feel supported by

Cathy and that he feels weighted down by her depression and failures, yet through all of that, he still loves and supports her.

Cathy is taking Jamie to meet her parents for the first time. Over the course of the car ride, she excitedly rambles on about her disappointing past relationships with the hope of a bright future with Jamie ("I Can Do Better Than That").

Jamie wakes up in bed along side another woman, whom he admits he has fallen in love with. Fighting off a panic attack in "Nobody Needs to Know," he decides he must go visit Cathy in Ohio and finally end their failed relationship.

Cathy is elated after her first date with Jamie. In "Goodbye Until Tomorrow" she is left breathless and speechless after they just shared their first kiss and stand apart from each other at her front gate. On stage at the same time, Jamie leaves their house together and offers her a simple goodbye. The musical concludes with both Jamie and Cathy leaving stage after a five year journey, Jamie at the end of their relationship and Cathy moments after their first date.

Musical and Theatrical Influences of Jason Robert Brown

As a musician and composer, Jason Robert Brown cites an eclectic mix of artists whom have influenced his works. As a result, the music in his compositions, especially those in *The Last Five Years*, jump between countless musical styles and genres. As with many musicians, Brown's earliest musical influences came from family. He offered that his family was not particularly musical, but his grandfather owned a piano that sat in the basement of his Brooklyn home. As a young child he quickly became mystified by it and asked to have it moved to their

living room to learn to play. He remembers thinking at seven years old, “I really want to be sitting at a piano and playing. They seem fun and cool.”

More peripherally, his great-grandfather on his mother’s side was a Klezmer violinist. Yet, as a Jewish composer who wrote music for a Jewish character in Jamie Wellerstein, it is paramount to note the presence of Klezmer influences. Klezmer music began as a musical tradition of instrumental dances at Eastern European Jewish weddings and celebrations. However, it slowly shifted and evolved once it was brought to America along with the influx of European immigrants between 1880 and 1924. As Jewish Americans began to assimilate into the mainstream culture, diluted forms of Klezmer, heavily influenced by American jazz styles, were able to gain popularity. In *The Last Five Years*, the influences of Klezmer are most notable in “Schmuel Song,” a Jewish folktale that Jamie, a Jew, has written for Cathy. The song is quintessentially Klezmer in its characteristic expressive melodies, orchestrations, and Yiddish folk story telling - complete with laughing and weeping to imitate khazone and para-liturgical singing.

As a young adult, radio pop icons, particularly Billy Joel, heavily influenced Brown. When he began playing piano, he always fantasized about being the “guy who played the piano and sang, while people screamed. That sounded like fun.” Even to today, he states that his life and his relationship with music was forever changed in 1978, when his family received a copy of Billy Joel’s LP *The Stranger*. After owning it, it became the driving force and motivation behind his musical writing and composition. He states, “And in terms of me looking back to figure out how I turned into the songwriter I am now, I think that *The Stranger* – with its warring impulses of blue-collar rock versus Tin Pan Alley sophistication, art-rock ambition versus Baroque

intimacy, slick and polished production versus rambunctious and ragged playing – comes closest to predicting the kind of work I ended up doing and loving (Brown 2011).”

However, in college he found the music he was writing was not shaping out to be radio pop songs. He eventually found his compositions had more “build” than the hits heard on the radio. He quickly learned to embrace this difference and follow his writing down a new path, stating:

“Pop songs by their nature are about establishing a mood, sustaining it, and finishing with it. Theater songs are about the opposite; good theater songs go from one end of an idea to a different place. I wanted to write songs that had movement; that had journeys to them. I realized I was not going to be Elton John, or Billy Joel, or Randy Newman ... I'll be some guy who does whatever weird thing it is that I do ... I still don't know what that is, but the closest thing I found was writing musicals (Brown 2011).”

Brown solely credits Stephen Sondheim as being the musical inspiration that led him away from his dreams of pop-stardom. In a recent interview, Brown stated that his first introductions to Sondheim’s *Sweeney Todd* and *Sunday in the Park With George* was what finally broke him away from his joining a rock band and trying to be Billy Joel. For him, experiencing these musicals was transformative:

“Once I heard what could be done, what enormous musical and emotional potential could be unleashed, I knew I had to write musicals. To say I'm a Sondheim Worshiper is to understate the case considerably - I owe my ambition and my dreams to him. Without his example, I wouldn't even know who to become (Brown 2010).”

What remains constant through each of these pieces is Sondheim's dedication to honest emotional attachment, telling the story, and allowing the character to live, breathe, feel, think, and react in their environment as they would in reality without any forced conventions, all of which Jason Robert Brown draws from in his works. Brown has received much critical acclaim for his work for creating music that allows for intimate, character and emotionally driven lyrics. While he is far from the household name that Sondheim has become, many theatre critics proclaim Brown to be Sondheim's successor and the next great American musical theatre composer.

As such, many influences and parallels exist between Sondheim's work and that of Jason Robert Brown. One such is their dedication to the honesty and integrity of the moment. Sondheim purposely omitted an applause getting "button" at the end of "Rose's Turn" for Ethel Merman because the character is having a nervous breakdown at the end of the song and he believed it would be "dishonest" given the context and mood of the piece at that particular. *The Last Five Years* borrows the same logic in its musical structure, as almost every song in the score flows seamlessly into the next as an *attacca as one*. Brown, focusing on a continual driving force and an emotionally-connected story line, holds the integrity of the piece, his message, and the emotional weight and journey of his character above audience applause and actor recognition.

Because of its complicated, non-linear plot, many connections are drawn between *The Last Five Years* and Sondheim's poorly received 1981 musical, *Merrily We Roll Along*, which tells its entire story in reverse chronological order. In an interview, Brown offered, "I'm always very moved in the theater by pieces that play with time and pieces that show cause and effect

(Hodkins 2004).” Sondheim uses the reverse chronological order to shape the audience’s emotional experience by giving them more back-story and information about the relationships on stage than the characters have at any given moment. When questioned about this conceptual similarity, Brown proudly stated, "*Merrily* was a very powerful (influence) on me as a kid. It's always meant a lot to me." He even added that there is an obscure reference to *Merrily* within *The Last Five Years*, but that he has, “yet to meet anybody who's spotted it" (Hodkins).

The Sondheim musical that may have had the most direct affect on the writing of Brown was *Company*. *Company*, written eleven years before *Merrily We Roll Along*, redefined what a musical could be, by throwing away the traditional plot structure of most book musicals at the time, which followed a clearly-delineated plot. In creating *Company*, Sondheim birthed the first concept musical, a musical composed of short vignettes, presented in no particular chronological order and connected through a theme, rather than relying on straightforward story telling. Loosely connected by Bobby's 35th birthday celebration, Sondheim depicted a life in New York City that wasn't always happy, wasn't black and white, and wasn't always clear. Instead, he showed the world characters who were lost, who couldn't find their way in the world, and felt alienated and disconnected from the world – themes that would find heavily themselves laced within *The Last Five Years*, with both Jamie and Cathy searching for fulfillment and satisfaction from the hungry and drive in their lives. The dialogue in *Company* did not build tension for or lead into songs in the traditional musical theatre sense. Rather, he created an environment in which the two were seamlessly integrated. Brown also borrows from this, as there is almost no spoken word in *The Last Five Years* and the music carries conversational tones at times.

Importantly for Sondheim, *Company* did not depict the stories of fictional, stock characters. Sondheim was not interested in made-up people, in made-up situations – he wanted to tell a story about the lives of real people, something that has not been done as successfully until Brown’s *The Last Five Years*. Sondheim wanted the audience to feel as if they could leave the musical and meet the person they had just watched on stage in the subway later that night. He avoided the cliché that the purpose of theatre was to entertain and have the audience escape reality. Rather, through *Company*, Sondheim forced the audience to deal with the issues they were seeking to escape. Sondheim put it best in explaining his message to the audience in *Company*, which could easily describe the action of *The Last Five Years* as well:

“Musicals for decades have had no doubts about the efficacy of a happy ending. We were saying something ambiguous, which is, actually there are no endings, it keeps going on, that’s what *Company*’s really about. It’s always difficult to make a contact with, commit to, and live with somebody, and at the same time it’s impossible not to. But it’s never going to be easy, and it’s never going to be solved, because it’s not a problem that has a solution. It’s not even a problem; it’s just what life is” (Maslin and Kantor p 333)

After Stephen Sondheim, the American musical was forever changed. Dramatic language the likes of which you would find in a Tennessee Williams or Arthur Miller play had now found a home in the American musical. With Sondheim, love songs would come from a place of utter and complete honesty and truthfulness, however imperfect and crudely worded. Perhaps most powerful of all is that Sondheim made musical theatre a dangerous place to be, by making it as strange, unpredictable, emotionally raw, and open as the human condition. It is

clear through his work on *The Last Five Years* that Jason Robert Brown continues in this tradition, as he too re-defines the American musical.

CHAPTER THREE: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Dramatic Structure of *The Last Five Years*

The Last Five Years follows the traditional dramatic structure developed by Gustav Freytag, as do the overwhelming majority of contemporary plotted musicals. However, it is partially hidden because the chronology of events in Cathy's story line is experienced in reverse order. In order to best comprehend and analyze the dramatic structure of the piece, it is helpful to reorganize the events in the musical, so that Jamie's and Cathy's plot points follow the same converging linear path. As such, the following dramatic structure outline is examined in a simple chronological fashion, out of context from performance order.

1. Exposition

The first few songs that Jamie and Cathy sing about their new relationships with each other introduce the two characters and offer a significant amount of background information about them. The songs Jamie and Cathy sing after their first date with each other establish the baseline for their personalities and their relationship they will grow into. In "I Can Do Better Than That," Cathy explains her previous relationships. "Moving Too Fast" in particular sets up a large amount of information about Jamie's personality, career, and emotional disposition. It spans a large amount of time and sets up a significant shift in their relationship once they begin living together in New York City. The inciting moment, which sets the remainder of the story and the Rising Action in motion, is the publishing of Jamie's first book and the beginning of his writing career.

2. Rising action

Once Jamie becomes a published author, it begins to place some tension and complication for the relationship. His successes begin to outweigh hers, which force an unspoken sense of contention and competition for Cathy. Matters are further complicated with lesser, secondary conflicts, that build in small frustrations between the two. While Jamie inspires Cathy to pursue a career in acting, she goes on unsuccessful audition after unsuccessful audition. She begins to get very beat down by repeated rejection, while Jamie's writing career is followed with subsequent successes. At the same time, their love with and for each other continues to grow and expand, and their relationship finds new depth and meaning.

3. Climax (turning point)

The third act of the dramatic structure is the climax, or turning point of the musical, in which a significant change occurs for both of the protagonists. In *The Last Five Years*, the climax is "The Next Ten Minutes," the musical number where Jamie and Cathy get married. It is a watershed moment for the ever-evolving relationship of the characters and the turning point of the musical because it is the only moment the two are together, both physically on stage and emotionally in the same place along their journey and timeline through the relationship. Up until this point, things have gone generally well in the relationship for both Jamie and Cathy, yet now the relationship begins to take a turn for the worst.

4. Falling action

The next sets of songs chronologically represent the falling action of the musical, as the conflict between the two characters begins to spiral downward. In "Summer in Ohio," the audience learns that Cathy has been able to secure a few acting jobs but could never hope to match the success that her husband has. In "A Part Of That" she divulges a growing depression

at the thought of living her life in her husband's shadow, but at the same time grows ever dependant on him to feel any love or self worth in her life. Jamie, on the other hand, has been blessed with continued success in his writing career, but is now being propositioned by an onslaught of single women. He talks through his frustrations in "A Miracle Would Happen," trying to convince himself that his relationship with Cathy will be "fine."

However, the rift between Cathy and Jamie continues to grow and separate them. They fight constantly, with more frequency and intensity. Cathy becomes increasingly jealous of the successes that Jamie has experienced, while Jamie loses some sensitivity in how he treats and addresses Cathy. In the song, "If I Didn't Believe In You," Jamie corners Cathy and asks her to finally be open about why they are constantly fighting. Eventually, the two are able to get to the real issue that she is not happy with her life and is angry that Jamie is and can be without her. He states he cannot continue to try to lift her up through her problems, and she simply must be accountable for her own life. Moreover, he says he is not going to compromise his happiness, his life, or his career for her. It is perfectly clear to both of them at this point that they are in a very broken relationship that will not be fixed.

5. Dénouement, Catastrophe, or Resolution

The complexities of a relationship in modern times are difficult to simplify and categorize within the dramatic structure as outlined by Gustav Freytag. In the song "Nobody Needs To Know," it is revealed that Jamie has started having an affair with another woman, whom he now loves. He realizes he must do what is best for him and cut himself off from Cathy completely. He stoically and firmly says goodbye to Cathy and moves on with his life, hurt and wounded by their failed relationship. Cathy is left sitting at their kitchen table with no hope in

sight, wondering how he could have walked away from the relationship. One could argue that Jamie, by choosing to cheat on his wife, has “fallen from grace.” By its definition, a Catastrophe occurs when the protagonist of the story is worse off at the end than they were at the beginning of the piece. For Jamie and Cathy, one could argue that both characters are worse off after their divorce or that they are better for it. Certainly it is difficult and there is no resolution within their marriage, but perhaps the two are able to find a resolution internally.

Chronological Opposition in The Last Five Years

A document analyzing the structural components of Jason Robert Brown’s *The Last Five Years* would be remiss without some exploration on one of the storyline’s key components – the chronological opposition between Jamie and Cathy. *The Last Five Years* is certainly not alone among movies, plays, and musicals in adopting a non-linear storyline. However, what is unique about this particular piece is the division of the plot into two, almost perfectly symmetrical, divergent storylines. The many critics and reviewers who have seen the musical over the years have offered a wide variety of opinions as to the purpose, the most cynical offering that it is used merely as a cover up to disguise an otherwise weak and predictable plot (www.theater.nytimes.com). Yet, I believe this separation is one of the most successful aspects of the musical in helping to communicate the story.

In developing and researching this particular production, I spent a great deal of time exploring what was to be gained by separating the two story lines, rather than having them play out side by side. The strength in Brown making that decision is he is able to eliminate some bias from the audience members. If the story of the relationship between Jamie and Cathy was

performed linearly, each audience member would naturally take sides, form opinions, and maybe even point blame and find fault for the characters' failed relationship. It seems that in separating their storylines, Brown hopes to create a controlled environment in which both characters are able to live their lives and experience their world without the emotion of the other character coming into effect and obstructing their journey. Allowing the characters to exist solitarily and tell their story uninterrupted by the other is in an effort to eliminate blame and elicit empathy and understanding of the audience for both parties. Brown explains,

“Everything I did in "The Last Five Years" was part of a conscious effort to make both of those characters absolutely real and completely sympathetic. I don't mean we're supposed to like either of them all the time, but we should understand them and see how they could get from Point A to Point B. I had some comments from audience members that it's not clear enough whose "fault" it is that the marriage collapses, but I really resisted creating some defining horrific moment at which everything falls apart, because I don't think that's how it happens. It's nobody's fault, and it's both of their faults, and their inability to articulate that culpability is what makes the show so meaningful to me, at least — blame is very fluid and volatile, but the pain of loss is absolutely immutable (Brown 2003).”

Musical Structure of The Last Five Years

Song structure in Western music is traditionally broken down into two forms: strophic and through composed. Strophic form, also known as chorus form, is a way of distinguishing and structuring a piece of music based on its repetition of a certain musical section. It is the

musical equivalent of repeatedly versed stanzas in poetry and lyrics, where text repeats the same rhyming scheme of a particular stanza or couplet. While there are many examples of the strophic form in classical music, they are harder to come by in contemporary music, in the traditional definition of the form. In today's musical theatre, as well as folk and pop music, the strophic form is seen as a song that holds to a repeated verse-chorus structure. Most songs in popular music follow the easily accessible and "catchy" A-B-A form with similar music and lyrics that accompany repeated stanzas of verse with a constant chorus. In musical theatre, while the lyrics and accompanying music of each verse and chorus may not be identical, they are usually identified as strophic if they carry over similar musical and lyrical structure and theme.

Its counterpart, the through-composed form, is categorized by a continuous, non-repetitive development of a musical melody that is not as easily divided into formal sections. Simply put, a song is categorized as through composed if it has different, developing music and lyrics throughout the song. In musical theatre, through composition is usually a device used by the composer to showcase a character who desperately wants or needs something or someone. Stephen Sondheim is known for popularizing the trend of using through-composed songs in his musicals, using his music as a device to fully develop plot and character. Other contemporary composers, such as Andrew Lloyd Webber and Jason Robert Brown, are known for their use of through composed music, which steps away from traditional musical theatre's almost exclusive use of the strophic form.

Additionally, musical theatre songs are broken into categories based on whether they offer commentary or are plot driven. As suggested by the name, plot driven songs serve to advance the action of the musical, while in commentary based songs, the character singing the

piece steps away from the action and discusses it, usually with him or herself. Interestingly enough, none of Jason Robert Brown's songs in *The Last Five Years* fit entirely into strophic or through-composed categories, as they all carry elements of both. Similarly, as the songs and lyrics are the only convention used to advance the plot, all are in some ways plot driven and offer exposition. Yet, some are more clearly and more directly advance the plot, typically when the singer is directly addressing the other character. Conversely, the songs sung primarily with an internal voice, by definition, are mostly commentaries. The following is a break down of the songs in *The Last Five Years* based on their classifications as strophic vs. through composed and commentary vs. plot driven:

1. "Still Hurting" – Catherine

In the opening number of *The Last Five Years*, Cathy sits alone in the apartment that she shares with her husband Jamie. She has just found a note from him, ending their marriage and five year relationship. This song, like most in the show, is a very intimate, deeply personal, and private conversation. In this particular song, Cathy is singing to herself, struggling to deal with the thought of their break up. At the same time she is fighting the pain of knowing Jamie has been able to turn his back on her and their marriage permanently. This song seems to be commentary, for the most part, as Cathy is not directly addressing Jamie, but rather talking to herself. Through her thoughts, she is not able to find any peace of mind, come to a conclusion, or find resolution or acceptance for what has happened. The song has several musical, melodic, and rhythmic themes that carry through the piece, but not to the extent of a repeated chorus, making it a through-

composed piece. There is a clear path, movement of thought, and sense of contemplation that carries through the piece.

2. “Shiksa Goddess” – Jamie

In the first song that Jamie is introduced, five years prior, he has just met Cathy and is ecstatic at the thought of a relationship with her. This song is almost entirely commentary, as he recounts his past relationships with various Jewish girls, and expresses to Cathy his excitement at the feeling of having found the person he’s waited for his entire life. This song is mostly strophic, as it has a rhythmic and melodic continuity throughout. While the words of each verse change and build in intensity, the musicality of the piece remains constant.

3. “See I’m Smiling” – Catherine

Cathy, traveling backwards chronologically, is in Ohio where she is performing for the summer. Jamie has come to meet her despite their troubled marriage, and she is hopeful they will be able to begin patching their marriage. This through-composed and plot driven song covers the course of their emotional and heated conversation outside. The melody of the song progresses and swells with their developing conversation. At the same time, it reveals huge insights into their relationship over the past five years, and the action over the course of the musical develops and advances the plot. Even though it is her birthday and she is thrilled to see her husband, by the end of the song she is broken and let down that he has decided to leave her early to return to spend time with his friends.

4. “Moving Too Fast” – Jamie

Jamie, at 23, finds out that a potential literary agent is very interested in his work, this just after his first date with Cathy. This plot driven song covers a significant amount of time passed, as it explains how his career quickly takes off, he drops out of Columbia University, and moves to NYC with Cathy. This song, like his first, is very catchy, has a great deal of excitement and passion, all while delivering a significant amount of plot detail. It could be argued that it is strophic, because while the plot of the piece is progressing, there is a clear and distinct verse and chorus pattern that is repeated.

5. “A Part of That” – Catherine

During this song, Cathy offers her frustrated commentary about her struggling career, having just been turned down by an agent. She offers other examples of why she’s disgruntled, including being constantly asked what it is like to be married to Jamie, a famous author. She also expresses how she is forced to patiently wait out his mood swings when he writes, and consequently shuts her out emotionally and ignores her. The choruses of this song are almost exactly identical musically and lyrically, which is might be to overemphasize that she is “a part of that” – a part of his life, that it is not a shared and equal exchange.

6. “The Schmuely Song” – Jamie

The Schmuely Song is a story Jamie wrote for Cathy as part of his present for their second Christmas together. The song is very plot driven as he uses the story as a means to inspire Cathy to go out and pursue her dreams of becoming an actress. He tells her to quit her day job and go and be happy, giving her encouragement, love, and even the number of a “headshot guy and a new Backstage.” The song follows a strophic form, as

the music accompanying the story is repetitive – almost identical from verse to verse.

Also, the choruses, in which the clock speaks to Schmuell, are identical, in lyrics and melody. He closes the song by opening to Cathy by telling her how lucky he is to be in love with her.

7. “A Summer In Ohio” – Catherine

Cathy uses this song as commentary on her less than exotic summer stock job in Ohio, as she writes to Jamie. She jokes about her situation even though it is awful and tries to make the most of it. She offers a lot of information about the recent developments in their relationship. More specifically, while her acting career is barely staying afloat, Jamie is back in New York with his latest book becoming a bestseller. The song could be considered through composed or strophic: through composed because the song lacks the repetitive balance between verse and chorus and strophic in that it does have a slight repetitive musical pattern, albeit one that is progressive

8. “The Next Ten Minutes” – Jamie, Catherine

Jamie begins the song, preparing himself for his marriage with Cathy, who later appears in her wedding dress. The two meet at the altar and exchange their vows and promises of their undying love, physically together for the first and only time during the show. The song is very plot driven. It is a monumental moment on stage, because it is the only time the two appear together. The song would best be categorized as through composed, as there is a clear progression and swelling of emotion between the two characters on stage together in the song. There are musical themes that carry throughout the piece; however, it is not done so as the main focus of the song.

9. “A Miracle Would Happen/ When you Come Home to Me” – Jamie, Catherine

Jamie comments to himself that he feels once he’s married, he’s tempted and attracted to other women more than ever. Yet, despite being the center of attention and feeling pulled toward these relationships, he tries to convince himself that his relationship is “fine.”

While the first part of the song is commentary, the second part begins to offer more plot information than commentary, as he talks directly to Cathy. The song follows the strophic form, in that it follows a very catchy musical style and repeats its verse chorus format.

10. “Climbing Uphill” – Catherine

Cathy shares with her father the stress and frustrations of hitting the pavement day in and out for auditions only to be faced with repeated rejection. The song has two sections, which rotate and play in opposition to each other. The first is her actual audition piece, which is the same song sung several times. Over the course of “Climbing Uphill,” this audition piece “When You Come Home To Me” is sung repeatedly. Musically and lyrically it is exactly the same, yet the style and tempo of the song is altered for comic effect. Within the larger umbrella song “Climbing Uphill,” they are strophic. The other part of the song is Cathy’s internal monologue commenting about the happenings over her audition. These ramblings do not happen in any particular musical pattern.

11. “If I Didn’t Believe in You” – Jamie

This song takes place during/ after a large fight between Jamie and Cathy. He has just gotten a book published and is upset that Cathy refuses to support him by going to a party thrown by his publishing friends. In this through composed and plot driven piece, he

opens up to Cathy by saying they need to stop fighting over surface issues, like parties, and really talk about what's really happening. After some time, he says he feels condemned for his successes, has always supported Cathy, and doesn't think she has supported him at all. While each verse has a similar musical accompaniment, the song is structured as through composed and very plot driven, because there is a clear progression, thought pattern, and emotional arc through the piece.

12. "I Can Do Better Than That" – Catherine

As Cathy becomes younger in time, her songs become brighter, catchier, and more youthful. In this commentary-based song, Cathy is driving Jamie to meet her parents, while she excitedly recalls her disappointments and repeated let downs from previous relationships, comparing them constantly to the potential promising future the two will have. This song follows the strophic form, as each verse and chorus are musically identical, each telling the story of a different broken ex relationship and experience.

13. "Nobody Needs to Know" – Jamie

In this song, Jamie wakes up singing to Elise, the woman he's having an affair with. Knowing he has to go to Ohio to see Cathy, he sits in bed battling a growing sense of panic and an overwhelming feeling of inevitability, while he admits to Elise that he has fallen in love with her. This song is written as through composed, as there is a clear, continuous development of the melodic theme throughout accompanying the Jamie's thought pattern. It is mostly plot driven, in that the song itself comes out of the actions and the situation Jamie is currently in. There are moments in it that Jamie is commenting on his current predicament and trying to reason with himself.

14. “Goodbye Until Tomorrow/ I Could Never Rescue You” – Catherine, Jamie

The last song of *The Last Five Years* bookmarks with Cathy jumping around in excitement, having just gotten into her room from her first date with Jamie. Her song is entirely plot driven, as she gets swept up sweetly singing about their first kiss they shared and imagines holding onto the moment for forever. She says goodbye to him, until tomorrow and waits for the next time he calls. In the same song, Jamie, at the end of their five-year relationship, bids her a restrained, quiet, forced pleasant, and plain and simple goodbye, showing his side of the end of their relationship. The first section of the song “Goodbye Until Tomorrow” repeats its chorus and has a strophic form. When Jamie is introduced into the song, the difficult, developing, and shifting musical structure opens up into a complex through-composed melody that opens her world to life and possibility. At the same time, the musical accompaniment of the piece is able to bring closure to his story and his relationship and mirrors the music that is heard at the Prologue of the musical, which accompanies Cathy’s realization of the end of their five-year relationship.

CHAPTER FOUR: A CHARACTER ANALYSIS

A. Character Situation

- a. What is the situation of your character and how does it change throughout the play?

The Last Five Years tells the story of Jamie Wellerstein, a successful writer, throughout the course of his five-year relationship with Catherine Hiatt, a struggling actress. At the beginning of their relationship, Jamie is madly in love with his Shiksa Goddess, but over the course of their relationship, they grow apart and eventually divorce. He moves on in his life with Elise, the woman he cheated on Cathy with.

- b. What is the initial situation before the conflict is locked?

The first few songs establish the given circumstances. Jamie and Cathy are introduced, as they sing about their new relationships with each other along with a significant amount of supporting information about them. The songs that Jamie and Cathy sing after their first date with each other establish the baseline for their personalities and their relationship that they will grow into. In “I Can Do Better Than That,” Cathy explains her previous relationships. “Moving Too Fast” in particular sets up a large amount of information about Jamie’s personality, career, and emotional disposition. It spans a large amount of time and sets up a significant shift in their relationship once they begin living together in New York City. The inciting moment, which sets the remainder of the story and the Rising Action in motion, is the publishing of Jamie’s first book and the beginning of his writing career

- c. What is the situation after the conflict is locked?

Once Jamie becomes a published author, it begins to place some tension and complication for the relationship, and essentially locks the conflict for the remainder of their relationship. His successes begin to outweigh hers, which force an unspoken sense of contention and competition for Cathy. Matters are further complicated with lesser, secondary conflicts, that build in small frustrations between the two. While Jamie inspires Cathy to pursue a career in acting, she goes on unsuccessful audition after unsuccessful audition. She begins to get very beat down by repeated rejection, while Jamie's writing career is followed with subsequent successes. At the same time, their love with and for each other continues to grow and expand, and their relationship finds new depth and meaning.

- d. What is the situation after the confrontation?

In *The Last Five Years*, the confrontation or climax is "The Next Ten Minutes," the musical number where Jamie and Cathy get married. It is a watershed moment for the ever-evolving relationship of the characters and the turning point of the musical because it is the only moment that the two are together, both physically on stage and emotionally in the same place along their journey and timeline through the relationship. Up until this point, things have gone generally well in the relationship for both Jamie and Cathy, yet now the relationship begins to take a turn for the worst.

- e. What is the situation after the culmination?

The next sets of songs chronologically represent the situation after the culmination, or the falling action of the musical, as the conflict between the two characters begins to spiral downward. In "Summer in Ohio," the audience learns that

Cathy has been able to secure a few acting jobs but could never hope to match the success that her husband has. In “A Part Of That” she divulges a growing depression at the thought of living her life in her husband’s shadow, but at the same time grows ever dependant on him to feel any love or self worth in her life. Jamie on the other hand has been blessed with continued success in his writing career, but is now being propositioned by an onslaught of single women. He talks through his frustrations in “A Miracle Would Happen,” trying to convince himself that his relationship with Cathy will be “fine.”

However, the rift between Cathy and Jamie continues to grow and separate them. They fight constantly, with more frequency and intensity. Cathy becomes increasingly jealous of the successes that Jamie has experienced, while Jamie loses some sensitivity in how he treats and addresses Cathy. In the song, “If I Didn’t Believe In You,” Jamie corners Cathy and asks her to finally be open about why they are constantly fighting. Eventually the two are able to down to the real issue that she is not happy with her life and is angry that Jamie is and can be without her. He states that he cannot continue to try to lift her up through her problems, and that simply she must be accountable for her own life. Moreover, he says that he is not going to compromise his happiness, his life, or his career for her. It is perfectly clear to both of them at this point that they are in a very broken relationship that will not be fixed.

f. What is the final situation after the resolution?

While Jamie and Cathy are not able to resolve their marital differences at their end of their story arc in *The Last Five Years*, in some ways the divorce between the

two serves as a resolution. While they may not have compromise or peace in their marriage, it is important for each of them to decide for themselves that they can be ok with the decisions they've made and continue to live their lives. In the song "Nobody Needs To Know," it is revealed that Jamie has started having an affair with another woman, whom he now loves. He realizes that he must do what is best for him and cut himself off from Cathy completely. He stoically and firmly says goodbye to Cathy and moves on with his life, hurt and wounded by their failed relationship. Cathy is left sitting at their kitchen table with no hope or resolution in sight, wondering how he could have walked away from the relationship.

B. Character Predicament

- a. What option does your character chose in order to deal with the overall predicament? (The option your character chooses or rejects reveals the character's flaw or valor, which is often hidden or subconscious until this moment).

Jamie's overall predicament throughout the course of the musical is balancing his life, happiness, and successes with Cathy's. He ultimately chooses his life, happiness, and career over compromising and sacrificing to accommodate hers. He spends five years trying to do everything he can to make and keep her happy, but it gets to a point where he can't do it anymore without holding himself back, and so he must break away.

C. Character Actions

- a. What does your character do?

Jamie is a writer. He quits from Columbia University once he first gets published and his career takes off. He lives in NYC with his girlfriend and then wife Cathy. He spends most of his days secluded and writing to himself. He spends his nights going out, partying, and socializing with his agent and people in his career network.

b. List objective

- i. “Shiksa Goddess” – to flatter and flirt with Cathy
- ii. “Moving Too Fast” – to congratulate and praise self for successes, to posture, to inflate ego
- iii. “The Schmuel Song” – to encourage Cathy to audition
- iv. “The Next Ten Minutes” – to propose to Cathy
- v. “A Miracle Would Happen” – to convince self to stay loyal, reassure self that I love Cathy
- vi. “If I Didn't Believe in You” – to open up to Cathy, explain
- vii. “Nobody Needs to Know” – to wrestle with panic attack and settle inner turmoil, to reassure that this new relationship will work
- viii. “Goodbye Until Tomorrow” – to leave Cathy, detach from emotions

D. Character Appearance

- a. Describe the character’s looks, physical characteristics, and carriage of the body based on the script.

Jamie is young and good looking. His personal appearance is probably a little bit messy and unkempt. He’s Jewish, and his physical appearance should probably

reflect that. He is very confident and passionate about his work and his beliefs, which is reflected in his posture.

- b. Compare your own physical characteristics with those of the character (structure, build, facial features, complexion, etc.)

My age, height, and look could be physically compatible to those of a typical “Jamie,” with the exception of not being Jewish. However, many actors who aren’t of Jewish decent play the role, as his religion is a secondary theme. While being Jewish, he needs to be very all-American, soft, welcoming, and sweet, all of which I tend to represent. Yet, at the same time, there is a thirst, hunger, drive, and restless passion that needs to be shown in his face and through his body language.

- c. Do you have the natural physical and emotional disposition to embody the character?

I believe I match the physical and emotional disposition needed for Jamie very well. Physically, we can match up well. He starts his five-year relationship with Cathy at 23 and I believe that I can convincingly play this arc of 23 through 28. While not an accomplished writer, I believe that we have a comparable amount of life experience and similar views on life and relationships. I believe that I can also connect very deeply and personally with his emotional disposition, which is why I selected the piece for my master’s thesis. I can connect with his excited feelings of love for Cathy at the beginning of the relationship and his need to prove himself to her. Once he meets her, he’s convinced that he must live his life for her and is willing

to do anything to make her happy and successful. However, that innocence and patience is constantly tested and challenged.

E. Character Center

- a. What is the character's psychological fixation or habitual activity?

Jamie's psychological fixation is his need to be successful in his career. At the same time he has a psychological fixation on his need to take care of and protect Cathy. He is very sweet and loving to her and wants her to be as motivated, determined, passionate, and successful as he is.

- b. Define the character's physical gravity center based on anatomical and psychological factors?

Jamie leads with his head, because he is constantly thinking, even in his relationship with Cathy. He tries to think from his heart when he deals with Cathy, but has a hard time dwelling in that place for long periods of time, and is not very emotionally open and available to it.

- c. Define the quality of the character's overall center.

Jamie is very centered in his drive to be successful and powerful in his career. It comes into conflict and is thrown off balance when it he has to juggle his life and his career for Cathy's.

F. Character Movement

- a. What is the weight or force of your character's movement?

Jamie has very strong movement. He is often tense and seems to carry a lot of weight in his movement, as he is constantly thinking and fighting himself in his head, which places tension in his body.

- b. What is the tempo of your character's movement? (Quick, slow, sudden, sustained, short, long)

When he is dreaming about or with Cathy early in his life, Jamie has very slow and sustained movements. When he gets excited, they quicken in pace. The more he grows up, grows away, and distances himself from Cathy, his movement toward her gets very quick and short movements. He struggles a lot more with the relationship and so his nerves force erratic and sudden movement patterns.

- c. What is the shape or direction of your character's movement in space? (Straight, wavy, direct, flexible, rigid or pliant)

Jamie's direction of movement is very straight, which mirrors how he carries out his life. He is very direct with Cathy; he doesn't beat around the bush. He says what he wants. He thinks and moves in very direct ways. His movement gets more rigid as he grows up and distances himself from Cathy.

- d. What is the rhythm of your character's movement? (Regular, irregular, free, bound, rigorous, spontaneous, steady, unsteady, fluent, erratic, flowing, or staccato)

Jamie tries to have regular and steady movement, but because he is young, excited, and often thinking way too much, he sometimes falls into spastic and erratic movement. In his younger years, he is very spontaneous and unsteady in a positive way. He becomes more rigorous and bound as he grows up.

G. Character Habitual Gestures

- a. What are your character's habitual gestures?

Jamie habitually reaches out for Cathy. He reaches out and tries to constantly pick her up when she is feeling low and discouraged. At the same time he is constantly looking up and looking out to try to find the next fulfilling and substantial obstacle to conquer in his life.

- b. What is your character's habitual activity?

Jamie habitually writes, mostly motivated by what happens in his life and relationship with Cathy.

H. Character Temperament

- a. What is the habitual emotional response of reaction of my character?

Jamie constantly tries to do anything he can to help support Cathy, but usually the ways that he tries to help her and be a good boyfriend/ husband are the ways that she does not need him.

- b. What kind of excitability does my character have?

Earlier in his life, Jamie is very excitable at the thought of Cathy and his new exciting career. He loses that spark and excitability later in life.

- c. What is the emotional state or mood to which my character is inclined to submit most often?

Jamie is very self-driven and career oriented, and nothing can stand in his way between him and conquering a goal.

- d. What kind of vitality does my character have?

Early in his life, Jamie has a very youthful, vibrant, and excitable vitality. It slowly fades as his life and his relationship with Cathy slips into the mundane, which is one of the reasons he seeks out an affair.

- e. What are the tempo, rhythm, and dynamic of my character's life?

When Jamie is in "writer mood," the tempo, rhythm and dynamic of Jamie's life is very slow, sustained, and boring. Early in his relationship with Cathy, he is energetic, focused, and ecstatic to be living life with and for her, although it faded over the course of their five year relationship.

I. Character Will

- a. What kind of will does your character have? (Unbridled, pushy, industrious, submissive, absolutely obedient, collective, authoritative, despotic, fanatic, opportunistic, philanthropic, misanthropic, seductive, self-sacrificing, mediumistic, exacting, superhuman, needy, despondent, aimless)

Jamie has a strong and unbreakable will. He is very career and goal oriented and will not let anything stand in his way between where he is and what he wants and where he needs to go. Jamie is unwilling to settle in his life and what he wants from it. When he meets Cathy, he becomes very self-sacrificing, in some ways, by doing anything he can to keep her happy. He never compromises with or is submissive to Cathy, which causes many problems for their relationship.

J. Character Desire

- a. Define the main desire of your character.

Jamie's main desire is to write and to make a successful career out of it. His marriage to Cathy and his relationships have always and will always be second to his career goals. When it comes to his relationship with her, he wants to help Cathy and have her be happy and successful in her own path, but shows that he is not very willing to compromise his life or inconvenience his desires.

K. Character Volitional Gesture (express desire or will showing characters intentions and foreshadowing action)

- a. What is your character's volitional gesture? (Threatening gestures of a tyrant, begging gestures of a poor person, beckoning gestures of a harlot, etc)

A volitional gesture of Jamie's is his dismissing gestures of someone who is unfaithful to his wife.

L. Character Feelings

- a. Specify the feelings your character expresses during the script.

In the beginning of their relationship, Jamie is very desperate and anxious to be with Cathy, because she is new, exciting, and exotic. He is instantly struck by her, has fallen in love with her almost instantly, and feels that they are destined to live their lives together. He feels that Cathy should be just as happy and successful in her career as he is. Therefore he is willing to do whatever he can so that he can give her that strength and confidence. Yet, towards the end of their relationship, he begins to feel smothered by her neediness and begins distancing himself.

- b. Define the cause of your character's feelings. (What stimulates your character's feelings)

Almost all of Jamie's feelings and actions are motivated by the conflict between his career and his relationship with Cathy.

- c. Define the sentiment of your character's feelings. (What attachments, define kind of sentiment, what stimulates sentiment)

Jamie feels very deeply, fully, and truly, yet he rarely allows that to creep out in her relationship with Cathy. Because of his intelligence and his writing career, which forces him to live so much in his head, he very often gets caught up in there and can not communicate well emotionally. It is rare and extreme emotional situations when he is so open that he can not help but pour out everything that gets bottled up.

- d. Are there any pathological feelings? (Feelings that occur without direct stimulation)

After he cheats on Cathy, Jamie begins to get a little paranoid about her relationships, how she feels, thinks about him, and how she will react to him.

M. Character Thought Pattern

- a. What and how does your character think?

Jamie thinks that he is a very talented writer. He thinks that anything he wants to do and set his mind to, he can accomplish. He pities Cathy a little bit because she doesn't have the self-confidence and determination that he does. He believes in Cathy and doesn't think someone with so much life, potential, talent, and purity and innocent should settle on her life. Because he sees so much potential in Cathy, he sees a certain bit of responsibility to break her free of her rut. He thinks that Cathy should return that love and show some loyalty to him and his career. Because Cathy

does not have much direction or focus in her life and Jamie does, he feels that it follows naturally that she should be a part of that and his life. As he gets older and gets impatient with Cathy, he does not think that he should need to compromise for her and her wants so much.

- b. What kind of thought pattern does your character have?

Jamie has a very single track, straightforward thought pattern. As an intellectual, writer, and self-made-man of some sorts, he sees an obstacle or goal and focuses and does whatever he has to in order to achieve it. In the beginning of his relationship, he juggles thinking about his growing life with Cathy and his emerging career, but as they continue to grow – they grow apart and become more disconnected and he is forced to pick between the two.

N. Character Point of View

- a. How does your character view matters discussed in the script?

Jamie, in his first song, sees past religious differences in falling in love with Cathy. Yet, the unconditional love that he feels for her in the beginning of the show slowly becomes more and more conditional. He and Cathy both have more and greater expectations for each other as they grow up and mature. He believes that he should not be punished or made to feel guilty about his successful life and career, just because Cathy's hasn't had the same success. On the surface in some ways, he believes he is justified in having the affair with Elisa, because he is not happy with Cathy. Just like anything in his life, he is able to toss aside his relationship with Cathy when it has become impossible to fix, in his eyes.

O. Character Attitude

- a. What kind of attitude does your character have?

Jamie has a very stubborn attitude. Often in conversations, he is uncompromising, and it is his way or the highway, which Cathy calls “Jamie Land.” He has an attitude that carving out his career, being a success, and fulfilling some superficial and material wants are more important than his emotional needs. Yet, deeper than all of this, he is kind, gentle, considerate, selfless, and loving, which is shown in his undying love and dedication for Cathy. He tries to do all that he can to make her happy and lift her up, and it is only after he has bent over backwards and done everything that he can, in his eyes, that he moves on emotionally.

P. Character Space

- a. Describe the place in which your character lives and acts.

Jamie lives in an apartment in 73rd Street in Manhattan, New York City with his girlfriend and then wife, Cathy. He spends a lot of time in his apartment at his desk, writing feverishly and secluded. He travels often because of the publication of his books, and often goes to parties and social events to promote them and himself.

Living in New York City, he grew up in a city where people do not and cannot afford to do anything but look out for themselves and live each day so that they can get to the next. It is a very cold, secluded, and harsh environment, which is reflected in Jamie’s world view.

- Q. Character Object (the object to which the character is attached, and through which one expresses the self)

- a. What are the objects your character is using during the performance?

Jamie spends a lot of time during the course of his relationship on his typewriter or computer, and takes frequent notes about things that are happening in his life. He spends a great deal of time on his cell phone talking to his agent and with Cathy, when the two of them are separated in different cities.

R. Character Relationships

- a. With whom does your character interact with in the script?

Jamie spends almost the entirety of the show on stage by himself, but is “interacting” with Cathy in many of them. He also interacts with his agent and Elise, his new girlfriend.

- b. What kind of relationship is it?

Jamie and Cathy have a very complex relationship. It begins very fast and is very heated and passionate. They fall in love with each other very fast. Because of the rushed nature of their early relationship and the successes and failures of their careers, their relationship begins having problems. However, through it all Jamie continues to love, support, and encourage Cathy. The intense passion between the two individuals turns ugly as they turn that against each other. Eventually, they are so torn away from the pure love of the beginnings of their relationship that they get a divorce.

- c. What do the characters want, expect, and hope from or for one another?

Jamie and Cathy want and expect many things from each other over the course of their five-year relationship. Through it all, the most important thing that they want from each other is love and support. Jamie expects Cathy to put her jealousies aside

to support his career and his successes. He hopes that she will be secure in herself that she'll be able to be self-sufficient and self-loving. He doesn't want her happiness to be dependent on him. He expects her to be able to have as successful of a career as he has, because he thinks she is more talented than she presents herself to be or allows herself to be.

- d. What do they give and/or take from one another?

Cathy gives Jamie inspiration for writing material and gives him the love, support, and validation that he needs from her early in their relationship. However, he soon grows out of it, and Jamie finds himself giving more support and providing more love to Cathy later in their relationship. Jamie gives Cathy a sense of purpose, belonging to someone, and a future.

- e. What do they have in common that binds them together, and/or what differences separate them?

Jamie and Cathy are bound together by their intense love for each other. In the second half of their relationship, they are bound by their marriage. It serves as a buffer to diffuse many obvious problems in their relationship. Both are willing to excuse and forget problems in the relationship, because they are desperate to sustain it. They are separated by their religious beliefs, by their careers, by their successes and failures, and by their personality types. Jamie is more career and goal oriented. He often thinks in black and white, right and wrong, what should be done and not done. He is usually not an emotional person, which puts him at a considerable distance from Cathy, who wears her heart on her sleeve.

f. How are they disposed to one another?

i. How do they get along?

In the beginnings of their relationship, Jamie and Cathy get along perfectly because of the intense passionate love that they share for each other. In the honeymoon stages of their relationship, they feel like they are untouchable and that nothing can hurt or harm them and their relationship. However, as they grow up and grow into each other, this innocence goes away and their personalities start to clash. Jamie begins becoming emotionally closed off, dismissive, and untrusting of Cathy (even though he is the one in an affair).

ii. How do they feel about one another?

Jamie and Cathy feel happy to have found each other at first. They feel that the other offers them a happiness that they haven't found in the many previous relationships they have had. They are committed to building each other up, and are willing to do whatever it takes to care for that other person. However, at the same time, they forget to love and care for their own emotional well-being. Cathy, in some ways, feels inferior to Jamie and knows that she can never give him the determined and committed love and support that he has given her, which forces her into a jealous state, while Jamie at the same time grows resentful.

iii. What emotions do they generate in one another?

Cathy tries to bring out serious deep emotions out of Jamie. Before he met her, he was very closed off and disconnected from his emotions. Meeting

Cathy, he began to feel things that he never felt before, since he spent most of his time isolated and focused on his career. Cathy, however, cannot bring out this emotionality often and it only happens at heightened emotional moments in their relationship. Jamie, on the other hand, brings out the full gambit of Cathy's emotional spectrum, almost all the time. He inspires her and gives her a sense of hope for the future, yet later in their lives, he generates a lot of anger, jealousy, and vengeful feelings toward Jamie.

- iv. What do they think about one another?

Jamie thinks that Cathy is capable of more than she is willing to admit, or thinks she is, as well as thinking that she is more beautiful, talented, and intelligent than she ever thought she was. Cathy thinks that Jamie is very intelligent and talented, yet thinks that his first priority shouldn't be his career, but rather his relationship with her.

- v. What are their points of view about and attitudes toward one another?

At the beginning of their relationship, Jamie and Cathy have a very loving and accepting relationship towards each other. Yet, this dissolves, as their relationship gets more complicated and complex. Jamie gets more frustrated with Cathy and closes himself off emotionally from her in order to protect himself, which is destructive for their relationship.

- vi. What do they do to one another?

Jamie validates Cathy and gives her the complimentary and supportive partner that she needs to be happy, as well as gives her hope for her own

success. Cathy gives Jamie the devoted and affectionate partner that he needs to balance his busy and successful life.

vii. How do they treat one another?

In the beginning of their relationship, Jamie and Cathy treat each other like they are the only other people in the world, and no one can touch or affect them. Later in their relationship, Jamie still continues to treat Cathy with compassion, support, love, and understanding, but most of the time it comes off as distant, condescending, and dismissive, rather than honest and heartfelt.

viii. How do they behave in the presence of others?

When Jamie is in the presence of others, he quickly forgets about Cathy, which he sings about in the song “A Miracle Would Happen.” After their marriage, as his career takes off, he starts to become very popular and famous within his circle and network of friends and in public acts, behaves, and flirts as if he is single. He tries to remain faithful and respectful of their relationship, but gets out of line and eventually loses control and has an affair. In public, he struggles to keep a level head while with other people, so that he doesn’t lose his cool, which is much more challenging for him than for Cathy.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRODUCTION JOURNAL

The following is my production journal, which began pre-production late in the Fall 2008 semester and concluded with two performances at the end of the Spring 2009 semester. Fairly new to the journaling process, I made a concerted effort to simply write whatever came to mind each day, and did my best not to censor my thought process. For the purposes of this Masters thesis document, I have made some edits to clean up any short hand speech, clarify whatever I was experiencing at the time, and to protect the names of other UCF students mentioned in the process. I hope to maintain the integrity of my original thoughts from the production journal by only editing for the sake of clarifying for the reader.

I chose to undergo this production because I knew it would be a challenging process for me both on stage and off. It was not intended to be a perfect, seamless production, but rather a learning experience for me along every step of the production process. My journal is not intended to be a blueprint for success in producing *The Last Five Years* or any other production. Instead, it is intended to catalog my journey and reflections on the process, in the hopes of providing insight for the young actor.

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

I am using today as the official starting point of my pre-production process for *The Last Five Years*. After conversations with graduate Coordinator Earl D Weaver about the possibility of several different master thesis performance projects, I informed him today that I've chosen to produce and perform in Jason Robert Brown's *The Last Five Years*. I've been attracted to this project for a long time because I believe it will help me develop my skills on several fronts. Firstly, as an actor, this musical is very intimidating to me. It seems a very fitting piece to be

able to the acting techniques learned as a graduate student to be able to deliver a truthful, emotional, and connected performance. Adding to the challenge of the role is the fact that I will never have a scene partner to work with and interact with, putting the responsibility for telling the entirety of Jamie's story on my shoulders. As someone with aspirations in theatre administration and directing, it will also give me experience on the other side of the table – managing the other aspects that go into mounting a successful production. And finally, as a young artist, this piece spoke to me deeply and emotionally. I feel a great connection to the piece and the story and feel that I have something meaningful to contribute to it.

For these reasons and more, I confirmed with Professor Weaver that this was the thesis project I wished to pursue. At which point, he advised that the next step would be to form my thesis committee. And so, I asked him to serve on my committee along with Professors Be Boyd and Chris Niess, who would act as chair. All agreed to serve on my committee. I also spoke to staff accompanist Nate Beversluis and asked him if he would serve as the music director for the production. Based on working with me in voice lessons, Nate said he would like to work on the project, but needed to check on dates and availability and get back to me. Finally, an email notice to cast the production's "Cathy" was sent out via the UCF Theatre dept.'s list serv mailing list.

Thursday, November 27, 2008

Most important to the production today, I spoke with Patrick Braillard, a current UCF Theatre MA student and asked him to direct *The Last Five Years*. Having a strong personal relationship with him, admiring his directing work professionally and with UCF, as well as

knowing the life experience he could breathe into the musical, I knew from the beginning that he would be the perfect person to work with for this project. He agreed in part because he said the project is outside of his directorial comfort zone and would give him experience directing with a musical.

Monday, December 1, 2008

I emailed a list of 20 actresses who have submitted themselves for the role of “Cathy” to my thesis committee members. I have already contacted ten, whom I screened for an audition, sent audition music cuts and expectations, and received their schedule for this week and next semester. I emailed my committee seeking any and all feedback that they might be willing to offer about anyone on the list - About those who I will be auditioning, but also those who I might have brushed over and should audition off of their recommendation. Also, I asked for any recommendations for students not on this list that they think would be particularly strong for this role and I should contact personally with an invitation. Both Professors Weaver and Boyd responded by the end of the workday and offered their recommendations and commentary about the students that they have had experience with. Their insight was really helpful and confirmed that I had screened the right actresses and trimmed the fat.

Tuesday, December 2, 2008

After my day of class in Daytona, I stopped by the UCF Tech Center to visit Professor Weaver in his office today to invite him to audit my auditions with me. As the musical theatre coordinator, I felt it was important to have his opinion in the room with me to offer a valued and

informed opinion of the students I would be auditioning. After we agreed, we candidly discussed several students who had already submitted themselves for an audition and the commentary that he had emailed me yesterday. Professor Weaver also informed me that Nate had spoken with him and tentatively agreed to work on project. His main concern was the time it would involve over the course of his semester, as well as rehearsals potentially conflicting with the Jacksonville Jazz Festival Piano Competition on April 2, 2008, for which he was submitting and currently practicing for. In spite of this, Nate is seemingly on board and I'm feeling like all the right pieces are coming together. I really want, hope, and expect this to be a learning experience for my vocally – something that I know Nate will be able to deliver as a music director.

Wednesday, December 3, 2008

Today was a very slow preparatory day for my auditions. Nate helped me by recording two audition tracks to email to potential auditionees. I created audition schedule of the students that I screened through to be seen in an audition and notified them of their audition time. Later in the day, I spoke with student R. S. and rescheduled her for an audition on Friday afternoon, due to an academic conflict.

Thursday, December 4, 2008

Today has been jam-packed, as far as the production is concerned. I spend a bit of time this afternoon fielding emails to make some final scheduling preparations for tonight's audition for "Cathy," as well as doing some damage control. I received an email from a student, who had

submitted for the role but I did not contact, inquiring if I was still holding auditions because she had not heard back from me. I sent her a very simple, clean, and professional response that due to time restrictions and casting requirements I was unable to schedule an audition appointment with her at this time.

Classmate Melissa Mason confirmed that she would be willing to sit at the audition table with me and serve as a proxy for Patrick. Because Patrick won't be able to attend the audition, I felt it very important to have a third opinion in the room along with Professor Weaver and myself and I highly trust her opinion.

I selected a cut of the lyrics from "See I'm Smiling" to be used as cold reading monologue for the audition. While the show is almost entirely sung through, I didn't want to just cast a "singer," so I thought it would be an interesting acting exercise to use song lyrics as a monologue out of context from the music, in the hopes of finding the actresses that were best suited to acting through the words.

I arrived at UCF and Trailer 534 at about 4:40 PM, giving me 20 minutes to get myself settled and set up. I went over a few small details and the audition schedule with Lisa Million my stage manager. I sat down for two seconds to see that Stephen Ricker had emailed me to inform me that he would not be able to design the set for the project. Lisa also briefly explained his situation and academic and personal concerns. Because it's so early in the game, and because there will barely be any set in the show anyway – I wasn't overly concerned about it. I told her we would table it and discuss it later. I had difficulties burning the two accompaniment tracks to a CD on my laptop and was not able to burn them using the desktop computer in the Stage Management office in the Trailer, so I decided to play the tracks on my Mac book Pro and

control them through a remote control. In hindsight, this was probably my best and most convenient option, because I didn't have to turn around, start and stop music tracks, which I would have been distracting to the performers and annoying to me. Rather I had it close and convenient to them.

I was very happy to see that Professor Weaver came in a little before 5 pm to audit the audition with me. While I had previously invited him, I did not expect him to be able to attend because of a class conflict. But it was great to have his advice and his input. Melissa arrived a little after 5 pm. We gave her a minute to settle herself and I let Lisa know that we would be starting the audition.

The following is my commentary written during/ immediately after each actress's audition:

1. E. T. - This actress had performed the role before, but I found her performance to be very vanilla and average. It lacked a deep, emotional connection and stayed on the surface. She didn't seem particularly confident and didn't impress with her vocals, which were shaky at times. I also wasn't convinced that she would be able to play the maturity of a 28-year-old divorcee.

2. H. W. – The actress delivered one of if not the best acted audition of the night. Her vocal quality was very clear and clean at the beginning and had a great sound, in spite of some pitch issues as the range increased. Her “belting as high as they can” line sounded very clean. Everyone at the table was very impressed with her performance, but we agreed that we found it difficult to cast her opposite me in the role because she did look very young and would come off looking like my kid sister rather than my lover.

3. S. C. - She started her audition after a bit of pleasant small talk. She was the individual whom Professor Weaver had been championing the most in the last week. And so, our expectations at the table were very high. Unfortunately, she failed to meet them. She had some really nice acting moments, but they were not as connected as I would have liked to see from someone familiar with the material. The table was concerned that she was over-singing the music, too technical vocally, and not just letting go and living in what she was singing. I was also a bit turned off that she didn't belt the "belting" note-one of the deal breakers for the audition that I was looking for. She read the "See I'm Smiling" monologue, which was good, but lacked a range of emotion and resorted too quickly to anger and yelling.

4. B. H. – Professor Weaver was very complimentary of her acting work coming into the audition, on which she delivered, but was way too out of her comfort level with the vocals and had some very stiff jerky movement.

5. J. G. – Came in very strong but seemed annoyed and frazzled. She had great comic moments in "Climbing Uphill" but generally painted a very hard Cathy, and one that might be unsympathetic and harsh, which I don't want for this production. She read the monologue, but seemed as if she had never seen the words before and didn't play any new or varied choices. The table agreed that she gave a strong audition, but did not show enough emotional variety or depth to be able to carry the role.

6. J. H. – This actress exceeded my expectations, which I was very happy to see. I had seen her in performance at a musical production at another Orlando area theatre and invited her to audition. I thought she had a great look and did a great job with the audition. She had a very nice and clean voice, a great look, and very expressive eyes. She had great sass in Climbing

Uphill and hit on a lot of great moments in that piece, but the table thought that, again, she would be too young to play the role opposite me.

7. V. S. – came in coughing, apologized for being sick, then immediately became self aware and corrected her audition faux pas by saying she wasn't. If for nothing else, it provided a tension break and a laugh for all of us. What immediately struck me about her was her look. The outfit she picked out was perfect, showed off her figure, and she carried herself with a maturity that no one else in the room had come in with. Seemingly what we've been waiting for. Despite being (or not being) sick, she gave a wonderful audition. She had many beautiful strong sincere acting moments in the first song and hit the comedy right on the head in the second song. Her reading of the monologue went just as well – it was very informed, specific, believable, without pushing.

8. B. D. – Also gave a strong audition. I thought she had some very nice moments acting wise, but her voice was a cause for concern at the table. She did great work making a lot of moments in Climbing Uphill work, including the last lyrics "Grant Me Grace," which no one hit as hard before her. I thought her strongest piece was the monologue. Overall I thought she was great in the acting department but lacked some of the necessary vocal power.

9. A. Y. – Last audition of the night. Had very beautiful strong acting moments in the first song, but thought that a lot of her moments were too turned into herself. She had some rhythmic timing issues when she sang Climbing Uphill and seemed to lack a bit of confidence, but generally acted it very well. She also had a strong reading of the Monologue. Melissa gave her some direction to re-try the Climbing Uphill piece to try to be more sincere and convincing and try to land more of the comedy rather than the self-pity. She took a step in the right

direction, but still didn't entirely hit it, while having the same rhythmic issues. But, we didn't think it was anything that couldn't be fixed through the rehearsal process.

Professor Weaver, Melissa, and I quickly gave some first impressions and discussed what we saw. We went down the list, mostly listening to Professor Weaver's commentary. He seemed to think, as did we all, that the two best girls in the room were V.D. and A. Y. He offered some pros and cons to each of the performers.

After grabbing a quick dinner and seeing two OAF productions, I came home around 10:15 pm and re-discussed the audition and options with Patrick and Melissa. The three of us looked through everyone's headshots and resumes and went over our commentary and thoughts from the auditions. Patrick listened and offered what commentary he could. Generally speaking, the auditions were a bit of a let down. No one entirely owned the audition and made it theirs to lose. Patrick saw that I was not ready or prepared to make a decision and offered that we hold a call back. We decided that, at this point, it was down between V. D. and A. Y. From what she saw, Melissa said that she thought she would cast Allyssa in the role. Although, I'm not convinced that she's the right person or that she has the right look for what I would want in a "Shiksa Goddess" like Cathy. She seems to fit the emotional disposition of one side of the character, but leaned almost too much. A major criticism of the character is that Cathy is a character that wallows in her self-pity, and so I want this production to be something that actively works against that. I wasn't exactly won over by her voice or her acting. She was great, but she wasn't the amazing I was hoping for.

Based on today alone, I would cast V. D. in the role. She has a great look. I think out of the two she would look the best against me, I think she would hold her own and could carry her

part well. Professor Weaver cautioned me about her work ethic, but said that she seemed to have learned her lesson from being unprepared for understudy rehearsals. I want Cathy to be sarcastic and funny. And she was. However, because Vicky is cast in *The Lark* this spring, it might present a problem with rehearsals.

Patrick and I agreed to set aside one hour this Saturday to come up with a working rehearsal schedule. From there we'll have a better idea of how to proceed. The two strongest performers I saw tonight both have huge scheduling conflicts with *The Lark*. There's always the potential of moving my piece to avoid those conflicts, but then I would be possibly losing Nate's availability. Maybe I'll investigate potential re-schedulings tomorrow with Professor Bert Scott.

After our conversation, I handled a bunch of email business to line things up. I contacted two actresses about rescheduling their auditions for tomorrow afternoon. I contacted A. D. and V. D. by phone and email about scheduling an audition call back for next Tuesday evening with Patrick and myself. Then, I sent one last email to Willis Chico to reserve a room for Tuesday night with a piano. I'm hoping to see the other two actresses tomorrow and will re-assess after that.

I'm happy with where I am in the process. All of this information is rattling around in my head, it's confusing, and it's a lot to handle and think about, but I don't feel stressed or overwhelmed by it. I was driving home from UCF thinking to myself that I feel very confident with where I am and what I'll be able to do with the piece and comfortable with the situation and know that it'll work itself out. There's a sense of control and calm taking over me, almost as if I'm half removed from the situation. In a way, it's very comforting.

Tuesday, December 9, 2008

I held a call bath this evening in the UCF Tech Center Dance Studio 1 for V. D., A. Y., and a third student, E. D., whom I wanted to sing for Patrick. E. D. gave an absolutely, amazing audition, but it was extremely difficult to consider her for the role because she has previously been cast in the UCF Dance Concert, which conflicts directly with performances for *The Last Five Years*. I provided the other two actresses a side from “Summer In Ohio” as an additional song to perform in addition to the other pieces that they performed in the initial audition. For the most part, both actresses presented themselves very similarly to how they did in their initial audition. Based on vocals, we thought A. Y. gave stronger auditions. On the acting characterization, we thought V. D. was more on the mark with what we were looking for. In conversations, Patrick, Melissa, and I affectionately nicknamed the two “Sassy Cathy” and “Emo Cathy.” Both were very strong character choices and both are sides of her personality. Patrick commented that V. D. had a better look for the role, based on how he saw the Character. Patrick worked closely with each and offered them direction. V. D. was much more composed and comfortable taking his direction and was more successful executing it. Based on his limited availability and us needing to mount this show in a truncated rehearsal period, he believed that the show would be a much quicker and easier process with V. D. We left the Tech center in an easy agreement that V. D. was the right person for our production!

After getting home and getting settled, I called V. D. and let her know that we’d be casting her as Cathy in our production. I now feel very happy with where we are sitting with the production and can put the stress of the casting process behind me as we go into finals week and

winter break. I look forward to working on the material over my free time during the break and into next semester!

Sunday, February 15, 2008

Now that the spring semester is settling in, I've begun the process of coordinating schedules to create a template for rehearsals. Patrick is directing a show at Mad Cow Theatre this spring, and has very limited availability until after April 4th, when he is able to work on the project and give it his full focus. Nate's availability is also extremely limited because he is also Music Directing the MFA Jerry Herman revue this spring. He's given me tentative availability for vocal rehearsals on:

Wed Feb 18th 1-2 pm

Wed Feb 25th 1-2 pm

Wed March 4th 1-2

Wed March 4th 1-2.

Additionally, he is free for the following times:

Mon and Wed April 13th and 15th (evening)

Either Sat or Sun 18th or 19th (day/ evening)

Mon and Wed April 20th and 22nd (evening)

Fri and Sat 24th and 25th (evening/ around tech?)

Sunday April 26th 8 pm show 1 open

Monday April 27th 8 pm show 2

The black box theatre was reserved as a rehearsal space as of April 13th through April 28th. At a first glance, it looks like I'll be putting this production together a lot more piece-meal than I would have initially hoped to, but I understand that I need to make these sacrifices if I want to work with Patrick and Nate, both of whom are very busy.

Tuesday February 18, 2009

I had my first vocal rehearsal today with Nate from 12:30 – 2:15 in the Blue Room. From 12:30 – 1:30, V. D. and I did a stumble through of Goodbye until Tomorrow and Next Ten Minutes. She left around 1:30 and from there we sang through Shiksa Goddess and Started working on Schmuel Song, before calling it for the week. Nate and I decided that next week we would do a run through of the first half of the show, from Still Hurting through Schmuel's Song.

I felt like it was a very productive rehearsal with V. D. I was really happy to hear that she was powerful and strong vocally with a very confident, booming voice. Nate commented afterwards that I had made a great pick in a Cathy. I felt a little unprepared in comparison to V. D. on the two duet songs. So I definitely need to step up my game and put in the work, be big, bold, and confident or I could be left in the dust and have this show overwhelm and overtake me.

Wednesday February 26, 2009

Today I had my second vocal rehearsal with Nate and V. D. in the Blue Room from 12:30 – 1:30. V. D. came in and said that she was sick with some persistent vocal issues, which I hope don't continue to be a problem for her or for the production. She said that she had pneumonia when she auditioned in December and it seems that there are some lingering issues.

Because of that, Nate and I let her go easy on her vocals today as she ran through “Still Hurting.” Next, I worked on “Shiksa Goddess” and was able to iron out some rhythm issues that I was having, similarly to the syncopated rhythms in “Moving too Fact” that we drilled last semester in voice lessons. V. D. had a strong sing through of “See I’m Smiling,” particularly with the rhythmic spoken section. She was pushing really hard on the high notes, forcing glottal stops, and squeezing out the notes, which Nate said he would stay on top of so it didn’t become a consistent issue. Otherwise, her tone was clean and bright. Next, we worked on “Moving Too Fast.” Nate was really proud of the progress I made on the number and loved the beginning section. We worked on some intonation issues and on not holding onto my breath in other sections, which seemed to move me in the right direction and give me some food for thought.

Thursday, April 9, 2009

Today was our first rehearsal with Patrick, which we used to discuss character, our concept for the production, and intention and context for each number. Patrick and I began our conversation one and one and were joined later by V. D. He opened with a very strong statement, which struck me, “My job is not to direct you. It is to hone your performance and find the aspects of the character that you want emphasized and highlighting them.” He also reinforced that through the process, there are no wrong choices that I can make. He encouraged me to make strong choices, fast, and commit to it. Going further, I was urged to never apologize for a choice that I make. Apologizing for my art would be diluting it and taking away from its truth. The only reason why a choice wouldn’t work would be if it was a weak one, not a wrong one.

Patrick and I then spent a good deal of time discussing what we thought the play was about. It covers many universal themes: faith, compromise, competition, struggle, marriage, life, career, love, and divorce. The relationship between Jamie and Cathy is one riddled with misunderstanding and miscommunication. But when examined closely, every married couple, from Adam and Eve to today, deals with miscommunication. The relationship between Jamie and Cathy is a perfect example that, often times, no amount of love can make up for miscommunication. Going further, Jason Robert Brown uses the chronological opposition as a device in his musical to further demonstrate how mismatched and incongruent this particular couple is, as they are there are never on the same page at the same place and time throughout the story. By breaking up the story, Brown forces the audience to work harder. Unlike simplistic, linear book musicals, the audience member must pay very close attention to the details of the song and piece together the chronology. *The Last Five Years* is a puzzle piece made up of many of the water shed moments in the relationship, although not all of which address their relationship directly. The story line, point of view, and deeper meaning is not laid in front of the audience in black and white, but rather dumped onto the table for them to piece together. In doing so, the audience is no longer an observer, but a participant, and in doing so, distances them from their own biases.

Unlike those in real-life relationships, the conversations that are being had over the course of the musical are allowed to be fulfilled fully, and given the opportunity for an uninterrupted stream of consciousness. The characters are allowed to speak their minds and hearts freely, exactly how they want to be heard. If these conversations were actualized in real life, they would be interrupted, i.e. the song "If I Didn't Believe In You" wouldn't get to verse 2,

because Cathy would respond and the conversation would go off on a tangent. These opportunities rarely happen in real life, and so both Jamie and Cathy can dig deeper to their emotional centers.

Patrick and I discussed the concept of communication – that each character is not only communicating with the other. They are also communicating with themselves, as they are constantly in a state of emotional and relational discovery and self-awareness. Finally there is a responsibility to communicate to the audience. But in doing so, can the audience leave this musical unbiased? Can they separate their own emotional baggage and not take a side in the story, but rather to learn from its moral message and the tragic flaws of the two characters? Unfortunately, it seems like the piece is so real, emotional, and deeply personal, that rather than turning towards self-reflection and recognizing these flaws within all people, the audience member opts towards self preservation. They turn against the flaws of each character, distance themselves from them, and label them as the exception rather than the social norm.

V. D. came into the Blue Room at 6:55 pm, and joined in our conversation. We then discussed the need for Jamie to be vulnerable and emotional, rather than the one-dimensional, unfaithful “prick” he is often painted as.

Seeming to be on the same page with each other, Patrick and I tabled that discussion and moved toward dissecting each of the songs, their meaning within the relationship, and the point of view of the character singing them. Some of our observations are as follows:

“Goodbye Until Tomorrow” – In this moment Cathy has met a fresh, new somebody that sparked a light in her that she hasn’t felt in a long time. She has almost given up on everything and everyone in life, but Jamie, for the first time, has made her stop and focus on one thing and

one person. For the first time in a long time, she can finally be excited about something in life. She's been blown off by guys in the past for their careers, and has been ready to settle down. She believes she has been emotionally ready to make a commitment in the past but the other side has backed away. Finally, she's a fighter. She fights for what she thinks is right and does not back down from that. She knows that Jamie and her are right for each other and does not want to let that go.

“I Could Never Rescue You” - In the closing moments of his relationship with Cathy, Jamie puts his hands up in defeat for the first time in his life. Jamie is a person who fights hard enough until he wins – he works hard until he gets the result that he wants. There isn't anything he's sought out to achieve that he hasn't received. Yet, marriage is not about winning; it's about compromise

“I Can Do Better Than That” – The reoccurring theme in this song for Cathy is that she does not want to be mediocre. She offers to Jamie that if we want it all, we can get it all, and we can get it all together. At this time, they are on the same level with each other. We questioned and discussed her level of naiveté. It seems like successful relationships are able to hold on to that aspect and a sense of playful innocence. Do we see her actively understanding the consequences of what she's saying? Is she rushing in blind or does she know what she's jumping into?

“Nobody Needs To Know” – Jamie is feeling very naked and exposed, even disgusted with himself. He is torn between his heart and head and fighting with himself over what he knows he has to do, and what he feels he should do. In “Nobody Needs to Know” he is almost to himself out of the guilty feelings. He recognizes that what he did to Cathy was permanently

damaging to their relationship, but he is hurting also, otherwise he would not have acted upon his desires for some physical comfort. Recognizing the pain that both he and Cathy are experiencing, he makes the deliberate decision to move on and pursue this other relationship, hoping for a better result.

“Climbing Uphill” – We see Cathy start to close in and show her first warning signs of a depression the point of making himself physically ill over the mental torture he is feeling, knowing how much and how deeply he loves Cathy, but realizing the gravity of his mistakes. He struggles with how it could ever be possible for him to be in love with two people at the same time, but not feel completely happy and at home with either. For his own sanity, he works hard to try to talk. Instead of talking to Jamie about her failure issues, she bottles them up. As a wife and a partner, she is willing to make sacrifices for Jamie, but she wants him to make sacrifices for her as well, and more importantly, to make them without feeling obligated to do so. Through the song, it is important to demonstrate what she needs from Jamie without seeming needy.

“If I Didn’t Believe In You” – Over the course of this conversation, Jamie is beginning to come to the realization that they both had very naive, misguided, preconceived notions about each other when they entered the relationship. As a successful writer, he wanted her to shoulder and celebrate his successes and be able to have successes of her own. Except, instead of feeding off of his success, they placed her in a jealous mindset and paralyzed her from pursuing what is important to her life. In doing so, they both have failed in each other’s eyes. They both didn’t get what they wanted in this relationship and have become so divided that neither of them see how much the other is hurting. Yet in spite of this, he is unwilling to let go of the relationship he

still holds onto in his head. In this song, he is finally admitting that their marriage is seriously damaged, but his deep love for Cathy and stubborn nature refuse to let him let go of it.

“A Miracle Would Happen” – As a newlywed and a powerful, successful, young writer, he is really struggling with temptations and needs to actively work against his instincts in this song. It is not a flippant, casual mention of these anecdotes, as it is often played. Rather, he uses the phrase “It’s Fine” as a mantra to calm himself and step away from the edge of infidelity. The song serves as a summation of both his love for Cathy and his guilty conscience. He needs to work against his ego, which protects the artist and shades him from responsibility. He knows that if he were single, he’d be sleeping with these women. However, he knows deep down that no matter how cathartic the short moments of sexual intimacy would be, it would never be good enough to make up for the vows he made to Cathy.

“The Next Ten Minutes” – This is the only moment in the musical where both Jamie and Cathy are together with each other, not just physically and chronologically. More importantly, this is the only moment that the two are truly connected emotionally, telling the same story and getting exactly what they want in the relationship. We discussed that it was not important for the scene to have a traditional wedding look, choosing instead to stage how this scene would play out in a perfect, “dream world” scenario.

“Summer In Ohio” – We felt it very important in this song to showcase Cathy’s sarcastic sense of humor and her way of jokingly dealing with the things that upset her or make her uncomfortable, working against the easy trap of having her complain her way through the piece. We also discussed her relationship with “Richard,” as a fellow actor that Cathy works with and

has been a “show crush.” In some ways, she’s flattered by the attention that he gives her, but generally finds him annoying and odd compared to Jamie.

“Schmuel’s Song” – We discussed this song as a multi-layered story, one that Jamie uses to encourage Cathy, but also one that helps him justify his life, work, and his own choices. We opened up a conversation about what the clock and Schmuel represent in the story. While he uses the story of Schmuel as a parallel to incite Cathy to pursue her acting career and her dreams, there is a great deal of the story that, unconsciously or subconsciously, shows Cathy the passion and detail in which he lives his life. Because this song is a fantasy story, Patrick and I knew we’d be spending a lot of time crafting it in rehearsals.

“I’m a Part of That” – At this stage in her relationship, we felt Cathy was beginning to feel unmatched, but willing to subordinate herself to Jamie for the sake of a happy relationship. She attempts to placate herself by stating that in order for Jamie to be happy and successful in his writing career, he needs to live a happy and successful personal life, which is something that she can provide for him. In her mind, without her on board, he would not be able to be as successful. The question then becomes where, when, and how can I give him that support without becoming overbearing and transparent, which he responds to by shutting down.

“Moving Too Fast” – While this song is a celebration of all of Jamie’s early successes, in his career and personal life, I stressed to Patrick how much I needed it not to come from an egotistical place. The arrogance often seen in Jamie’s character was something I really wanted to fight against. Rather than playing the song as if he believes that he deserves all of these things, the audience needs to feel that he’s earned them, and buy into him as a nervous, excited, and energetic protagonist.

“See I’m Smiling” – This song probably offers the actress the greatest range in her emotional arc over the course of one song. Underneath the entire conversation, Cathy is desperately trying to hold on to Jamie and the relationship. She recognizes that it is not a healthy or happy relationship, but is beyond fearful of what would happen to her if she lost him. At a loss for how to remedy the situation, she knows that she could and would never leave him and would let him put her through anything, just as long as she would be allowed to stay with him. With all of her emotions boiling underneath her in the beginning of the song, she needs to try to remain even keeled with small talk, pretending that everything is fine. It is important that the song starts off light heartedly so that we can knock her out at the end, when finally she’s swallowed her tongue for too long and all of her emotional center comes bursting out like a volcano. It is so telling of how delicately she trots in the relationship, by not even mentioning her birthday until the end of the conversation. Almost as a last ditch effort, it is a cry of pain that Jamie is so wrapped up in his own world he can’t even bring himself to recognize hers, while she has pushed away her needs time and time again and has thrown her life away for him. We discussed the importance of the final tableau in the number as one of complete physical and emotional isolation, painting Jamie’s resolve and Cathy’s desperation. After pouring her heart out to him and completely draining herself emotionally, the only thing Cathy wants in the world is for Jamie to pick her up and hold her. However, knowing that that’s what he should do, he needs to not help, because doing so would be playing into her fragile emotional state and would complicate him trying to leave the relationship.

“Shiksa Goddess” – The song serves as Jamie’s introduction to the audience and is important that he playfully wins them over. Jamie is someone who very easily gets

claustrophobic with the mundane life, which is why he's been so bored with dating all of the neighborhood Jewish girls that he grew up with. Cathy is one of the first things that give him an opportunity for a new and exciting adventure, and it just happens to be bonus points that he's bucking his family traditions.

“Still Hurting” - Because this is the first song in the musical, it is so crucial that the actress not over play the depressed side of Cathy. If it comes off as too self-loathing, then it could back fire and cut her off from the audience. Rather, the focus needs to not be on Cathy at the end of her journey, but as someone who is trying to pick herself up and start a new one. While the wounds and the hurt is still very new, she needs to be portrayed as someone trying to find herself, gaining some fortitude, and trying to force herself to move on from Jamie. It is probably at this moment, the final moment of their five-year relationship, that Cathy is most independent, partially by circumstance, but also by choice. In an act of self-preservation, it is important that she distances herself further from Jamie, claiming that she knows he's “fine” and “not hurting.” If she did, then it would be impossible for her to emotionally detach from the relationship be able to convince herself to get over him. Most importantly, we need to see that Cathy knows that this is not the end for her and that she will date and hopefully marry again. There is a lesson to be learned from this – one she hasn't learned yet – but one she certainly will discover in time.

Monday, April 13, 2009

Today was our first full rehearsal from 6:30-9:30 in the Black Box Theatre. We began with a sing through of the music and cut almost all of the dialogue used between songs, because

Patrick and I both felt that it didn't add any necessary information to the text found within the songs. Although, I wasn't off book yet and was held back a bit by being tied to the music, Patrick was very pleased with the progress that was made and didn't think that we would be along as far as we were. The few duet sections in the music, including "The Next Ten Minutes" started to finally lock in together vocally and are coming along nicely.

We once again stressed that my connection to the text is what is going to be Jamie's saving grace in the eyes of the audience. Without an emotionally connected and thoughtful performance, Jamie can and will come off as shallow, egotistical, and self-absorbed. While, he can come off as all of those things at face value, there is so much more to him than that, which is what I want to find in this production. For the actor playing Jamie, it is a difficult task, because there will be people who will make up their minds to turn against his character from the moment Cathy begins "Still Hurting." We want the audience to walk out discussing the story line and the relationship, rather than talking about which side of the relationship they were on. It is not solely a musical about infidelity.

We closed notes with Patrick saying, "You make it very easy on my behalf; I'm happy with tonight" and will begin blocking tomorrow. As far as I'm concerned, I couldn't ask for a better response from him.

Tuesday, April 14, 2009

V. D. was late to rehearsal, claiming that the shuttle wasn't running and so we wasted about 30 minutes of rehearsal time so that I could pick her up and get her to the theatre.

Professor Niess came into the theatre to view a bit of the process, and left after we blocked a few numbers.

We began blocking by designating SL as Jamie's "side" and Jamie's world, which SR serving as Cathy's side. We blocked our entrances on stage during the prologue as an omnipotent, other worldly place in which we have complete knowledge of the entirety of the five-year relationship. We played the entrances several ways - playing the end of Jamie's story and the end of Cathy's Story, the chronological beginning. If it was the end of my story, I felt the need to initiate some kind of physical contact, which we tried. After a few passes through, we found a balance between playing the beginning of the relationship, our first meeting, then transitioning it to the end of the relationship, and ultimately into "Still Hurting."

Patrick's process for blocking each song was a three step process, in which, first two actors would be allowed to perform the song fully integrated and interacted with the other, secondly fully closed, and lastly, finding a balance between the two. It proved to be a useful acting exercise to help us find a deeper emotional connection to the text and to be able to help silently support, respond, and progress the scene forward.

We found in playing through the blocking of "Shiksa Goddess" that I needed to work on finding more levels to play and was relying a bit on some nervous ticks, namely standing and moving around on my toes and rocking my steps, rather than staying planted and grounded. I'll need to work on finding a way of transferring the nervous energy of the character through my body and not holding onto my own tension. I also need to spend some time clarifying my point of view during several points in the song, including the "You" bridge section, how I feel

specifically about each girl I dated, and what makes Cathy so different from them, aside from the obvious fact that she's not Jewish.

We found simple blocking for "See I'm Smiling," which helped greatly to make the song about Cathy's emotional journey. Going through the song with the interaction really helped to give a new and deeper appreciation for the text. It became clear that Patrick would be staging the show with both characters sharing the stage the entire time, which I thought might complicate the chronology, distract the audience, or pull focus from the scene and "time" that the scene is happening. Also, selfishly, it's slightly concerning vocally, because I'm worried about being on stage the entire length of the play without any break where I can be offstage, to grab a drink of water and can have an emotional break from being "on." Patrick was happy to meet me in the middle by saying that he wasn't opposed to having water bottles that we can use and drink from on stage. However, he said that we would need to find very specific and useful times to take a drink, not just whenever either of us randomly felt like taking a drink. As a directorial concept, Patrick believed that having the actors on stage the entire time allows us to use the space to our full advantage, because we don't have the conventions of a set, lights, sound, costumes, and props. From his eyes, it would be the best way to accentuate this musical for *this* space for *our* production.

I'm realizing that at this point, I will need to surrender my own thoughts, concepts, and pictures that I've created in my head and surrender them to Patrick and his vision. As I said to Patrick during the rehearsal, I just want us to tell the best story possible. And I want him to make sure that I do in my singing and blocking. I just need to trust his eye and his vision at this point that it is the best choice for the piece.

Wednesday, April 15, 2009

V. D. was excused from rehearsal today because of personal reasons. I personally didn't want to, but felt that my hands were tied on this matter and we would have gotten little productivity from her if she came. Patrick turned our attention to some of my bigger songs, beginning with "Schmuel's Song." We started with a very slow blocking of the piece and gave each of the three characters, the narrator, Schmuel, and the Clock, a region to play. We spent a lot of time knit-picking some of the blocking and ironed out choices that I was making. I felt very strong about my connection to the text at the "epilogue" section when Jamie is talking directly to Cathy. But I had difficulty connecting to parts of the story line. Particularly the section when Schmuel starts making the dress, makes his wish, and starts traveling back in time. I've just felt confused about the story line and was worried that there is too much information being shoveled out at the audience. The task froze me a bit because I don't know how best to handle that and communicate all the details effectively to Cathy but more importantly the audience.

To tackle this, Patrick had me re-tell the story in my own words. After first failing by giving a summary of the events, I jumped up on my feet and tried to throw myself into an excited retelling of the story in my own words. I identified different pieces of back story about Schmuel, an old man with a giant white beard. Even though he's a tailor, the clothes that he wears don't fit him anymore and sag and are baggy on his shrunken old frame. He has tough and rough workers hands and smells like an old man should. Now in his old age, he's too old to be bothered with making anything pretty, elaborate, or fancy and chooses, in his old age to make practical

garments like pants and jackets and shirts. In spite of the successful shop that he's run, he desperately regrets not pursuing Natasha, the love of his life, with whom he has been in love with for the past 41 years but never told.

In actively re-telling the story and out loud in my own words, I was really able to identify more with Schmuell and his desire for something more in his life. I think I was getting a little bit too caught up in separating the Narrator character from the story and keeping him very straight laced, but it still needed an element of getting caught up in the excitement and communicating that excitement and mysticism to Cathy and the audience. After a five-minute break, we came back and ran the number and found that it was much more connected and alive. Overall I felt like I had made really great progress on what will be one of the harder numbers to pull off, because it is a marathon to sing and act through. I'm making progress; It's a process. I just need to keep reminding myself that this process is far too short, and I don't have very much time at all for "baby steps."

I'm going to spend all of my down time tomorrow working on lines. Getting solidly off book for the first half of the show, which is partially there. At this point in the process, I need to not be held back by lyrics and make some big creative leaps. But it is showing glimmers of fun, creativity, and good playful excited energy. I think we have the makings of what will be a successful story.

Thursday, April 16, 2009

V. D. arrived to rehearsal 10 minutes late, again claiming that she wasn't able to get onto campus because of issues with the shuttle. She then took her blocking notes from rehearsal. We

began today's blocking with "Moving Too Fast," which Patrick explained as a "dancing around in my apartment and I don't care what I look like because I'm so happy and no one's home" number. He stressed the need to charm the audience and talk to each one of them to sell my excitement. From there we had a very long process of finding and polishing small moments of the number. I felt the need to be by Cathy during the "some people" bridge section, because I feel like it foreshadows and references her in part. I tried to attack the song and be a bit more reckless with it, by listening to my instincts and committing to them. The challenge for me now is spending time focusing and telling the story, rather than getting caught up in the musicality or the gimmicks of the song. It still needs to be about this guy's story and his excitement for the opportunities that are coming his way.

In blocking "I Am A Part Of That," we decided that I would be using that time to write and draft up The Story of Schmuell and developed some blurred chronological lines in the staging with some nice countering blocking. In blocking "Summer In Ohio," Patrick explained that if *The Last Five Years* was a movie, this would be played as a musical montage with her in different comical situations and different musicals throughout the summer and he wanted to retain the light and playful spirit of that with some musical theatre references and gimmicks. A lot more time was spent blocking and polishing "The Next Ten Minutes."

I need to talk to Patrick tomorrow about my co-star. Because of several personal reasons, she hasn't been taking very good care of herself and her voice. I'm unsure how to address the issue or even if it is my place to do so, because at this point I've stepped into the role of actor and have turned the reigns over to Patrick. In any other rehearsal environment, it would be the responsibility of the stage manager and a director to handle and discuss the situation with her. I

understand that this is my thesis, but I do not want to place myself in a situation that would compromise or otherwise negatively affect my relationship with her on stage.

Those issues aside, it was a very productive day. We blocked four numbers and got them solidly on their feet. I feel particularly strong about how *Moving Too Fast* will shape up to be. I explained to Patrick during a rehearsal that I have a slow process. I will make choices and then the next time we run the show, I'll have more choices made, others solidified and be able to free my mind to make more. I was concerned that I haven't been aggressive enough about the choices I'm making in these songs. But he assures me that they are in a good place and that I'm on target for what I need to do and where we need to start putting these songs. I'm looking forward to the first-half run tomorrow. I'm interested in seeing how I hold up vocally with acting out the numbers full out, in succession. It's been a really tiring process, even four days into blocking. I've been coming home and have been completely exhausted each night. I'm thankful I haven't had too much homework or other assignments to do on top of these rehearsals, so I've been able to go home, make food, sit at the kitchen table, journal, then go to bed.

Friday, April 17, 2009

I was very excited to have Nate with us again for rehearsal. Unfortunately, before we began the run, V. D. told us that she had seen a vocal therapist who told her that in order for her to get through the show, she would have to be on complete vocal rest until the performances. Patrick and Nate decided that, for today, the best course of action would be for her to whisper-speak her way through tonight's run and focus on acting and characterization.

After running through Scenes 1-8, I generally felt very good about my performance. We re-worked some musical sections with Nate. Nate was please with my vocal progress from when we had worked together last. He commented that the high notes in “Moving Too Fast” had come along a long way and were much clearer, in part due to some coaching on them with Dr. Steve. But I’m really just trying to attack the notes better and have something great I’m doing physically during them, which is mentally taking off some of the pressure from me vocally. We also worked on the middle section of “Schmuel Song” to clean up and solidify some awkward meter shifts. Nate also commented that I needed to be mindful to have a relaxed vocal quality for the Narrator’s singing voice and not to holding on to Schmuel’s tense qualities. We did some vocal exercises to work on getting myself to a neutral singing voice and re-sang the song.

Notes from Patrick on today’s rehearsal were mostly on clarifying or shifting some blocking. All of my character notes were positive. After a five, we re-ran scenes 1-5 and my vocal quality and sound production held up throughout the night. Essentially we ran through the first half of the show twice, and sang Moving Too Fast and other numbers additional times. And I left feeling very comfortable with my voice. A few weeks ago, I’d be vocally drained after one hour of singing with Nate, but tonight I left feeling 100% confident and comfortable with my voice. It reminded me of how I felt after singing Jesus in *Jesus Christ Superstar* in my undergrad, where I could throw my voice around without worry and felt perfectly fine. I’m glad that this show is starting to get to a place where I don’t have to worry about vocal production and if I’m comfortable singing the notes, which was one of the major hurdles I knew I’d have to mount. The notes are there. I just need to let the character take over, have fun with what I’m doing, and then the rest will take care of itself.

Patrick seems to be happy with my energy on stage and my vocal production. The first half of the show is definitely, in my eyes, the harder of the two halves. So I was very happy today that I was able to sing through it twice and feel completely healthy and safe about my vocal production and feel like I could continue and keep working. I am very much looking forward to finishing blocking the show on Sunday and then running it fully on Monday. Patrick spoke to V. D. about her vocal issues during a break and decided that she would be speak-singing on Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of next week but singing when we have Nate in preparation for the opening of the show. As of now, he said that he feels confident that she can do the show and that her vocal issues are, in large part, psychosomatic. Because this is my thesis production, I feel responsible to make steps to prepare us if she can not perform, in spite of what Patrick thinks. I'm finding this issue is making it very difficult for me to be the "producer" and a performer. I am trying to do what is best for me and my mental sanity by removing myself from everything other than the role.

Sunday, April 19, 2009

With rehearsal scheduled from 4-10 PM, V. D. texted me one hour before rehearsal began that she was working until 4 pm and would not be available to get to rehearsal on time. She eventually arrived at 4:40 pm. Without my co-star, we began staging for "A Miracle Would Happen," which I wanted to interpret different than was originally done and in other productions. In previous productions and recordings, Jamie comes off in the song as cocky and chauvinistic. But in my interpretation of the text, he's still a newlywed, still really loves Cathy, and genuinely wants to make their relationship work. Yet, just because he's married, it doesn't mean that he's

not going to be tempted. In the song, he's trying to convince himself to look at their marriage as a "challenge" that he has to overcome, because that is the only way that he knows how to conquer things that stand in his way and achieve a goal. In working the second half of the song, I tried to play honest sincerity, rather than leaning too heavily towards the end of the musical. He does want to be with her and is actually trying to rush through his work and finish the chapter of writing so that he can get home to her.

One particular section of spoken text that we left in the show is a monologue placed in the middle of "Climbing Uphill." In it, he's celebrating a review that came out at a bar with his agent Elise and wants Cathy to come out and celebrate with him. However, she doesn't want to leave the house because she's depressed that she just had a terrible audition. The important thing for me was to make the monologue solely about the book review, rather than giving Cathy and the audience any reason to be suspicious that there is an illicit relationship with Elise.

My blocking for "If I Didn't Believe in You" was very simple and effective and was very complementary to how I was playing the song emotionally in voice class from last semester. For the first time, I really tried to focus on the song as a response to her simply saying, "You don't believe in me," which helped to re-define and specify some moments. Blocking for "Nobody Needs to Know" focused mostly on clarifying what moments are an internal conversation with Jamie, what is to Elise, and what he is saying to his own haunted image of Cathy. I really struggled and had some difficulty with the lyrics in the last stanza of the song. I found it very depressing to settle on a Jamie that is afraid to be alone, needs to be with somebody, and is struggling to convince himself that he can be in love with Elise. My difficulty with the text carried through in our staging of "Goodbye Until Tomorrow/ I Could Never Rescue You." I had

a hard time with the text emotionally. It was really difficult living in that place and saying those goodbyes. Even given the freedom to move around the stage, my body was completely paralyzed.

I think my run through of scenes 8-14 afterwards was largely successful. I felt much more connected to the text and honest in my approach when I was able to put larger sections of the text together, rather than taking each one individually. That being said, it's going to be a difficult week to get through. I was really feeling the weight of the piece when we ran the last few scenes. I'm greatly looking forward to our full run through with Nate tomorrow and putting the piece together for the first time!

Monday, April 20, 2007

During the school day, I had a long morning of discussions with my Thesis Committee members individually concerning the vocal issues of my co-star, as well as Dr. Steve Chicurel, who is an expert on vocal health. The consensus seemed to think that would be in the best interest of the project to have another actress serve as a stand-by if V.D. would be physically unable to perform the role. I called my friend, actress Elizabeth Bailey, who agreed to be a stand by for the role of Cathy.

Our first run through with Nate went well. Patrick had very little in the ways of notes, and was just concerned about getting through the piece and connecting the dots. Afterwards we fixed some vocal issues with Nate, including some timing issues in "Shiksa Goddess" and "The Next Ten Minutes."

Tuesday, April 21, 2009

Today has certainly been an overwhelming day. I had two very large class projects due for class that required a lot of my time and energy, so I wasn't able to really think or focus on the show until after 5 pm. I did, however, call Elizabeth in the early afternoon and asked her to join us for rehearsal tonight to get some blocking notes and watch our rehearsal. With rehearsal beginning at 6:30 pm, I arrived at the Black Box theatre around 5:45 to turn on the work lights and begin warming up. Lisa arrived shortly after. At 6:30, Lisa called my co-star to find out where she was and why she was late for rehearsal. We were informed that she was at the tech center waiting for a ride/ the shuttle. Patrick immediately instructed me to pick up my co-star. Feeling taken advantage of, I explained that at this point in the process, my job was to be the actor and I shouldn't be in charge of the rehearsal process. In response, Patrick very forcefully said, "look now you're wasting my time. You have two options: Pick her up or call her and fire her." I walked out of the theatre, originally to pick her up, but then gathered myself and decided that I needed to call her. She picked up her phone after the second call, giving an excuse for why she hadn't even arrived at the Tech Center yet. I explained my frustrations that this was the third time she had been late to a rehearsal call and was given permission to miss a rehearsal for personal reasons. I expected, at the very least, with all of her vocal health issues and the problems that this show rehearsal process has come across, to have her to work harder to convince Patrick and I that she is focused and dedicated and has her head and heart in the right place.

She explained that she had to work in Sanford until 6 pm, which was why she wasn't able to park and get to campus on time. Yet, she agreed to the schedule weeks ago and it was well

beyond the point of bringing conflicts to our attention. Unfortunately, it is not a situation of needing to give her a second chance, since this is the third time that she's been late, especially after she was late the day after we gave her a personal day off last week. If we gave you a day off the day before, the last thing you should do is come to rehearsal late the next day. I told Vicky, that it was best that I release her from the project. I could not waste any more of Patrick or Nate's valuable time, which they were both volunteering, after I had already lost a significant amount of rehearsal time because of her lateness in an already horribly short rehearsal period. I explained to her that if this behavior had been exhibited in a rehearsal for UCF's main stage season she would have a failing grade for the course, or if she had been continually late to rehearsals for a professional production, she would be fired. And so, it was important for me to maintain that same level of integrity. She asked me to reconsider, but I told her I had made the decision and needed to move on from there. I said that I didn't expect her to understand my decision right now and that it hurts me as much as it hurts her because of the trust and investment that I put in her, but I needed her to respect that it was the best thing for the production and the best thing for her in the long run.

I returned to the theatre and explained the situation to Patrick, who then sent me to walk off some of my frustration. After returning to begin rehearsal, V. D. walked into the theatre and asked to speak to me. She, Patrick, and I stepped out into the lobby. Begging for the role back, I told her I needed to stand my ground and stick to my decision. She reiterated time and time again how much this piece means to her and how much work she has put into it, all of which was never an issue. She stated that she learned her lesson and realized that she took advantage of the situation and the people involved, especially me, and that with her social and personal life

crashing down in front of her, this show was the only thing she left to stand on. While trying to be empathetic to her situation, I told her that I needed to move forward.

Patrick stepped in and offered, that while he had no say in the executive decision to remove her from the project, he didn't disagree with the decision. But he offered that this was the best decision for her. Even with all of the work she put into the piece, he was and still is very concerned for her vocal health, and offered that having the time away from the piece will be positive for her. Whether or not she chose that path, it will give her an opportunity to get her life in order and her vocal issues corrected.

This situation hurts and it hurts a lot. I know that she put a lot of work into the show, but at the same time, she wasn't taking care of herself outside of rehearsal or giving the process the focus it warranted. I hope that eventually 2 weeks, months, or years down the line she will look back on this and realize that the right decision was made, not only for the production but for her. Patrick commented that it would hurt him more to let her go through with the process and to see her voice go out halfway through a run on Monday night and see the panic take over on her face. He didn't want to be responsible for her cutting years off of her career and vocal health. Therefore, he and I both think that it is the best decision for her at this time, to start to take care of herself and put herself on the right track for continued success down the line and for years to come. I explained to her that she was not leaving the production and that half of my performance is from her and that she would still remain a part of the production. Because so much of our rehearsal process was collaborative and crafted between the two of us and the director, the Jamie that I have built and created is in part due to her. The conversation ended with hugs and I asked her to please take care of herself.

From there, we went back into the room where Elizabeth was taking blocking notes and running numbers with Lisa. We started a run of the show. Patrick focused on taking lighting notes during the run. Because it was a put-in rehearsal for Elizabeth, the acting aspect of things kind of got tabled for the evening.

Wednesday, April 22, 2009

This morning, I informed my committee about releasing V. D. from the project, which I was surprised to be met with mixed reactions from the committee members. Most important to them was that the project would be continuing as scheduled. I met with Elizabeth at 1 PM to discuss some character work with her, which unfortunately did not have much depth of thought. It wasn't until this point that I started to be concerned whether or not I had made the right decision. Personal and professional issues aside, V. D. was a great actress and gave the role tremendous life and spunk. She was able to embody all of the things about Cathy that we were hoping to fight against. Now, it seemed like I was stuck with a weaker actress, who didn't see Cathy as anything but a weak, abused victim and wasn't able to convince me that she could pull off her inner-strength and confidence when we needed it in the production. But, as they say, the show must go on. I did my best to keep myself calm and focused on my own character and his journey. While it is my responsibility to help catch Elizabeth up and get her on the same page, I have a responsibility to hold on to all of the work that we created over the course of the semester and continue to use that for positive and production character growth.

We began tonight's rehearsal for *The Last Five Years* immediately following a run of my cabaret for an independent study. For several reasons, I was distracted throughout, which in part

led to some disappointing vocal and acting work and an overall weak performance. However, Patrick and Nate commented that they both thought that it was a better show than the run on Monday night. Specifically, Patrick thought that the physicalities in “Schmuel Song” was much improved but clarification was needed on some moments in ‘If I Didn’t Believe In You” and “Moving Too Fast.”

Thursday, April 23, 2009

We rehearsed tonight from 630-9:40 PM, with Professor Niess visiting for part of the rehearsal period. After some initial notes, we began a 7 PM run. As opposed to the previous evening’s run, I felt particularly connected to the text, especially during the second half of the piece. I really tried to focus in on some personal memories and layer them into the text and circumstances as “as ifs.” Yesterday, I seemed too in my head about the Cathy replacement situation, which drastically affected the honesty in that performance. I made it a point to do some additional warm up exercises to clear my head and focus in. Also, I was very happy to see that Elizabeth was much improved from last night, and will be serviceable in the role.

Friday, April 24, 2009

This afternoon, I hung some promotional posters around the Tech Center and picked up the Clavinova piano from Orlando Repertory Theatre with classmate John Mansell. At the beginning of rehearsal, Patrick costumed the show based on several options Elizabeth and I brought in for him. Over the course of the run of the show, I had some problems hearing and communicating with Nate, which we found out was due in part to a delay and reverb in the amp.

After re-working some musical numbers with the problem resolved, I expressed to Patrick that I was concerned I wasn't telling the best story possible. Part of me doesn't feel in complete control of my performance and very exposed, to which Patrick responded that this was the type of show you want to feel exposed during. I need to make a commitment to fully invest in the character tomorrow, every moment of the show, bridging the connections between songs in the hopes that it will help to ease my apprehensions.

Saturday, April 25, 2009

We had a 5:30 Call today and began with some general notes from Patrick, who said he was very pleased with yesterday's run. We worked some sections with Nate, including the "Come back to bed, kid/ take me inside of you" section of Nobody Needs to Know. We slowed down the tempo but built the music up to give that section a more intimate feel without disrupting the tempo. We also worked the final section of "A Miracle Would Happen" to try to nail down the rhythm of the last page.

We began a 7 PM dress rehearsal, before which I reminded myself to make a conscious effort to really stay in the moment and not let myself fall out of focus during Cathy's songs. I had a lot of fun playing with "Moving Too Fast" and felt confident about the vocals. Patrick said that "Schmuel Song" is a show stopper and felt the story telling aspect was spot on. "The Next Ten Minutes" also felt really connected. I knew I needed to work on the sincerity in "A Miracle Would Happen," which Patrick said played very well. I'm still having a bit of difficulty with the monologue during "Climbing Uphill." It's not rolling off of my tongue the way it needs to and just needs to be drilled before tomorrow. According to Patrick, my best song of the night was

“Nobody Needs to Know,” but the complex emotions of the entire second half played very well throughout. There were a few UCF students in the audience for the dress because they could not attend either of the performances, but they all seemed to be really affected by the piece at the end and genuinely loved our performances. I felt really good about our last run of the show before we open tomorrow. It wasn’t perfect, but no performance ever will be. I think I’m finally at a place where I feel like I’m doing a good job. I feel confident in the story I’m telling. I just need to attack and jump on the show from the very beginning and not slowly step my way into it until it kicks into gear with “Schmuel Song.” I need to attack it and grab my audience from the very first second I’m on stage. It’s just one step away from being that much better than it is already. I’m ready to give a great, connected, and fun performance the next two nights!

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

As an actor, I am fortunate to have been a part of two productions of Jason Robert Brown's *The Last Five Years*, the first being my Masters Thesis production with The University of Central Florida Conservatory Theatre in April 2009, and the second, understudying the role of Jamie in a regional production with The Media Theatre in February 2011. I am beyond grateful for both experiences and the lessons they taught me as a performer and as a person. Yet, the execution of both productions could not be more dissimilar. At the close of performances with The Media Theatre, I found myself reflecting on both productions, the differences in their creative approach, and examining how successful they were in communicating the story of *The Last Five Years*.

As an understudy, I had the luxury of being an observer for most of the rehearsal process at The Media Theatre, and was surprised at how "by the books" the creative approach was. Having built such a personal connection into my creative process at UCF, I was disheartened to watch a production of *The Last Five Years* that seemed almost entirely centered on the technical rather than the emotional. Disappointed, I watched the director build a production around a complicated multi-media presentation, countless props, a myriad of costume changes, and complicated and stiff staging. While the production was charming, enjoyable, and fairly reviewed, Philadelphia theatre critics all echoed that they were never able to fully understand why the characters made the choices they did that led to the downfall of their relationship. Having watched the production take shape, I am confident it was in large part to an emotional disconnect between the director, actors and the text. Rehearsals did not incorporate table work, character discussions, or find organic, natural blocking that allowed the actors to connect to the

text. A large part of the rehearsal process involved the actors learning and creating their characters in isolated one-on-one rehearsals with the director, rather than crafting the relationship collaboratively with the other actor through on-stage interaction. It was an incredible disservice to Jason Robert Brown and the piece to have so little time and focus placed on building the emotional live of the story.

Upon reflection, being a part of this second production of *The Last Five Years* was a watershed moment my career as an actor and led to a maturation process in what I see as exciting and important on stage. Before, I found myself taken by spectacle, effects, and technical devices that aide in the story telling, but spent little time focusing on what is most important – character, plot, and an emotional point of view. From that point looking forward, I was able to gain a new respect for character work that lays the emotional groundwork for the story to shine through. Since, as a scene partner, my focus on stage has always been to make sure that I am doing everything that I can be doing to tell the story and to ensure that I am making my scene partner look good. It gave me the confidence as an actor or director to trust that all of the information that is needed is given in the script and score, rather than feeling a need to create concepts or force aspects of the production that could detract from the story. From that point, I was fixated and drawn to the potential for musical theatre, not only to entertain, but also to draw out emotion from its audience, which I am hopeful that my production of *The Last Five Years* was able to do.

Having experienced this growth, I felt strongly reinforced in my approach for the musical, which focused entirely on communicating emotional and physical choices and seeking only to simply tell the story. While I recognize that my performance and my thesis production were far from perfect, I do think that I was able to provide more depth of character and make

Jamie more sympathetic in the eyes of the audience. The research I conducted on Jason Robert Brown, his life, and the musical itself certainly served to better inform the emotional life of Jamie and the production as a whole. The tools I developed through my class and studio work helped me conduct a deeper structural analysis. Upon reviewing my rehearsal journal, I know that relationships built on dialogue and open communication between director and actor are often the most helpful for me to develop a strong emotional connection between the character and myself. Reinforcing my training in the Meisner Technique, this process taught me that as long as I remain focused on complete emotional honesty with myself and my fellow actors, I will more fully be able to communicate my point of view, and more importantly, the playwright and composer's point of view. In keeping that my singular goal, allowing myself to be touched by the words and music of Jason Robert Brown, I believe I was able to better communicate the deepest and most complicated of human emotions through the exploration of the relationship between Jamie Wellerstein and Catherine Hyiatt.

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