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# The Beauty Of Stage Managing: Being A Catalyst For The Theatrical Arts.

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THE BEAUTY OF STAGE MANAGING: BEING A CATALYST FOR THE  
THEATRICAL ARTS

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Fine and Performing Arts Honors Program

By

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Fine and Performing Arts Honors Program

East Tennessee State University

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*The Beauty of Stage Managing: Being a Catalyst for the Theatrical Arts* analyzes the art and craft of stage management. My experiences as a theatre student at East Tennessee State University from 2009-2012, culminated in my final senior capstone as the stage manager for the ETSU Division of Theatre and Dance production of *Beautiful Bodies* by Laura Shaine Cunningham (performed October 18-21 2012 at the Bud Frank Theatre). In addition, the following research of the history and development of stage management and its modern practices created a better understanding of the artistic field. Both in theory and in practice, I explored the multitude of organizational and artistic responsibilities that are in the custody of the stage manager.

## ***Part I: Stage Management***

### *What is a stage manager?*

I have been stage managing for over seven years now, but my mind always runs wild when I am asked to define my job. My definition of a stage manager (and a rule I live by) is: A stage manager is employed to support every production department, to ensure the rehearsal hall is conducive to the artistic process, to serve as the liaison between the director, actors, designers, and production staff, and once the show is in production, to act as the central force behind the scenes, motivating the performance and maintaining the integrity of the production. The stage manager orchestrates the technical arrangement of a play and is the organizational handler from pre-production to the fully realized performance. I believe all stage managers are built similarly. The job requires a certain skill set that one must hone through practice and dedication. Having the ability to quickly create an organizational system that is practical and manageable is a skill that must accompany any stage manager. A stage manager is employed to communicate with every member of a production company thus a stage manager's communication skills need to be second to none. The lack of leadership skills in a stage manager can severely complicate how a production company is run.

In Peter Maccoy's *Essentials of Stage Management*, he states that a stage manager's job is to "ensure that all elements of the production are consistently in the right place at the right time" and to guarantee that nothing adversely affects the production. Typically, a production will employ more than one stage manager, depending on the size of the production, the type of organization, and the budgetary constraints (Maccoy 14).

The responsibilities of a stage manager can include:

- Preparing the rehearsal space and keeping it tidy and organized;
- Maintaining discipline within the rehearsal space and backstage;
- Preparing and marking the prompt script, which is the documented text with corresponding stage movement and cue points; recording the blocking (any

movement done on stage by a performer); notating cue points (when transitions in technical elements occur);

- Passing on information from the rehearsal room, particularly details of the production's requirements as they are raised, to the artistic staff;
- Monitoring the artistic quality of the production, in line with the director and designer's original intentions;
- Giving notes to performers when a line of script is unintentionally altered;
- Ensuring rehearsals are given appropriate breaks when necessary and ending those breaks in a timely manner in order to keep the production on schedule (Maccoy 15).

Actors' Equity Association (AEA), the union that represents professional stage managers and actors, states that membership of AEA is required of a stage manager in order to work at an Equity company (Ionazzi 27). The following list from *The Stage Management Handbook* by Daniel Ionazzi, describes the AEA professional stage manager's responsibilities: A stage manager under Actors' Equity Contract is, or shall be obligated to perform at least the following duties for the production to which s/he is engaged, and by performing them is hereby defined as the stage manager:

1. S/he shall be responsible for the calling of all rehearsals, whether before or after opening.
2. S/he shall assemble and maintain the prompt book, which is defined as the accurate playing text and stage business, together with such cue sheets, plots, daily records, etc., as are necessary for the actual technical and artistic operation of the production.
3. S/he shall work with the director and the heads of all departments, during rehearsal and after opening, schedule rehearsals and outside calls in accordance with Equity's regulations.
4. Assume active responsibility for the form and discipline of rehearsal and performance, and be the executive instrument in the technical running of each performance.
5. Maintain the artistic intentions of the director and producer after opening, to the best of his/her ability, including calling correctional rehearsals of the company when necessary, and preparation of understudies, replacements, extras and supers, when and if the director and/or producer declines this prerogative. Therefore, if an actors finds him/herself unable to satisfactorily work out an artistic difference of opinion with the stage manager regarding the intentions of the director, and producer, the actor has the option of seeking clarification from the director or producer.
6. Keeping such records as are necessary to advise the producer on matters of attendance, time, welfare, benefits, or other matters relating to the rights of Equity members. The stage manager and assistant stage manager are prohibited from the making of payrolls or any distribution of salaries.
7. Maintain discipline, as provided in the Equity Constitution, By-Laws and Rules where required, appealable in every case to Equity.
8. Stage manager duties do not include shifting scenery, running lights, operating box office, etc.
9. The Council shall have the power from time to time to define the meaning of the works "stage manager" and may alter, change or modify the meaning of stage manager as hereinabove defined.

10. The stage manager and assistant stage manager are prohibited from handling contracts, having riders signed or initialed, or any other function which normally comes from the duties of the general manager or company manager.
11. The stage manager and assistant stage manager are prohibited from participating in the ordering of food for the company.
12. The stage manager and assistant stage manager are prohibited from signing the closing notice of the company or the individual notice of any actor's termination.

(9-10)

### *History and Development of Stage Management.*

Since the creation of a venue large enough to contain an audience, there has been a central force responsible for the operations of a live performance. Someone was accountable for cuing the gladiators in a coliseum or hippodrome (Maccoy 11). Dating back to the times of medieval pageant theatre, stage managers were known as “keepers of the book” whose primary responsibility was to serve as the prompter for actors on stage who needed cuing for their lines. During Elizabethan times, the prompter began to be referred to as the “book keeper” or “book holder” (Maccoy 11). As the custom-built venues developed through the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, the role of a book keeper expanded. Their duties included several assignments, most importantly, arranging for necessary licenses to be drawn up by the Master of the Revels, which was established by Henry VIII as a means of administering censorship to stage performances on behalf of the Lord Chamberlin (Wickham 118). Further responsibilities included copying out individual parts for the actors, noting in the book who was needed and when, marking in entrances and exits, providing a synopsis to be pinned backstage for reference during performance, noting what props and sound effects would be required and ensuring that they happened in the right place at the right time. Also, during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, a new position, stage keeper, was defined as the person responsible for the maintenance of the theatre (Maccoy 11).

Prominently, stage managers existed in the nineteenth century in parallel with the development of a repertory system and the rise of actor/managers. A repertory company performs several plays that vary each night or week. This repertory system practiced by stock companies meant that actors needed to memorize many roles at one time. Rehearsal periods were very short, sometime a matter of a few days, and thus the role of the prompter became crucial. The role of the director and producer was sometimes referred to as “stage management”. It is likely that the stage manager and prompter may have taken on some of the responsibilities of the director, particularly when rehearsing an understudy or a change of cast (Maccoy 11-12).

During the years surrounding World War I, the art of theatre went through many changes. In 1911, Edward Gordon Craig, actor, director, and scenic designer, regarded a stage manager as “the highest title to be won in theatre” (Maccoy 13). But in 1922, Harley Granville-Barker

summarized the position of stage manager as something quite different, stating that “the stage manager has become to some degree an anachronism. He is still supposed to be interested in the play itself, to watch the actors, rehearse their understudies, and to be responsible for the artistic upkeep of the performances generally. But the coming into fashion of the producer has deprived him of any initiative in such matters, and nowadays he is chosen mainly for his powers of controlling the stage staff, his technical knowledge of scenery, and his ability to keep accounts. The position would be better filled by a man who disinterested himself in the dramatic side of the business altogether” (Maccoy 13).

By the Second World War it was recognized that a stage management team consisted of a stage director, a stage manager, and an assistant stage manager or two. In repertory theatre the team might have included an apprentice stage manager, and the assistant stage managers were expected to take on small acting roles. In fact, this was one of the main routes into acting as a career before the proliferation of drama schools, and the only way into stage management. This meant that the majority of acting assistant stage managers were actually hopeful actors and not remotely interested in stage management (Maccoy 13). The stage director was responsible for the technical side of the production and ensured that the production ran smoothly. Once the production opened, the stage director was in charge of the entire upkeep of the production, for the remainder of its run. The stage manager usually kept the book. The assistants and apprentices undertook a number of other duties which might have included operating sound, lights, or assisting with scenery changeovers, giving calls to the actors, and sometimes acting. The placement and assignment of props, along with the operation of effects were undertaken by property staff under stage management supervision. A separate business manager dealt with front of house, box office, publicity, and company salaries (Maccoy 13).

Modern stage management has shifted from a role that is strictly associated with the keeping of the book and has merged with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century stage director position to create a hybrid profession that contains responsibilities from both jobs. The modern stage manager holds an executive-level position that is at the top of any production’s hierarchy. Stage managers working today are not only responsible for keeping a master prompt book, but are also in charge of keeping the production’s artistic integrity as the artistic director and designers preordained.

### *Personal Development as a Stage Manager*

The skills of stage management do not simply fall into one’s lap or become memorized in one’s brain after reading a book. On-the-job experience is the best way to learn the ins and outs of stage management. With every show I work on, I attempt to learn a new skill or method of stage management. My growth as a stage manager has been progressing since I first began stage managing seven years ago. Comedy usually comes to mind when I reflect on my first couple of shows as a stage manager. I made extremely inexperienced choices that ultimately caused the production to suffer. I was not confident in my leadership skills until I had worked on my first

few shows in high school. Through my constant work as a stage manager, I have better learned how to solve problems and execute a strategic plan. However, it is because I took the initiative to learn and grow as an artist that I am able to work so well as a stage manager. As a member of the artistic process, and also one who is innovating and creating new ways of completing my job more efficiently, I am an artist.

Recently during the summer of 2012, I worked as the deck stage manager for *Horn in the West*; the nation's longest running revolutionary war outdoor drama in Boone, North Carolina. Transitioning from small/medium sized shows produced by ETSU to the large size of *Horn in the West* was a difficult transition. However, as I am one to do, I used my experience at *Horn in the West* as a learning opportunity. The artistic director of *Horn in the West*, Julie Richardson, moonlights as an Equity stage manager when she is not spending her summers in Boone, North Carolina. I seized the opportunity to work with a professional, unionized stage manager for three months. The time spent at *Horn in the West* was invaluable. A skill that I learned from Julie, and something I will use for the remainder of my life is the way I learned to better communicate with people. Communication is much more than a person telling another person about X. Good communication skills come from the way you speak to people, the way you listen to people, and the way in which you respond to what you just heard. The amount of respect I have gained from my peers after learning from Julie is astronomical. My job became easier and more enjoyable because I worked on my craft and grew as an artist.

As a stage manager, I pride myself on my ability to manage and anticipate problems that could arise during the production process. Being able to identify potential problems is important when trying to oversee an entire production. Working in theatre is a collaborative effort amongst dozens of people, all carrying around larger-than-life egos. Problems surface and I do my very best to prevent them or extinguish them altogether. When dealing with others in such situations, I find the best course of action is to recognize where the person is having trouble and allow the person to feel how s/he pleases. I may not agree with the way the person is feeling, but the person did not come for my advice, s/he came for my help. In my opinion, stifling emotion has been much less successful.

I also think of myself as being very efficient, which is an attribute that has been created by mixing my ability to delegate tasks and my ability to communicate effectively with all members of the production. Since the stage manager is responsible for overseeing that all aspects of the production are in order, distributing tasks to the production assistants and interns is necessary. Identifying crew's strengths and weaknesses plays a heavy role when distributing tasks. When taking everything I have said about my process into account, I used all of these skill sets during my senior theatre capstone experience, *Beautiful Bodies*. I served as stage manager for the East Tennessee State University Division of Theatre and Dance's opening fall production, under the direction of Professor Patrick Cronin.

## ***Part II: Stage Manager in Action***

My journey with *Beautiful Bodies* began on June 14, 2012 when the play's director, Professor Patrick Cronin, asked me to spearhead his production as stage manager. At the time, I was working in Boone, North Carolina as the deck stage manager of *Horn in the West*, and I was elated to have the opportunity to work with Patrick for a third time in four years since I began my theatre education at ETSU.

### *Synopsis of Beautiful Bodies*

The playwright, Laura Shaine Cunningham, set the play in an apartment in NoHo, New York. Jessie, Nina, Lisbeth, Martha, and Sue Carol come together to celebrate the baby shower of a mutual friend, Claire. As the play begins, the audience is introduced to each character individually and the audience is able to acquaint themselves with the characters of the show. Jessie is the first character to be introduced and is portrayed as the central figure of the group; she is the one character that links all the other women to each other. Nina is next to appear onstage with Jessie; Nina is over-the-top and the most voluptuous in her group of friends. Juxtaposed to Nina, Lisbeth is the third woman to enter; Lisbeth is the most shy of her peers and very frail. The fourth woman to materialize is Martha; taking the role of the 'mother hen,' Martha is loud, bold, and overly opinionated. Sue Carol emerges from the streets half way through Act I; she is in a constant state of hysteria and narcissism, obsessing over her relationship with her husband. Once the five women have assembled to celebrate the baby shower, they wait on the arrival of their friend, Claire. Claire is unmarried and her child is the result of a one night stand. Naturally, her friends are apprehensive about her choices and, as the alcohol flows, they begin to force opinions on Claire about her situation. As Claire defends herself, deeply personal issues about the other women are revealed.

### *Production History*

*Beautiful Bodies* can be found in two different formats-a play and a novel. The novel was first published in the United States by Washington Square Press in May 2004. The UK edition was published in 2004 by Bloomsbury. *Beautiful Bodies* premiered at the Whole Theatre in October 1987 with Olympia Dukakis as Artistic Director (Cunningham iii). For the past 25 years, *Beautiful Bodies* has gained praise for the script's ability to depict real life without becoming cliché.

“Cunningham displays a knack for smart, catty chatter...the sophisticated and often funny repartee contribute to the play's swiftness and appeal. The parts very nearly play themselves, needing only some seasoned pros to add the right dash of pepper and spice.”  
-*Variety*

“It's a juicy, jazzy party, with a bottomless punch bowl of wit.” -Bob Campbell, *The Star-Ledger*

“Real women—and the men in their lives—certainly talk about this stuff and playwright Laura Shaine Cunningham isn't afraid to write it down. She gives her characters honest lines, lines that reveal the 'secret life', the essence of our most intimate moments.”  
-Dufflyn Lammers, *Savannah Morning News*

*Beautiful Bodies* continues to run throughout Europe. Companies in Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Estonia, the Netherlands now coming to Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland have all produced *Beautiful Bodies* (Plays).

### *First Impressions of Beautiful Bodies*

When I first read *Beautiful Bodies*, I saw the script as a message about friendship and the tribulations that come as people grow older. However, once I digested the show and began to work on it, I saw that the show greatly involves the acceptance of personal choices and accepting life as it comes towards you. Since the play is very contemporary and the director, Patrick Cronin, was fond of setting it in 2012, a lot of research I concerned myself with was very technical. I asked myself: “What do New York women, ages 30-35, think about?” “How is their day to day activity different from mine?” And most importantly, I had to keep the script, which the original version was from 1984, up to date with modernizing changes. In the original text, Cunningham wrote several jokes about President Nixon, pagers, beepers, and Bendel's Department Store. All of these out-of-date topics had to be updated for the modernized concept that Patrick Cronin wanted. Understanding the text and subtext within the script is an important task for a stage manager. Performers will have questions about costumes, props, and set design that will need to be answered immediately.

It was vital to understand the inner workings of each woman. How do these women walk, talk, and present themselves? An immediate requirement was for the request of rehearsal shoes. As soon as possible, having performers in rehearsal garments is important. Nothing is more jarring than having a performer unable to move on stage two days before the show opens.

I was also interested in examining the different types of human relationships. All the characters are life-long friends and would act accordingly. All acting is reacting; therefore, figuring out how longtime friends react to one another is a topic that the cast had to develop from scratch.

## *The Playwright*

When working with Patrick Cronin, I was well aware that he was interested in bringing the playwright, Laura Shaine Cunningham, to our production. In fact, this was the second time I have worked with Patrick when he invited a playwright to visit, and this was the fourth production I have worked on as stage manager that involved a living playwright in residence. A playwright in residence refers to the situation when a playwright works on a production of their own work. Having a playwright in residence can be very beneficial to the overall production value, but can also manifest another set of problems.

Working with Laura Shaine Cunningham was filled with positives and negatives. Her comments regarding the diverse characters were the most beneficial aspect of her visit. Cunningham was able to give suggestions about speech and back story that completely changed the way some of the performers saw their characters. Over the course of her first two days, I saw a rejuvenated cast of hysterical New York women. Aside from helping the performers with character history, Laura Shaine was worried with how verbatim her lines were being recited. During her first visit, she did not watch the action on stage at all. Instead she pulled out her script and read along with the performers, as to ensure her lines were being properly said. I felt her actions were rather annoying, but if I ever write a play, my opinion may change.

As playwrights commonly do, Cunningham was very opinionated about the design elements of the show, which, as the playwright in residence, she had very little power to go with her strong opinions. When she would voice her distaste for a costume piece or set decoration, I kept myself quiet and focused on Patrick. If anything were to become heated, I, as stage manager, would have to intervene and work to rectify any damage.

## Pre Audition

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My preference as a stage manager is to read the play for the first time in one sitting. Cramming all the information into my brain helps me get a grasp of what I am to expect. After I finished reading the play, I stopped, digested everything the playwright wrote, and began to read it again.

During my second read through I looked for any mentioning of props, costumes, character appearances, pyro, lights, and sound. The second read through is the most thorough reading I will do of the play. Each creative department will require its own set of paperwork. The most difficult and most tedious assignment I do during the second read through is to begin compiling a preliminary props list. Whenever the script mentions a prop, I note that in a spreadsheet with page number and character usage. Having a preliminary props list is not always indicative of the stage manager; it could fall to the props master. However, I like to create my own. I feel the list puts me a step ahead before the rehearsal process.

Once preliminary paperwork was completed, I created the audition form. Every form is similar but must be specialized for the particular shows requirements. The director must know about the performers experience, availability, contact information, etc. Something specialized for *Beautiful Bodies* was to ask the performers if they were opposed to altering their appearance.

Since this is my thesis and I have others to guide me, I decided to experiment with some extras that ETSU does typically not do. I created a welcome packet for all members of the cast and crew. In the welcome packet I included a company letter, company rules, wallet card of phone numbers, and a contact sheet (all handmade). Time will tell if it was worth my efforts. Welcome packets are more often used when companies hire out of town-ers who need to be familiarized with a new area.

In the beginning weeks of August, I had a nice long chit chat with my director, Patrick. Auditions were not for another three and a half weeks, but I was still able to get conflicts, deadlines, and dates from Patrick that would enable me to start piecing together a production calendar. During the conversation, Patrick asked me to divide the script into beats; very atypical of a stage manager. A beat is a part of a scene when a character objective changes. Beats can be as short as a page or as long as 50 pages. I think Patrick's request shows more trust in me than he has in the past. I'm not going to lie, I was a bit nervous.

A week before the auditions, I had a meeting with Patrick to discuss how he wanted the auditions and callbacks to work. He asked me to pick one side for the auditions and six sides for the callbacks. A side refers to a specific beat or part of a beat that will be used as audition material. Again, very atypical for a stage manager to be picking sides.

# Audition Process

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## **Audition Day**

August 30, 2012

Day of auditions means that I have to double check everything. I began my day by printing 50 of my beautifully handmade audition forms, gathering as many pens as I could find, and organizing all the information into easy to use files. Then I meditated. I always try and meditate before I go to work on a show. Meditation comes in many forms, this particular instance, I was blasting 90s soul music while making to-do lists. Additionally, I thought it would be fitting to look stellar. I got dressed in semi-formal garb. Sparkly. Clean. Gorgeous.

The auditions did not start until 7:00pm, but I arrived at the Bud Frank Theatre at 5:30pm. The space is tripling as a classroom, audition space for *Caesar 2012*, and audition space for *Beautiful Bodies*. As I suspected, the space had not been cleaned and looked messy. Good thing I got there an hour and a half early. A clean space is a happy space AND a safer space. After the space was cleaned, I set up the audition table in the lobby of the theatre. It is amazing how confused performers can become by a theatre lobby with a table that has papers on it. Really? Tell me the options.

Facilitating the comings and goings of the people auditioning is part of my job. Yes, I moonlight as a babysitter. The most frustrating part of my night was when Patrick arrived 10 minutes late. He is the director, it is his show, he is allowed to do what he pleases, I had to adapt. Once the auditions started, Patrick and I worked very quickly and efficiently. Patrick asked me to sit in on the auditions, which is again very atypical of a stage manager. When all the women were finished auditioning, I collaborated with Patrick on a callback list. A callback list is simply a list of names with individuals who were granted an initiation back to read for the director. The performers receiving a call back received an email with the callback information.

## **Callback day**

August 31, 2012

Ok. I've slept. Who got a callback? Callbacks are interesting to me. They are half based on talent and half based on politics. Who earned the callback and who is expected to get one? To prepare for the day I made copies of callback sides. We are using the scenes when each character enters. Killing two birds with one stone, we get to see multiple combinations of people on stage while still isolating one person.

Luckily the theatre was still clean from the previous evening's auditions (mine). I arrived at 5:00pm and callbacks began at 5:30pm. Unlike the auditions, I wore a fabulously casual outfit of skinny jeans and metallic vest. The lobby was set up very similarly to yesterday's auditions. One by one the women who received a call back trickled in and took one side at a time. Studying, reviewing, nervously pacing.

Since I am a veteran of this department, I have come to know a lot of the faces, old and new. But I have never had so many people try and pry casting information out of me. Who's up for what part? What is Patrick looking for? How would this character do such and such? I am a proponent of an even playing field, so my mouth stayed shut. Once Patrick arrived, the callbacks began.

About midway through the callbacks I received a text from my dad informing me that my grandmother was in the hospital with about a week left. In that very moment I had a dilemma: do I leave or stay? In these tough moments I am thankful for meditation. I take a breath and stay calm so I can access the situation. It is Friday before a long weekend. I don't work tomorrow. It is already late at night. I could drive in first thing in the morning. So I stayed at the callbacks.

Once callbacks ended, Patrick and I discussed our final thoughts amongst ourselves and then began deliberating with Herb Parker, director of *Caesar 2012* at the same time. Surprisingly there were no objections between Herb and Patrick. Each director made casting choices that did not interfere with the others vision.

Since I am the first SM to be in the theatre this season, it is my responsibility to see that the theatre is restored to its proper state at the end of the day. A/C on, dehumidifiers on, lights off, doors locked, trash up.

I did not post a cast list as I typically do. Instead, I emailed everyone, individually. Each performer must accept her part before I can move forward with my process. Thankfully, no one rejected a part.

To move forward, scripts will be copied for all cast members and crew members. Next, I will begin piecing the production calendar into more of an order, and then the production meetings and rehearsals start. First rehearsal will be on Sept 4 at 7:30pm- Table Read.

# Rehearsal Process

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September 4, 2012

Table Read.

Today is the table read. A table read is the very first gathering of performers, stage managers, and director (outside of the auditions). Everyone is called for a line by line read through of the play. The tradition is to start the process with a rehearsal that everyone attends. I honestly cannot stand table reads. I understand the purpose, especially in academic theatre, but it is the most uneventful rehearsal for a stage manager.

The table read began at 7:30pm. I arrived at the theatre at 6:45pm. It is common for the stage management team to arrive (referred to as a call time) at least 30 minutes before the performers. Before every rehearsal, the stage floor must be swept, first aid must be accounted for, and the stage must be set for the scheduled scenes. The table read requires a little bit more preparation, since we have everyone in one place, might as well go over rules, policies and procedures, and friendly reminders. This is where I fell in love with my welcome packet. Everything that everyone needs to know was delivered in one packet. I saved myself and the table read a ton of time.

I set the stage with 2 rectangle tables and 10 chairs. By any standards, this is a small table read. I have seen table reads that require rented out banquet rooms, catered food, and hundreds of chairs. Luckily, ETSU is a little bit more low-key. At 7:30pm everyone had arrived...with the exception of Patrick, who PROMISED he would have the scripts. As always, he came strolling in about 2 minutes late, thankfully with scripts in his hands. I corralled everyone on stage, they found their seats, and Patrick began to introduce and speak about the process. After about 15 minutes of introductions, the first stage directions were read and the table read had begun.

During the table read I took notes of anything I might have missed during my first 3 reads. Props are the most taxing part of *Beautiful Bodies*. They can be mentioned so subtly in the text and not even noticed. I added about 30 more props to my preliminary props list. Another task that had to be done during the table read was to get all the performers scheduled for measurement appointments. Never an easy task, but made much easier by the small number of characters in the show. (Dare I flashback to either one of the Dance Concerts?)

When the table read was finished, I called for a ten minute break. I needed a drink, something strong and on the rocks. Once I called the brigade back from break, Patrick gave a few more words of wisdom to the cast and the day was over, for everyone else but me. I then had to shut down the theatre, set up the dehumidifiers, and go home. Once I got home I had to type up the rehearsal report, type up the measurement schedule for the week, send reminder emails about the production meeting, and reminder emails about the weekly schedule. A rehearsal report is the

stage managers most important job during the rehearsal process. A rehearsal report is a document that is typed up by the stage manager and sent to all members of the production staff. The report reiterates what was done during the rehearsal and informs of any qualms or necessary items needed for the rehearsal process.

## **September 5, 2012**

### Blocking Rehearsal 1

Now that the table read is finished, we can begin the process of realizing this play. Blocking rehearsals are the very first rehearsals done in the theatre. Performers will be given blocking to be paired with the lines in the script. Blocking is any movement done on stage. The process of giving a performer blocking varies with the experience of the performer and the director. Patrick is both a very experienced performer and director, so to him blocking comes “organically”. He allows the performer to discover blocking.

The blocking scheduled for tonight is pages 1-13. Tonight is a trial run. Patrick has not directed in a few years, we have three very new performers on stage, paired with three veterans, 13 pages of blocking in one night could be ambitious. Here we go.

Patrick is being extremely laissez-faire. He didn't even bring a script. He is adding several more hand props and is letting the performers run the rehearsal. The performers are free to make suggestions and take the blocking as their own. I am nothing if not a chameleon, I'm adaptable, but I cannot (in the true sense) take blocking if it keeps changing every 5 seconds. Did I mention it is the stage managers job to take down blocking and run rehearsals?

Thankfully, after a reminder of our time constraints, we finished on time! On a very deep level, I think Patrick also saw today as a trial run, too. He was hands off in order to see what the new women were going to bring to the rehearsal. Great minds think alike.

Now that I'm home it is time to send out the rehearsal report, get an update on the measurement appointments, and prepare for tomorrow. Au revoir!

## **September 6, 2012**

### Blocking Rehearsal 2

My grandmother passed away during my lunch break at work today. This day isn't ending any time soon.

The agenda for today's rehearsal is simple, just get through it. We are blocking 14 pages again and adding in 1 more character. Just stay calm and get through the rehearsal.

Patrick was more hands on tonight. I think I was correct; he did look at last night as a trial run. The blocking was concrete and he was offering feedback to the performers' suggestions and choices. Our ten minute break was more like a 30 minute break; Patrick tends to be long winded. However, he was giving advice about how to connect with each other when in an ensemble. I believe I'm going to schedule a rehearsal for the women only, when the show is blocked. I have done a non acting rehearsal way back during the Beckett shows, and I think it could be well served with this show.

In a blur of "William Almost Having a Breakdown" the rehearsal ended at 10:30pm. We once again, met our daily goal. Thankfully. More performers will be added, complicating our tight schedule, but I believe we will triumph. Some performers are bringing great suggestions and, in turn, feeding the creativity of others.

Once I got home, I sent out the rehearsal report, sent out reminder emails for Friday's fittings, packed a bag and hit the road for Knoxville.

## **September 10, 2012**

Blocking rehearsal 3

"Art is the only way to run away without leaving home." –Twyla Tharp.

There is a weird dichotomy when I say this quote to myself while running on the treadmill. Running really helped me get back to my normal pace after the funeral.

Today we continue blocking Act I, and thankfully we will have props for the first time. Props are anything held or used by a performer. Many props can be found in the stage directions, but they can also be hidden in the dialogue. We are meeting our daily goals consistently, but every time we add more performers, things slow down, and the daily goals become more of a figment. I am pleasantly surprised with the performers' ability to retain the blocking so well. All the blocking is very natural and self discovered by the performers. If blocking continues to stick and look appropriate, I will not have a problem deviating from the daily goals and working on character development (Patrick's favorite). At the beginning of each rehearsal, we run from what we completed the previous rehearsal and continue running until our daily goal is met or abandoned.

We spent about an hour and a half working on two pages which included an entrance. An entrance is exactly what it sounds like- a character comes onto to the stage. Having between two to four people on stage at a time are the real "magic" numbers. People are easily given focus and the stage can be very balanced with between two and four people. Today, however, we added

person number five and person number six. Each added entrance became very important because once a person is added, the others must accommodate.

Needless to say, we did not meet our daily goal for today. But the goals for this week can be tweaked easily since we have all performers on stage. Praise.

## **September 11, 2012**

### Blocking rehearsal 4

Today has been a very “normal” day in rehearsal. The process has finally taken form enough times for everyone to have a routine. As of yet, no one has been late or off their game, people continue to bounce ideas off each other and characters are beginning to form.

Today we reviewed Sue Carol’s entrance, because it involves a ton of movement and the addition of a performer to the stage. I really can’t stress enough how difficult it can be to add characters. Hannah Hasch is playing Sue Carol, obviously it’s impossible to go wrong with her. Fabulous. She has been a trooper throughout the rehearsal period and has great insight to the Sue Carol scenes. Hannah is a veteran of our department and bring fresh ideas to every role she tackles.

AFTER A REHEARSAL AND A HALF of working Sue Carol’s entrance, we finished. Take a 10.

So, now that we are back, let’s talk about the 4 hours it took to block 5 pages. Oh, the long winded Patrick. Now that we are done talking, we are adding in Claire (the last character!)

Claire is the last character to appear on stage, and after she enters all six characters stay on stage for the remainder of the show. Traffic patterns and blocking will become much more fluid as the rehearsal period progresses. Once you’ve acquired all the ingredients, baking the cake is easy. Now we bake.

We did not get much further in the script by the end of rehearsal. Claire’s entrance will be the trickiest since it is the set up for Act II. At least we put her on stage and ran through the entrance a couple of times. We did not figure out what worked but we did figure out what didn’t work.

## **September 12, 2012**

### Blocking rehearsal 5

Today was a landmark rehearsal. We finished blocking Act I. The fiasco of Claire’s entrance was much less time consuming and fiasco-esque than I anticipated. Since Claire is only in Act I for 7-

8 pages, Patrick decided to ground everything leading up to Act II, seeing as how Act II is a giant hurricane of emotions.

The end of Act I deals with a crowd scene located down stage center. The beat causes a lot of action and propels the story into Act II. Down Stage means a position closer to the audience and Center means between the left and right sides of the stage.

Layman's Terms: People get drunk and spill things.

All the ice is broken once you get into Act II, and the crowd scene helps break all barriers, which as an audience member makes me feel more relaxed. It might sound crazy, but I have a hard time enjoying a play or movie if I can't or don't know the climax of the story. I spend the entire rising action stressing and wondering what the hell is going to happen.

The end of Act I is still being worked out. Patrick is going to think about it and we will get back to it when we begin working rehearsals. Working Rehearsals are rehearsals that fine tune the blocking and work out time and pacing.

Tomorrow is our first "working rehearsal". I will be staggering the performers call times; one more thing to do. Just when you think your schedule is set, it changes.

## **September 13, 2012**

Working Rehearsal/Stumble Through Act I; 6

Tonight, we are beginning with the opening scene with Jessie and Nina. This scene is almost at show quality level. Having just 2 performers on stage is convenient and easy to control. There is about 2 minutes of stage business (movement without lines) before Nina enters. We worked with Callie Barber (Jessie) on what exactly she saw herself doing in the 2 minutes.

When Nina comes in, the show blossoms into a chatty back and forth banter; very reminiscent of *Will and Grace* or *Friends*. The scene is looking very nice and natural. It should, I've only had it memorized since auditions.

The next to arrive is Lisbeth. To me, Lisbeth adds variety and shows a layer to the group we do not see with Jessie and Nina. Lisbeth is a very introverted, quiet. These women all depict New York and I think Lisbeth shows a part of NYC that we (people who do not live in NYC) do not have access to. Lisbeth is my favorite character. Patrick kept her static and rooted, almost as an anchor force pulling everything in.

Martha is the next character to be added. She is the awkward vase that everyone has in their house because you have to keep it since your bitch mother-in-law gave it to you. For some reason Jessie, Nina, and Lisbeth are friends with Martha and the audience is never sure why.

Martha is driven, hard headed, and opinionated, just like your mother-in-law. We worked on Martha's entrance for quite some time; we left it a little sloppy and finally got it fine tuned.

In comes Sue Carol. I love Sue Carol. She solely brings the theatricality to the production. We did not spend much time on her scenes since it is very grounded and calm (except for Sue Carol who remains hysterical).

Claire is the last to enter. Finally, after hours of working entrances and setting a pace, we added in Claire. As I said yesterday, Claire is the easy part because Act II is the hard part. Whew. What a day.

So, next week we will block Act II. Supposedly. It's on the schedule and it's all the time we can give Act II, but somehow Patrick can procrastinate and it all works out.

## **September 17, 2012**

### Blocking Rehearsal 7

Today's goal is to complete as much blocking in Act II as possible. Tomorrow will be lost to the publicity photo shoot, a necessary evil. Tonight we will hit the ground running and hopefully surpass our goal of 15 pages.

This cast is really starting to bond and become friends. As I type this very paragraph, they are gabbing about the party from this past weekend, how so-and-so is doing after her breakup, and where the best places are in town to get Mexican food. Finally, I think these women are building trust amongst each other which will lead to chemistry on stage. The off book (date to have all of your blocking and lines memorized) deadline is in exactly two weeks, I feel this goal is achievable now that the cast has the hard part behind them.

Hope is beginning to fade quickly. We are on a ten minute break after only blocking three pages. Everyone seems to be regurgitating blocking from Act I, causing the opening to feel stale. Opening each Act with a powerful punch will keep the audience engaged throughout the whole show, better than having a disengaged and bored audience. I keep reminding myself that these slow, tedious blocking episodes are necessary, but knowing that we lose half of tomorrow makes me wish that Patrick was less of an organic blocker.

Once we got back to work, things seemed to pick up. Powering through difficult spots can usually be followed by an easy, breezy ten pages of solitude. One of the main problems we are facing with this show is keeping a balance between what we as artists feel are the best choices while still listening to Laura Shaine's stage directions. Since we are modernizing the play, several of Laura Shaine's lines and stage directions do not make sense, thus must be altered to fit our specifications. Maybe this is where some of the hang-ups are developing.

We did not meet our daily goal, but there is still hope for tomorrow. Days like this happen and when they do it is my job to accommodate such schedule changes.

## **September 18, 2012**

### Photo Shoot/Working Rehearsal 8

Just like any form of entertainment, theatre productions must be publicized, and getting the right picture cannot be rushed. Last night was not our finest night, but there is more to putting a show together than putting performers on stage with blocking. It takes an army. When doing a photo shoot, the cast will arrive, wearing something plain and simple that Patrick has picked out (in this case a solid colored tube top and jeans). The photographer will then arrange the cast around the rehearsal set up. The raw photographs are very...raw. In order to go on the poster, they will be edited.

Right now I am watching our photographer, Larry Smith, work with the cast on stage. The chemistry between everyone is amazing. I have yet to see any test shots, but I can tell these pictures will be amazing.

The photo shoot is wrapping up and it is 8:30pm. I'm sure Patrick could tell I was beginning to stoke out, because 10 minutes ago he told me what edits he wanted made to the schedule. Right now I am digesting the alterations, Emily has gone to get my Zanax and I will be better soon. We will not be blocking anything new today. Patrick has decided to dedicate this whole rehearsal to the photo session with any remaining time being used to work the blocking from last night. My senses are telling me that he did not love the work we did last night. I see Larry finishing up, I'm calling a 20 minute break...because I can.

Back to brass tacks baby, I've had a fabulous salted caramel mochaccino from Starbucks and am ready to work the scenes from yesterday until they are so perfect that *Caesar 2012* grovels at our beautiful feet for mercy.

Rehearsal has just ended and my sugar/caffeine rush is a distant memory. Apologies for the previous paragraph. Working the opening to Act II was very helpful. I was correct in thinking that Patrick was unhappy with last night. Luckily, he came in with some stellar ideas that opened the scene up and made it more dynamic.

## **September 19, 2012**

### Blocking rehearsal 9

Today is my last rehearsal of the week. Yes, it is only Wednesday, but Thursday's rehearsal is cancelled due to a dance function and Friday is a character development rehearsal. Mr. Stage Manager is going to sleep. Forget homework and everything else. Sleep.

We will begin rehearsal today where we left off on Tuesday. From there, we will begin blocking until the day is up. I truly do not have a daily goal for today, whatever page number "as far as possible" is will be the goal. As the cast arrives, everyone seems to be in a positive mood. I, on the other hand, happen to be hungry, but I haven't eaten a meal since 1997, that's to be expected.

Now that we are on a 10 minute break, let me fill you in. Most of what we have done today is about Sue Carol and her cheating husband, Bob. Hannah Hasch plays Sue Carol. Hannah does a fantastic job playing Sue, but a great deal of her discovery has been through the question "What doesn't work for Sue Carol?" Sue Carol is a southern belle who came to New York to become a star. There are more clichés about working class performers than you can shake a cliché at. I have complete faith in Hannah; Sue Carol will become her own.

Props are slowly beginning to show up in the theatre. Having all the props possible, as early as possible, is very beneficial. This rarely happens in theatre; therefore, performers must be adaptable. The show I see in rehearsal will look completely different by the time opening night comes around.

So far so good, we made it through an additional 10 pages tonight, putting us at still slightly behind schedule, but not in any danger zones. We WILL complete blocking for Act II on Monday of next week. Even if I have to send Patrick outside for an hour while I do it myself, we will finish Act II on Monday.

## **September 24, 2012**

### Blocking Rehearsal 10

We are on the downward slope. We are officially past mid season. We still have a lot of work to do.

The goal for today is to finish Act II. Whether or not it will happen is yet to be seen. I remain hopeful and optimistic, because if I don't have my business together no one else will.

Today's rehearsal is starting out rough. We have two late performers, there is some serious low energy, and Hannah just had a breakdown over selling plasma. Sigh. One of my biggest pet

peeves as a stage manager is when people are late. In the grand scheme of things, it is my job to start the show. If I have late performers, my job becomes impossible.

We are again, taking longer than usual. However, we are working beats as we block them. We are getting to a point where props are becoming essential. Having just the rehearsal props is proving to be very preventative for the blocking. There are several parts that we cannot fully block until the actual set pieces and props are installed. Like the Jolly Jumper. In a certain part of the show, Lisbeth has to literally hang from the ceiling. Obviously this cannot be blocked and worked until it is installed. The installation date is 5 days before we open.

Today we will not meet our goal. But for me, at this point in the rehearsal process, the goal is to finish the show. If I dare to remember back on all the other shows I have stage managed, I do get to this point with every show. I can set daily goals all I want, but the only goal that matters is the finish line.

This rehearsal was a bit sloppy. Performers were late, energy was low, it is time for a pep talk. Let's raise morale. Trust and Focus are the two verbs I will continue to associate with this show. Ensemble pieces require trust. Focus is needed during these long grueling days. Act II was not finished tonight. Instead of finishing it tomorrow, we will push it to Wednesday and work on the Martha scene tomorrow. I am hoping the break from blocking will allow the cast to regroup and breathe for a day. Then tackle new material with ease.

## **September 25, 2012**

### **Working Rehearsal 11**

Today will be better. Last night was a struggle; I'm glad it is behind us. We are only working with Jessie, Nina, Lisbeth, and Martha. For some reason, Patrick loves the Martha scene; we will be working from Martha's entrance to Sue Carol's entrance all rehearsal. Working is a very crucial part of the show. Working is like taking the rough draft to the final draft. There is a fantastic sense of relief once scenes are worked. Marks are set and the performers finally get a chance to play.

We have only been working for an hour and twenty minutes, but I'm calling a 20 minute break. Last night's rehearsal is beginning to look like a monopolized cake walk compared to this one. People are over thinking all the choices that were made previously. Chelsea Kinser's blocking has completely changed, and I think it is throwing some of the other performers off. It seems that Callie is about to have a nervous breakdown, she became so accustomed to delivering her lines in a certain way and in a certain direction, these new alterations have jarred her. This break could not have come soon enough.

Slowly but surely, we persevered through this rehearsal. God knows it was not easy and only he knows why. In the end, the scene changed for the better. We explored new spaces that we had never used before, found some subtext that was under developed, and mentally pushed ourselves to the limits. Growth is what happened tonight. Several people on that stage needed to be thrown in the deep end without a life jacket. In retrospect, this night was the most necessary for the growth of our ensemble.

Tomorrow we will finish blocking Act II. No exceptions.

## **September 26, 2012**

### Blocking Rehearsal 12

Tonight is all about Sue Carol. It seems that each character will have her day in court... I mean rehearsal. Hannah truly has instincts that rival working professionals. She is very aware of her location on stage and makes nothing less than smart, likeable choices. I have high expectations of this rehearsal. Ideally, we would be able to work with Sue Carol through Act II, but that is not an option since Act II is not finished. Act II will be done soon and all my dreams will have come true.

No new props arrived today. Props are becoming a massive problem. We open in 3 weeks and we have yet to so much as SEE any final prop choices. Some of the 'veterans' in the show are aware that the props department is having trouble, which is the opposite of what tech is supposed to do.

Working these parts with Sue Carol are really pointless. Everyone else is benefiting more from the scene work than Hannah. Her original choices are already an 8 on a scale from 1-10. Patrick is beginning to put thoughts into her head. Back story is developing and her rat bastard (unseen) husband, Bob, is becoming a clearer picture. We are also at a point where she can begin pacing herself. Pacing and rhythm are the last things to work on during a show since everything has to be set in stone before the timing can be implemented. Callie and Aryn are finding some good subtext through this rehearsal. The last of the performers unmotivated choices are now a thing of the past.

After working with the Sue Carol scenes, we are finally finishing Act II. Not finishing-FINISHING, but the blocking is set. Once the skeleton is laid, the other layers of muscle and epidermis (science joke?) can build and prosper into a thriving being. The blocking went very quickly. Much of my notations are not legitimate, 'taking stage' is mostly what the last 10 pages of the script are. In this case, 'taking stage' is a show worthy notation, but in most shows it would not fly.

## **September 27, 2012**

### Stumble Thru for Designers 13

Today is the first time we will run the show from start to finish, commonly referred to as a “stumble thru”, because the performers will literally be stumbling from start to finish. On my end of things, today’s rehearsal is very easy. As long as everyone shows up on time, I sit back and take notes. We have invited the designers to view the stumble thru. It is always a good decision to have the artistic staff view a full run of the show, that way they will be able to solidify or alter their artistic choices. Especially with a director like Patrick, the designers have (somewhat) free range to create what they wish, as long as it is in keeping with the script and theme.

The cast has expressed nervousness about the run through. I am a little surprised since I have a stigma about performers-they should never be nervous. Focus and Trust are our mantras. Things ran rather smoothly during Act I. Melissa, our lighting designer and technical director, has been experimenting with the lighting during the run and Dr. Hall, our scenic designer, is paying close attention to the blocking. Hopefully, once the “lack-of-props” issue is seen firsthand, they will arrive quickly.

There was a bit of a stagger moment when Martha puts up the Jolly Jumper. It was so great for Dr. Hall to be able to see the Jolly Jumper scene. Now that everything can be visualized, the set should be coming right along. What a multi-purpose day it has turned out to be. Not only does the cast have a full run under their belts, but the entire show has been realized and seen for the first time, AND I was able to relax during a rehearsal. Being able to complete a Stumble Thru is generally an accomplishment. I’ve seen a stumble thru that only lasted 30 minutes because the show was not blocked yet. We are in a great spot.

## **October 1, 2012**

### Working Act II 14

It is show month. The finish line is within reach. Everything is about to change-the weather, the leaves, our rehearsal format. We will love each other more than we ever have, and we will hate each other with every fiber of our being, because that’s what families do. From our stumble thru, it was blaringly obvious that Act II is what needed to be worked the hardest. Today, we have 3 whole hours to work Act II.

The Jolly Jumper bit is the most problematic situation for all parties involved. Patrick informed us that no other theatre company has attempted to do the Jolly Jumper scene. Most just rework the script around it or cut the sequence all together. NOT HERE! We persevere through the tough spots! Luckily, Chelsea Kinser is the only person who does much with the mechanics of

the Jolly Jumper, and she is willing to do anything we ask of her. Today, we asked her to stand atop a bar stool in stilettos to install the Jolly Jumper. I better get my first aid kit ready.

We spent a chunk of time on Martha's "take stage" moments that end Act II and the show. Every single time we went through the motions, something new and wonderful was discovered, thus the "take stage" moments will stage just that. And come opening night, I have to give the cast my trust- they will do what is best for the show.

Now time for a William update: Since the tedious parts of the show have started, I have little time to mediate or go for a leisurely run. What a problem. I am experimenting with some new activities to get me focused and de-stressed before rehearsals, but nothing beats going to the gym. The closest thing I have found is to simply stretch. I put in my iPod, revert back to watching Dance Concert warm-ups, and try to breathe. It gets the job done, but I long for the days of treadmills and yoga.

## **October 2, 2012**

### Working Act II 15

Patrick has decided to work Act II again tonight. I don't blame him. Don't get me wrong, last night was a wonderful progression, but tonight will solidify everything we have done up to this point. These types of rehearsals are nice and calm. For once in a while it is nice to not do something new. These also allow the cast an opportunity to do character work while working the scene.

(Upon walking into the theatre for the first time today) Did I call it or did I call it?! Sitting center stage is a giant pile of show worthy props. I KNEW that once the "lack-of-props" issue was realized, they would start to appear. Granted this is not Christmas, not every single prop arrived, but a great deal of the necessary ones did. I have all the presents for Claire's baby shower and wrapping materials! What a wonderful surprise. I may not be able to use them to their fullest tonight (performers arrive in 30 minutes) but these will get utilized as soon as possible.

Patrick is not quite as thrilled about the arrival of the props as I am. He went through and vetoed many of the choices, but at least we know what doesn't work. I had a very 3 Stooges encounter with the new playpen today. Apparently it takes a genius to get the contraption to work.

Tonight has turned into a run of Act II. Patrick will give notes afterwards. I'm ok with that. I think we worked it hard enough yesterday, and tonight is allowing it to become muscle memory. Technically, today was supposed to be the last day with scripts in hand, but Patrick has extended our off book deadline to next week. Off book refers to the script, having lines memorized. Ideally, the off book deadline would be a hard deadline with no exceptions, because once you've

started extending the deadline, it's hard to seem like you're not as strict as you need to be. Time will tell.

The run through was not terrible. I think it would have been more beneficial to work parts of Act II and then run through, but either one works for me. I could definitely see clear character choices and sharp subtext through the emotional parts of the script. But again, I reiterate, working with a script in hand only allows you to half perform.

### **October 3, 2012**

Run Act I 16

Today will be a day of agility. I have a huge project due in my Modern Drama class, plus French and Musical Theatre History homework. Then, after all my classes are complete and wonderful, I have a short two hour break, and then it's off to the theatre for a run through of Act I. I want to get there early enough to sort through the new props and discard of the old ones. It will be nice to revisit Act I. Two long days of beating Act II to death has been exhausting. Act I is a comfort zone for all of us.

Life is so much better, now that all the rehearsal props are out of the theatre and new ones are being assigned, the backstage area and wing space are beginning to look appropriate.

Patrick has a very clear vision of what he wants tonight. He wants to run through Act I and give notes. He will be looking for places to adjust pacing and find some hidden nuances that he did not previously see. I am very excited. I like rehearsal when we run acts; it gives us a big picture to analyze.

Things have been going well. For some people, it is their first time going back to Act I for a few days, so this review is very beneficial. Today was also the first day the performers wore their show shoes. Adding in any costume elements is always a separate set of problems, because fit issues arise, along with problems with movement and aesthetic value.

Patrick ended up running Act I twice tonight. The first one was sufficient, but I could barely keep me eyes open during the second run. Energy was very low and I think everyone was as exhausted as I was.

### **October 4, 2012**

Run Act II 17

And on the 25<sup>th</sup> day the Lord made Starbucks, because that is what it takes to get through this run through. Today, we will be identical to yesterday but substituting Act II for Act I. We will be running through Act II twice. I'll give you a minute to take it in; I needed all day to digest. Patrick is a notorious/self proclaimed "under rehearse-er" but it's hard to believe when we run a whole act twice in one evening.

Act II is much slower paced. The realization that Martha is not leaving finally settles into reality. There is a level of comfort in knowing that Martha is not leaving. Act I is a revolving door of attempts to get Martha to leave with no avail. Finally, in the final beat of Act I, the audience is put out of their misery and told that Martha is not leaving.

Changing the pace of the show can either be beneficial or deadly. If the pace is slowed too much, the audience will feel the jarring halt and the play will lose some of its realism quality. Working the pace in Act II is much more crucial than the pace in Act I. The opening couple of beats in Act II are really what will be worked over and over again. Once a pace is set, it will be easily followed.

The first run through was a little rough. Act II is so hard to get settled into since it is very natural. Simply, it is six women sittings around and having a conversation. We have all done it a million times before, but not as a character. Being natural is hard. The second time around was better but still a little forced. I've been mostly making prop notes and working through the technical elements in the script. Patrick had his work cut out for him tonight, and all I had to do was keep an eye on the clock.

# Technical Rehearsals

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**October 6, 2012**

Load In

Load In is the day when all set pieces, props, and construction must be installed in the theatre. The day is typically a very long. Several dozen people are involved and we leave the theater in a completely different condition than when we found it.

Upon arrival to the theatre, I learned that our prop master would not be in attendance; therefore, I would be in charge of all props. Oh good. I armed myself with two cast members to assist me, Karen Brewster, a hot glue gun, and a prayer.

Now that I am in charge of the props, I have no choice but to know them inside and out, thus it will be easier to teach to my crew-silver lining. I also got to stay in the warm and dry costume shop on a cold rainy day. Most of the day was spent maneuvering presents into different gift bags and coming up with a logical order for the presents to be presented. It was actually really fun. I liked being able to creatively solve problems within the show.

The day was not the longest load in day I have ever experienced, but it was definitely taxing. More and more times I kept remembering small tiny (almost) insignificant props that we just had to have. Those tiny props are the bane of my existence.

My day ended at 4:30pm. I got a lot done and kicked a lot of ass.

**October 8, 2012**

Tech Rehearsal Act I 18

Today is finally all about me. For the next two days, the acting rehearsals are on hold and each rehearsal will be adding in tech elements. The technical elements will be added in slowly but surely. I enjoy tech rehearsals because it shows that the end is right around the corner. The first thing we will add is lighting. Since the show is realistic in style and takes place in real time, there will be no lighting shifts or transitions in the middle of the show. Things should go rather simply.

The most complicated part of the entire show is the damn curtain speech. It's always complicated because the curtain speech sequence is the first thing the audience will experience, it must be timed out perfectly, in keeping with the pacing of the show. Example: the curtain speech on this show will be much quicker and energized than the curtain speech for *An Evening with Beckett*

*and Pinter*. I was able to run the curtain speech sequence three good times before we moved on to the run of Act I.

During all of Act I, there are no lighting cues except to start and end the Act. There are several sound cues, but those will be added in at a later date. Since Act I is so light on light cues, I have the advantage and make notes about prop issues, blocking issues, and line issues. Never a dull moment. Once we finish the run of Act I, there is a much needed break. It may seem silly, but even though the tech rehearsal is low tech, it is exhausting. The reality hits that these are the last few days to get everything completed. My calendar keeps reminding me that I only have X number of days to reach perfection.

After the break, Patrick made the decision to only run the curtain speech sequence, and then skip to Martha's entrance. The run was done by 10:15pm; a far cry from the 14 hour long Dance Concert tech rehearsals. Traditionally, after tech rehearsals, there is a departmental meeting to discuss things that need to happen or alterations that should be implemented. Sound was the only department that needed to change ideas after seeing the run today. Sound will play a much heavier hand in the show than originally anticipated and it will also work as some comedy in the show. I am très excited.

## **October 9, 2012**

### Tech Rehearsal Act II 19

Round 2. I did not study my script last night, I'm hoping that somewhere in my brain there was a little Smurf reviewing the cues in my head. Not all cues are from the text, a lot of them are from physical movements or visuals that I get from the performer. During a show, a stage managers nose should never be pointed anywhere but the stage. As it turns out, there is no sound for tonight; I was expecting to have that out of the way. Alas, we will press onward with the lighting and I will notate where sound should go in my script.

The lighting for Act II was just as simple as Act I. There are the transitions out of Intermission and into Act II, but that is about it until curtain call. This will be another day of blocking, line, and prop note making. I took several notes on props that, for some reason or another, we were missing. We were finally able to use the Jolly Jumper in its full sequence without problems. Chelsea Kinser is really the best at improvising the scene, if she did not, the entire play would come to a screeching halt just to get some piece of scenery into place.

Lines, lines, lines. You know, it is luck that I do not have to call a ton of cues during this show, because never in my life have I had to be on book for a tech rehearsal. Ridiculous. I know that this script is particularly difficult to memorize because of the conversational nature, but as a

performer, it is your responsibility to know your lines. I would not be able to show up to a show and not know my cues.

Due to the (henceforth known as line drama) Patrick has canceled the run through with tech that was scheduled for tomorrow in place of an acting rehearsal. I have never experienced this in my entire life. Tech is in a place where we can sacrifice a day so that this line drama can really fixed. I am not letting anyone in on my frustrations with lines; there are bigger battles that I need to fight than with this line drama.

## **October 10, 2012**

### **Impromptu Acting Rehearsal 20**

Happy Birthday Dad!

Today is atypical. We are forced to go back and fix problems that never should have occurred. I will not be naming names or calling people out, but amateur problems are arising from people who are not amateurs. I love each and every person on that stage; it is my duty to support them and make this show as wonderful as it can be. I will do that, but if my cues start to slip, I expect the same courtesy extended to me.

Patrick is starting with Martha's entrance in Act I and running until the end of Act I. This entrance has to be bigger and the severity of Martha's presence must be realized. It has been slipping for the past few weeks, but other issues have taken priority. I hope this review rehearsal will recharge everyone's batteries. Of course all this nonsense would be happening on mid-term week when every professor on campus is requiring mass amounts of work to be turned in. I suppose, in a skewed little way, this rehearsal is a nice get away from the crazy that is this week.

After we review Martha's entrance, Patrick skips to the last scene of the play; the "take stage" portion. Everyone really put their all into this scene. I'm very happy. The banter between Martha and Sue Carol was really sharp and quick, Lisbeth was as goofy and spaced out as she has ever been, and Nina was a regular spit fire. Everything was very natural. Some of the blocking was solidified, even though the notes are still 'take stage', it was encouraging to see clean traffic patterns and natural counter crosses.

Today was a necessary evil. I will face days like this again and will be all the wiser of how to handle such problems. The glass is half full today, as we will be doing our first run through with tech tomorrow.

**October 11, 2012**

Full Run with Tech 21

Happy Birthday Mamaw Louise!

After last night, I can either feel two ways today. 1. Exhausted or 2. Motivated. I choose to feel motivated. Last night was a nice vacation away from the mundane mid-terms, and we were able to bring the show back up to the level we know it can be. Tonight is our first run through with tech; I'm converting my nervous energy into motivation. I am prepared to go into tonight's rehearsal and have fun. Sound will be incorporated for the first time and lights are set in stone, so why not sit back and enjoy the experience.

Later in the day I got an email from our sound designer, Scott, informing me that he would not be in attendance to rehearsal tonight. What this means for me: I have a computer full of sound cues and no direction of when they should occur. Yes, logically I know that the doorbells occur when the script calls for a doorbell, but ambient noise and intermission triggers are at the digression of the sound designer....who will be absent. Reminder to self: I choose to feel motivated. Say it back...I choose to feel motivated.

Once I got to the theatre, my motivation turned to utter annoyance. I had some crew members decide to not show up and some performers decide to ignore the sign in sheet. Not ok, there will be a little chat during notes tonight. In addition to getting the sound figured out, I had to preset the stage for the top of the show. William's fuse was burning fast. I did power through and get everything preset and had an opportunity to listen to all of the sound cues, so I could at the very least make an educated guess as to their placement.

Once the run started, things went really well. The performers adjusted well to the sound cues. Patrick liked a lot of what he heard, but he made some notes on necessary adjustments. After the run was complete, we blocked the curtain call and gave notes.

# Dress Rehearsals

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**October 16, 2012**

First Dress Rehearsal 22

After a nice and restful four days off, it is time to crawl back to the theatre. Some things to look forward to this week: Finishing the show, meeting the playwright, and watching the six weeks of hard work finally come to a close. All of these are long term goals, but tonight I will only focus on getting through the day. Tonight marks our first dress rehearsal. A dress rehearsal is one of the final steps in the rehearsal process. After all tech elements are added, the costumes and hair/makeup are added before previews. You would think that it is easy to do something as simple as put on clothes or apply makeup, but you would be wrong. Dress rehearsals are a crucial part of the rehearsal process; it is essentially, the last time to get everything wrong.

Since dress rehearsals are practice for the actual shows, it is treated as such. Everyone's call time is moved forward and all the details are practiced. I will arrive at the theatre at 6:00pm and begin the preshow process.

Once I got to the theatre, I was overwhelmed with the amount of extra set dressing and props, many of which I was not aware. My normal preshow duties include but are not limited to unlocking all doors, sweeping and mopping the stage, setting all props, facilitating the light and sound check. Any added events must carefully be coordinated and planned in to the preshow schedule. Having said that, I was not on a tightly knit schedule during tonight's preshow. Glass half full moment: at least it happened tonight and not opening night. Laura Shaine, our playwright arrived with Patrick, just before the curtain speech. Brief pleasantries were made, and the show began. It makes me CRAZY to start a show late.

Intermission update: things are not going well tonight. There is nothing to blame except the four day vacation. In addition to calling cues during the show, I am also on book, feeding lines to performers who have yet to memorize their lines. At no point should a stage manager be on book during a dress rehearsal. But if these women need my help, I am in no position to turn them away.

As Act II progresses, much of the same keeps happening. This was not the best showcase for Laura Shaine, but tonight was not about her. This entire show is not about her; this show is about the growth of the six women who were cast. I will keep going, I will do the best job that I can, and I will continue to inspire my crew to support these performers.

**October 17, 2012**

Preview 23

Little can be done once the process is this far along. The show is now in the hands of the performers. Trust and Focus is our mantra. It must be practiced. All of the ingredients are on the stage: a fabulous set, complimentary costumes, a truck load of props, and talented performers. The show will be a success if the performers buckle down and review everything learned during the rehearsal process. Chelsea is the senior and she must step up to keep Act II from imploding. Officially, the show is now mine. Once the show enters performances, the director releases all custody to the stage manager. It is still my job to keep the directors vision intact.

Laura Shaine Cunningham will be in attendance, every night, until the final performance. A necessary evil, but one we must live with. Her knowledge of the play is invaluable; however, I can tell that her presence is causing stress for others. She has expressed disdain for the costume choices. Apparently...Sue Carol is too sexual-Martha looks pregnant-Nina is too 80s-Jessie is a butch college student-Lisbeth actually looks ok-and last but not least, Claire looks "awful". Let's talk about Claire. She demanded that Claire's costume be changed. Originally, Claire was wearing workout shorts, an oversized t-shirt, and a track jacket. (You don't need to be a genius to tell that this costume is not cute.) To change anything on our one preview is absurd, especially since the show only runs for four days. When the playwright INSISTS, you must oblige. Thus we did. Claire, played by Courtney Spencer, will be supplying her own costume. Away from the athletic attire we go, and on to grungy, downtown realness we stop. In addition to the costume problems, Laura Shaine has been a bit of a line stickler. Instead of watching the performance this evening, she set in the middle of the house with her nose in the script.

The preshow duties went on as normal. My crew and I have everything down to a science. Sweeping, mopping, prop setting, light check, and sound check can all happen at the same time. My assistant, Emily, needs more direction than I can give her. I should not have to tell you to get off the phone during preshow. I should not have to tell you to do your job. But I have had to do both.

Now that the show is over, Patrick and Laura will give some final notes. (A few moments after I typed the last sentence...) Patrick has decided to change the entire opening with Jessie and Lisbeth. Lighting cues have to be changed, sound cues have to be changed, and new props have to be preset. And I thought we were getting away with a simple costume switch. I am not the only one slightly stunned by the alterations. The crew and artistic staff were all dumbfounded, but I know deep down that Patrick only did this to improve the show. Had Laura Shaine not come, he never would have made these switches. In addition to these fun little changes, a performer informed management of an "allergy" to apples. This is not a problem unless we use apple juice onstage, which we do. The kicker is, this all could have been avoided had she referenced this on her medical information sheet, which she did not.

As the night comes to a close, I reflect. It was trying and difficult. Yes, the show went rather perfect and I commend the cast and crew, but tomorrow will be new. Many will have to adjust to the changes. I will have to adjust to the changes. Gulp.

# Run Of Show

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**October 18, 2012**

## Opening Night

After what seems like the swiftest 23 rehearsals of my life, it is time to open this show. I know I talk a big game about meditation, but today I will not meditate. The constant silence and free time will allow my mind to double and triple worry over tiny details. My checklist has been made; I don't need to think about the show before my call time. William's schedule for today is as follows: 9:45am-11:05am Class, 12:00pm-5:30pm Work, 6:00pm-10:30pm Show. I purposely leave myself no down time on opening nights. If I do, I'll manifest stress... I'm a stress manifester. All the changes that were made yesterday will have their time to be worked, but not before 6:00pm. This is when the "Future Equity" William comes out.

Once I got to the theatre, I was happily greeted by my crew. They were all lined up outside the theatre, like little eager beavers ready to start the show. I am ready for this show to begin. We are expected to have large houses for the next four days, but I will keep that on the down low. The preshow duties continue in their normal fashion. Emily and I will be rechecking everything, down to the most miniscule detail, until the house opens. At 6:30pm, I wander my way to the booth and began working through the new cues with my light and sound operators, Madison and Reagan, respectively. My fabulous duo and I worked through the new cues a few times and had it down perfectly. As it turns out, the alterations are much easier to time out than the originals.

Every show is different. The job responsibilities for a stage manager are NEVER the same from show to show. On various occasions I have had to deal directly with the house manager, but sometimes the duty is left with the assistant stage manager. Since Emily's preshow duties conflicted with her ability to correspond with the house manager, I dealt with the house manager. No job is too small for a stage manager. My most important duty of this entire production (outside of calling the show) is to make sure that Patrick arrives on time. The curtain speech is live, and unobtainable if Patrick is not present.

The house was surprisingly full. For any of you that are unaware, the "house" is where the audience sits. Plain as day. There were a lot of familiar faces that I am glad to see.

In order to end all suspense, I will tell you: Tonight went very well. A few issues with props occurred in Act I, but besides that the energy was up and the audience was entertained. Callie did not preset her phone for the top of Act I phone call. She mimed it very well and the phone was easily snuck onstage to her. When Martha enters with her gaggle of gifts, one was left offstage. Ever the professional, Chelsea waited for a beat and worked the exit into her blocking. It was not distracting or obvious.

The first talk-back was after the show. A talk-back is a time for the audience to ask questions to the performers, playwright, and director. I find them dull, but as long as we have Laura Shaine, she will be used.

## **October 19, 2012**

### Performance 2

Big sigh of relief. I find that at times, I have to remind myself of how much free time I gain when the show is in production. Making alterations this far in the process is futile. We live with what we have been dealt. On some (unlucky) occasions, costumes will rip or set pieces will break, thus meriting some alterations to be made. However, this show seems to be the lowest maintenance I have done in a while. Everything was built to be very sturdy while still aesthetically pleasing. Many time's performers will be given notes once they arrive for the evening's production, but Patrick has opted out of 'note giving' while Laura Shaine is around. She has enough notes to go around.

Last night's audience was very vivacious and engaged throughout the show. Good audiences help fuel the performers and make the show more pleasing to watch. I hope tonight's audience is as betrothed with the production as last evenings. Per usual, the house opened at 7:00pm and the audience began shuffling in, until...

I was walking down from the booth to check with the house manager. It is always the safest option to make oneself accessible. The first thing I noticed as I entered the lobby was a cluster of people huddled around the right side of the lobby. Before I could even catch a breath to ask what was happening, the house manager, Kim Eaton, comes flying at me with information. Apparently, a student worker doubling as an usher blacked out while patrons were entering. Oh good. Luckily, Patrick was not there yet and the first responders were already tending to the patient. At this point, the production had to stop. I told my assistant stage manager, Emily, to inform the cast of our hold. When a production has to "hold" that means that the starting time of the show will be delayed, but the cast and crew must be ready as if the hold is not in place. Patrick shortly arrived as the usher was being removed by first responders. I'm not sure he noticed.

The show only began 5 minutes late, which I consider a major accomplishment. As luck would have it, nothing else went earth-shatteringly awry for the remainder of the show. If I'm going to be picky, I will mention how intermission ran a few minutes long because Laura Shaine needed to sell merchandise. Another picky critique I can make involves Martha's entrance. Even though we dedicated several rehearsals to the beat, it was off kilter.

Part of the stage manager's responsibilities is to fix any problems that occur. Yesterday, we had some prop issues. As a result, I had to assign specific props to specific performers to assure the issues would not resurface.

Tomorrow is a new day. Through all of the drama that happened tonight, the show came across well to audiences and the performers excelled.

## **October 20, 2012**

### Performance 3

Today will be a relaxation day. I will live the life of a normal person. My hours will be normal; my daily activities will be normal. I will do laundry and watch a marathon of *Law & Order SVU*. To relax, I will do yoga in my living room while watching *Sex and the City*. Instead of eating something convenient and greasy, I will be slow-cooking some homemade chili. Normal blows. I would rather be busy and on the verge of tearing my hair out than peaceful and serene.

More of Laura Shaine's unique specifications are beginning to surface. She has made the production staff aware that she has concerns with Hannah Hasch's interpretation of Sue Carol. As a refresher, Sue Carol is the tragic/over dramatic southern-belle performer. I find Hasch's rendition to be fun and refreshing. Laura Shaine finds her to be "over sexual." Obviously, I find her to be incorrect. Issues like this commonly arise when a playwright is involved with his/her own production. The proper protocol for such scenarios is for the playwright and director to hash things out amongst themselves. I, the stage manager, was only brought into the debacle on an "as needed" basis. People give me all kinds of information. I know everything.

The preshow set up was lightning fast today. I did not time the set up, but everyone had ample time to sit around and twiddle their thumbs. If this show were a full season long run, I would move call times later. On long running shows I have been a part of, once the preshow patterns are set, the entire production becomes much more relaxed. Most recently, at *Horn in the West*, my initial call time was 90 minutes before the show began, and at the end I came only 60 minutes before the show began. I believe if *Beautiful Bodies* were to run longer, the crew and myself could leisurely stroll in at 6:40pm and have ample time to relax before the curtain speech at 7:30pm.

As the relaxing show began, I truly felt like I was in the middle of a 50 show run. The cues were running like clockwork and the performance was running its normal route through Act I and II. This is both a horrible and beautiful time. Horrible in that the cast and crew are not as excited about the project as they were in the beginning. Beautiful in that there are no mistakes we cannot overcome. If a line is flubbed, the performers can recover. If a prop is forgotten, the performers can adlib. If the performers skip lines, I can follow them easily.

Tonight's talk back was very refreshing. Usually the talk backs are stale and full of regurgitated questions, but tonight's questions were new and interesting. Much of the audience stayed to ask the performers questions about ensemble work. I do not think Laura Shaine was pleased, giving up her spotlight to a gaggle of college performers. She will just have to get over it now, won't she?

## **October 21, 2012**

### Performance 4

How is this process over? What happens tonight is irrelevant. Since Patrick and Laura Shaine are here, we have to pretend like we care it is the last show. However, deep down the entire cast and crew just longs to tear this set down and go eat Mexican food. Strike will immediately follow this afternoon's performance. Strike is the removal of a show from its current venue. Therefore, all things *Beautiful Bodies* related will leave the Bud Frank Theatre and properly be stored in storage. For me, I stop being the stage manager the moment I call for the lights to come up after the curtain call. In order to motivate strike to be quicker and more efficient, during the talk back I will be working with my crew to take anything off the stage that we possibly can. Hand props, costume pieces, food, drinks, wrappers, and anything the cast is not sitting on will be removed from the theatre during the talk back. I don't like wasting time.

This afternoon's performance was the hardest yet. Yes, deep down we will all miss the experience and camaraderie, but we have classes together. In the booth, between the light operator, sound operator, and me, we were keeping tally of the remaining cues. To give you a clue of how comfortable we all were with the running of this show, during this afternoon's showing, I was doing French homework while simultaneously calling cues. (Disclaimer: to anyone reading, I do not recommend this practice. Do as I say, not as I do.)

I gave a huge sigh of relief once the show ended. For the fourth and final time the women bowed to an audience giving them a standing ovation. The work was done and it was time for the next show to have our place.

### **Strike**

Immediately following the announcement of the talk back, I left the booth. When strike begins, the booth is the last place to enter my mind. I went to the dressing rooms to expedite the cast; I wanted the talk back to start and end quickly. As the talk back is in progress, my crew and I rummage around the stage, getting as much done as possible. We were probably disrupting the talk back, but that was the least of my worries.

My first step to completing strike in a timely manner was to sort all props into categories and to make sure all the props in the respective categories were transported and sorted together. Initially, it might seem like a lot of fuss over nothing, but in the long run it will benefit the department when things are in order. I was in charge of the organization/inventory/transportation of props. Typically this is the duty of the prop master, but there has been a lack of support in the props department. I took over. As acting prop master, I rallied a team together and we carted each and every prop to the ETSU Costume and Scene Shop. I felt safe to leave the theatre since our technical director/lighting designer, Melissa Shafer, was facilitating strike.

While at the Costume and Scene Shop, my team and I hauled all the heavy items to prop storage, which involved climbing 30 stairs up a narrow hallway. Removing the large items from the cramped Shop allowed us some freedom of motion. Once the large items were out of the way, we were able to sort through the more minuscule props. Small props (tissue paper and wine bottles) are either unique enough to keep or plain enough to throw away. There is limited space in prop storage; discretion must be used when deciding what to keep.

Strike only lasted two and a half hours. The sets come down much quicker than they go up.

Once the set is down and the floor is swept, my keys are handed over to the other stage manager.

My job is done.

## ***Part IV: Final Thoughts***

### *Discoveries*

On the most basic level, from *Beautiful Bodies* I learned how to work with a new group of performers and technicians. Having the ability to be flexible and easy to work with is almost as important as your talent in this profession. I also learned how to delegate tasks and communicate effectively with my cast and production staff. I believe that practice makes perfect and *Beautiful Bodies* was a stop on my way to a professional career.

### *Concluding Remarks*

From October 18, 2012 thru October 21, 2012, *Beautiful Bodies* played at the Bud Frank Theatre on the main campus of East Tennessee State University. *New York Times* best-selling author and *Beautiful Bodies* playwright, Laura Shaine Cunningham was in attendance for all four performances. She was able to provide insight about her work that enhanced the performance quality. The audience was offered some thought provoking material to reflect on well after the curtain closed. In an intimate venue of 225 seats, *Beautiful Bodies* was able to draw a crowd totaling 850. I learned a lot from the opportunity to work on this production, and I feel as if my position as stage manager was executed to the best of my ability. In researching and experiencing first-hand the role of the stage manager in play production, I am eager to enter a professional career as a catalyst for the theatrical arts- a stage manager.

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