

# **SEEKING A VISION, FINDING A VOICE**

EXPLORING THE MUSICALITY OF THEATRE THROUGH MULTIDISCIPLINARY  
PRACTICE

by

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## ABSTRACT

In classrooms and textbooks the “Director’s Vision” is often identified as the unifying concept for the production, and my goal in returning to graduate school was to explore my own vision as a director. In my own practice as a director, I tend to “hear” the play in my head before visualizing it. From my interpretation of the text, to the staging of the performers, to my collaboration with design team, my approach to the production of theatre stems from a place of musicality. *Seeking a Vision, Finding a Voice* explores my creative journey as multi-disciplinary theatre artist through a series of case studies detailing my practice as a Director/ Sound Designer. It examines my evolving process, which often utilizes audio collage to shape the dramatic arc of a piece or scene, experiments with using music to inform character, emotion, and movement, and values the impulses of the cast and creative team as important collaborative resources.

By detailing my process on three productions (as Director/ Sound Designer of the University of Central Florida’s Theatre for Young Audience’s Tour, Emily Freeman’s *And Then Came Tango*, as the Assistant Director/ Dramaturg/ Sound Designer for UCF’s production of Paula Vogel’s *The Baltimore Waltz*, and as the Director/ Sound Designer of John Patrick Shanley’s *Doubt: A Parable*, for Titusville Playhouse, Inc.), my process as director/designer is critically analyzed and reflected upon. Through my analysis, I explore the benefits and challenges of being a Director-who-Designs and a Designer-who-Directs, utilizing aural dramaturgy, collaboration, rhythm and emotion as essential tools in practicing theatre production.

*Seeking a Vision, Finding a Voice* reflects on my practice through the lens of David Roesner’s *Musicality as a Paradigm for the Theatre: A Kind of Manifesto*, analyzing the ways in

which the ‘notion of musicality’ was exemplified in the preparation, performance, and perception of my work. This thesis examines the benefits and challenges of multidisciplinary artistry, pondering the merits and pitfalls of taking on multiple roles in each of my processes. It further explores the impact applying musicality to theatre practice can have on both actors and audiences and cherishes sound design as a valuable tool capable of enriching theatrical storytelling.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	ix
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Directing with Musicality .....	1
Background.....	4
CHAPTER TWO: EMILY FREEMAN’S <i>AND THEN CAME TANGO</i> .....	12
About the Play.....	12
Process .....	16
Conclusions.....	24
CHAPTER THREE: PAULA VOGEL’S <i>THE BALTIMORE WALTZ</i> .....	28
About the Play.....	28
Process .....	30
Conclusions.....	47
CHAPTER FOUR: JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY’S <i>DOUBT: A PARABLE</i> .....	51
About the Play.....	51
Process .....	54
Conclusions.....	63
CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTION THROUGH MUSICALITY .....	65
Introduction: The Musicality of Theatre.....	65

Exercising Musicality .....	65
Meaning-Making through Music .....	66
Musicality in Devising .....	67
Performative Musicality.....	68
Quality over Quantity .....	70
Musicality in the Text and Delivery .....	72
Impact of Musicality on the Spectator .....	75
Political Implications of Musicality in Theatre .....	77
CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS.....	79
Learning Craft Musically .....	79
Musicality as Style .....	79
On Borrowing .....	80
On Multidisciplinary Theatre Practice.....	82
APPENDIX A: PHOTO COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FROM EMILY FREEMAN .....	86
APPENDIX B: PHOTO COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FROM TONY FIRRIOLO .....	88
APPENDIX C: PHOTO COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FROM ECLIPSE PHOTOGRAPHY .....	90
REFERENCES .....	92

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Roy basks in the sun as the colony awaits Silo’s arrival. (Photo by Emily Freeman). .	13
Figure 2: Walter and Lily in the incubation room. (Photo by Emily Freeman).....	14
Figure 3: Walter gives Roy and Silo an abandoned egg to raise. (Photo by Emily Freeman). ....	15
Figure 4: Roy and Silo begin their pair-bond dance. (Photo by Emily Freeman). .....	22
Figure 5: Anna and Garcon at the French Café. (Photo by Tony Firriolo).....	38
Figure 6: Anna dreams of a romanticized death. (Photo by Tony Firriolo). .....	40
Figure 7: Alex Bair and Ryan Sutter rehearse the Ferris Wheel scene. (Photo by Tara Kromer).41	
Figure 8: The Ferris Wheel scene in performance. (Photo by Tony Firriolo). .....	42
Figure 9: Anna and Carl’s final waltz. (Photo by Tony Firriolo). .....	44
Figure 10: Director Julia Listengarten in rehearsal with collaborators, Christopher Niess and Kate Ingram. ....	48
Figure 11: Mandi Jo John as Mrs. Muller. (Photo by Eclipse Photography).....	56
Figure 12: Patrick Sullivan as Father Brendan Flynn. (Photo by Austin Harris). .....	58
Figure 13: Linda Lawson-Jones as Sister Aloysius Beauvier and Shanell Sparr as Sister James. (Photo by Eclipse Photography). .....	60

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Directing with Musicality

As a multidisciplinary artist with a passion for exploring the musicality of theatre, I hear the play in my head before visualizing it in my mind's eye. In my process, the relationship between directing and sound design, while not completely inseparable, are deeply intertwined. By examining my processes on Emily Freeman's movement-driven play for young audiences *And Then Came Tango*, Paula Vogel's surreal odyssey through the grieving process *The Baltimore Waltz*, and John Patrick Shanley's well-made play *Doubt: A Parable*, the evolution of my practice as a director will be critically analyzed. The challenges and benefits of taking on multiple roles on each production will be explored, and the merits of a multi-disciplinary approach to theatre training will be contemplated. Further, the art of theatre will be examined as an inherently musical event, wherein each aspect can be considered within the context of musicality.

In the Spring of 2014, I was presented with the opportunity to direct UCF's touring production for young audiences, a new play by Emily Freeman called *And Then Came Tango*. This production marked a number of "firsts" for me as a director: the first time I had worked with a movement director on a very movement-driven piece; the first time I had directed a show that needed to travel to various venues; the first time I directed a play that presented somewhat controversial material that was aimed at a distinctly younger demographic. The original music that worked well for the first production in Austin, Texas was discarded when composer Paul Marbach was unavailable to adapt the score to the newly revised script. In addition to directing the piece, I took on the sound design, giving the play a familiar soundtrack utilizing string and

piano instrumental covers of popular songs interspersed with emotional pieces by pianist Helen Jane Long. Music became such a driving force in this production, and my aptitude for sound design was first recognized and praised by my advisors, who encouraged me to further my practice in the discipline.

Later in the semester, I served as the Assistant Director and Dramaturge of Paula Vogel's *The Baltimore Waltz*, directed by Dr. Julia Listengarten. Listengarten had pushed me academically to explore my fascination with the camp aesthetic through my studies in her courses in theory and Avant Garde theatre. Her invitation to assist on *The Baltimore Waltz* engaged me in a highly collaborative process which allowed me to further my application of this aesthetic as a director and, unexpectedly, as a sound designer. It was agreed upon that I would work closely with a faculty sound designer in order to gain knowledge of the tools and technologies that I lacked during *And Then Came Tango*. During the week before rehearsals began, upon the resignation of the original designer, I was enlisted formally to create the sound design myself. I was thrilled to take on the challenge of creating the aural landscape for this moving piece of dark comedy, which became one of the most collaborative artistic experiences of my graduate career as well as one of the most fulfilling for me as a multi-disciplinary artist.

While in rehearsals for *The Baltimore Waltz*, I secured my first production as a director at a venue outside the university. The Titusville Playhouse was seeking a director for their second-stage production of John Patrick Shanley's well-made play, *Doubt: A Parable*. This was a very powerful small cast drama, which I had seen on Broadway several years ago with Cherry Jones, and was a directing opportunity I simply could not pass up. I wondered how my process as a director would have to adapt, as most of the shows that aligned with my directorial aesthetic

were comedic, or at least fell into the genres of dark comedy, tragicomedy, and often parody. How would my directing technique have to change in order to approach a serious drama? What would it be like dealing with a cast of older, more seasoned, professional Equity actors? How would my process as Director/ Sound Designer evolve within this different style of material? As I embarked upon an exploration of the text with the actors, the language and the ideas debated in the piece took front-and-center and the sound design was incorporated just prior to tech. Perhaps because the text stood on its own and was driven by strongly-written characters played by seasoned actors, my focus in this instance was more keenly tuned into the musicality of the text and the actors' interpretations of its meaning.

As these processes unfolded, I began to ask myself a number of questions as an artist: Is it effective directorially to consider the production aurally before imagining it visually? How does the design inform the performance? How does the performance inform the design? What are the benefits and challenges of creating the sound design for a piece while simultaneously providing leadership to the cast and other collaborators? Does my split focus on the design of the aural environment and my leadership of the ensemble do justice to the creative process? How can I best utilize my resources and collaborators in order to make sure the production's needs are met? How can I create the best circumstances for a collaborative and creative atmosphere in the rehearsal room? Do I risk cheating myself of an additional collaborative experience by designing the sound myself? Will I find it more effective or rewarding to create my own sound design as a part of my preferred directorial methodology or will it prove a handicap when I'm provided with a brilliant sound designer of my own?

In each of the processes I describe, sound proved an important design element in its own unique way. By examining the evolution of my process, evaluating the benefits and challenges of serving in multiple capacities, and analyzing the unique evolution of the soundscape's creation in each of my processes, the inner-connectedness of stage directing and sound design will be considered. I will further utilize the "paradigmatic principle" of "musicality" detailed in David Roesner's article, "Musicality as a paradigm for the theatre: a kind of manifesto" (293) as a lens to reflect upon my practical research. I intend to explore how "'musicality' as a form of perceiving and thinking on the theatre stage, as a principle of 'praxis', which can be a training, working and devising method, a dramaturgical approach as well as a perceptive frame for audiences" (Roesner 294) was observable in my practice.

### Background

My family instilled in me a love of music from a very young age. I grew up watching movie musicals: Saturday morning cartoons were easily trumped by a viewing of Leslie Ann Warren as *Cinderella*, Robert Preston as Harold Hill in *The Music Man*, or Mary Martin as *Peter Pan*. My adoration of these films, along with several old Disney musicals from the 1960s and 70s, eventually led me to an interest in live theatre and, later, to a real fascination with how music and sound design can shape the world of a theatrical production.

I became heavily involved in amateur theatre within my high school and community, and was drawn to almost every aspect of the theatrical profession and enjoyed working both onstage and off. My involvement in the music program began long before high school, and my family and friends always expected me to pursue music in my undergraduate studies. Even at eighteen,

music seemed to me such an integral part of theatre: my pursuit of a theatrical occupation was certain to satisfy my desire to keep my love of music close at heart. Not long before my graduation, I was allowed to direct my first one-act play, and I fell in love with being the offstage hand who guides the performers and the designers down a common path—it seemed to encompass all my interests.

My undergraduate studies led me down a multi-disciplinary path. After two years focused on technical theatre at the University of South Florida, I transferred to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro to pursue a BFA in Theatre Education. I eventually found my way into directing and stage management, realizing my passion for being in the rehearsal room exceeded my interest in being in the classroom. I opted for a more flexible Bachelor of Arts degree in order to continue nurturing my broad range of interests. I directed a number of studio productions and sought opportunities to assistant direct and stage manage as often as I could throughout my remaining semesters. During this formative time, I began exploring the relationship of direction and sound design—supplying my own cricket-filled ambiance for a scene I directed for class from Sam Shepard's *True West*, creating the aural environment of a subway train for my production of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*, and filling transitions with musical life for a production of Diana Son's *Stop Kiss*. At the same time, I found my way into crew assignments in stage management, and developed an appreciation for the sense of timing required to maintain a production's tone and pace with regard to lighting and sound. These actively malleable elements of scenography were vital in creating the atmosphere that the creative team was trying to construct and often felt like additional characters integral to the world of the play. In hindsight, it seems that a majority of the projects I completed during the

early years of my directing practice included creating my own sound design. This was something I did out of necessity, which in my earliest work often came as an afterthought; a thrilling but usually rushed eleventh-hour activity that I was often hard-pressed to create a few days prior to performance.

After earning my undergraduate degree, I accepted a position as the stage manager and technical director at a struggling dinner theatre that produced musicals and revues. From my earliest experiences with musical theatre as a teenager, I was familiar with the standard practice of spending the first several days of rehearsal gathered around a piano, plunking out notes, and memorizing harmonies. The musical's composer seemed to be the director of its pace, tone, and timing; the composer provided vivid information about the tone and pace of almost every moment through the notes on the page, the instrumentation, the time signature, and the prescribed tempo. The musical's director was able to guide staging and character choices as in any non-musical play, but the score provided both additional dramaturgical resources and possible constraints. It was not until the following summer that I was exposed to the notion that musical or atmospheric sound could be utilized early on in the process of non-musicals as well, and prove to be an element of production that would evolve and transform in tandem with the actors' exploration.

In the summer of 2005, I accepted an opportunity to be a Directing Intern in the Lab Company at the Hangar Theatre in Ithaca, New York. My first assignment there, *I Am My Own Wife*, marked the first time I had experienced having a sound designer in the rehearsal room. I assisted Director Wendy Dann, who was in collaboration with sound designer/ composer Ryan Rumery. Rumery, armed with his electronic keyboard and headphones, created aural

environments for our actor to explore in real-time, as the actor and director crafted each moment. His sounds aided in the actor's transitions from character to character, and truly became a scene partner to our Charlotte Von Mahlsdorf. It was a mesmerizing experience to witness the collaboration between the director, the designer, and the performer as they worked together to find the perfect aural motifs to accompany the actor's transformations into the multitude of characters in the piece. Dann's collaborative methodology as a director, her tactful way of creating a rehearsal environment that invited the open sharing of ideas, had a significant impact on my practice. Later that summer, I directed a small production of Jane Martin's *Anton in Show Business* with the female members of the Lab Company and found myself much more open to a more organic staging process, allowing myself to relinquish the compulsion to block entire scenes on paper prior to rehearsal in favor of inviting more open collaboration with the members of the cast. I also found myself trying out sound effects and clips of music much earlier in the rehearsal process than I had in my practice as a student director. I had always fancied myself a director of musicals but began to find there was perhaps even more creative freedom in the ability to shape a non-musical in a very musical way.

After my summer at the Hangar, I was the assistant director for Jeffrey Hatcher's adaptation of Henry James' haunting novella, *The Turn of the Screw*, at Triad Stage in Greensboro, North Carolina. In this case, the sound design was not integrated into the production until technical rehearsals, but utilized some interesting organic techniques. In this production, real water dripping into metal buckets suspended above the house gave the audience the chilling feeling of the spooky and isolated environment of Bly manor. Another piece in which one man plays multiple characters in a neutral/ multi-functional setting, sound and light helped the

audience to follow the actor's character shifts and set the tone for an atmosphere in which bumps in the night, wind, and the haunting voices of singing children would drive a young governess to lunacy.

My career segued into stage management for a number of years thereafter, and I found myself at Seaside Music Theatre in Daytona Beach, Florida. Here my love of musicals was deepened and my understanding of the precision of timing needed to call a musical was put into practice. It all boiled down to the seamless marriage of the music to the action of the performers, and the visual world of the scenic and lighting design. During this time I was fortunate to observe a number of directors and choreographers in collaboration with music directors and sound designers from the earliest stages of the process.

I continued freelancing in stage management, electrics, and props in Chicago and upstate New York in the years following the closing of Seaside Music Theatre before landing back in Florida and taking a position as the resident stage manager at the Hippodrome State Theatre in Gainesville. There I gained extensive exposure to the process of Artistic Director Lauren Caldwell, who always directed with a sound designer in the rehearsal room. Caldwell has a knack for continuing her storytelling through transitions, often creating elegant or eccentric musical interludes or incorporating unexpected dance breaks, providing opportunities for herself to further or intentionally disrupt her storytelling. During the rehearsal process, resident sound designer Risa Baxter tested music and effects choices from the earliest phases of the staging process, using headphones first to privately test the choice or find the appropriate place in a piece of music. As the design and performance took shape, some design choices were informed by an actors' discoveries, while some acting moments were informed by the design.

After two-and-a-half years in this creatively-charged environment, I felt the need to test the limits of my own artistic and scholarly capacity and return to school to earn my MFA to refocus my career toward directing. I had no idea the experiences and opportunities that would befall me would lead me through an exploration of my own directing process and even further to an unexpected interest in sound design. From my very first directing project, a production of Christopher Durang's *For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls*, it seemed not only necessary but natural and fun to design the sound for the production. During this time, my fascination with the camp aesthetic began and certainly helped to shape my choices: covers of Madonna's "Like a Virgin" underscored Lawrence's monologue about his esteemed swizzle stick collection in the wistful voice of a child's music box, and Tom's homoerotic tomes on the fire escape were accompanied by a live piano smooth jazz version of Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance".

Later that school year I was assigned to direct and sound design an original piece titled *Cobblestones*, a product of Orlando Rep's Writes of Spring writing contest for K-12 students. In this instance, I was able to collaborate with composer Igor Yachmenov and with co-playwrights Brandon Yagel and Jason Gerhard to create the score for a totally new play-with-music based on the creative writing of one hundred and twenty K-12 students in the Central Florida area.

The following summer, I juggled a number of hats as a Director/ Sound Designer, Teaching Artist, and Props Designer during my residency at Keystone Repertory Theatre in Indiana, Pennsylvania. There I directed and created my own sound design for a youth production of Doug Cooney's *The Beloved Dearly* with the Footlight Players Academy, utilizing a soundtrack comprised of music from the 1930s and the swing revival of the 1990s. This music, peppered with the tones of a New Orleans jazz funeral, helped to create a modern *Little Rascals*

feel, which served to tell the story of “Ernie” and “Swimming Pool”, two kids going into the funeral business for departed neighborhood pets.

Over the course of these projects, my skills as both a director and a sound designer began to take shape, and the challenges and benefits of working simultaneously in these two demanding roles became clear. Directing and sound design were skills I had a growing passion to nurture, and I began to examine my successes and shortcomings in both areas. Although I considered myself a versatile theatre artist, I was eager to focus on the skills needing the most development: as a designer, my knowledge of the software used in most theatres for programming and playback was lacking. I had gotten much more comfortable cutting and layering music and effects with Audacity, but had only basic knowledge of playback software, including Q-Lab. Directorially, I had room to grow as well, and continued in my efforts to better my practice as a collaborative leader, as a communicator of creative ideas, as a builder of ensemble, and as the catalyst between the text and the actors and the design. For the first project of my second year, a studio production of Bert V. Royal’s *Dog Sees God: Confessions of a Teenage Blockhead*, I was privileged to work with a full design team for the first time. My sound designer, Anthony Narcisso, provided transition music, the iconic teacher’s trombone voice and a dub-step Vince Giuraldi remix for this angsty coming-of-age parody of the Charles Schultz comic strip, *Peanuts*. While it was thrilling to work with a sound designer for the first time, and a relief to be allowed to give the actors my undivided attention, the sound for the production was not added until tech and felt to the cast like a foreign element of the show that took some getting used to. I realized how much of a luxury it was for directors like Lauren Caldwell and Wendy Dann to have the

resources to recruit sound designers who could commit to attending at least most of their rehearsals.

The following year, I pursued more opportunities to exercise my dual interest in directing and sound design, taking on the projects this study will detail. My intent in pursuing my graduate degree had initially been to focus solely on directing, but through my practice and exploration of process, I have discovered a passion for practicing multi-disciplinary artistry in the theatre as well as a natural capacity to view theatre through the lens of musicality.

## CHAPTER TWO: EMILY FREEMAN'S *AND THEN CAME TANGO*

### About the Play

In December of 2011, University of Texas at Austin MFA candidate Emily Freeman had her new play, *And Then Came Tango*, selected for production the following Fall as the university's Theatre for Young Audiences Tour, slated to perform at elementary schools throughout the Austin school district. The piece Freeman had written, a forty-minute play intended for 2<sup>nd</sup>- 5<sup>th</sup> graders and their families, told the story of Roy and Silo, two male chinstrap penguins who formed a pair-bond and were given an orphaned egg to raise at New York's Central Park Zoo. The piece gained national attention when, after its first performance at Lee Elementary School in the Fall of 2012, school administrators objected to the play's content and had the tour cancelled (Freeman). When Freeman returned to her hometown of Orlando to serve as an adjunct professor at the University of Central Florida in the Spring of 2014, she brought with her a revised draft of *And Then Came Tango* and a strong desire to bring this touching story of acceptance to audiences at home. Theatre UCF's Spring touring production of Freeman's play presented a creative opportunity in which I was able to explore sound design as a directing tool and appreciate the benefits and challenges of occupying the dual role of Director/Sound Designer.

As Freeman's play unfolds, we are introduced to its young protagonist, ten-year-old Lily, a plucky city kid from a single-parent family who keeps coming back to visit the zoo after her summer experience at "Junior Keeper Camp". The zookeeper, Walter, prepares to feed the penguins as Lily persistently asks to help. Walter allows Lily to hold the fish bucket, and the child excitedly names the chinstraps in the colony, including a shy male penguin whom she calls

“Roy” (see Figure 1). When a new penguin is delivered from San Diego, Lily names him “Silo” and Walter introduces the newcomer to the colony (Freeman 4-13).



Figure 1: Roy basks in the sun as the colony awaits Silo’s arrival. (Photo by Emily Freeman).

Mating season begins and the penguins of the colony begin pairing off; each couple performs a pair-bond dance, builds a nest of stones, and prepares to lay an egg. Meanwhile, Roy

and Silo have begun to form a bond of their own and Lily notices they have built their own nest and have been taking turns sitting on a rock as if it were their own egg. As the other pairs' eggs hatch and they begin nurturing their fledglings, Roy and Silo become depressed and stop eating. After a chat with her mom about the meaning of family, Lily realizes that Roy and Silo just want to be parents like the other couples in the habitat, and she manages to convince Walter to give the pair an orphaned egg (see Figures 2 and 3) from the incubation room (Freeman 14-34).



Figure 2: Walter and Lily in the incubation room. (Photo by Emily Freeman)



Figure 3: Walter gives Roy and Silo an abandoned egg to raise. (Photo by Emily Freeman).

When news of this same-sex adoption gets out, protests erupt at the zoo, and Walter runs the risk of losing his job. Lily and her mom make their own protest signs and stand up for the penguin family. As the play concludes, baby “Tango” arrives and Lily goes about plotting to show the world what good parents Roy and Silo are, concocting grassroots plans of activism to continue defending an open and loving spirit of family acceptance (Freeman 35-45).

The updated draft Freeman had been working on was full of changes from the previous draft: a number of participatory moments were altered in order to give the main character more agency and a scene was added in which we see Lily at home with her mom. The play had been given a new spin and was being presented to a different community with the hope of a more

welcoming reception. While all but one of the K-12 schools that we approached were not able (or in many cases not willing) to bring the piece into their schools, the impact of our performances at UCF, Orlando Repertory Theatre, and Freedom High School were appreciated by the community and provided unique opportunities for the students involved.

### Process

My team of MFA classmates and I set about preparing to present *And Then Came Tango*'s Orlando premiere in January of 2014 as coursework for two graduate-level courses in the Theatre for Young Audiences program at the University of Central Florida. This project gave each of us the opportunity to engage in a highly collaborative, multi-disciplinary process. I was chosen to be the director of the production, with my classmate, Jason Gerhard, serving as movement director. After our initial assignments were issued for the production, we were asked what additional duties we would be comfortable taking on. The lighting designer and production manager also played the role of Walter in the show. The actor playing Lily also served as the assistant production manager and maintained the production's presence in social media. The dramaturge was also the stage manager, and so forth. Due to my increasing interest in sound design, I found this to be a wonderful opportunity to gain experience in that discipline in addition to furthering my directing practice.

The complex collaborative relationships fostered through what our team branded the "Project Tango Tour" grew from a compact timeline and an already established sense of rapport amongst our graduate class. We were granted an extremely limited time for planning before the rehearsal process commenced: on our first day of the semester, we learned that *Tango* was going

to be our touring project, conducted a read through, and discussed the play at length. We submitted written requests for what our individual roles in the production could be, and our instructors, Vandy Wood and the playwright herself, Emily Freeman, delegated responsibilities to the group. By the start of the second week, our primary roles had been assigned, and Gerhard and I struggled to squeeze in time to plan, conduct auditions and cast the play. Juggling our first teaching opportunity as co-instructors for an undergraduate Theatre Survey course and keeping up with additional graduate coursework were the primary factors dictating the limitations on our planning time. I was also in technical rehearsals as an assistant director working to open a production of Debra Zoe Laufer's new play, *Leveling Up*, in UCF's Black Box. The semester proved to be a true lesson in multi-tasking and efficiency. By the end of our third week of class, we had recruited a cast of twelve and conducted our first rehearsal, begun design collaborations with advanced scenography students, reached out to a number of potential venues for booking, and planned our strategies for community engagement. We had allotted three evening rehearsal sessions per week of three hours each for a period of six weeks prior to our opening performance on March 23<sup>rd</sup> in the auditorium of UCF's School of Visual Art and Design.

Our rehearsals for *And Then Came Tango* began with the requisite read-through and table-work discussion but, as the play contains human actors playing penguins, it was established early on that I would work with the "human" characters to establish blocking and conduct character work with them while Gerhard worked with the "penguin" cast to establish a movement vocabulary for the "colony".

Our stage manager/ dramaturge shared a number of video clips of real chinstrap penguins in nature and captivity. This audio-visual research brought the cast a point of reference upon

which to build their physical performances, and allowed them to incorporate subtle chirps and honks inspired by reality. This aural research also informed my later design choice to set the scene between Lily and Walter in the incubation room to the “hum” of a fluorescent light, emphasizing the uninviting sterility of the environment. Early on, effort was made to foster open collaboration in terms of the use of music in the show: as early as the first rehearsal I invited the cast to come to me with suggestions for songs or artists that I should explore. It had actually been during the audition session that Gerhard and I had conducted the previous week that I was introduced to the Vitamin String Quartet, a music group popularized by their string covers of modern pop songs. When soon-to-be cast member Douglas Jensen shuffled through a playlist for a movement exercise in the audition session and played a string cover of Coldplay’s “Yellow”, the seed of an idea for the tone of the show was planted.

At the beginning of the process, there had been a possibility the creator of the music for the original production, Paul Marbach, a composer from Austin, TX, would be available to collaborate with us and adapt the existing score to the revised script. I was somewhat anxious to proceed with a long-distance collaboration of this nature based on our limited timeline. While Marbach’s lyrical score, which won him UT Austin’s Roy Crane Award for Outstanding Creative Achievement in the Arts (Marbach), was incredibly well-written and touching, it lacked the contemporary edge I had in mind for our production. Between these factors and the composer’s limited availability during our time frame, I found it necessary to reimagine the sound design for our production.

By the end of the second week of rehearsal, I had established rough blocking for the scenes between Lily, Walter, and Lily’s Mom, and the “penguin” cast had established and

perfected a movement vocabulary inspired by video footage of chinstrap penguins in the wild and in captivity. We also had engaged the cast in some improvisational exercises to bring the entire cast together, playing with tasks like feeding and emphasizing character exploration. The time had come to start putting together the piece as a whole.

In my role as sound designer, I had spent a number of hours exploring the canon of the Vitamin String Quartet and similar groups like the Dallas String Quartet, 2Cellos, and The Piano Guys, who likewise distributed classical-sounding covers of popular tunes. Due to the free and educational nature of our production and the university radio station's agreement with ASCAP, our use of the music selected was free of royalty. I had gathered a number of options for different moments in the show: a playlist for feeding, one for flirting, one full of options for pair-bond dances and the like. A cast member's suggestion to check out the music of pianist Helen Jane Long proved fruitful in accumulating a number of strong options for more touching emotional moments. Armed with a number of exciting options, I was prepared to enter our next phase of staging: putting together the show as a whole and the staging of the movement sequences.

The process of shaping the soundscape while still keeping a hand on the piece's overall direction was simultaneously exciting and frustrating; it required a great deal of support from my collaborators and a considerable amount of planning. Gerhard's leadership techniques as movement director utilized devising methods and Viewpoints work, with which I had limited experience. These methodologies proved to be considerably more organic and time-consuming than our limited timeline allowed for, and I often found myself urging Gerhard to make movement choices in a more timely fashion. In a reflection paper for our tour class, I recalled that I had "... wish[ed] that I'd realized earlier how ahead-of-the-game I needed to be as the

sound designer on a movement-heavy piece like this. It wasn't until 2 or 3 weeks into the process that I recognized that the most effective way to guide Jason's work to a more efficient end, in line with my own vision, was to provide him with specific cuts of music to tailor the movement to (music first, then movement was most effective for this process)" (Kromer). In a peer evaluation of Gerhard, I recounted, "Jason deserves a lot of credit for really working on ensemble building through the exercises and warmups that he would conduct. He has also developed a really beautiful movement vocabulary with the penguin characters, which is something that I am not as well-versed in, and the ensemble really bonded during the first few sessions." In the same evaluation, I reflected on my own process, "Learning as a sound designer when it was best to tailor the movement to existing music versus when to tailor the music to the action that was being created has been vital in navigating that aspect of my role" (Kromer). Once this realization was made, Gerhard and I would sit in the graduate office, with coffee in hand, having just taught our morning class together, and would play sections of music, narrating the action that could be staged to support the story. My evenings at home were spent finding correctly-timed excerpts of each song and adjusting the keys of the tunes when necessary to musically segue from moment to moment. Our production's assistant stage manager, Sarah Van Marter, had experience programming using the Mac-based program, Q-Lab, and was able to program the show in real-time as choices were being made in the rehearsal room. Although I had help with programming, splitting my focus between guiding the production directorially and actively tending to the aural landscape and musical arc of the piece required additional attention and awareness.

It soon became clear that the music would not only be the driving force behind the penguin movement sequences, but that the aural environment being created drove a number of the “human” scenes and created the production’s overall flow. This made making very specific choices about which sections of the songs I had pulled very important. In an article written for Emily Freeman’s and Vandy Wood’s graduate TYA Seminar, titled *Penguins and Protest: Tango-ing with Camp*, I recounted the reasoning behind some of my musical choices: “...I chose to use classical covers of modern pop songs to provide a recognizable soundtrack for the movement in the play. Songs like The Jackson Five’s “ABC” and Jason Mraz’s “I’m Yours” provided the aural environment for penguin flirtation” (“Penguins and Protest”). The quirky indie-film tune “Anyone Else But You” by The Moldy Peaches provided the innocent and playful tone inherent in the early phases of Roy and Silo’s courtship. A lyrical string cover of Coldplay’s “Yellow” set the stage for their pair-bond (see Figure 4) and retained a multidimensional meaning wherein the audience (those familiar with the song’s lyrics) recall the image of a color has not been gendered in our culture. This subliminal lyrical message commented on the nature of Roy and Silo’s bond— one that was blind to gender norms.



Figure 4: Roy and Silo begin their pair-bond dance. (Photo by Emily Freeman).

In *Penguins and Protest*, I recalled:

Nearly all of the songs chosen for the show had a double meaning: thematically setting the tone for the scenes and movement sequences, lyrically speaking to the action of the moments that they supported in the piece. Although the song lyrics were omitted from the instrumental covers of the music, my intention was to choose music recognizable enough that mature audiences

would subconsciously recall their familiar lyrics and relate them to the moments as they unfolded. For example, the water ballet during which Lily and Walter wait for the arrival of Silo is underscored by a string version of “Maps” by the Yeah, Yeah, Yeahs, with subliminal messages telephoned from Silo to Roy saying “Wait, they don’t love you like I love you.” Silo’s introduction to the penguin colony was underscored by Jason Mraz’s “I Just Haven’t Met You Yet,” again ironically delivering portions of Silo’s inner monologue as he waits to meet his penguin partner. During the “hatching” sequence, in which Roy and Silo stop eating because their rock won’t hatch, Aimee Mann’s “Wise Up” sends subliminal messages to Walter and the penguins that action needs to be taken: “It’s not going to stop, ‘til you wise up.” ... First played jokingly at a designer run as a placeholder, an instrumental version of Guns and Roses’ “Sweet Child O’ Mine” gave the cast and crew a good chuckle, but ended up sticking and becoming the scoring for the final scene and curtain call. (Kromer)

Pianist Helen Jane Long’s moving body of work set the tone for more touching and emotional moments: the silent scene in which Walter acknowledges the sadness and isolation of the same-sex penguin pair, the moment when Walter introduces the couple to their new egg, and the emotional climax of the piece in which a determined Lily conducts a silent counter-protest to stand up for Roy and Silo just moments before the arrival of their new chick. If the instrumental

pop covers utilized in the major movement sequences left lyrics imprinted on the mind, songs like Long's "Goodnight", "Rainbow", and "Echo" allowed for lyric-less moments of dramatic clarity which directly influenced the pace, tempo, and emotional interpretation of these moments by the cast.

Once a solid outline of the sound design for the piece was established, I was able to return more of my focus and energy to the performance of the cast. Vital to this transition of focus was the programming skills of our assistant stage manager. It was a great asset as a director to be able to emerge from troubleshooting cues and testing design choices behind the glow of a laptop screen in order to work moments and take notes on run-throughs. In the multi-disciplinary situation that the entire graduate class had been thrust into, we each adapted as needed to get our work done. Each of us were pushed to the limits of our skill set and were able to experience the gratification of throwing ourselves into a project and working together as a team.

### Conclusions

Reflecting on my direction and sound design of Emily Freeman's *And Then Came Tango*, I come to a number of conclusions. As with any experience, there were lessons I learned as a director, as a designer, and as a multi-tasker that I hope to carry into my future work.

Firstly, while this was not the first production for which I provided my own sound design, it did mark the first time that my design served as the driving force behind the play's action. This brings me to a question: what drives any play? What makes a play tick before it is ever spoken aloud? From our conversations with Freeman, this play was often described as "movement driven," and while the music for the original production's score was considered and

discussed, the play itself was never (in my recollection) referred to as “music-driven.” Perhaps one of the lessons learned here is that, more often than not, the two are synonymous; although you can have music without movement, it is rare for a movement piece to lack music. It is now clear how much more prepared a sound designer must be with choices and options when working on a “movement-driven” piece.

This process taught me just how important good collaborators are to me as a director, especially as a director-who-designs. There were points in the process in which I did not effectively use my collaborators, when I failed to communicate with them clearly enough or found them unable to communicate effectively with me, when I did not trust them enough or felt as if they lacked trust in me. There were times when I felt like my leadership as the director of the production was being undermined and that my movement director and I were not on the same page about how to best utilize our limited rehearsal time, how to share leadership responsibilities, and how to bring a unified vision for the show to our ensemble. There were moments of clarity when I realized without a doubt that my team had the welfare of the production as their first priority; their intent was not to step on my toes but to support me by watching and critiquing the actors when my duties as a sound designer occasionally preoccupied my attention. There also were times when I was overwhelmed with gratitude that I was surrounded by wonderful and creative individuals, who each brought unique skills and perspectives to the table, and who were all working very hard for a common goal.

The most overwhelming notion was that the cast and creative team all were really passionate about getting behind this story. They each brought their bravery and artistry to celebrate and champion for same-sex couples and other diverse families. The show’s reception

by the young people and open-minded families who attended our performances was overwhelmingly positive and supportive, but I wondered if perhaps had not succeeded in reaching an audience for whom we could have caused a shift in perception.

Lastly, in a conversation outside of school after one particularly periled performance of *And Then Came Tango* in Studio 1 at UCF's Performing Arts Center, my knack for the discipline of sound design was first acknowledged by a mentor professor. At the top of the performance, something had gone awry with the studio's sound system and the music and sound effects for the show played back, but were barely audible and sounded muffled and distorted. As I sat anxiously with my parents, who had come in from out of town to view the performance, my heart sank: the action seemed false and unmotivated, the dialogue sounded cheesy and over-the-top, and the formerly graceful movement sequences became awkward and disjointed. The richness of the scoring, which had served to help ground the performers had become hollow and weak. The stage management team took turns trying to fidget with the touch screen in the sound cabinet until eventually Professor Vandy Wood snuck down and whispered to me, "What's going on with the sound?" to which I replied, "I have no idea, but this is miserable- ask them to switch to the computer speakers that we used in the rehearsal room." Although playing the sound from a pair of old used desktop computer speakers failed to provide the quality of sound that I would have preferred, the remainder of the show was much more bearable to watch after the change was made. After the performance, Wood later commented that this mishap served to highlight the fact that the sound design I had created for the piece was an integral part of the storytelling, without which the production had far less emotional impact. She encouraged me to study and pursue my interest in this design area further, which laid the groundwork for my next multi-

disciplinary endeavor, the sound design, assistant directorship, and dramaturgy of Paula Vogel's

*The Baltimore Waltz*.

## CHAPTER THREE: PAULA VOGEL'S *THE BALTIMORE WALTZ*

### About the Play

Playwright Paula Vogel wrote *The Baltimore Waltz* shortly after her brother's death from AIDS in 1988. This Obie Award-winning play, which put Vogel on the map as a noteworthy playwright, was produced by Theatre UCF in the Fall of 2014. Directed by Dr. Julia Listengarten, this production featured a highly collaborative process in which I served as the Assistant Director, Sound Designer, and Dramaturge.

Vogel's memorial to her brother is layered with symbolism and utilizes parody, homage, heavy satire, transference, and humor to deliver its characters toward closure by means of an imaginary odyssey through an idealized Europe. In a 1998 article for POZ Magazine, titled *Tribute: My Brother, Myself*, Vogel recalls:

I wrote my first breakthrough work, *The Baltimore Waltz*, in New York City in 1991, and it was produced Off-Broadway the following year to great acclaim. The play was inspired by a trip Carl and I never took. He had asked me to accompany him to Europe, but I didn't go, discouraged by the cost – and unaware that he was HIV positive – so he went without me. As I waited for Carl to die, I sat in the hallway of Johns Hopkins University Hospital, imagining the trip we didn't take and writing the play in my head. (“Tribute”)

In the play, Anna, a middle-aged schoolteacher, serves as a stand-in for Vogel herself. Having stepped into the shoes of her dying brother Carl, Anna is diagnosed with the mysterious and terminal “Acquired Toilet Disease.” The Doctor delivers the news of this diagnosis, in many

uncertain terms, to Anna and her brother Carl, and suggests the only hope for a cure might lie in the hands of Dr. Todesrocheln, a Viennese practitioner of “uriposia” (the drinking of urine). As an added measure, Carl phones Harry Lime, an old friend living in Vienna from whom he hopes to obtain black market for his sister. Armed with a couple of passports, Carl’s childhood stuffed rabbit Jojo, and a cynical sense of hope, the siblings embark on an imaginary trip through an American’s fantasy of Europe. Carl and Anna are pursued by the mysterious Third Man through France, Holland, and Germany, to find Harry Lime and Dr. Todesrocheln in Vienna. There, Carl breaks away from his sister and locates Harry at the famous Prater amusement park where he is thrown from the top of the famous Ferris wheel. Meanwhile, Anna meets with Dr. Todesrocheln, who is eventually revealed as the Doctor from the hospital in Baltimore, destroying her European fantasy and thrusting her back into the harsh reality of Carl’s death from AIDS (“The Baltimore Waltz” 9-52).

Vogel uses a number of conventions in this piece to distance herself from the reality of her brother’s death; she handles the subjects of fear, loneliness, promiscuity, death and dying with the sardonic humor that was so vibrant in Carl. Vogel writes:

My brother was a librarian at the San Francisco Public Library. He had the kind of mind you want on your side during a game of Trivial Pursuit: a historian’s recall coupled with an English professor’s love of literature. He had a passion for both high and low art, sensing the aesthetic similarity between Tennyson and John Waters. He was also a political activist, a founder of a chapter of the Gay Activist Alliance, a participant in Students for a Democratic Society, an advocate for civil rights for everyone, a feminist. (“Tribute”)

This description of Carl permeates every page of *The Baltimore Waltz*. UCF's take on Vogel's enchanting tragicomedy embraced her film noir aesthetic and over-the-top references to classic movies. Listengarten and I worked closely with a cast of nine and a creative team of student and faculty designers to bring Anna and Carl's imaginary trip to life, with the hope of celebrating the memory of Carl Vogel and those like him who were taken prematurely in the AIDS crisis.

### Process

In early April 2014, Dr. Julia Listengarten approached me with the opportunity to serve as her assistant director for UCF's Fall production of *The Baltimore Waltz*. This was to be a project that would test my limits creatively as a multidisciplinary theatre artist, wherein my role was gradually expanded to encompass dramaturgy and sound design. The production also provided me the opportunity to engage with Listengarten and her creative team in one of the most highly collaborative processes I have experienced as an artist.

When Listengarten invited me into the process for *The Baltimore Waltz*, a couple of early design meetings had already taken place, and preliminary discussions about the world of the play were already underway. There was no dramaturge initially assigned to the production, so the designers had already been conducting their own preliminary research. In this process, the formal, department-mandated weekly production meetings were supplemented with more casual weekly brainstorming sessions involving the director and design team. For the first time in my experience as an assistant director, I was invited into these early design meetings not only to observe but to participate as a valued collaborator.

The production fell into the first production slot in the Fall lineup, which necessitated that the scenic and costume designs be completed prior to the Summer break. The scenic design would live in an abstract world, in line with Listengarten's desire to stray from a literal duplicate of the interior of Johns Hopkin's Hospital as suggested in the script. It would instead feature elements that suggested a hint of that environment: a series of wispy, white cloth panels on tracks would provide our major reference to the hospital, with sterile aluminum chairs placed in various compositions to create different acting spaces within the action. A rotating C-shaped platform featuring a ramp and an outer ledge moved on an off-center pivot, providing levels and versatile staging opportunities for the various locations indicated in the script.

The major costuming conventions suggested in the text were maintained due to their importance to the storytelling: Carl's pajamas provided a constant reminder of the reality of his illness; Anna's negligée symbolized her lustful desire to escape the threat of death and embrace vitality; and the trenchcoat, hat, and glasses of the Third Man set this character apart from all of this actor's other personas while maintaining Vogel's reference to the mysterious character lurking in the shadows of the 1949 Orson Welles classic, *The Third Man*.

Throughout the summer, Listengarten and I would meet about once per week to plan and talk about the play. Vandy Wood, a longtime friend and collaborator of Listengarten's and the production's lighting designer, met with us at the earliest of our summer meetings, suggesting we use the scenic model to storyboard the scenes in order to get a sense of which scenic configurations of the fabric panels and orientations of the central platform would work for each scene. Over the course of the summer, as Listengarten and I got more and more familiar with the play's structure and the arc of each character, we began simultaneously gaining a stronger sense

of communication with one another which later proved very useful in the rehearsal room. This three-month period of acclimation with my director, filled with text-driven creative conversation about the material and casual planning, was another incredibly treasured gift I had not experienced before as an assistant. It was clear that Listengarten truly aimed to forge a relationship of trust and open communication with me as an assistant, and we luckily had ample time to meet and share ideas long before the rehearsal process began. This is certainly a practice to which I aspire as a director: the few times I have enjoyed the luxury of having assistants or additional directorial collaborators have been under severely limited timelines (the most recent example of which was exemplified in the process that Jason Gerhard and I shared for *And Then Came Tango*).

Listengarten's lengthy collaboration with me left me with a number of questions about my own directorial process: How can I achieve the level of like-mindedness with my future collaborators that Listengarten and I found? Is it possible to achieve on an abbreviated timeline? Is it only possible to do on a limited timeline when working with collaborators with whom you've already developed a kind of creative short-hand? What was it about this collaboration that made me feel more invested artistically and valued creatively than other recent projects? Whether this perception had to do with my connection to the material, my connection with Listengarten as a mentor and collaborator, the extra time that was spent brainstorming each moment of the play and discussing how we would approach the process, or a combination of these factors: our collaboration on *The Baltimore Waltz* was one of the most rewarding experiences of my graduate practice.

From the beginning of the process, Listengarten and Wood had planned for me to work closely with the sound designer of the production in order for me to gain more exposure to the practicalities of sound design. Although I had executed a number of my own sound designs as a director, I had done so with support from technicians who had a better working knowledge of the technology of sound. I had developed a basic understanding of most of the functions in the free editing software “Audacity”, but I had very limited experience working with the Mac-based program, “Q-Lab”, which seemed to be the preferred program used for running productions at UCF and a number of other venues for whom I had worked. In our final design meetings in the Spring, then faculty designer, Chip Perry, had compiled several disks full of music that he had pulled with the show in mind. Over the summer, in addition to our discussions about staging and story, Listengarten and I chatted at length about the tone of each scene and, as I was to be a liaison-of-sorts between Perry and Listengarten during the process, I started jotting down tracks that may suit various moments in the play. When we were informed that Perry had resigned from his position at UCF to pursue another job opportunity, Listengarten and I began layering sound into our weekly discussions more heavily. Still wary that another faculty designer would assume Perry’s role and bring another perspective into the mix, I was a bit reluctant to get attached to any of the ideas I had been formulating with regard to the sound design. The design was reassigned to staff audio engineer Phil Ingle just before he too followed an outside opportunity and left the University. A couple of weeks prior to the start of rehearsals, the title of Sound Designer was offered to me with the understanding that Anthony Narcisso (an alumni of the undergraduate design program, who had designed my production of *Dog Sees God* the previous Fall) would provide support to me as a sound engineer.

The audition and callback process for *The Baltimore Waltz* provided an opportunity for further exploration of the text: finally the words that Listengarten and I had mulled over all summer were being spoken aloud. Upon my suggestion, a movement element was incorporated in our callback session wherein Movement Director Christopher Niess taught auditioners the basics of the Viennese waltz, hammering out simple beats on a drum as he instructed the performers vocally. After movement and readings from the text, Listengarten and I narrowed down our pool of actors, and armed with a couple of options for each role, she entered into a clandestine meeting with the other faculty directors to finalize casting for the entire Fall season.

Comedian Robin Williams had been found dead not long before the start of the term, and as a fan of his work, I had been watching his films as a sort of memorial when I stumbled upon a film called *The Fisher King*. This was one of the few films of Williams' that I was not familiar with, but this happenstance ended up informing the casting and staging of the final scene of our production. In the film, Williams' plays Parry, a schizophrenic homeless man who falls for a rather odd accountant named Lydia (played by Amanda Plummer); in one particularly enchanting scene, Parry follows Lydia into Grand Central Station. Through Parry's eyes, all of the inhabitants of Grand Central Station begin elegantly dancing a waltz as he pursues the object of his affection from afar, pushing his way through a sea of waltzing tourists and rabbis and businesspeople. As Lydia disappears from his view, Parry is snapped back into the real world, and the dance suddenly dissipates. When I introduced Listengarten to this clip, we both felt that it certainly encompassed a couple of ideas that were vital to our storytelling: the notion of imagined moments being created spontaneously in everyday environments, the cruel snap back to reality, and the fullness of bodies moving through space creating the illusion of fantasy. With

these notions, we expanded our ensemble from three to six in order to be able to engulf the stage with movement, and we incorporated this clip as a reference in the dramaturgy of our production.

With a finalized cast list and a unified vision for the piece, we conducted our first rehearsal on the first day of the Fall semester. Each member of the design team presented their materials to the cast, and I spoke briefly on my ideas as the newly-appointed Sound Designer for the show. Our first read and discussion went fairly well, but left Listengarten and me with the suspicion that we had a menacing task ahead. This piece presents a particular challenge to younger actors: the emotional depth required to play characters who are experiencing the stages of grief and are literally dancing with death is not so easily achieved with young actors without much life experience. The impact of the AIDS epidemic was most strongly felt in the 1980s and early 1990s, before many of our cast members were even born. In addition, the cultural references Vogel makes in the piece are largely from films made from the late 1940s through the mid-1960s: nostalgic for members of the baby-boomer generation but somewhat lost to our cast of millennials.

I had been accustomed to providing dramaturgical research as an assistant director, and turned to social media as a means to share my research. A private Facebook group for the production served as an open forum for information sharing and commentary on the piece. This proved to be an easy and convenient way to share articles, music, images, and video and provided our collaborators with access to each other's research. The group provided a location to gather content about the AIDS crisis, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Vogel's life and work, and the play's many homages to works of art and culture that were largely outdated in the eyes of our young cast. Eventually a glossary of difficult terms and translations of the European languages in

the text were added. As with *Tango*, I found videos and recordings to be the most accessible means of sharing historical and dramaturgical research with the cast. In this case, my research enabled the cast to better understand Vogel's references to films like *The Third Man*, *The Student Prince*, and *Hans Christian Andersen*. The actor playing The Third Man was given access to video clips of *Dr. Strangelove (or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb)* as reference for Dr. Todesrocheln, Peter Sellers in *The Pink Panther* for the Garçon and a number of other video and sound clips to aide in creating a multitude of iconic characters.

While it would have been ideal for the cast to have lived with the text and dramaturgical research for a longer period before rehearsals began, our timeline was quite limited. The cast also would have benefitted from extra rehearsal time devoted to table work in order to more cohesively fill in the holes in Vogel's imaginary world. With the addition of an ensemble, the limited availability of our Movement Director, and the unique demands of working with our abstract scenic elements, it was necessary to get the piece on its feet with haste, forcing the cast to absorb the play's themes, nuances, and dramaturgy as the staging process unfolded.

Listengarten encouraged me to be a present and vocal collaborator in the rehearsal room, consulting with me on blocking choices, and inviting my ideas and opinions on interpretation, and trusting me to stage certain moments and give notes to the actors. I also provided on-the-spot dramaturgical research during rehearsals to supplement the information gathered online. We had not gotten far into the staging process when it became necessary to start making and testing design choices. It was a rewarding challenge to engage artistically with the cast and creative team in this multi-disciplinary role.

Listengarten and I had discussed creating a world that could be painfully emotional at times but was balanced with the campy nostalgia that Vogel infused in the writing. We had discussed the desire to bring more modern voices into the soundscape to help with transitions. A piece by Polish singer-songwriter Julia Marcell, titled “Twin Heart,” started the production with a simple but haunting piano melody playfully joined by Marcell’s wispy and innocent vocal. Her lyrics seemed the perfect fit for the first moment of the play and brought the audience into Anna’s world, where sickness and death threatens a strong bond between siblings:

Let's go out and play  
I don't feel too well I'm sorry  
We don't have much time  
I'm too young to die I'm so scared  
If you go away either way  
I will always love you  
I can't let you stay  
you will never let me go. (Marcell)

Later in the song, the lyrics continue to echo the context of the play, alluding to the conflict between Carl and Anna later in the play, and finally supporting the transference that occurs throughout the piece with Anna taking on her brother’s place as the sibling stricken with illness:

If you wanna go, just go  
And leave me here with  
All my pain and suffering.

But just remember that

I am you and that you are me. (Marcell)

Vogel suggests a number of specific songs in the text, usually referencing very iconic material from classic films: Anton Karas' zither theme from *The Third Man* and other selections from the film's soundtrack set the tone for scenes featuring Harry Lime. As prescribed by Vogel, the scene in the French café (see Figure 5) was underscored by a recording of "La Vie En Rose" on the accordion, "The Drinking Song" accompanied the transition out of "grief" and onto the train to Holland, and "Inchworm" from the 1952 Danny Kaye Film, *Hans Christian Andersen* provided a theme for Anna's longing to return to the simplicity of home.



Figure 5: Anna and Garcon at the French Café. (Photo by Tony Firriolo)

Vogel's iconography relies upon such a broad spectrum of somewhat-dated cultural references, it was occasionally necessary to help the audience with additional context clues. For example, when Anna imagines her romanticized death scene at the end of Scene 3 (see Figure 6), she describes the classic film *Wuthering Heights*. Although we grappled with the notion of being "too literal", we were able to create a moment that gave the audience enough information to appreciate the reference: Alfred Newman's "Cathy's Theme" from the 1939 film swelled into the air as projections of Merle Oberon's "transcendental gaze" illuminated the full stage picture in black-and-white Warhol-esque quadruplicate and the orderlies of the ensemble drifted through the space, gently wafting the gauzy drapes.

Vogel's text provided additional opportunities for me to include my own iconic aural references to assist with establishing the play's historical context. Carl's introduction into "Reading Hour with Uncle Carl", for instance, became the theme from the long running 1980s Nickelodeon children's show *Pinwheel*, sending thirty-somethings back to a time before AIDS had a name. A later scene, in which Anna meets a Radical Student Activist at a seedy nightclub in Berlin, was underscored by portions of Marianne Faithfull's 1987 cover of "Boulevard of Broken Dreams." As most of the play's action takes place in Anna's mind, we did not feel the need to limit ourselves to music from the 1980's and prior, but found ways to weave in references to era of the AIDS epidemic.



Figure 6: Anna dreams of a romanticized death. (Photo by Tony Firriolo).

Early in our collaboration, Listengarten and I talked about the theme of travel and how to link it to the hospital world which serves as a container for Anna’s dream. We discovered that one of the major links between these worlds would be through the soundscapes of these environments: train stations and airports both brought to mind the electronic-sounding “beeps” and “dings” and muffled announcements that were inherent in the world of the hospital. We turned to more stylized interpretations of these noises, and treated transitions into these areas

with rhythmic cacophonies of hospital equipment noises or train whistles and bells, supporting these moments with an energetic shift in dynamic.

Among the earliest design choices that had to be made were those to which movement would be associated: at the beginning of the staging process, I provided a number of options, in a meeting with Niess and Listengarten, for the three major “waltzes” in the play. The first of these waltzes was in the iconic scene which Vogel borrowed nearly verbatim from *The Third Man* in which Carl is finally reunited with Harry Lime on the Ferris Wheel. Straying from Vogel’s suggestion of using waltzes by Johann Strauss, we found that “The Second Waltz” by Dmitri Shostakovich provided the tension that we desired for Carl and Harry’s struggle over the coveted rabbit (see Figures 7 and 8).



Figure 7: Alex Bair and Ryan Sutter rehearse the Ferris Wheel scene. (Photo by Tara Kromer).



Figure 8: The Ferris Wheel scene in performance. (Photo by Tony Firriolo).

The second of the waltzes in our production would be the scene in which Anna discovers the lifeless Carl after her strange visit with Dr. Todesrocheln, and manages to reanimate him briefly before her fantasy fractures completely. Vogel suggests “The Emperor’s Waltz,” and that “...suddenly, like the doll in *E. T. A. Hoffman*, the body of Carl becomes animated, but with a strange, automatic life of its own. Carl begins to waltz with Anna. Gradually, he winds down, and faltering, falls back to the bed” (“The Baltimore Waltz”). The imagery of this stage direction led me to suggest another Shostakovich piece, the haunting “Dance of the Dolls.”

The final waltz of the play reunites Anna with the memory of her brother for one final dance together (see Figure 9). For this moment something gentle and consoling was needed and another opportunity for nostalgia presented itself. A lovely piano arrangement of the 1972 Jim Croce song “Time in a Bottle” provided touching final moments wherein the ensemble of orderlies inhabited the stage in three waltzing couples around the siblings only to disappear, leaving Anna with her memory of a healthy, vital brother. In this moment we were able to synthesize the feeling that had inspired us in our clip from *The Fisher King* while leading those patrons familiar with the lyrics of this song to a recollection of their content: although not present in Robin Spielberg’s arrangement, Croce’s words seemed to echo Anna’s longing:

If I could save time in a bottle  
The first thing that I'd like to do  
Is to save every day till eternity passes away  
Just to spend them with you  
If I could make days last forever  
If words could make wishes come true  
I'd save every day like a treasure and then  
Again, I would spend them with you.  
(Croce)

These three waltzes were planned from very early in the staging process, while most of the other sound design choices were made as the blocking and overall arc of the piece were created. The countries to which Anna’s imagination deliver her and her brother are intended to be heavily

scored recalling “every cliché of the European experience as imagined by Hollywood” (Vogel, “The Baltimore Waltz” 7)



Figure 9: Anna and Carl’s final waltz. (Photo by Tony Firriolo).

The piece runs the gamut of emotions from the playfulness of the scene in which the siblings pack for Europe, through the Airport Security Guard's comical inspection, soon after delving through the stages of grief into moments of deep existentialist cynicism. About two weeks into the process, the worries that Listengarten and I had been harboring since our first full read-through about the ability of the actor playing Anna had been mounting. As we went about staging the more intimate scenes, Anna's sex scenes with the Garcon and the Munich Virgin, it became increasingly clear that not only was there a lack of chemistry between the actors playing Anna and the Third Man, but there was an overall lack of emotional commitment and depth from the actor playing Anna that had not been obvious in the audition room. Although both these moments were supported musically, with Stromae's "Tous Le Memes" providing a hot-and-heavy feeling for the lusty and playful encounter with the Garcon and Secret Garden's "Silent Wings" setting a tender and vulnerable tone for the Munich Virgin scene, our Anna simply was not connecting emotionally. In the latter scene, which our discussions about the play deemed the most connected and meaningful encounter in Anna's sexual odyssey, Listengarten and Niess pleaded with the actor: 'Are you listening to this music?' as they struggled to coach her toward connectedness. Despite private coaching sessions and guidance toward additional reference material, the production felt a huge shift in momentum when this actress was replaced by her understudy at the end of the second week of rehearsals.

Listengarten did a wonderful job providing feedback on sound options as the process progressed. She was not afraid to tactfully pull me back from over-scoring the piece now that we had a new "Anna" in place with a greater degree of understanding and connection to this pivotal

role. I was happy to find more moments of silence within the musicality of the play and found the director's hand to be a gentle and well-informed one.

As we approached tech, our production encountered a number of setbacks resulting from the recent renovation of the performance space. The addition of a new tension grid and the inspections it required were behind schedule, creating a bit of a domino-effect of inconvenient circumstances: the load-in of the scenic elements was delayed causing the postponement of the lighting hang and focus, and seating risers in the house could not be reinstalled for the first week of performances. The support of the subwoofers which I would have had installed beneath the seating banks to support several heightened moments would have to be sacrificed in order to open the show on schedule, and large portions of the first week's patrons were suddenly saddled with limited-view experiences of the production.

Amid this turmoil, I had a fairly good handle on the content and placement of most of the cues in the show, but continued to struggle to find the appropriate scoring for the sequence that took Anna out of the clutches of Dr. Todesrocheln and back to discover the gravity of her brother's plight. I knew the sequence from "Dance of the Dolls" fell in the midst of this cueing sequence, but I was struggling to build a tension-filled segue into that moment. My first attempts involved sections of scoring from the television show *Doctor Who* layered with echoes of Carl's voice calling Anna's name and haunting her memory with a cacophony of echoes of his lines like "I just wish we could spend more time together," and "You're just going to leave." This was one of those design ideas which seem really brilliant at 4:30 a.m. when you've been working on layering together a cueing sequence together for hours, but that seem a little heavy-handed in the light of day. When a few variations of this option were tried during tech, Listengarten was quick

to point out that the voiceovers and music choices for this moment were a little too cheesy and over-the-top. After a good laugh and a bit more searching, a small excerpt from Phillip Glass' 1999 score of *Dracula* created the tension needed to fill this transition without the unintentional camp latent in the previous attempt. Listengarten's way of guiding me as both an assistant and as a designer was never derogatory or chastising but always encouraging, which is a quality I certainly wish to emulate in my own directing practice.

Despite the challenges of replacing a lead actor and navigating the delays caused by the renovation of our performance space, the experience of working as the Assistant Director/ Sound Designer/ Dramaturg on UCF's production of *The Baltimore Waltz* was one of the most rewarding and collaborative experiences of my graduate career. The creative relationship forged between myself and the director and our other collaborators was quite successful, and I certainly hope to have the opportunity to create another piece of theatre with Listengarten.

### Conclusions

There were many wonderful things about this process that will enhance my future practice as a director, a sound designer, and a dramaturge. I am discovering, as my process evolves, that I am still drawn to multi-disciplinary roles, and I thrive in creative environments where I'm encouraged to don multiple "hats." This way of working makes me feel more invested in the project at hand, and in this case allowed me more freedom to experiment with choices both in the realm of sound and direction.

I had served as an assistant director and dramaturge simultaneously on a number of productions in the past, and always found these two disciplines to be incredibly inner-related.

Listengarten lamented having separated those two roles on her last production, Sara Ruhl's *Euridice*: she often recalled how she felt as if there had been “too many voices” in the room with a dramaturge and an assistant and a movement director. She attempted to scale back the size of her creative team with *The Baltimore Waltz*, but still found that a dialect coach, a movement director, and I were vital ingredients in the collaborative mix (see Figure 10). Although it was not necessary for the dialect coach and movement director to be present at each of the rehearsals, it became part of my contribution to help maintain these aspects of the performance in their absence.



Figure 10: Director Julia Listengarten in rehearsal with collaborators, Christopher Niess and Kate Ingram.

(Photo by Tara Kromer).

The additional role of sound designer that I had attained was actually quite refreshing in this context: suddenly I had evolved from a director who did most of my own sound design out of necessity to becoming a bona fide member of a design team. In this role I was finally given the extra set of ears that had always been missing from my endeavors as a director/designer and was thrilled to have Listengarten as a sounding board and guide. The give-and-take of working with Listengarten and Niess made it a thrilling creative experience in which I suddenly did not have to be the leader in the rehearsal room at all times, but was given ample opportunities to lead both directorially and via the medium of music. I found the dramaturgical research I had unearthed was vital to the choices I was making as a designer and impacted the cast greatly in the context of our abbreviated rehearsal period.

The largest observable challenges of working in three different capacities on this production arose during tech, and possibly stemmed from my split-focus in the rehearsal room. While I was able to get ahead on the sound design by tailoring the cues to the action during rehearsal, it was often necessary for me to focus instead on working with the cast and supporting the director. I was accustomed to facing these challenges as a director/designer, and felt I navigated these waters well, but found I had not allowed myself the additional time needed to concentrate of the larger cueing sequences toward the end of the show. Juggling the demands of producing a dramaturgical display for the lobby, taking and giving notes for the director on the overall performance, and keeping up with my teaching responsibilities proved to be challenging but not prohibitive. Aside from a few long nights and a bit of lost sleep, these challenges were overcome without consequence.

In the end, our production garnered mixed reviews from patrons, but a positive response from KCACTF respondent, Missy Barnes. The show was more abstract than and not as linear as UCF's standard theatrical fare, causing some patrons to leave the theatre with more unanswered questions than they were accustomed to. It seemed that most patrons who took the additional time to read the program notes and peruse the dramaturgical display left with a greater understanding of Vogel's piece, but a few left scratching their heads. This production produced some of the richest post-show discussion of any show I have worked on: hours of debate and conversation ensued after the production's closing, including several hours on the phone with my own brother, who isn't a regular theatre-goer but who was dying to discuss the intricacies of our production. Carl's stuffed rabbit was a point of debate and a wide range of interpretations and few patrons hypothesized that the siblings' entire journey to Europe was actually the hallucination of the fevered mind of Carl as he lay dying of AIDS, rather than the escapist fantasy of his weary and grief-stricken sister/ caregiver.

Overall, I was overwhelmingly pleased by the amount of discussion and debate that UCF's production of *The Baltimore Waltz* inspired. I could not have been happier with the openly communicative and generously collaborative process that Listengarten facilitated. Despite the complications of replacing a cast member, working within an abbreviated timeline, and navigating delays caused by the renovations of our performance space, our production was definitely a creative experience that I can reflect upon with pride.

## CHAPTER FOUR: JOHN PATRICK SHANLEY'S DOUBT: A PARABLE

### About the Play

John Patrick Shanley's *Doubt: A Parable* opened to critical acclaim in 2004. The piece earned a Tony Award for Best Play, a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding New Play, and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2005. In the Fall of 2014, I was presented with the opportunity to direct and design the sound for a production of this poignant drama for Titusville Playhouse's Second Stage season. I was thrilled at the opportunity to change gears and work in a style outside my normal comfort zone: a serious, dramatic period-piece was quite a contrast to the tongue-in-cheek comedies and plays for young audiences that comprised the majority of my directing experience.

In my program notes, I prefaced:

Fifty years ago, in 1964, this country was going through what playwright John Patrick Shanley calls "some kind of vast puberty." In the year following the assassination of President Kennedy, the country experienced sweeping changes: racial desegregation and Civil Rights Movement, the Free Speech Movement, old regimes fighting to maintain their ground as new ways of thinking struggled to emerge. The progressive changes brought into the Catholic Church by the Second Ecumenical Council produced a compassionate smile for potentially predatory clergymen to hide behind.

With *Doubt*, Shanley presents us with a perfect storm of the conflicting ideologies of this period, bringing us into a world where it is impossible to know with absolute certainty which "concerns" are valid ones and whether a priest's

compassion for an isolated young black boy could be a guise for sinister or perverse motives. This play forces us to consider many possible truths, causes us to empathize with each of the characters, and challenges us to examine what we would do in our own lives when faced with nagging suspicions. It causes us to grapple with the idea that things are never simply black and white. (“Director’s Notes”)

The piece opens with a sermon delivered by Father Brendan Flynn, a progressive young priest at Saint Nicholas Catholic Church. From the outset of Shanley’s parable, he plants the seeds of suspicion: Flynn shares a story of a sailor lost at sea who must grapple with the doubt that he may not have set the right course. This sermon sparks suspicion in shrewd school principal, Sister Aloysius Beauvier. As the play unfolds, we are introduced to Sister Aloysius and her innocent young protégé, Sister James, whose visit to the principal’s office to check on a student’s nosebleed quickly turns into a lecture. Aloysius urges James to be stricter and less warm with her students, demanding to “see the starch in [her] character cultivated” (Shanley 15), and warning against the innocent complacency that could easily allow corruption into the school (Shanley 5-15).

Father Flynn is next seen in the school gym, giving the boys a lesson on the subject of manhood, advising them to keep their nails clean before sending them into the rectory for cookies and punch. Meanwhile, in the garden that separates the rectory and the convent, Sister James confides in her superior, expressing concern over the strange behavior of Donald Muller, the school’s first black student, after a meeting in the rectory with Father Flynn the previous

week. Certain that Flynn was sexually inappropriate with the boy, and armed with the detail that the child returned to class with alcohol on his breath, Aloysius launches into a crusade to uncover the truth and force a confession from the suspicious priest (Shanley 16-24).

Aloysius summons the priest to her office under false pretenses and eventually steers the conversation to the topic of Donald Muller. Outraged by the audacity of Aloysius' accusations, Flynn becomes defensive and explains the boy had been caught drinking altar wine and had been called to the rectory for disciplinary reasons. He insists that when the child pleaded not to lose his place amongst the altar boys, he took pity on him, being wary of the potential for scandal if the behavior of the school's first black student was called into question (Shanley 25-36).

Still unconvinced, Sister Aloysius summons the boy's mother to her office to question her and voices her concerns that Flynn had an inappropriate relationship with Donald. Over the course of their meeting, Mrs. Muller reveals her perception of Donald's homosexuality and that his father frequently beats him because he is perceived to be "that way" (Shanley 48), and that she felt the priest's advances may have been invited by the child. Father Flynn sees Donald's mother leaving the principal's office and storms in to confront Aloysius, furious that the nun's witch-hunt has continued. Aloysius' conviction to bring down the potentially corrupt priest remains steadfast, and she leaves him alone to make the necessary arrangements for his transfer from the school. At the conclusion of the piece, we find that Flynn transferred and was given a promotion to become the pastor of another parish, giving Aloysius doubts about her own faith in the laws of the church, and the audience is left to decide whether to believe in Flynn's guilt or innocence (Shanley 42-58).

Artistic Director Steven Heron placed this well-made play in the Titusville Playhouse's Second Stage season in the Fall of 2014, fifty years after the events would have occurred. My goal in directing the piece was to bring to life a story full of ambiguity that would leave our audiences discussing the possible truth, and to explore the challenges of directing and designing a 'well-made play'.

### Process

When I was offered the opportunity to direct *Doubt: A Parable*, it seemed a great opportunity to further my interest in serving in a dual role. I initially expected to conduct a process similar to those executed for *The Baltimore Waltz* and *And Then Came Tango*, wherein the sound design would unfold as the action was developed. In reality, I found myself thrust into an even more diverse role than Director/Designer: I was surprised to find this particular playhouse did not provide stage managers for their productions. This meant I would be responsible for the scheduling of rehearsals, communication with the cast and technical staff and I would need to allow extra time for the cast to record their own blocking.

Before I was brought on as the director for the production, Titusville Playhouse favorite Patrick Ryan Sullivan had been pre-cast in the role of Father Flynn. Sullivan had attended high school in the area and had moved to a career as an Equity actor in New York City. He had returned to Florida and was working as a character performer at Walt Disney World, but returned frequently to the Titusville Playhouse as an actor and director. Although he played somewhat older than the Flynn I had envisioned, I was thrilled to be working with an actor who had substantial professional experience.

At auditions, two particular actors stood out: Linda Lawson-Jones was the most capable and age-appropriate choice for Sister Aloysius. A retired professional actress from Cocoa Beach, she gave the strongest reading and held her own opposite Sullivan's Flynn. For the role of Sister James, UCF's Shanel Sparr, who took over the role of "Anna" in *The Baltimore Waltz*, had the dramatic range to play this dynamic character. The small but vital role of Mrs. Muller was the most difficult to cast, as no women of color attended the Titusville audition. We began table work for the early scenes of the play before this role could be filled, when I contacted Equity performer Mandi Jo John, a Disney co-worker of Sullivan's with whom I had previously worked on Seaside Music Theatre's 2007 production of *Crowns*. Although she played a bit younger than the Muller in my imagination and had limited availability, John seemed to connect with the character and signed on to take the role (see Figure 11).

The design process for this piece did not possess the same collaborative feel that my previous projects at UCF featured. Communication became my primary challenge with the design team, as the document I had shared with the artistic director (containing the properties list, technical needs, and my inspiration images) was never shared with his staff, and their contact information was also difficult to obtain from Heron due to his own busy rehearsal schedule. The theatre had just opened their Second Stage space and was in the midst of building a production of *A Christmas Story* on their mainstage, and the three-person tech staff had their hands quite full. Meetings were habitually rescheduled, and when I was able to meet with the other designers, they had done little research on their own and had not seen the information I had sent to them. My training in directing and design had held collaboration with my design team as

such a benchmark of the process. I became conflicted about giving my team the prescriptive guidance they seemed to expect.



Figure 11: Mandi Jo John as Mrs. Muller. (Photo by Eclipse Photography).

Sullivan had proposed an alley-style seating configuration and general idea for the layout of the set to the artistic director prior to my arrival. Putting aside my defenses toward an actor with a forward approach to imparting his own “vision” for the piece, I found this idea an intriguing staging challenge and entertained this idea. It soon became clear the space was actually too shallow to add seating along the upstage wall and this convention was abandoned.

With rehearsals underway, more substantial one-on-one conversations were had with the theatre’s Costume, Lighting, and Scenic designers in order to get the bare essentials for the simple staging of Shanley’s parable. A desk, filing cabinet, and three chairs established our Principal’s Office stage right, with a stone bench, some foliage, and a potted rosebush representing the garden stage left. Flynn’s monologues would be isolated with lighting down center for his sermons and far stage right for his lecture to the boys in the gym. The walls and floor would be left black, with the exception of some wall art and an oriental rug that Sullivan hauled from the old performance space in the “office” and some rubber mulch softening the hard edges of the “garden” area. It was clear from the outset the intensity of the actors’ performances and the complex simplicity of Shanley’s text would truly take center-stage in our production, and we would take a minimalist approach to design.

Prior to our first rehearsal, I set up conferences with each of the actors to discuss their characters and review their backstories. Each member of the cast brought a refreshing degree of professionalism and maturity to the process, bringing focus and an eagerness to do the detailed work necessary to bring the story to life, and each worked in a distinctly different way. Lawson-Jones’ character analysis was particularly thorough and meticulously crafted, and we had a telephone conversation about her take on Sister Aloysius prior to our first read. It was clear she

would respond to a more method approach to character development. Sparr approached Sister James from the “outside-in:” the meek innocence of Sister James would demand a physicality and vocal quality would be the polar opposite of the grounded and sexually awakened “Anna” she portrayed in *The Baltimore Waltz* at UCF, but the characters shared a common love of teaching and a trying situation spiraling out of control. Both these actors were quite open to collaboration as we embarked on table work and blocking, as was John.



Figure 12: Patrick Sullivan as Father Brendan Flynn. (Photo by Austin Harris).

Sullivan had been gearing up to play this role for some time before I was brought on as the director and had lots of preconceived notions about the role and the production as a whole. As a regular performer at TPI who had found success in the role of Julian Marsh in the Broadway revival and national tour of *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, he exhibited a self-assured sense of ownership of his role and performance. His take on the role and reading of Father Flynn was well-informed and charismatic (see Figure 12), but it took time to establish his trust in my direction.

After a couple of rehearsal sessions at the table spent discussing character, intention, and clarifying the beat changes in the text, we began to get the scenes on their feet. Whether the cause was this particular text or the professionalism of this group of actors, for the first time in my directing practice I was able to focus on directing the piece without having to also be an acting coach. The cast and I were quick to develop a common vocabulary, and I strived to create a rehearsal environment open to collaboration and the open sharing of ideas.

In *Doubt*, each line and moment is so richly laced with meaning and nuance, devoting my focused attention to the actors and the text was important from the outset. The cast seemed so in-tune with their characters, and the real work of the play was uncovering the highest-stakes action for each moment. The scenes between Aloysius and James (see Figure 13) had a tendency to drag early in the process, but as I continued to urge the pace these scenes along, the struggle of each of the characters became more dire. The cast seemed to be as eager as I was to do focused, diligent work to get to the heart of the story.

For this production, my role as Director/ Rehearsal Stage Manager proved taxing. Coordinating rehearsals between three cast members in Orlando, one in Cocoa Beach, and a

performance space in Titusville, was a particular challenge. As a former stage manager myself, I always carry a great appreciation for the too-often-thankless work of an organized and efficient stage manager. In this instance, I realized just how much I had come to rely upon and trust in the support of a good stage manager in my directing process.



Figure 13: Linda Lawson-Jones as Sister Aloysius Beauvier and Shanell Sparr as Sister James. (Photo by Eclipse Photography).

Throughout the process, I continued to feel out the appropriate point at which I should introduce sound but following my instincts led me to focus my complete attention on the actors’

work with Shanley's words. The creation of the aural environment was constantly in the back of my mind, and I had come up with general ideas to set the tone of the piece: Catholic hymns would cover the transitions in and out of Father Flynn's sermons, with environmental sounds (school bells, distant crows and ambiance for the scenes in the garden and the school gym). The sound design for this piece ended up being one of the last elements incorporated into the production and was tailored to the needs of the transitions. The show opened with a short clip of the hymn "Be Gone Unbelief" and portions of the hymns "Abide with Me," "Blow Winds of God," and "Crown Him with Many Crowns" covered the transitions in and out of sermons. When Mrs. Muller's visit interrupts Sister Aloysius secretly listening to a confiscated transistor radio, clips from news reports recounting the results of the Warren Commission fill the air. Although the clip was from September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1964 (about a month prior to when we set the action of our production), it was chosen for its echo of the circumstances of the piece, as it deals with "rumors and speculations" surrounding Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby. It goes on to explain that the commission was created in an effort to "dispel all illusions about a relationship existing between these two men" (Blair). It seemed important to point up the suspicion and socio-political unrest raging during this time period. The final addition to the sound design was the preshow music, which incorporated hit songs from 1964 interspersed with radio news clips and advertisements in order to place the audience in an aural environment reminiscent of the 1960s.

With the cast secure in their performances, we forged ahead into technical rehearsals and experienced a smooth process, despite the continued renovations to the space that had frequently interrupted our work. I felt secure in the preparedness of the piece, gave the sound design the attention it deserved during technical rehearsals, and also kept a close eye on the performances.

Resident Lighting Designer William Gibbons-Brown, would operate the lighting and sound for the piece, so once levels were set and cues were placed, I was able to focus my attention on the overall feel of the production as a whole.

An incident occurred on the evening of our opening which rattled our cast and caused me to examine the potential effects of the split in my focus. With a packed house, the piece began as planned, but in the second scene the actor playing Sister Aloysius completely lost her lines. Despite the efforts of her fellow actors to save the scene, “line” was called and the actor had to be prompted multiple times throughout the performance by Gibbons-Brown on book at the lighting and sound console. From the start of the process I had admired how Lawson-Jones carried the show with wisdom and a commitment to accuracy. She had been diligent with her lines and the clarity of her intentions in each moment of the piece. Would this actor have felt more secure in front of an audience if I had more focused attention to give her during our final days of rehearsal? Had this memory lapse been a fluke? Lawson-Jones carried the largest burden of memorization and, as none of the other actors seemed to experience this difficulty, it was understood to be an isolated incident. I returned to run lines and work with her prior to the next performance to rebuild her confidence.

The production ended up being a great success, playing to sold-out houses for a majority of the run. Pam Harbaugh reported in Brevard Culture, “Director Tara Kromer keeps an elegant sparseness to the production, allowing the drama to breathe. Her characters engage with each other, have real conversations and reveal emotional arcs” (Harbaugh). Directing and designing my first period drama was a rewarding challenge, and I truly hope to have further opportunities to bring diversity of genre into my repertoire.

## Conclusions

Through my practice as the Director and Sound Designer (and rehearsal Stage Manager) for Titusville Playhouse's *Doubt: A Parable*, I have observed the extent to which a dual role can feel more manageable based upon the scale of the design. Because *Doubt*'s text is so rich with ambiguity, it was important to hear every word, creating the quiet intimacy these sensitive conversations demanded in order to showcase the performances of the cast in each moment of the action. The realistic style of the piece demanded straightforward approach as it did not contain the element of stylization present in my other two projects of focus: there were no romantic interludes, no fanciful moments of choreography. My approach to the direction and design needed to mirror Shanley's tightly-written, emotionally rich text.

The direction required a gentle hand and the design a subtlety that reflected the chilling isolation of the inhabitants of this Bronx Catholic school, each in private turmoil over unspeakable suspicions. I found it a very rewarding experience directorially to work from such a brilliant text and did my best to allow the language to tell the story. Doing the kind of detailed moment-to-moment work this piece required was aided by the veteran actors who comprised our small company.

A well-made play like Shanley's would have been overburdened with a heavier-handed sound design. While my additional responsibilities stemming from the absence of a stage manager kept me as busy as I may have been on a more design-heavy production, the simplicity I wished to highlight in the production made it easier to split my focus, allowing more time for me to concentrate on the actors. The level of collaboration I had come to enjoy as part of a design team was not quite as rich, and I found myself creating the sound design in isolation, late at night

alone in my living room. I could quite possibly have executed the same sound design having never seen the performances of the cast, based on the text alone, whereas my design choices on my previous projects were both heavily inspired by the evolution of the actors' performances and input from other collaborators.

Perhaps the difference in the quality of the collaboration in this case stemmed from the contrasting objectives of the production's producers: Theatre UCF's productions led by faculty with the desire to instill a love of collaboration and an attention to process, compared to a community theatre with much more investment in keeping costs low and houses full in order to fund the next production. Whatever the cause, I wondered if there had been any more I could have done as a new director working at a theatre for the first time to facilitate a more fulfilling collaboration, even on a play that required a minimalist approach. I felt quite proud of our production of *Doubt* and felt fortunate to have had the Titusville Playhouse Second Stage as a testing ground as I continue on my multidisciplinary journey into directing and sound design.

## CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTION THROUGH MUSICALITY

### Introduction: The Musicality of Theatre

In his article, *Musicality as a Paradigm for the Theatre: a kind of Manifesto*, David Roesner examines how the “notion of musicality” can influence the ways in which practitioners and audiences produce and perceive theatrical productions. Roesner applies this “notion” not only to human musical talent but further “...to things, situations and processes,” intending to make it “meaningful to speak of a musicality of the theatre, of a particular staging or lighting design, of a rehearsal or of the musicality of an act of representation.” He describes “‘musicality’ as a form of perceiving and thinking on the theatre stage, as a principle of ‘praxis’, which can be a training, working and devising method, a dramaturgical approach as well as a perceptive frame for audiences” (294). The principles outlined in Roesner’s manifesto resonated with me as I reflected upon my process.’

### Exercising Musicality

Roesner first describes musicality in theatre as “a matter of exercise” (294). I found this to be true of all my processes, not simply because of the academic context of much of the work, but because—despite the amount of planning I was able to conduct—my process both as director and sound designer always relied heavily on the “practical try-outs, failure, modification and dismissal” to which Roesner refers (294). Just as rehearsals prepared my casts for the performances of each production, my practice as a director/ designer prepared me for each subsequent day of rehearsal, and—more broadly—each new project. My attention to the “... complex interplay of movement, text, sound and space in the theatre” that Roesner describes was

fine-tuned as my process was refined through these ‘exercises’. In this way, my practical training was fortifying in me “... a sensitivity towards rhythm, timing, sound quality, musical form, dynamics, space and sound...” in order to develop “...an awareness (and to some extent, the technical skills) to perceive and craft theatre as a sonic and rhythmical event” (Roesner 295).

### Meaning-Making through Music

Roesner’s manifesto describes musicality as one of the principles that guided the work and provided a point of reference for audiences and practitioners of post-dramatic theatre. While none of my projects of focus fall into the post-dramatic category (each possessing definitive characters and narrative forms), the meaning-making and coherence-enabling capacity of music that Roesner describes was nonetheless utilized in my processes. My design choices in *And Then Came Tango* exemplified ways in which “Musical form, rhythm or sound can endow meaning and coherence on a second, more abstract level” (Roesner 297). In this case, instrumental covers of popular songs were chosen to underscore key moments with the intention of furthering the cast’s and audience’s understanding of the action. The music served to provide a non-verbal language, speaking the subtext of the penguin characters in the piece. The repeated use of certain themes, such as the use of various samplings of the instrumental covers of Owl City’s “Fireflies” used for Lily’s theme provides an example of how “motif relations, repetition, variation, ... rhythmic protention and retention” (Roesner 297) were called upon in my process. Various versions of this theme were utilized in order to dramatically support Lily’s dramatic arc and were often accompanied by repetition in Lily’s staging: her eager entrance from her home stage left, charging through the corridor of our “zoo” to meet Walter in his office stage right. This

“suggestive staging [enabled] a kind of re-semanticization of the initially self-referential musical coherence,” (Roesner 297) which, in our production, symbolized the passage of time.

### Musicality in Devising

*And Then Came Tango* also served as a prime example of Roesner’s ninth thesis, “Musicality in theatre has potential as a principle of devising.” Roesner says, “Musicality seems to me to be a devising strategy similar to site specificity or improvisation, which not only contributes to the generation and structuring of scenic material, but does so with potentially quite unique results” (300). The water ballet sequence, the flirtation and pair-bond dances of each penguin couple, and the nesting sequence were all devised by the cast and movement director based upon the music I provided. Roesner describes a similar process he conducts with his own students:

As an exercise, I also often provide my students with a short piece of music as a stimulus and starting point for a theatrical devising process. Instead of inventing music to accompany a theatre scene – as is customary in conventional practices of composing incidental music or film music – I ask the students to invent a scene to accompany the music by constructively using the sonic, rhythmic and structural characteristics of the piece as the ‘script’ for the scene. The results from each group tend to differ considerably, but one can always clearly recognize the mental process of abstraction, the accomplishment of a transfer from one medium to another, which often prevents an overly simple, ‘unfiltered’ approach and can result in interesting and complex results. (Roesner 301)

In our production, the music became the framework by which the movement was devised and the ‘script’ for our non-verbal characters. Although we worked within the parameters of the playwright’s pre-established story, each clip of music was selected in order to further embellish a smaller, more personal story within the overall narrative. My questions regarding whether the music informs the performance or vice-versa were answered, at least in the context of a piece that relied heavily on devised movement. The way in which the music informed the staging in this instance provides a direct example of musicality’s successful use as a principle of devising.

#### Performative Musicality

In Roesner’s eighth thesis, he poses the concept of musicality as a “productive, performative task” (299). He further identifies two types of “musical performer [the methodologies of which are]... particularly suited... for working with amateur actors as they expand the historical perspective on performance” (299). The “score performer” utilizes “a musically motivated form of representation [which] encompasses all theatrical signs and – as opposed to [using] Stanislavskian or Chekhovian techniques – works from the outside to the inside... first technically develop[ing] a structural frame and then – depending on the piece – flesh[ing] it out emotionally or leav[ing] that to the spectator” (Roesner 299). In this way, musicality is used as an acting, and arguably, a directing technique. This methodology was most noticeably utilized in my process on *The Baltimore Waltz*, wherein the principals often became “score performers” when I was able to use sound design choices to steer their emotional journeys. The instance in which the actor originally cast as “Anna” was having difficulty connecting emotionally during her scene with the “Munich Virgin” was perhaps the most vivid

example of this technique. The music chosen for this moment was utilized to some degree of success in rehearsal with the objective of leading the actor to the emotionally vulnerable and tender place—from the “outside in”, when more ‘method’ tactics, like emotional recall and the magic ‘if,’ had failed.

The ensemble of UCF’s production of *The Baltimore Waltz* also provided an example of the “chorus ensemble” (300), which Roesner describes as capable of providing “a set of instruments, to de-individualize texts and movements and present them in manifold sonic, rhythmic and dynamic ways” (300). Our six performers in scrubs became almost an extension of our Third Man, often speaking or repeating his lines, but always maintaining their individuality as orderlies at Johns Hopkins. Roesner describes this style of performance, saying:

In contrast to music, where any choir aims to sound as homogeneous as possible, letting the individual voice hide in the overall collective sound, the theatrical chorus provides an interesting paradox: on the one hand it gives the impression of a collective, sometimes even a uniform mass and on the other hand features the individual at the same time by consciously exposing the small deviations within the uniformity. The scenic and linguistic levels of expressions never quite gel and merge in the same way that musical expression can. Musicalization by means of the chorus ensemble thus increases the interplay and sensitivity of performers for each other, while at the same time providing the audience with a scenic phenomenon, which oscillates between effects of multiplication and individualization, unity and difference, scenic consonance and dissonance. (300)

Our ensemble engulfed the stage, at times moving and behaving as a stylized unit. In other moments, single members of the ensemble crossed the stage, uttering echoes that plagued Anna's subconscious: "Es tut mir leid ... There's nothing we can do" (Vogel 10-11). They became individual extensions of the Third Man during scene in which he becomes the Public Health Official, each of them bringing unique personality to the "Dos" and "Don'ts" suggested to avoid Acquired Toilet Disease and buttoning the scene in unison with "Do squat, don't sit" (Vogel 19-20). Our 'choral ensemble' brought yet another dimension of musicality into *The Baltimore Waltz* and their work is an example of musicality as a "performative task" (Roesner 300).

### Quality over Quantity

One of the most fascinating aspects of my practice was exploring the role of sound in shaping the performance. In the cases of *And Then Came Tango* and *The Baltimore Waltz*, I began my design processes by over-scoring, utilizing music as a means of communication with my cast in guiding the emotional tone, pacing, and tempo of scenes. The scoring would later be pared down. This methodology bares similarities to what Roesner describes of Sebastian Nübling's process:

...incidental music is composed and played back during rehearsals as an acoustic backdrop, which provides the actors with an orientation as well as something to work against. During the actual performances, this music often is no longer played back at all – it merely contours the attitude, timing and flow of energies

within the scene in the cast's collective subconscious, as a mixture of a musical stage direction of sorts and an acoustic subtext. (Roesner 295)

Roesner's second thesis echoes the realization I came to in paring down the scoring in order to find more silence in my soundscapes: "A theatre production is not automatically more musical when more music is being played" (295). Often, once the music had communicated to the cast what I was looking for in a moment, they were able to retain the rhythm or emotion that the music had been chosen to instill, and the music could be removed without damaging the emotional impact of the moment. It is here the artistry of the sound designer described in *Sound and Music for the Theatre: The Art and Technique of Design* comes into play:

Too many elements in a cue might distract the audience, interfering with their comprehension of the theatrical moment that the sound is meant to support.

Whereas overdesigning a show is intrusive, too sparse a design gives the production a feeling of not being fully realized. Your artistry lies in finding the appropriate middle ground— helping the audience's understanding of mood, time, place, or situation without getting in the way. (Kaye and LeBrecht)

Over the course of these three projects, I strove to find this "middle ground", discovering the impact of silence in my aural storytelling. Jerzy Grotowski was described as employing a "musicality that fed on the quintessential energy created by the sound-silence dynamic" (Frendo 214), and I quickly learned the value of the emotionally impactful relationship between sound

and silence. Effort was also made to avoid taking the audience's emotional intelligence for granted, while maintaining the style which the aural landscape was helping to support.

### Musicality in the Text and Delivery

“Musicality in theatre means to approach the theatrical means of expression in a musical way, which could mean that there might not even be a single musical note in the performance in the end. Musicality can instead manifest itself in other ways, particularly in the work on texts” (Roesner 298). Although musicality was certainly an observable feature in the texts of each of my projects of focus, John Patrick Shanley's poetic words make *Doubt: A Parable* the most vivid example of the textual musicality Roesner describes. The richness of the text, and the contrast provided by a more minimalist approach to the sound design of the production allow the words in *Doubt* to take focus.

Roesner proposes that “Working on text musically unlocks different levels than a purely content related analysis will” (298). In our rehearsal process for *Doubt*, we made a point to contemplate not only the meaning of Shanley's words, but their cadence, their inherent musicality. Observing “the poetic and sonic function of words in addition to their referential function; ... reveals the rhythmic qualities of paragraphs, line breaks and punctuation beyond their semantic meaning, and invites experimentation with intonation, vocal pitch and timbre” (Roesner 299).

Father Flynn's opening sermon provides an example of the musicality inherent in Shanley's text:

What do you do when you're not sure? That's the topic of my sermon today. You look for God's direction and can't find it. Last year when President Kennedy was assassinated, who among us did not experience the most profound disorientation. Despair. "What now? Which way? What do I say to my kids? What do I tell myself?" It was a time of people sitting together, bound by a common feeling of hopelessness. But think of that! Your *bond* with your fellow beings was your *despair*. It was a public experience, shared by everyone in our society. It was awful, but we were in it together! How much worse is it then for the lone man, the lone woman, stricken by a private calamity? "No one knows I'm sick. No one knows I've lost my last real friend. No one knows I've done something wrong." Imagine the isolation. You see the world as through a window. On the one side of the glass: happy, untroubled people. On the other side: you. Something has happened, you have to carry it, and it's incommunicable. For those so afflicted, only God knows their pain. Their secret. The secret of their alienating sorrow. And when such a person, as they must, howls to the sky, to God: "Help me!" What if no answer comes? Silence. (Shanley 5-6)

The rhythm inherent in this passage is clear in the short empathetic passages in which Flynn personifies the potentially doubtful members of his congregation: "What now? Which way? What do I say to my kids? What do I tell myself?"; "No one knows I'm sick. No one knows I've lost my last real friend. No one knows I've done something wrong" (Shanley 5-6). The musicality of Shanley's text was explored throughout our rehearsal process.

Roesner points out that when the actor speaks the text, “It becomes untranslatable and unique as the sonic manifestation of a fixed textual Gestalt in a moment of ephemeral presence” (299). The musicality found in the actors’ delivery in each of my projects of focus was unique to each piece: from lines of importance repeated in a childlike rhythm in *And Then Came Tango*, to the mixing of languages and musicality of the varied speech patterns of the Third Man in *The Baltimore Waltz*, choosing music and sound effects that would support and enhance the musicality already inherent in the text was paramount. In his third thesis, Roesner describes how musicality can be observed in the way that the text is being delivered:

...one becomes mindful not only of what is being told on stage, but how it is being told. Those who, for example, not only occupy themselves with the content of a text, but also with its rhythmic and sonoric structure, reflect how language is being used and presented and on how the act of saying interacts with what is being said. Actors who not only motivate their entrance psychologically, but also reflect on the timing and the agogic of their movements enrich the mimetic performance with a poetic dimension (Roesner 296).

The musicality of *Doubt* was observable to a lesser degree in the transitional music and environmental sounds that were executed in the sound design, and much more on the “rhythmic and sonoric structure” (Roesner 296) of the language, translated through the voices and bodies of the actors. The musicality of the other two texts included in this study is also notable, but this textual and performative musicality stood out in *Doubt* as a piece with fewer sound design needs. The actor playing Sister Aloysius had an especially broad vocal range and used it to great effect

in the context of the character's numerous tirades. She had a knack for using this range to describe a troublesome situation within the text by reaching into the higher tones of her range, shifting into lower, more resonant tones and a more calculated, deliberate pitch when driving her point home. Contrastingly, the actor playing Sister James kept the character in the upper register of her range, reflective of the character's innocence and naiveté, maintaining a nervously clipped tempo until the final scene of the play. In the final scene, the actor brought the pitch and tempo of James' speech down, which helped to exhibit the character's growth and change.

#### Impact of Musicality on the Spectator

Roesner's fourth thesis describes how "Musicality in theatre liberates audiences from their reflexive quest for meaning and opens eyes and ears for theatre as a multi-medial audio-visual event." The spectator's "awareness of the interplay of scenic elements and theatrical means, which makes use of the wealth of the models available in musical voicing and composition techniques, expands the scope for staging theatre far beyond the homologue/antinomy dichotomy and enriches the theatre with differentiated, engaging and imaginative interplays between the theatrical voices" (296). *The Baltimore Waltz* provides perhaps the most vivid example of the "interplay" that Roesner describes. A decidedly multi-medial event, it showcased musical sensibilities in its sound design, movement, language, delivery, and further brought the element of musicality into the scenic design: the large fabric panels that framed the center platform were not only used as a surface for projections, but the rattle of the wheels in the track and the "clack" of the panels contacting each other also became an element of the soundscape, used to punctuate important lines. Arguably, the lighting and projections possessed

their own musicality as well in their movement, content, and the way in which they correlated with the aural and physical world of the play. The agency that this ‘paradigm of musicality’ lends to spectators enables them “to switch between ‘theatrical’ and ‘musical’ modes and habits of perception,” allowing them to choose whether to “go hunting for meaning and try to semantically decipher [the theatrical event, or to]... let his or her attention wander and idle, and in doing that detect structural connections and explore the sonic and rhythmic qualities of the performance” (296).

Roesner’s sixth thesis is closely related, explaining musicality’s ability to “rais[e] awareness of the harmony of theatrical media,” providing “examples of how text, music, lighting, set and movement at times entangle in complementary rhythms, provide sonic punctuation for each other, concentrate or disperse the atmosphere, flirt with changing causal connections, remain mutually foreign, develop anthropomorphic autonomy, become co-performers and so on” (298). The marriage of the design elements with the acting was a vital part of the processes of each of my projects of study. I often felt in these processes as if the sound that I was creating was becoming another character in the play. My practice on these projects caused me to consider the director (and later in the process, the stage manager) as a conductor and each designer and actor as an instrumental voice in the orchestration of the production. I tried diligently to be mindful of the attention to tempo, rhythm, and dynamics that each member of this ‘orchestra’ must play, and the mindfulness to balance and pacing and the “interplay” of all of these elements that I had to maintain through my directing.

### Political Implications of Musicality in Theatre

Roesner's final thesis suggests that "Gestic musicality in theatre in a Brechtian sense can have political implications," explaining that "theatre in its process of creation can be seen as a model for social interaction, and in performance creates a space for perception, which can have political impact and significance" (301). The use of music in theatre situates it as a performed event: it makes the spectator aware that what they are watching is staged. It can also be used subversively in its performance. Take, for example, the way Carl twists his rendition of "Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush" in *The Baltimore Waltz*:

"Here we go round the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush, the mulberry bush:/

Here we go round the mulberry bush, so early in the morning."

"This is the way we pick our nose, pick our nose, pick our nose:/

This is the way we pick our nose, so early in the morning."

Third verse! (He makes a rude gesture with his middle finger.)

"This is the way we go on strike, go on strike, go on strike:/

This is the way we go on strike, so early in the —" (Vogel 10)

Each of my projects centered on decidedly political subject matter, as do most of the plays that I am attracted to directorially. *And Then Came Tango* celebrated diverse families and led by example by sharing the story of a young girl challenged to stand up for her beliefs. *The Baltimore Waltz* satirized the AIDS epidemic and took stabs at the entities that de-prioritized the disease because it only plagued the marginalized. *Doubt* reflected on a time of great political and

social unrest and reminded us of how racism, sexism, and homophobia skewed the lines of perception in that time and continue to do so today.

At its core, theatre strives to generate understanding—through our processes of creating it, our need to perform it, and our compulsion to allow it to impact our lives as spectators. It starts when the playwright hums a little tune in his head, it grows when a director takes that tune as notes on a page and decides to make those notes heard, it lives when an actor utters it aloud. When the spectator hears that tune and makes the choice to sing along, we've created something truly impactful.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

### Learning Craft Musically

A substantial portion of my coursework in the Theatre for Young Audiences track at the University of Central Florida centered on utilizing theatre as a teaching tool, taking into consideration the many different ways in which people learn. It was through this coursework that I came to a better understanding of how I teach and learn, discovering that my sense of musicality was my strongest learning modality. This discovery helped to explain my difficulty with reading: I have always been ashamed of my inability to absorb reading materials quickly; I need to read a passage or a scene many times to absorb its meaning and nuance unless I'm also able to hear the words aloud. It stands to reason that as a theatre practitioner with an interest in directing that I would arrive at an approach that relies heavily upon this modality of musicality. Through my practice, I have found my ability to listen well to be among my strongest assets as a director/ designer.

### Musicality as Style

One of my courses emphasized the need to develop a signature aesthetic or style, and I claimed satirical comedy and camp as benchmarks of my personal artistic voice. Over the course of the projects I took on as a student director, I came to value taking on projects outside my comfort zone. Anne Bogart's words resonate with me:

Young artists often look to forge a personal signature. But ultimately a personal signature evolves from the constant renewal of attempts, a return to the drawing board, rather than an enforced, imposed style. Perhaps the ubiquitous corporate,

consumer culture encourages artists to obsess about their style and the development of a brand. In the light of this pressure, I try instead to concentrate on the immersion, the process and the attention to craft, all of which eventually reveal styles that I could never have imagined before (Bogart).

Through immersion in the practice of directing, I have found the notion of musicality applied in my process to be helpful in creating compelling and expressive works of theatre. As the styles to which I gravitate evolve and change, I think a mainstay will be my attraction to finding the music of the play. Whether it is in the text, or the words, or the rhythm and pace, or the sound effects and music chosen used in the sound design, the application of musicality in theatre is an extremely compelling idea.

### On Borrowing

In an article titled “Moving the Furniture,” Andreas Kahre interviewed Canadian director, playwright, and dramaturge Peter Hinton. In their interview, Hinton reflects on his early practice of directing and providing his own sound with a degree of lament:

I must admit, somewhat apologetically, to too many shows where I have had to DJ — basically to go through my Arvo Paart collection and find music that's going to fit in that world...

But the DJ method has its limits — ethically, on the principle of stealing music from other people written for other purposes — and then you have the problem of trying to find music that people will not have a prior association with,

so you have to find music that is obscure enough or independent enough that it can actually serve the play. (qtd. in Kahre 11)

I would say that I, not quite as apologetically, engaged in this “DJ method” on each of my projects, shamelessly borrowing music from pre-existing sources and collaging them together to serve the needs of my productions. More scandalously, I often utilized recognizable material intentionally for its cultural value. I never found this ethically questionable: I found audio collage to be an effective way to support my productions with musicality in the absence of a composer. Our capacity to build upon the work of other artists is arguably one of the most compelling ways to innovate. This quote from filmmaker Jim Jarmusch resonates in this regard:

Nothing is original. Steal from anywhere that resonates with inspiration or fuels your imagination. Devour old films, new films, music, books, paintings, photographs, poems, dreams, random conversations, architecture, bridges, street signs, trees, clouds, bodies of water, light and shadows. Select only things to steal from that speak directly to your soul. If you do this, your work (and theft) will be authentic. Authenticity is invaluable; originality is non-existent. And don't bother concealing your thievery - celebrate it if you feel like it. In any case, always remember what Jean-Luc Godard said: “It's not where you take things from - it's where you take them to.” (Jarmusch)

### On Multidisciplinary Theatre Practice

One of the most challenging and rewarding aspects of my practice has been taking on multiple roles. From the very start of my journey into the theatrical profession, I have taken pride in my versatility, embracing opportunities to learn and grow in a broad range of disciplines. In my experience as a technical theatre practitioner, bringing a wide range of skills to the table enabled me to keep consistent work in the field and provided enjoyable—albeit demanding—variety to my career.

Through my practice I have found it very rewarding to serve in more than one capacity: I feel that it keeps me sharp, encourages me to make bold choices quickly in both disciplines, and keeps me engaged at a heightened level throughout the process. I was often able to use music as an effective form of short-hand with my collaborators. This process also comes with its challenges. Firstly, the additional time commitment involved in multi-tasking is significant: my preparation time outside of rehearsal was split between spending time with the text, conducting research, learning new software for editing sound, listening to hours of music and sound effects, choosing and editing those sounds, and programming in most cases. Secondly, my focus in rehearsal was often split between the two disciplines, and I learned quickly to seek the support of my collaborators when possible. For example, having an ASM who was capable of programming Q-Lab made shifting my focus between the sound and the cast far more manageable during *And Then Came Tango*.

In the process for *The Baltimore Waltz*, the hats I wore felt slightly more balanced: serving as the Assistant Director gave me needed practice in collaborating and working with the cast and taking on the dramaturgy of the piece provided necessary research for the team as well

as giving me a deeper perspective of the material. Those roles gave me the insight I needed on the play and on my director's vision to execute the design successfully and since Listengarten was able to give her focus to the actors, I could confidently shift my focus in rehearsal to sound. As I was encouraged to play with sound choices early on, my influence on the cast's performance was more abstract- guided by musicality.

The process for *Doubt* also felt more manageable because it did not require a great deal of sound reproduction. The emphasis I placed on mining the text and performances for meaning and musicality enabled me to concentrate on those elements and tend to the design outside of rehearsal time just prior to tech. While *Doubt* may have enjoyed fewer collaborative opportunities than my other projects, the textually-driven nature of the play and the minimalist approach necessary for the design made for a manageable director/designer experience.

My practice on these projects caused me to examine my overall relationship with "collaboration". The value my program placed on working collaboratively was strong, as was the encouragement from my mentors to explore a broad range of disciplines. I often wondered how having a sound designer to collaborate with could have strengthened my communication skills as a director. Using the short-hand of music in a process with a sound designer could be perceived as prescriptive, and was a practice I avoided when working with a sound designer in the past. Based in the scope of my directing experience thus far, I am eager to gain more practice collaborating with sound designers and composers. It would also be beneficial for me as a sound designer to gain more experience working with directors and perhaps experimenting with digital music and composition as well.

My transition into graduate school was initially intended to narrow my focus and allow me to zero in on developing my directorial skills, but I managed instead to further broaden my range. As I look toward the future, I am faced with questions about how I should present myself in the field: Am I a director? A designer? A director/designer? Will I still be a stage manager? A props artist? An electrician? Do I have to be just one or two? What will be the professional repercussions of identifying as “all of the above”? In an article on Howlround.com, David Chapman wrote about the ups and downs of working in multiple aspects of theatre:

Certainly, the field is full of multi-disciplinary artists. Many of the folks whose work I admire most ... consider themselves to be “slash artists”: writer/ director/ performer/ producers. But I know there are others out there like me who have felt pressure to specialize in one thing. Is that pressure internal or external? In other words, are the walls I want to put up between my various creative activities self-perpetuated, or has the field become so segmented that branching out, especially before you’ve reached a certain status, is impossible? (Chapman)

In his article, Chapman describes his efforts as an “emerging” director in New York, attempting to navigate the waters of establishing an artistic identity: “To make myself the most efficient, market-friendly product possible, I decided not to bring my compound artistic identity around with me. (Forgoing Steve Jobs’ example, I stopped presenting myself as capable of making the whole widget.) ... if I had to tick one box, directing definitely felt like the most complete expression of my creative identity.” He further explains how labels even within directing felt limiting: “Either I was the musicals director, the new plays director, the classics director, the

“edgy/experimental” director, etc. And no matter what, I was a director. Maybe two or three folks out there could really claim to have more than one “specialty” and they were decades older than me, more established, and/or had their own companies...” (Chapman). Is it possible to forge a career as a director without subscribing to a definitive creative label? Can I honor the part of me that directs and the part that designs?

I strongly identify with Chapman’s statement: “From now on... I will resist labeling myself as the go-to guy for a certain “kind” of theater or directing. Instead of leading with my director-self and asking what ... projects might require my directing services, I will lead with my artist-self... The professional hit I may take by pursuing interests other than directing matters less to me than my desire to have a full and multifaceted life making theater” (Chapman). My training has prepared me to work hard, to value collaboration but to work independently when necessary, and to use whatever combination of disciplines that I need to call upon to interpret and present a playwright’s story with cohesiveness and artistry.

**APPENDIX A:  
PHOTO COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FROM EMILY FREEMAN**

3/11/2015

Tara Kromer - Outlook Web App

**From:** Emily Freeman <emilyrfreeman@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, March 5, 2015 9:16 AM  
**To:** Tara Kromer  
**Cc:** Earl Weaver  
**Subject:** Re: Copyright Permission Request

Hi Tara,

Absolutely! I'd love to read the chapter as well.

Warmly,

Emily

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 4, 2015, at 5:48 PM, Tara Kromer <[tara.kromer@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:tara.kromer@knights.ucf.edu)> wrote:

Hello Emily,

This is Tara Kromer. As you recall, I directed and designed the sound for our TYA Tour of your play, *And Then Came Tango*. A chapter of my thesis is devoted to my process on that production and I am writing to ask about getting your permission to use some of the photographs that you took of our production at the SVAD that exist digitally in our shared folder (<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B7bXTKmVm6u1TTFKUXpEREImemc&usp=sharing>).

This thesis paper will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida, therefore I would like to get your written consent to use your photographs of our production.

Please respond at your earliest convenience. I would be thrilled to use your images of our production to supplement my writing about our process!

Thank you!

Tara Kromer  
MFA Candidate  
University of Central Florida  
Department of Theatre

**APPENDIX B:  
PHOTO COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FROM TONY FIRRIOLO**

3/11/2015

Tara Kromer - Outlook Web App

**From:** Tony Firriolo <tony@tonyfirriolo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, March 4, 2015 6:59 PM  
**To:** Tara Kromer  
**Subject:** Re: Copyright Permission Request

Tara,  
You have my permission to use the photos. Thanks for asking and your kind words.  
Tony Firriolo

On Mar 4, 2015, at 5:07 PM, Tara Kromer wrote:

Hello Tony,  
My name is Tara Kromer and I am a 3rd year MFA student in the Department of Theatre at UCF. I served as the Assistant Director, Dramaturg, and Sound Designer on TheatreUCF's production of *The Baltimore Waltz* last fall, and I am currently writing my Master's Thesis. A chapter of my thesis is devoted to my process on that production and I am writing to ask about getting your permission to use some of the photographs that you took of our production that I found on TheatreUCF's website (<http://theatre.cah.ucf.edu/events.php?id=2724>) under "Media".

This thesis paper will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida, therefore I would like to get your written consent to use your photographs of our production.

Please respond at your earliest convenience. I would be thrilled to use your phenomenal images of our production to supplement my writing about our process!

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Tara Kromer  
MFA Candidate  
University of Central Florida  
Department of Theatre

**APPENDIX C:  
PHOTO COPYRIGHT PERMISSION FROM ECLIPSE  
PHOTOGRAPHY**

3/11/2015

Tara Kromer - Outlook Web App

**From:** Austin Blake Harris <[eclipseaustin@gmail.com](mailto:eclipseaustin@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Friday, March 6, 2015 12:03 AM  
**To:** Tara Kromer  
**Subject:** Re: Copywright Permission Request

Hello Tara, I would be happy to allow you to use my photos in your thesis! If possible, please note that they were taken by Eclipse Photography at [bit.ly/eclipsedesign](http://bit.ly/eclipsedesign)

Thank you, best of luck to you, please let me know if you need anything else!

-Austin  
[eclipseaustin@gmail.com](mailto:eclipseaustin@gmail.com)

Sent from my iPhone

On Mar 4, 2015, at 6:01 PM, Tara Kromer <[tara.kromer@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:tara.kromer@knights.ucf.edu)> wrote:

Hello Austin,  
My name is Tara Kromer and I am a 3rd year MFA student in the Department of Theatre at UCF. I served as the Director and Sound Designer on Titusville Playhouse's Second Stage production of *Doubt* last fall, and I am currently writing my Master's Thesis. A chapter of my thesis is devoted to my process on that production and I am writing to ask about getting your permission to use some of the photographs that you took of our production in this shared folder (<https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B3isMOahKjM0cHNaRONZcE1wdFk&usp=sharing>).

This thesis paper will be published electronically by the University of Central Florida, therefore I would like to get your written consent to use your photographs of our production.

Please respond at your earliest convenience. I would be thrilled to use your phenomenal images of our production to supplement my writing about our process!

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Tara Kromer  
MFA Candidate  
University of Central Florida  
Department of Theatre

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