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# Student Directing Thesis: Directing a Main Stage Show

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DIRECTING A MAINSTAGE SHOW

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of Honors-In-Discipline Honors Program

By

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April 7, 2014

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In this first chapter I will be discussing my research process for the play. I will talk about interviews I had with the playwright, and different designers of my show. I will welcome you into the creative process, and all the sources which helped me with challenges, and find new creations for the play that have never been seen.

When directing a play I begin by studying the script and its language. I then research the individual characters for the show. Finally I research topics I intend to apply towards making the show my own. Research for a director should always be happening especially in pre-production, and by no means should it stop until the show is ready to run. Research is the ongoing process which can make a director credible or just an amateur. I have much pride in what I do, that is why I did research to help guide me through a show that is heavily influenced by NASCAR, which I knew nothing about.

I began by reading the script a good couple times. I was taught to always read a script for the first time just for enjoyment, then on the second read, start to form ideas and opinions about the play. This is what I did, once I got to the second reading of the show I started to realize, that this was much more than a play about NASCAR. This was a play about relationships, and how those relationships can intertwine and affect people. With that being said the NASCAR themes did have to be analyzed so that the show could flow the way it was intended.

The first source that I wanted to seek out was the author, Ms. Catherine Bush. Catherine Bush lives only an hour away in Abingdon, so finding time to meet and have an interview with her was quite easy. I thought she would give me great insight to what her thought process was and maybe she could give me some knowledge of the sport she wrote about and her interpretation of the script.

The first thing I asked Catherine was what gave her the inspiration to write this play?

Catherine said “I was visiting Barter to see a show and had brunch with Susan and Cody Rhyne. They talked about the races in Bristol and Cody told me about the race fans in Turn Two who would throw chicken bones at the track. I also had a coworker in NYC who was from Kannapolis, NC - a black, gay man named David Halley who grew up revering Dale Earnhardt and the races. David told me how the "sound" of the engines affect him like a heartbeat. I put these two stories together - plus a few more - and got a play. The characters Coty Webb and Halley Smoot were named after these two gentlemen.” Catherine’s answer fascinated me, she took the two male leads from people she really knew, which she later said made it easy to write the characters. Also knowing that these people were real it gave me a good starting ground for character research and analysis. Secondly I asked her what she believed to be the overall message of the play, and why the message was important. Catherine replied with, “The way I see it, every endin’ calls for a new beginnin’. No sooner does one race get over than another one’s fixin’ to start. And you have another chance to prove yourself. Another chance to make your own destiny. All you have to do is be willin’ to get into the race, be willin’ to trade a little paint... Yessir, the way I see it, this here flag is a symbol of... hope. I think it's important that people take responsibility for their own lives - too many people are ready to be victims of circumstance versus forging their own destinies. Forging our own destiny is an American dream - long may it wave.” When Catherine said this, it made me think about the second time I read the play, how I thought to myself that this show is way more than just NASCAR. I then asked her how much she knew about NASCAR before writing the play, and how much did she have to research in order to factually write the play? I was surprised with the answer she gave me. Catherine said, “I knew nothing. I've never been to a race, although I have been driven around

Bristol's track at 70 mph and almost lost my lunch. Amazing! All my NASCAR info came from the book "NASCAR for Dummies." When she told me this, I thought she really deserved a tip of the hat. She created a world around a subject that she hardly knew, and by the end, she developed a world that NASCAR fans all over the world would believe. Now back to my belief that the play is not really about NASCAR at all raises more eyebrows. I told Catherine that I believe most playwrights write from personal experience. I went on to ask her how much of her personal life was in this show? Catherine went on to say, "I had a wonderful father, like Lucky Tibbs. I was blessed that a-way." The character of Lucky Tibbs is the female crew chief, who empowers Darla to be her own person, and to really take care of herself. Lucky is a very strong and confident woman, which does remind me a lot of Catherine Bush. At this point I knew the play pretty well, and the play could come off as offensive in many ways. Knowing how family oriented the theatre is that debuted the show, I thought it was appropriate to ask if she was ever worried she would offend someone with the play? "Not the content, but the language - it's Barter." (Catherine Bush). This was exactly the response I thought I would get. The language throughout the whole show is politically incorrect, and I could see the possibility that audience member would get upset. I think as a theatre artist, you cannot be afraid to portray real life situations. In my opinion Catherine portrayed these mountain people spot on, and without the language I don't feel that she would have been true to the culture she was writing about. This made me want to know more about the inspiration of the main characters, and the thought process of developing these characters on paper. Catherine told me, "I told you the inspiration Halley and Coty - I wrote Darla and Lucky to be played by Elizabeth McKnight and Seana Hollingsworth (they were both in my play "The Other Side of the Mountain) - but Emac left Barter before it was produced. I imagined how they would play the characters and then heard the

voices.” As a director I thought that it was interesting that the inspiration for the main characters was the playwrights’ ideas as to who the leading women would be. Although I do not believe that to be an uncommon thing, a lot of playwrights will write a character with an actor in mind to play the role. They will think about how that actor will say a certain line, and that helps the playwright make decisions on how he or she will write the character. So I found that bit of information to be quite fascinating.

Tradin’ Paint debuted in the summer of 2006, which makes it seven years old before I directed the show. I know debuts are always big accomplishments for playwrights, so I wanted to get Catherine’s insight on how she thought the debut went, and if there was anything she would have changed knowing what she knows now?. Catherine said, “I thought the production was great. I wish they had marketed it better and took archival photos.” I felt at this point I got some good knowledge out of Catherine, and now was time to selfishly ask some questions that would determine how I cast the show. There is a character in the play who plays four different characters throughout the play, and I asked Catherine if she would be opposed to me casting multiple characters instead of one actor playing all four parts? She was quick with the trigger to say “yes I would be opposed.” These remarks striking my interest, made me ask her why it was so important that all four characters be played by the same individual? Catherine said, “I wanted the Flagman (representing the Race) to be woven into the personal lives of the characters as well. Hence, the same actor.” Her answer made a great deal of sense, when I thought about how different characters interacted with each other. One of the characters is Flagman and he is the voice of reason, the narrator so to speak. Then he becomes Halley’s boyfriend and the Boss of the Nascar Speedway. Every single one of these characters affects so many different people just

like a single racer on the track. She thought this was pivotal, and after her answer and reflecting I agreed with her.

Like I said I was being selfish in this part of the interview, because I wanted to know as much as possible about the old runs so I could make mine completely different, while still being true to the script. Obviously after reading the script I realized there were some practical problems that I would need to address. I asked her after seeing the show produced and performed so many times, what has been the hardest parts for the director/actors to accomplish? After pondering the question for a good minute, Catherine responded with this, “Not making Darla whiny. If Darla is whiny, the play is sunk. She is matter-of-fact about her life. It is what it is. Secondly was how to stage the races theatrically. Mary Lucy Bivins kicked the shit out of it when she directed. It was amazing.” I thought the Darla comment was a good note for me as a director, and for anyone playing the role of Darla. However, the second answer was what I was looking for. The NASCAR races, are such a huge part of the play and to figure out how to do that would be a task in itself. So I was relieved to know that it was a challenge for a professional director to also figure out that practical problem. This did excite me and led me to endless possibilities, which later led me to a unique topic to research.

Coming up on the end of my time with Catherine, I thought I would take the conversation in a different direction, just to obtain some different knowledge about playwriting from her. So my next question to her was how this play was the same and different from any other play she had ever written? Catherine stated, “The biggest difference was the use of direct address to the audience. I hadn't done it before and I haven't done it since... yet.” I thought that was very insightful, because the fourth wall is almost nonexistent through the entire play. This immediately gave me ideas on how I wanted to block the show, and different things I could do

with the audience members. Next I asked her about why in the script the scene changes run right over each other. I love this as far as the play moving along, but what were your reasons for writing the play this way? Without hesitation Catherine said, "It was part of my evolution as a writer. I never go to blackout at the end of a scene anymore - it stops the play. I learned that writing for the Barter Players." I thought this was a fun fact to know about Catherine as a writer in general. Almost all of her later works, are written in the same fashion. Lastly I thought I would ask advice from the experienced playwright, on approaching this play? Catherine's last words of wisdom to me were, "Hmm. I don't know. Have fun? Keep it moving? Here's something I noticed after seeing a production in Atlanta that I'll pass along. In the first scene of Act II, when Darla is visited by God, Dale Earnhardt, her father and Halley Smoot (all played by Halley Smoot) the actor in Atlanta gave each different character a different "voice." Literally. Tempting as that is for an actor... please don't let him do that. I wrote it so we know who's speaking by what they say, not how they say it. God sounds like Halley Smoot. Dale Earnhardt sounds like Haley Smoot. Darla's father sounds like Halley Smoot. That's what make it interesting..." That was great advice about the main character of Halley Smoot. This made me think of the depth of this character, and how much influence he will have on Darla and the outcome of the play.

I thanked Catherine Bush for being so insightful and generous with her time. I already felt that I had a good understanding about this play, and if nothing else I had a good base to build off of. I was pleased with starting my quest of knowledge and research with Ms. Bush, because she made me think about aspects that at the time had not exactly crossed my mind yet. And if they did cross my mind she gave me information to expound on and new areas to research.

The next step for me was to get knowledge of NASCAR. I wanted to understand how NASCAR came about and how I could connect what I know to this area of the country. This I thought would be a great learning experience since; Bristol Speedway is very close to Johnson City. I first searched the origins of NASCAR, who, what, when where and why was this sport created. “On December 12, 1947 the first meeting for the National Association for Stock Car Automobile Racing was held, and Named Bill France Sr. the President” (<http://www.decadesofracing.net/TheBeginning.htm>). I found out that the February of the following year the first race was held in Daytona Beach Florida, which is why to this day Daytona Speedway is one of the largest racing spectacles in the world. However, this still did not answer the question to how or why driving cars at very high speeds became a competitive sport. So I did more searching and what I found out was amazing. According to Meredith Levinson, “NASCAR’s roots go back to Prohibition when runners—people who delivered moonshine, souped up their cars so they could give the slip to the federal tax agents determined to bust them” ([http://www.cio.com/article/17142/A\\_Brief\\_History\\_of\\_Nascar\\_From\\_Moonshine\\_Runners\\_to\\_Dale\\_Earnhardt\\_Jr.](http://www.cio.com/article/17142/A_Brief_History_of_Nascar_From_Moonshine_Runners_to_Dale_Earnhardt_Jr.)). If anyone is thinking about Dukes of Hazard right now, that is quite alright. In fact you see the influence to racing in the modern movie of the classic TV show. David Thompson a professor at Lora College in Dubaq, Iowa says, “Runners built their reputations by outsmarting and outdriving the law,” he says. For bragging rights, he adds, they held informal races to determine which runner was fastest” ([http://www.cio.com/article/17142/A\\_Brief\\_History\\_of\\_Nascar\\_From\\_Moonshine\\_Runners\\_to\\_Dale\\_Earnhardt\\_Jr.](http://www.cio.com/article/17142/A_Brief_History_of_Nascar_From_Moonshine_Runners_to_Dale_Earnhardt_Jr.)).

Now I started to understand what the sport was based upon, and what made the sport grow so quickly. It was a way for young men to feel rebellious, and really push their automobiles to a limit that they didn't even know truly existed. At this day and age NASCAR is debated to be the sport most largely watched in the United States. Kiley Alderink says, "Stadiums for NASCAR venues can hold up to 170,000 spectators - this is much more than for any other sport in North America, and the televised Sprint Cup Series races gather more than 10 million" ([www.shavemagazine.com](http://www.shavemagazine.com)). This blows most stadiums of any kind out of the water, and the amount of fans that view the Sprint Cup Series is astonishing. The only sport to compare to Nascar is the National Football League.

With having an understanding of the sport and what it means to people all over the United States, I wanted to connect the sport and the play to home. This meant I needed to learn about the Bristol Motor Speedway and what better way to do that then to take a tour of the speedway. One Saturday morning I took a trip over to Bristol and walked the track and looked at the exhibits. The thing I took the most from the trip was the physical appearance of the speedway, which highly influenced my set, and the vast openness of being on the track. I started thinking about what the racers feel on Sundays when they race, and how driving in the cars, on the hot asphalt must feel and how loud the atmosphere would be. All of these aspects were running through my mind, as I took the tour, and I feel like I took those aspects back into my production of Tradin' Paint. Bristol Motor Speedway, was built in 1961, on Bristol Highway, because the original location of Piney Flats, Tennessee did not get approved by the locals. "The entrepreneurs were on record stating if anyone not in favor of the construction and existence of such a facility in the small community came forward to express their opposition, they would find another location. Some local citizens did, so, the track that could have been called Piney Flats

International Speedway eventually was built on a dairy farm less than 10 miles to the north on Hwy. 11-E in Bristol” ([https://www.bristolmotorspeedway.com/news\\_media/history/](https://www.bristolmotorspeedway.com/news_media/history/)). So the very famous world’s fastest half-mile, was not originally supposed to be in Bristol. That event in history changed the future of NASCAR forever.

After getting a history lesson of NASCAR and Bristol, I thought it was finally time to start talking to my scenic designer Dr. Delbert Hall. We talked about the feel I wanted to give to the audience with the design of the show, and immediately we both discussed putting grandstands on stage, that the audience could actually sit in. Going of my own research, and my interview with Catherine Bush I wanted to let the audience feel like they here just as much a part of the show as the cast. I wanted the actors to be able to interact with the audience members easily, an give the aesthetic look of the coliseum structure of Bristol Motor Speedway. I thought that if the set resembled the speedway, the audience members would connect with the show automatically, since a majority of them have lived in this area most of their lives. Dr. Hall and I agreed to make this set Bristol’s look alike, which led us to also agreeing on having the Bristol tower as a part of our simple yet detailed set. The tour also helped with my discussions with my lighting designer Melissa Shafer. I wanted to recreate the look of the stadium lighting, so Ms. Shafer suggested a truss, which is basically a huge metal rack with lights running across, hanging above the stage. This strategy worked spot on, and gave us the exact effect we were looking for.

Other aspects of production such as costumes, and music were mostly taken care of by Krista Guffy and Bobby Funk. Now there were production meetings, where I discussed what I was hoping to see or hear, and my designers did most of the research for those aspects of the production. Ms. Guffy and I discussed how the costumes had to have a selective realism to the appearance. I wanted the racers to look like they were wearing real fire retardant uniforms,

without all of the logos and sponsors. With my insight, Krista researched and made the executive decisions. With other characters, I just wanted the costumes to fit their personalities, but in a simplistic way. I did not want there to be too many costume changes, because I thought that would be difficult with how fast the scene changes are in the script. I also thought that it would make it too realistic in style. When talking to Bobby I discussed with him that I wanted old country music playing in Darla's truck, and that I definitely wanted the song "For Whom the Bell Tolls" for the big crash scene at the end of ACT I. I also told Bobby that I wanted the race effects to be so loud that it would blow the audience right out of their seats. We both wanted to recreate the atmosphere of a NASCAR race, specifically the atmosphere of Bristol.

The next step in my process as a director was to start thinking about the casting process, which is one of my favorite aspects. With my concept of the play I added three characters who are not written in the script. The main reason for this decision was because I wanted the racers on carts, and I needed people to push them. Also these three new characters would help the production by being props when needed, and would help carry out the extremely fast scene changes. I called these characters the pit crew members, for the context of the show, but the idea behind these characters come from the Japanese art form Kukoro theatre. "In kabuki, the kuroko serve many of the same purposes as the running crew serves in western theatre. They move scenery and props on stage, and aid in scene changes and costume changes. They will also often play the role of animals, will-o-the-wisps, or other roles which are played by the Kuroko not in full costume, but by holding a prop. Kuroko wear all black, head to toe, in order to imply that they are invisible and not part of the action onstage" (<http://www.encyclo.co.uk/define/Kuroko>). In my production, the actors did wear black head to toe, because I did not want them to take focus away from other actors, still they were the biggest

part of the show. Throughout the play they helped the racers with moving, held props, moved set pieces, and at times became set pieces themselves. Todd Ristau who is a respondent from the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival said, “ The director was quite inventive in approaching some of the problems of production, but coming up with the idea of an ensemble of pit crew ninjas who pushed the stock cars, took the roles of additional non-speaking characters and providing an on stage running crew”. No other production of this show ever used the idea of Kuroko, and I feel like it added so much to our production. Everyone who attended the production, including both of the respondents, said that they could not envision or enjoy the show without the pit crew being a part of the show. Like expressed earlier in the quote, the Kuroko or ninjas, would hold props or become props or represent different characters, and this happened many times throughout the production. A moment that sticks out the most is when they come in as God’s angels in scene 1 of ACT II. They were representing his entourage, and held and handed him different props throughout the scene. They also became football players that lift Cody in the air when the football player sacks him. They even formed their bodies into a table in Skeeters workshop during two scenes. The ninja/pit crew made little moments in the play stand out more completely, than if they hadn’t been there. If I ever directed this show again, I would use the idea of Kuroko again, because I just think it added so much to the play that would never be experienced if they were not used. The Kuroko is the epitome of the saying “there are no small parts, just small actors”. None of these actor had lines, but they were dedicated and went one hundred percent with my concept of the show.

Some people asked me why I did not just get more stage hands, instead of casting actors, to basically be stagehands? The answer to that question, is that the pit crew were acting roles, not stagehand roles. Yes, they did do jobs, and had some of the responsibilities of a stage hand,

but the pit crew actually played roles, and performed choreography for the huge crash scene. Stage hands are technicians not performers and in this production I needed performers. “The job of a prop stagehand is to make sure the necessary props are where they need to be at the beginning of a scene. When the scene is completed, the stagehand usually has to remove those props, place them backstage, and replace them with new ones for the next scene. He or she might also have the responsibility of finding props for various scenes”

(<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-does-a-stagehand-do.htm>). I cast actors instead of having more stagehands, because it was vital for them to be at every rehearsal. You usually do not get stage hands, until tech weekend, and that would not have been nearly enough time to learn what they needed to do. Like the ancient Kuroko these roles were acting roles, not stagehand roles. I wanted the audience to know that these pit crew members were actors, and they were totally existing in the world of the play. My research into this type of theatre, set my production of Tradin’ Paint a part from all the rest.

After figuring out I was going to add three new characters, and was understanding the style I was heading towards it was time to really look and see who the characters were. I had to start pulling back the layers of these characters, so I could give my actors stepping stones to work off of. With that being said, I think it is important for the director to not analyze the characters, so in depth that he won’t let an actor have artistic vision as well. So what I did was studied the script, and read the different parts, and from my reading of the script I got a good base knowledge of who these characters were.

The first character I really studied was Darla. Darla is the lead character, and by figuring things out about her it helped us find things out about all the others. Like Catherine stated in her interview, it is very important that Darla does not come off as a whiney woman. She is very

matter of fact about her feelings. Darla is a self-conscious, does not feel like she is good enough for someone's love kind of woman. A scene that sticks out in my mind the most when talking about this is in ACT II, with Darla and Halley. Halley gives her an A+ on her paper and tells her that she good be a really good writer, and she starts to cry. This makes Halley very uncomfortable, making him feel like he has done something wrong. Then Darla says, "No. I mean, I don't know. Nobody's ever been nice to me before" (Tradin' Paint Act II pg. 23). Darla has no self-worth through most of the play. She feels like she needs to hold on to what she has, like Coty because at least he has never left her. And nothing that happens now is her fault, she blames everything on her daddy leaving. "Coty's right I am fraught with deep seated insecurities on account of my daddy leaving'. I ain't never finished high school. I ain't never been married. Sometimes I wonder what Coty loves more-me or the fried chicken" (ACT I pg 8). Early in the play Darla does not realize that at a certain point she needs to take responsibility for her own life, and forget about what her father did. She learns this at the very top of ACT II. Halley says, "Yes, I left. A lot of men leave and sometimes women do, too. But the only one responsible for your self-esteem is you! That's why it's called self-esteem, and not daddy's esteem or mommy's esteem" (ACT II pg. 8). This is the start of the turning point for Darla in the script. Of all the character, I do believe that Darla makes the most drastic change throughout the play. She goes from a woman with no self-worth, or confidence, to a woman who realizes she can live on her own and she does not need anyone to fill the voids in her life. At her moment of epiphany Darla says, "Not anymore, Coty. Now I got me someone else, someone way more important than you, and thats me. For the first time in my life I got me. And that's all I need" (ACT II pg. 34). This is where Darla recognizes herself as just Darla. There is no other person effecting what she is

doing or how she is feeling about a certain thing. All of these things, are base points that I gave my actress playing the role, and I do believe it helped her.

The next character I analyzed was Coty, Darla's love interest in the play. Coty was a bully who picked on people weaker than himself. In this case it is Darla that he bullies around. Coty is very mentally and vocally abusive to her, throughout the entire show, but there is a moment very early on in the play that lets you know what type of person Coty is. During the first big scene with Coty and Darla, Darla is trying to be honest with the audience and Coty hates that. So in his rage Coty says, "Woman, unless you want to feel the back of my hand I suggest you shut the hell up" (ACT I pg. 10). This immediately lets us know that Coty is not above hitting a woman, if he thinks she is wrong, or he is just upset. On top of his abusive tendencies, he also does not like to take responsibility for his life. Coty says, "I ain't insecure. You hear me?! I ain't insecure one bit! Y'know why? Because I know for a fact, girl-for a fact-that I ain't responsible for the bad things happenin' in my life. No, ma'am! It ain't my fault! I am a victim of circumstance, that's what I am! A victim of circumstance" (ACT I pg. 9). Just like Darla he blames past events for him not succeeding in his present life. This is why I believe the two characters are so connected at the beginning of the play. It goes back to that old saying "misery loves company". When it comes down to having a base for Coty, he is a man with no manly qualities. He does not take care of himself, let alone Darla. Also, he treats women like hell, because he thinks they are weaker than him in every aspect. Toward the end of the play we find out that this is not true when Lucky sets him in his place in. Coty also has a pretty big change at the end of the show when he claims to be on his meds. He comes in apologizing to Darla for how he has treated her and is saying things that are very uncharacteristic up to this point. The line that sticks out the most is, "No I did it for me. I wanna feel better. I wanna be happy" (ACT

II pg. 46). This shows a whole new light on Coty, and for the actor this gives him room to make artistic decisions, on whether or not Coty is truly sorry and sincere. I thought this gave the actor a good base to work on.

Next I took a look at the character Halley Smoot, the gay, black, college professor who loves NASCAR. What I love about Halley in the play, is that he keeps a very positive mood throughout the show. Halley is always willing to teach and to be taught himself on some form or fashion. Halley says after his breakup with Jack, "It's time for me to give back to this land which has given me so much. Time once more for bumping into humanity, for tradin' paint with the locals. To see what I can teach them... maybe what they can teach me" (ACT I pg. 17). I already talked about how Halley was Darla's teacher, and what he offered her, but to understand Halley's character I think you must also know what she offered him. I feel like after Jack breaks up with Halley that he feels alone in the world that he loves so much. At this low point Darla enters his life, needing Halley to help get G.E.D. This action gives Halley a feeling of self-worth. This is ironic, because the man Darla looks up to, has no more self-worth than she does at times. Now I say at times, because Halley Smoot does like himself, and is comfortable enough with who he is to be himself. This is another important lesson he teaches Darla, on her path to finding who she really is. Darla asks Halley if he ever wishes he was straight? Halley says, "Never, I like me just the way I am" (ACT II pg. 26). Darla admires that about Halley, and I feel like that makes her try even harder to achieve her goals. In return, she teaches him that he should not be afraid to go after his dreams, or be afraid of anything for that matter. Darla says, "I used to be afraid too, before Lucky Tibbs learned me how to change a flat tire" (ACT II pg. 27). I feel like this opens Halley's eyes to if you are always afraid to fail then you will never achieve anything. This is the most beautiful relationship in the show, because it comes with so

much give and take. Halley Smoot is an interesting character because he is such a motivator and a inspirer, but he is also crying out for love and acceptance just as much a Darla.

One of the biggest pieces to the puzzle however is Lucky Tibbs. She is what gives Darla the bravery to start school again. In the second act she also gives Darla a job working on cars. Lucky Tibbs is a savior for Darla, because she shows Darla how to be a strong, confident independent woman. For example in ACT I when Darla has a flat and Lucky stops to help. Darla complains that there is no way she can change the tire. Lucky responds with, “well you are gonna have to, because nobody else is going to do it for you” (ACT I pg. 22). This automatically shows the audience that Lucky is an independent woman who does not need a man to take care of her. This is important, because Darla does not understand that concept. She stays with Coty even when she is not happy because she feels she needs him in her life. It is not until later that Lucky can convince Darla otherwise. Another scene where Lucky shows her independent side, is when she first meets Skeeter at his auto repair shop. She comes in looking for a job, and Skeeter looks at her and laughs because she is a girl. So Lucky rears back and kicks him right in the crotch. (ACT I pg, 29). Lucky is very tough but will also show the audience her softer side as well. This powerful character is easy for the audience to relate to and her honesty and vulnerability makes the audience trust her. The moment that catches my attention, with her vulnerable side is when Skeeter makes her cry about her honeymoon. Lucky says, “I was the one who spent her entire honeymoon bein’ dragged to every race track in the circuit so I could study it and learn all about the strategy” (ACT I pg. 33). After this Skeeter replies with so and it makes Lucky cry. I loved this moment in the show, because it really formed Lucky as a full person. She had to be the perfect combination of independent, but thinks love is a great thing to find.

After Lucky, I looked deeper into the character of Skeeter. Skeeter was definitely the leader of the race clan, and in many ways just a good ole country boy. When I thought about Skeeter, I thought about the guy in the town that everyone just likes. If you were talking to someone and they brought up Skeeter Jett, no one would have a bad thing to say about him. What I liked about Skeeter, is that he was a little full of himself as well, which added a fun layer to him. When Lucky and him meet for the first time, and she doesn't realize who he is, it really bothers him. Skeeter keeps saying, "I'm Skeeter, Skeeter Jett" (ACT I pg. 27). What I love about this is that he just is dumbfounded that there is a person from that area who does not know his name, and he takes a little offense to that. My favorite moment with Skeeter, is when Lucky comes back from crying and Skeeter is trying to make things better so he says, "My big break warn't when I won that race down in Darlington. And it warn't when I made you my crew chief, even though that was of the smartest things I ever done... My big break come the day I met you" (ACT I pg. 35). The reason I love this moment, is because it is such a breath of fresh air compared to Coty. You can tell that Skeeter really loves Lucky, and he is a gentleman. Men in the audience who watched that scene being performed could relate to a moment like that in their lives. This is the classic moment where a guy pisses off his lover, and then tries to say something sweet to make the moment better. Skeeter is a role model for many men and a great role to perform, and this ground work really helped my actor perform the role.

The final character that I really put much research into was Flagman. He was another good ole redneck, who knew everything there was to know about stock car racing. What I loved about flagman, is that you see how much living meant to him. I think the last monologue he gives in the show, is what summed up flagman the best. It lets the audience know, this show is not about NASCAR, but NASCAR is a symbol for the way people should live life. Don't be

afraid to leave your mark on people or vice versa. It is important to know that we all live once, and sometimes when we can see the opportunity to achieve greatness, which gives us hope for the future that better will come. Flagman says, “The way I see it, every endin’ calls for a new beginnin’. No sooner does one race get over than another is fixin’ to start. And you have another chance to prove yourself. Another chance to make your own destiny. All you have to do is be willin’ to get into the race, be willin’ to trade a little paint.... Yessir the way I see it, this here flag is a symbol of hope” (ACT II pg. 41). This monologue tells me all about Flagman, because it’s showing me that he cares about people in his life, and all the monologues before this one are trying to prepare us for what life has got in store.

All the other characters like the Garbarino, Forbush, Boss, and Jack, were experienced mostly researched through the rehearsal process. Now I obviously had ideas on the characters, and how they would turn out, but they were not analyzed as deeply as the main characters. These characters, were small roles, with not a lot of script to backup analytical research about their personalities, so I and the actors explored those characters in a more raw sense when we got into the rehearsal process.

Everything that I researched helped me direct this play to the best of my ability. Like I said before it is most important that a director does his research, so he can discuss with his design team on how they will create the show. Also it is important to know that just because you research something, does not mean you will use it for the show. It is best to have way more information than what the director can deal with, so he will have lots of things to pull ideas from when brainstorming with his production team. My favorite part of my research, was going on the tour to Bristol, and analyzing the characters, because I feel like those two elements found

their way in the play the most. Those elements make a director feel like the work has paid off and at the end of the run, hopefully the director feels like the process was a success.

In this chapter you will be reviewing my director's prompt book that I used for my production. A prompt book is more or less a guide that can help the director and maybe even the designers through the process of the show. In this section you will find a contact sheet, rehearsal schedule, props list, and most importantly my script with notes and blocking.

This chapter will give you a sense of the behind the scene work done for the play. This is a raw look at how the director works with the script, and how he/she remembers blocking. When you are looking at the script you will see different colors used, and sets of numbers. The different colors are used to indicate different characters in the play. The numbers indicate which number of blocking the director is on in the show. Like I said it is a good way for a director to look back at his script and see exactly what the actor should be doing, and on what line they should be doing it on.

Essentially what the prompt book is, is the show in book form. It has all the information needed, which would help direct a show with ideas of style and concept. It will keep myself, stage managers, and designers on the same page if utilized properly. It is also not uncommon for the stage manager to be in charge of the prompt book through the whole entire process of the play.

This is the prompt book I used in the play, so I hope you find the work fascinating and well organized. I assure that after looking at the prompt book, you would understand how the show was block, and transformed from words on a page, to a story on the stage.

## Rehearsal Schedule

September 3: 8-10 (read through full)

September 4: OFF

September 5: 8-10 (read through full)

September 6: OFF

September 7: OFF

September 8: OFF

September 9: 7-10 (Block Beats 1 and 2)

September 10: 7-10 (Block Beats 3 and 4)

September 11: OFF

September 12: 7-10 (Block Beats 5 and 6)

September 13: OFF

September 14: OFF

September 15: OFF

September 16: 7-10 (Block Beats 7 and 8)

September 17: 7-10 (Block Beat 9)

September 18: OFF

September 19: 7-10 (Finish any blocking start walk through of ACT I)

September 20: OFF

September 21: OFF

September 22: OFF

September 23: 7-10 (Continue Walk through of ACT I)

September 24: 7-10 (Continue Walk through of ACT I)

September 25: OFF

September 26: 7-10 (Block Beat 10)

September 27: OFF

September 28: OFF

September 29: OFF

September 30: 7-10 (Block Beats 11 and 12)

October 1: 7-10 (Block Beats 13 and 14)

October 2: OFF

October 3: 7-10 (Block Beat 15)

October 4: OFF

October 5: OFF

October 6: OFF

October 7: 7-10 (Block Beat 16)

October 8: 7-10 (Finish any blocking and start Walk through of ACT II)

October 9: 7-10 (Continue Walk through of ACT II)

October 10: 7-10 (Continue Walk through of ACT II)

October 11 – 20th : OFF

October 21: 7-10 (Work ACT I)

October 22: 7-10 (Work ACT I)

October 23: 7-10 (Work ACT I)

October 24: 7-10 (Work ACT I)

October 25: OFF

October 26: OFF

October 27: OFF

October 28: 7-10 (Work ACT II)

October 29: 7-10 (Work ACT II)  
October 30: 7-10 (Work ACT II)  
October 31: 7-10 (Work ACT II)  
November 1: 7-10 (Work ACT II)  
November 2: OFF  
November 3: OFF  
November 4: 7-10 (Work ACT I)  
November 5: 7-10 (Work ACT II)  
November 6: 7-10 (Full Run of Show)  
November 7: 7-10 (Full Run of Show)  
November 8: 7-10 (Full Run of Show)  
November 9: OFF  
November 10: OFF  
November 11-15: (Full Run of show)  
November 16: Tech (TBA)  
November 17: Tech (TBA)  
November 18: Full Run  
November 19: Full Run with Dress  
November 20 Full Run with Dress  
November 21-24: Opening of the Show

**Tradin Paint Prop List**

## ACT 1

3 steering wheels

Chicken buckets

Football

2-dimensional Lug Wrench, jack and spare tire

Podium

Paper work for podium

Rag for Skeeter's podium

Darla's research paper Halley reads

Green flag

Yellow flag

Black and white checkered flag

Color guard flag for Flag man at crash in first act

2-dimensional fire extinguisher

Battery on a stick

## ACT 2

Buckets of chicken

Cigar and glass of scotch for boss in the hauler

2nd research paper from Darla that Halley is reading

2 VIP passes for darla and coty for the race

Dog catcher stick for coty

2-dimensional lug wrench for Lucky

Open sign for Skeeter's work that a pit crew member can hold

Podium for Halley

Checkered flag for flag man

Bouquet of Flowers for Coty to give to Darla

**Tradin' Paint Contact Sheet**

Josh Holley: (423) 773-5158

Hannah Hasch: (423) 483-0401

Kathryn Patterson: (865) 696-9596

Nick Balcells: (423) 737-8787

Jay Bales: (423) 972-8776

Ben Riggs: (423) 794-9187

Justin Aubin: (423) 470-1426

Michael Lee: (720) 838-6042

Reagan James: (423) 341-3540

Aryn King: (423) 782-9233

Danielle Tucker: (423) 956-4487

This final chapter I will be discussing the overall experience I personally had with my thesis project. I will start off by saying that the experience was unlike any other that I ever had up until this point. I was introduced to so many different and new aspects of theatre that I never had to confront in my earlier years. What I mean by this is, having production meetings, setting up appointments, rehearsing three hours a night to put up a full length main stage production. All of these things were new to me from a directors stand point and at times were frustrating and stressful. However, I think it is important for any student to feel the stress and pressure of deadlines and collaborating with other artists. Not only collaborating with other artists, but collaborating with artists, in this case who have been in the field much longer than I have.

Being a student director of a main stage production is no small task. There is a lot asked from you, and you are expected to be organized and ready to work. When I started talking to designers, who were my professors it was intimidating at first. There was a relationship barrier, that everyone had to get over in order for this production to be successful and productive. In the class room I was just the student, but in production I was the leader of professors, who have taught me the craft I was applying. We all had to understand these boundaries, even though it was a little weird at first. I do have to say that the relationships, had much trust and respect and when it came down to decisions being made, everyone worked well together.

With that being said, production meetings could get interesting. Like I stated earlier, we all have to understand that you have many different artists trying to put one show together and have the director's concept be seen. This is why I think theatre is the most unique art in the entire world. You are asking a team of at least six people, with different personalities and artistic visions to come together and produce one vision. This sometimes can be easy, and sometimes this can get difficult. Most of our meetings were handled professionally, but it is hard for egos

not to be stung during these meetings. Everyone comes in with their ideas, which are usually all great. However, not all ideas can be used because it just does not fit the concept of the show. The meeting that sticks out to me most is when we were discussing props. Now you think discussing props would be an easy task, but that day changed the whole show for me and I think the show thrived because of that. With this whole meeting we finally nailed down a concept that worked for all designers involved with the production. We talked about this real world in a very nonrealistic environment. We had two dimensional props, and a battery that was flying on a stick. The acting was realistic, the situations were realistic, but the environment in which they inhabited was not. This cleared my mind, and all of my designers minds and the show from that point on was designed very smoothly.

The next big thing tech wise I had to concern myself with was our tech rehearsals. Now I think our tech rehearsal ran very smooth and efficiently, thanks to my design team. They knew exactly what I wanted and knew exactly how to get it done. That is what made the design of this show so amazingly easy. Every designer I worked with, had done numerous of shows at many different professional theatres. If I was having trouble explaining something, they could figure out what I was trying to say then they told me the correct way to say it next time.

I would say that the design aspect of my show was the biggest learning aspect business wise. They not only saw and produced my vision, they taught me how to more effectively state my vision when I go out into the real world and start directing professionally. I believe that directing for the theatre has to be collaborative and open minded, and in this production my designers never stepped on my toes. They let me have full artistic vision to the show, and they would help when they knew I needed the help. They also educated me when needed, which I feel is the whole point of the thesis project.

I would like to talk specifically about one design element that I had great collaboration with and that was with my costume designer Krista Guffy. Krista is a costume designer from the Barter Theatre in Abingdon, Virginia. What was interesting about Krista is that she already designed this show at Barter when it ran there a couple years back. At first this made me very nervous, because I did not know if she was going to come in with any biases towards the original production. Luckily for me, Krista was the best at collaborating. She took this opportunity to redesign the show with a whole new feel, and with my concept in mind. She gave great insight at production meetings, and she always treated my cast and me with respect. She really cared about my opinion, and really wanted the young actors to feel comfortable up on stage in what they were wearing. I thought she nailed all of the design elements, which were needed to carry the characters even further. Everyone who was a part of this production loved having her aboard, and it really kept me relaxed knowing she had my back the entire show.

One last person who I would like to mention was Bobby Funk, who is my mentor and my sound designer on the show. Bobby has been an inspiration to me since I have been at ETSU. He has taught me in many different classes and directed me in multiple productions. I give him much credit to why I made it to the Kennedy Center last year, and much of the credit *Tradin' Paint* went as smooth as it did. He was the person who handed the show over to me for my thesis, and once he did that he and I never looked back. He stood behind every decision I made and made sure that no one took advantage of the fact that I was young and new to the professional directing process. He made sure to stick up for me in meetings, and constantly helped me with the vision of this show. Without Bobby this process would have been nerve wrecking and at times more difficult than I could imagine. I remember sitting with him in rehearsal and talking to him about the type of music I wanted to play for the show, and without

another word the next day he had a sound track ready to go for me. He really made this process a joy and I will never forget working on this project with him ever. He is a great advisor, professor, and friend to me and I will always be grateful for all he had done and provided me with.

The next experience I would like to talk about is the rehearsal process with my fellow peers. Once again there was a relationship barrier that the cast and I had to overcome. I can honestly say that this was not difficult at all. The students understood I was the director and they were the actors. The best part is that they always trusted me to know what I was talking about, and know the job I had to get done. I also trusted them to trust me to know what I was doing and to work hard for me even if I was just a student director. I was very proud of my cast for never looking down on my show, like it was anything less than a main stage production, just because it was not directed by a professor. The work was totally trusting and collaborative and I love every minute of it.

I love the rehearsal process; I think it is the heart and soul to theatre. This is where a relationship is formed between director and actors, and also just relationships between actors. I think when actors get up on stage and realize just like designers do, that they are all fighting for the same cause and start connecting with each other it can be a beautiful thing. Now my cast was a very young cast, not just with age but with students who have never been on stage before so that did cause some issues early in the process. There were moments that technique had to be taught, which can slow down a night of rehearsal, but in collegiate theatre you have to understand that it is a learning experience for everyone. I would say that I actually liked the fact that I had some challenging moments with actors, because it allowed me to actually direct and know not all actors will automatically know how to do what you tell them to do.

In this business you have to get really good at learning how to talk to different people. Learning to say the things that will make a person tick, or connecting with them in a way that will make them do the things you want to do. Emotions in theatre can play a big part on how performances go from night to night especially in rehearsal. There was a night that I was trying to get a scene done with my leading lady and one of my leading men. In this scene the leading lady is trying to confront her father about leaving when she was a young girl. Now I had the luxury, or dare I say luxury, that I had an actress who had something similar happen in real life. Now you might say that this is cruel to use against her, but in theatre I believe anything goes, and if an actor can relate to a scene by using past emotions I believe this is the best way to act. I say this because at that point you aren't acting anymore. You are bringing forth an emotion that you have really experienced and applying it to a scene in the show. At that rehearsal I reminded her of her father until she gave me the performance that I knew she could give. This is what theatre is about to me, use the pains in your life to bring an emotion into the scene that will connect you to an audience member. Now that was an extreme part of rehearsal, that does not happen every night, but I will remember that moment forever, directing one of my best friends in my entire life.

The production had a very long rehearsal period. We had almost two and a half months for the whole process, so we did not even begin five day a week rehearsals until after the first show of the semester was over. Once we got in the swing of things everything ran so smooth. The actors were ready to work and they really bought into the concept and the style of the show. My favorite part of directing during the rehearsal process was working with the pit crew members that were never written in the script. I created these three new beings that became one of the largest parts of the show. They drove the cars, were used as props, and were extra people

in scenes when needed. Creating those characters from an original idea to a complex organism that carried the show was amazing. What was even more amazing were the three ladies I had in the pit crew parts. They never once thought they were not an important part of the show, if anything I believe they carried the show because no one could imagine the show without the ninjas. I believe they made the show a huge success and selfishly, they solved many practical problems I would have had without them present. Not to mention the many times, the three ladies came into the rehearsals ready to work the hardest and always with positive attitudes. Moments like that make directors happy, and it made me love what I was doing.

Earlier I brought up making relationships in the theatre and I think that is what theatre for me is all about. I have made many relationships, and one of my favorite, has been with Josh Holly my best friend, since I came to college here. We have been in many different productions together and he has been in multiple productions that I have directed, including the show that took me to the national American college theatre festival in Washington D.C. Being able to direct him one last time was truly a treat for me. Since we are so close, we already know what the other one is thinking and we don't have to say much to get what we want done. There were many scenes where Josh blocked himself, because he knows what he is doing. He is totally capable of just blocking himself because of his great instincts. One of our last nights of rehearsal, I remember he came out with the checkered flag in his hand and walked down center and gave this breath taking monologue. I never told him what to do, he just did it, and it was remarkable, and that is how it ran in the show.

I think too many times directors won't give the actors room to work on things their own way, which is foolish. An actor is an artist just as much as the director is and many times, they are capable of going on stage and blocking a show on their own. I think to not let them do that is

ludicrous and takes away from their vision of who their character is. That's why I feel the actors respected me so much, because of how collaborative I am in the rehearsal process. I want an actor to try something without having to ask. I want them to be creative and feel something when they are acting, for I believe those elements are important. I allowed them to explore and really create their characters. I see the director as an editor, who lets the actors do their job, and if the director likes it will keep it, and if the director doesn't, then he/she cuts it out of the show. It is not our job to block everything in my mind. I was very pleased with how the actors and I responded towards each other, and I thought it led to tremendous performances.

I decided to watch every performance which was nerve wrecking, but it was also informative. I got to see the things that worked with the audience. I got to first hand see ideas that were integrated in the show bring out different emotions in the audience, which makes theatre what it is. The reason I wanted to be in a performing career is because of how certain performances could make me feel sad, mad, or happy without even being personally connected to someone. Some random stranger on stage gave me an emotion that left such an impression on me, I realized I wanted to be that stranger who shared with someone an emotion out of nowhere. I love doing this through directing plays, and bringing words to life. I think it's fascinating that you can take merely words from a page and create a whole world out of it. Not only do you create this world, but when people walk into the theatre they are letting you know, even though they know this is not real, but for the next two hours they are going to allow themselves to believe this world. This is such a give and take art, and if you are doing it properly you give and receive an equal amount. That's why people do theatre, and every night I was watching the show I was reminded of that.

This production had two KCACTF respondents come see the performance, and then after to give us oral feedback following Saturday's performance. I was pleasantly surprised by the feedback that we were given from both of the respondents. Now I was not surprised, because I thought they would not like it but I was weary of what they would say because it was a student production. The both of them loved the show and had a lot of great things to say about it. They talked about how I was an ambitious and brave young director for some of the choices I made with the show. They were in love with the fact that I integrated the three ladies into the production without them being written into the script. They told me that if they saw the show again without the pit crew, they would not be able to enjoy the experience as much, because they felt the pit crew were needed. They also felt that the ninjas were a big backbone of the show which I totally agreed with. Now however, they did have some things to say about the concept of my show. They felt at times that some aspects did not correlate with each other. They did not totally buy into the unrealistic staging, with the totally realistic set. They thought that I should have come up with fake logos instead of realistic NASCAR logos. They were also concerned that I never made the driver of each car actually make a left turn in the show. I personally think that all of these criticisms were very knit picky and I took that as a compliment, meaning they didn't have much to say about the show that was wrong. I think it was a good thing for all the young actors to hear and it gave me a little bit more insight on directing. It was yet another moment where I was getting educated through the entire process.

A different kind of feedback I got was from the author, Catherine Bush. Her feedback, was not as friendly, and to be quite honest I believe she hated the rendition of her show. She thought some of the ideas were too outside of the box and was not happy that I cut a couple lines in one of the scenes. It is important to know that it is always difficult to perform a show when

the author is present because it can be difficult to please them. Now if Catherine would have been more involved with the rehearsal process, she would have had some say about what I could and could not do with her show. However, she did not show up until performance time and that is too late to change anything in my book. Once a show starts its run, no more changes need to happen that could disrupt a performance. Catherine asked me to change a line back after the show was running for four days, and I said with all due respect, “no”! The run is almost over and it absolutely could not be changed. Catherine Bush never wrote back, and I took that as a sign that she was done talking with me. I am surprised when playwrights get upset when different directors have different takes on the same show. To me that is the point of different people producing it, every production will be unique and different. To not want that to me means you are not really open to new art. That’s what art is about, different interpretations of life. As a writer I would love to see different directors interpret my words in different ways. Which also holds up my argument that different people will see things differently, and if you do not like that someone is going against your artistic vision then maybe you should not write shows to be performed by others. That was a sore subject with me, because I was hoping for an open mind from her and I got a very closed mind for the whole show. She never even stuck around to talk to me in person, she did it through email. I would have respected the comments more in person, and believe that would have been more professional to me.

I do not take criticism personally, you can’t in this field of work. You will never make everyone happy at one time. Some people will love your work, while other people will think your work is a bunch of shit. The opportunity to direct on main stage was amazing however, and I thank the faculty and staff for the chance to direct a main stage show which only one other

student has ever got to do here. It let me know that they had trust in me, and that they knew I could get the job done and that it would be quality work.

The experience overall was an amazing one, that I still can't believe is already over. It was a lot of planning and hard work from many different people that made this project work. I am happy that I had support when I needed it with the faculty and a special thanks to Bobby Funk my mentor and Pat Cronin the head of the department for standing behind my work and knowing that I would not let the department of the school down. If I could I would do the experience over and over again, which shows me it was a truly meaningful experience that I will never forget for as long as I live. Everyone from the Honors College down to my cast had a part in this piece of ETSU history and I am so proud of the work we all accomplished last fall.

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