

PERFORMING THE ROLE OF
TONY KIRBY
IN THE PLAY
YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU
BY MOSS HART AND GEORGE S. KAUFMAN

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“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. I will meet you there.” - Rumi

For us.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	4
ABSTRACT.....	6
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	7
2. THE PLAY.....	8
3. THE PROCESS	
Casting and Concept.....	11
Characterization.....	13
Physical Explorations.....	17
Vocal Explorations.....	21
Diverse Techniques Employed.....	22
4. THE PERFORMANCE.....	25
5. CONCLUSION.....	28
APPENDICES	
APPENDIX A – PRODUCTION PROGRAM.....	30
APPENDIX B – PRODUCTION PHOTOS.....	36
REFERENCE LIST	
WORKS CITED.....	37
WORKS CONSULTED.....	37
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	38

Abstract of Project in Lieu of Thesis Presented to
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Chair: Ralf Remshardt
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You Can't Take It With You by Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman was first published in 1936. It went on to win the Pulitzer for Drama in 1937, and the film adaptation won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1938. In the University of Florida production, directed by Charlie Mitchell, I created the role of Tony. This document chronicles my creative process from casting to the final performance.

Honoring the fluid nature of my creative process, this document is much like a conversation between the reader and the writer. The first portion is a brief examination of the play. Next is an account of the acting process, which includes casting and concept, characterization, physical explorations, vocal explorations, and diverse techniques employed. The final portion of the document includes a chronicle of the actual performance, as well as the program and production photos.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

I enjoy learning how artists create their artwork. It dispels the myth – or proves it, depending on your lens – that their brilliance is effortless. If the medium permits, I then go back and review their artwork a second time, with a new lens, appreciating the process they undertook to create such mastery. DVDs and documentaries are great tools for revealing the veiled tactics filmmakers, musicians, and visual artists employ. Live theater, however, has no special features menu option. Audiences are lucky if they catch a glimpse of the actor after a performance, at which time the actor is probably more concerned with eating than pontificating. On rare occasions, theatre practitioners are given the opportunity to put down in writing their creative process. So, long after the play has closed, some would-be audience member has a chance to learn of an actor’s artistic journey. Such a document is especially rewarding for fellow artists within their medium. Writing such a document is another thing – or beast – entirely. But, as I have learned so many times before, with each challenge comes an opportunity – in this case, an opportunity to get a MFA. Much in line with the way I approach a role, I am eagerly plunging in. And, who knows, perhaps I will even come to love describing how I came to create “Tony,” my thesis role.

The time is now 10:31 a.m., Thursday October 20, 2011. By the time you read this document – actually, by the time I finish writing it – my creative process will have morphed, yet again. My creative process is constantly evolving. None of the characters I have played are developed exactly the same. While the scaffolding is usually consistent, the method of invention is altered. The creation process is modulated according to the demands and stresses of the role. Needless to say, the journey about which I write is unique to *You Can’t Take It With You*. I’d like to think of myself as a sculptor molding and shaping a block of clay. Unlike Michelangelo, I do

not see the sculpture hiding within the block of marble, peering at me. I see my creation, the final product – “Tony” in this case – in flashes. I see the “finished” form in waves, like sporadic car headlights on a dark street. I get these flashes while in rehearsal, or in conversation, or while molding my interpretation of the text.

This, my “project in-lieu of thesis” document, shall be as fluid and strategically impromptu as my creative process. I would like to take you, the reader, on my *You Can’t Take It With You* journey from textual analysis and casting to characterization and performance. Within these pages one will find references to artistic blunders, Acting 101 pitfalls, and hopefully, my journey as it was when I embarked upon this endeavor. This, so to speak, is my “special features menu” option.

CHAPTER 2 THE PLAY

First published in 1936, *You Can’t Take It With You* marks Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman’s third of six collaborations together. The play premiered at the Booth Theatre in New York City on Monday night, December 14th, 1936. It was met with instant success, and was adored, in part, because of its appeal to audience members to live life to the fullest despite the perceptions of others. The fifth-longest-running show of the decade, it ran for an astounding 837 performances and went on to win the Pulitzer for Drama in 1937. Soon after, Hart and Kaufman sold the rights to Columbia Pictures who then immortalized it in film. In 1938, the film won the Academy Award for Best Picture. The play had two successful Broadway revivals in 1965 and 1983. Widely adored for its message, *You Can’t Take It With You* “has earned the status of a Broadway classic” (Harris 34).

As the play was in its early phase of development, Kaufman wrote to his wife Beatrice, “I doubt if I can convey the quality of the Hart play in writing.” He went on to say:

You know it's a slightly mad family, and has to do with the daughter of the house, the only sane one. She falls in love with the son of a conventional family, and the play proper concerns her attempts to reconcile the irreconcilable elements. The Tony family comes to dinner – arriving on the wrong night – and finds everything at its most cuckoo. It turns out that the young man himself has a streak of madness in him, and at the finish he converts the girl and they both settle down happily with (her) family. But it has a point, as you see – that the way to live and be happy is just to go ahead and live, and not pay attention to the world. I think the play will have a nice love story and a certain tenderness, in addition to its madness. Does it sound too naïve – I don't think it will emerge as such. Of course we have some swell mad things for the family – the father manufactures fireworks in the cellar, the grandfather retired from the world in 1898 and doesn't admit that anything has happened since then, etc. Please let me know how you react. (qtd. in Goldstein 271)

Beatrice's reactions were quite encouraging (Harris 38). Interestingly, Kaufman had a great deal of difficulty writing the love scenes between Alice and Tony. He and Hart agreed that love was the thread that linked the entire story. Without it, the play would be a wacky exhibition with little narrative. As a result, they insisted that the characters not appear to be stock, cardboard cutouts (41).

Aside from the struggles Kaufman and Hart had in developing the romance scenes between Alice and Tony, we know little about the challenges they faced in developing the story. History tells us that the play was written in the aftermath of the Depression and the threat of war was certainly looming. In fact, the play was produced only three years prior to World War II.

One can surmise how vital Kaufman and Hart saw their message of love to be. Blending the condition of one's environment and the theatricality of their art form, playwrights have a peculiar challenge. Adolphe Appia notes:

The theatre has always been bound strictly by the special conditions imposed by the age, and consequently, the dramatist has always been the least independent of artists, because he employs so many distinct elements, all of which must be properly united in his work. If one of these elements remains subject to the conventions of age, while the others free themselves to obey the will of the creative artist, the result will be a lack of balance which alters the essential nature of the dramatic work. (7-8)

Through the voice of dance master Boris Kolenkhov, Kaufman and Hart repeatedly discuss the absurdity of Stalin and his regime. Through Grandpa Vanderhof's exchange with Henderson, the IRS agent, the irony of militarism and the US occupation of foreign countries are examined. And through Tony's appeal to his father, Kaufman and Hart argue that one's dreams are always present no matter how hard he or she tries to suppress them. About the play, Edmond M. Gagey maintains:

Whatever its failings, it kept its humor and its sanity at a time when civilization seemed to be going to smash under the impacts of depression and war. Its impudent escapism is admirably expressed... (Gagey 229)

Further noting the timely nature of the play, Joseph Mersand suggests:

This play is an example of clever theatrical craftsmanship, of strikingly funny situations, of dialogue that is humorous and stage worthy and of a view of life that may have been in the hearts of many in the unhappy days that had not yet seen the

last of the Depression and were shortly to witness the beginning of World War II.
(Mersand 223)

CHAPTER 3 THE PROCESS

Casting and Concept

Theatre artists have become the poster children for the slogan: “Hope for the best, and prepare for the worst.” One unsuspecting challenge or another met every single production of which I have been a part. We’ve all come to expect them, and if for some reason a disaster doesn’t happen before the show opens, we fear that it’ll occur on opening night. Our production of *You Can’t Take It With You* was no exception. While the word “disaster” is a bit heavy-handed, we did encounter a few unanticipated setbacks.

Not long after the play was announced and billed to open the 2011-2012 season, word spread that Paul Favini, Interim Director of the School of Theatre and Dance, would direct the show. This was exciting for me because I had never worked with him before, and long before the rehearsal process would begin, I decided I was going to approach this production as I would one in a professional setting. Paul recognized the strain our production would put on the costume shop. Considering that our show was set to open no less than 4 weeks after the first day of class, and that there were over nineteen named characters and even more costume changes, Paul decided to cast several of the named characters in the Spring 2011 semester. This would give the costume shop a head start. At that time, Grandpa, Alice, Rheba, Essie, Ed, and Tony, my character, were cast. Then came the bad news. Before the summer was over, I received a personal email from Paul, saying that his remittent cancer had come back, and for health reasons he could no longer direct the show. His words proved to be transformative for me.

For several months leading up to rehearsals, I dismissed the play as another white-bred story, with antiquated language. Though I tried to see otherwise, the demeaning cultural references of Rheba and Donald, the only characters my ancestors could play, screamed at me. To both acknowledge and subvert these cultural eye-sores Paul cast me, an African American man, as Tony, the son of an affluent, Wall Street business owner. Historical understandings of miscegenation had no place in the world Paul sought to create. With a sensitive lens he selected actors who would not reinforce cultural stereotypes. For example, Paul believed a particular BFA senior, though he gave a fine callback audition, should not be cast as the dull-witted Donald because it seemed to convey a statement of Latino ignorance. It was with this sensitivity that Paul approached the casting process. This was remarkable for me.

Prior to his message, I had not realized the power and beauty of *You Can't Take It With You*. He encouraged me to see the play as a vehicle to teach, to inspire. He taught me that the play encourages all of us, despite color, creed, or orientation, to live unapologetically, to love without fear. When he looked back over his life, he told me he had no regrets. It was not about the quantity of his days, but the quality. This moved me. At that moment, I decided to embrace the journey, to meet Tony with love and not resistance.

By the start of the Fall 2011 semester, we had gone through yet another director, Tim Altmeyer. Due to other obligations, he was unable to direct the show. Charlie Mitchell, the third and final director, took the helm and picked up where Paul left off in casting. Charlie's concept was to cast the Sycamores as all Caucasian and the Kirbys as African-American. He said that he didn't want the audience to work too hard at trying to figure out who belonged to whom. While he recognized that interracial dating was revolutionary at best during this time in American History, he thought that calling attention to it gave no real payoff.

As we developed our characters, Charlie encouraged us not to “comment” on each other’s strangeness. In other words, our acting choices should not suggest that the character thought the Sycamore’s way of life was bizarre. Romance and beyond, we were to pass no judgments whatsoever. Excluding the Kirbys, at no point was a character to make a judgment call on the wackiness of another. Everything was accepted with open and loving arms. In doing so, when the Kirbys' arrive in Act II, the two families would appear even more contradictory.

Characterization

I stated earlier that my character development process tends to be fluid. Depending on the nature of the project and role, I prepare in slightly different ways. I also noted that while the scaffolding of my creative process tends to be the same, the invention is different. By “scaffolding,” I refer to the foundational analysis I do, no matter what the role demands. To explain this idea further, I will compare my development of Biff and Cephus, two characters I hope to one day portray.

The most obvious difference between Biff in Arthur Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* and Cephus in Samm-Art Williams’ *Home* is their race. While themes like neglect, being misunderstood, and unfulfilled dreams are universal ideas, these themes (and themes like them) are engaged differently when filtered through a certain cultural context. Stated plainly, Arthur Miller had no intention of making Willy Loman, Biff’s father, an African-American. There are historical improbabilities that exist if Willy Loman is played as a Black man. This unstated fact must be accounted for when I begin developing his son’s backstory. After examining the commonalities between Willy Loman and *my* Great-Grandfather who lived during this period, certain elements become clearer. I learned this lesson from American playwright, actor, and

founder and Artistic Director of the Negro Ensemble Company, Douglas Turner Ward. In his discussion, “Actor or Black Actor,” Ward notes:

...when you talk about interpreting characters, there will be a particular rhythm to the cultural experience. I am not going to be believable playing a Russian before I can first play my grandfather. That is going to give me closer access to the character of my own experience. I will come to find out after playing my grandfather that my grandfather’s experience might be similar to those of the peasants of the Gulag, or pre-Czarist Russia, during Turgenev’s time. But I’m not going to be able to do anything with Chekhov, until I know what those peasants down on the Southern American plantation were like. I can’t skip over that experience and say, I’m going to be a Chekhovian actor. I can’t play Chekhov worth a damn unless first I come at it through the route and particularities of my own subjective personal/historical experience. It is not separate; it is related. It gives me access. It is first things first. (Edwards 19)

After adhering to Ward’s admonition, an important detail materializes if I were to portray Biff. Willy Loman was written to “fit” on the periphery of the dominant culture, though he was Caucasian himself.

Willy Loman’s social position is my way into the text, for Willy’s journey is not far removed from the journey of a Black man. However, an African-American during this pre-Civil Rights era would receive far more bigotry in the form of threats of violence and blatant racist lashings. As an actor, it is easier for me to fill in the cultural gaps, making Willy and Biff’s existence as Black men more tangible, once I can connect their journey to a journey that *my* people endured. A peer of mine once noted that Linda’s final words to Willy, “We’re free and

clear. We're free. We're free...We're free..." mean something drastically different if said to the body of her Black husband. Recognizing these intricate details is possible only after asking myself: "what were my people doing during this time?"

Justifying Cephus' race is not necessary. He was written as a Black man by a Black man. Certain inalienable cultural experiences are inscribed within Samm-Art Williams' text that reveals the unique challenges that face African-Americans. Williams engages a universal theme – searching for one's dream – and pays homage to cultural nuances within and outside the Black community, without making a heavy-handed show of sensitivity. He explores these cultural nuances without sacrificing the plot, or theme. In the same way that Williams pays homage to his culture, Miller similarly pays homage to *his*; however, we are taught that the culture of Caucasians *is itself* universal.

The above analysis, considering what was happening to Black people during the period in which the play was set, is the "scaffolding" to which I refer. With this understanding I am then able to contextualize my character's respective journey. Otherwise, I am "adding fiction on top of fiction" as one of my acting teachers once said. Conversely, Peter Brook (1993) argues that such a discussion should not be the starting place for the actor:

It is always a mistake for actors to begin their work with intellectual discussions, as the rational mind is not nearly as potent an instrument of discovery as the more secret faculties of intuition. The possibility of intuitive understanding through the body is stimulated and developed in many different ways. (108)

While I generally agree with Brook, this up-front "work" helps me make sense of the role and play. Probing these questions is critical so I do not reject my character on the basis of improbability later. Saying to myself, "this would never happen to a Black man during this

period” is the last thing that should be going through my head, whether in rehearsal or when exploring the text in private. Despite how disconnected my ethnicity and role may be, as long as my intellect is disengaged, I can play the game.

I wish I could say with confidence that I did this preliminary work for Tony. The truth is I did not. I stated briefly that I chose to approach this production as I would in a professional setting. So, while my MFA predecessors and peers may have spent countless hours immersing themselves in the language, world, and experiences of their characters, I picked up a part-time job at Starbucks. Somewhere in my mind I rationalized that working a part-time job in the day and going to rehearsal at night would mirror the life I will encounter in the coming months as a professional actor. As I will explain below, I attempted to employ every technique I found useful during my time as an MFA student, while throwing away the ones that didn’t serve me. I will explore whether or not I found success in Chapter 4.

The latest and most profound technique that I used to create Tony comes from *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* by Melissa Bruder et al. (1986). In it Bruder et al. note that acting is the *physical process* of achieving a specific goal with the other actors in a scene. Acting means to essentially improvise within the framework of given circumstances (8). The improvisation, they note, is “the act of impulsively choosing from moment to moment how to do that action. These choices are based on what is going on with the other actors in the scene at that instant” (9).

The technique outlined in *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* can be summarized in the following statement: there is no functional separation between you and the character. You *are* the character. “Being,” however, is just a starting place for the actor. Working oneself into an emotional state in an attempt to “be” the character is a common pitfall for actors. The actor does

not have to work himself into frenzy, nor does he have to convince the audience that he is the character. Bruder et al. maintain:

The actor does not need to think about or work for these things. If he really throws himself into getting the other person to take a chance, the audience will believe he is driven by his love because of the given circumstances of the play, even though the reasons he gives himself for doing it may have nothing to do with love. (22)

The audience knows that my name isn't Tony Kirby, Jr. They can open the program and see my name is clearly written: Ryan Johnson-Travis. They have come willing to play the game, to accept the convention. The audience believes that they see Tony Kirby, Jr, despite that countless other people have played the role before me. They are willing to come along for the journey.

I personally have no idea of what it means to study at Cambridge, or to be raised in affluence, or to be a Vice-President of a Wall Street business. I do not need to trick myself into believing that I am Tony Kirby, Jr. Nor do I need to agonize over "being" the character. By immersing myself in the given circumstances of the play and plunging into the pursuit of my essential action/objective, my portrayal of Tony Kirby, Jr. is well on its way to being successful.

I held tight to this technique. I went into the rehearsal room with the utmost confidence that this character was absolutely tangible. While I'd still have to work hard, I understood that I didn't have to search too far outside of myself, as I had come to demand of myself in other roles.

Physical Explorations

Not long ago, my creative process hinged on the costume renderings. I believed that my process was unquestionably "outside-in," that I had to put the fabrics *on*, that I needed to feel the texture of props. While all of these elements to some degree still inform my understanding of my

character and the world he inhabits, they definitely are not nearly as critical as they once were. I have come to learn that the Meisner Technique is truly at the root of my physical exploration. I discovered Meisner during my second year as a MFA student, searching for a platform from which to teach my Acting II class. I was both stunned and delighted at how closely Meisner mirrored my own creative process. I taught my class with authority, knowing that my process was tried and proven by a master.

An original member of the famous Group Theatre and a direct apprentice of Michael Chekhov, Sanford Meisner is the pioneer of the art of doing. Radically different from Chekhov, Meisner believed that spontaneous interaction between living, breathing human beings was the seat of true acting. The idea that anything could happen, at any given moment, was what compelled audiences to listen. From his experiences as an actor, he learned that “the foundation of acting is the reality of doing” (Meisner and Longwell 16). "An ounce of behavior is worth a pound of words," and "Act before you think," became the maxims for which he is most known. On the walls of his classroom and studio these proverbs were posted, serving as a constant reminder to students that acting is about doing (Eckhart).

The process of doing before thinking or analyzing served as my bedrock as I explored the physicality of Tony. I began by using my own physical habits as a launching pad. The text always tells me if my personal way of standing and walking is too grounded or direct, as was the case with Tony. After rehearsal on Wednesday, August 31, Kathy Sarra, my Alexander Technique instructor, gave me a wonderful physical adjustment to work with. As opposed to the wide stance I usually maintain, she suggested that I find another way to stand, one that is more befitting for someone who hasn't quite recognized their full potential as an individual. Instantly an idea was generated. I figured by standing with my feet closer together, my stride would begin

to totter and become less grounded. I took that physical choice into rehearsal. It helped tremendously as this physical posture informed how the words were delivered. This added to the boyish nature of the character. While these choices were subtle in performance, they helped holistically in the discovery of the character. A physical choice is often where my character and I meet for the first time. As with Meisner, doing – in this case, physicality – really helps me discover the character from multiple points of entry.

On another occasion, the director asked me to attach a physical movement to the imagery of the text. Up to that point he noticed that I was arbitrarily gesticulating with my hands. I gesticulate with my hands when I am unsure of what else to do with my body. So, the moment I get a note about my hands, it is a trigger for me to go back and really look at what I am saying. He had me make broad/bold physical choices to articulate through my body what I couldn't say through words. This was a wonderful exercise. I was free of my holding patterns. I felt present with the actors around me. And most importantly, I was connected to both the imagery and my body.

Meisner would ask his students to count the number of light bulbs in the room, in an effort to get the actor out of their own way. By “getting out of one's own way” I am referring to the process of transferring the point of concentration outside of oneself. Some actors tend to play their characters internally. Their choices, as a result, become less active and casual. Meisner maintains that transferring one's concentration *from* themselves and *to* the other person is a “big battle won” (26). This notion is further articulated in Bruder et al's work. What we do should always be purposed toward the other person. Acting is not about attitude, or about being clever. It is always about the task – for example, to get another character to forgive me, to shut him down, to get her to love me. The action must be specific to the other person. One's performance

does not truly come alive until the action is motivated, until one makes a deliberate choice toward pursuing his or her goal. For Tony's exchange with Alice in Scene Two, for example, I used the above admonition to guide the choices I made as the actor. While I could *show* some quirky method of getting Alice to love me, I made the deliberate choice to *get* Alice to love me. This subtle psychological shift makes all the difference when engaging a real human being.

Meisner also maintains that a scene must have an emotional texture prior to its beginning. For him the text was secondary, he maintained that a person could communicate everything without words. The only way this was possible, however, was to have an emotional investment prior to even entering the scene. From this starting point, actors can proceed organically within the given circumstances.

The text is like a canoe, and the river on which it sits is the emotion. The text floats on the river. If the water of the river is turbulent, the words will come on a rough river. It all depends on the flow of the river which is your emotion. The text takes on the character of your emotion. (Meisner and Longwell 115)

Separate from Strasberg's idea of plunging into one's personal experiences, Meisner believed that one should stimulate an emotional state through imagination. This was another idea I sought to incorporate as I developed the emotional template for Tony. I used my interactions with the other actor's onstage as a gauge to modulate his temperament. I couldn't ask, "How would I respond if I were in this situation?" The questions became more direct, such as: "What is at stake here? What happens if she walks out of my life for good?" These questions juxtaposed to Tony's responses helped me determine if he was relaxed or high-strung.

Vocal Exploration

Through my tenure at UF, I have learned and become somewhat proficient in the Lessac-based vocal approach. The synthesis of voice work into a complete and harmonious acting technique has been something I often neglect. Though I try not to admit it, to some degree, I am a “heady” actor. Every day is a constant effort to plunge in, to not deduce my creative choices to intellectual rationalization, to not care about how crazy I may appear. The moment a “heady” actor learns a technique such as the Lessac-based vocal approach, he tends to apply left-brain, scientific analysis to a medium that is fundamentally organic. This intellectual lens he applies to voice work is often the foundation for utter failure. Arthur Lessac (1997) emphatically notes:

In the final analysis *good acting is nothing more than interesting, imaginative, involved behavior*; it is the *experiencing* of communication and, at the same time, the effective and involved expression of that experience. It is the voice, the inflections and intonations, the words, eyes, gestures, and emotions working together, expressively, in symphonic concert and harmony. (8)

Lessac argues that voice work has to become integrated into the entire acting process, that everything is working together to form a beautiful tapestry.

While I clearly understand there should not be a dichotomy between the voice, the body, and the text, I did not approach my thesis performance with such clarity. As the saying goes, “You always have 20/20 in hindsight.” Yes, I see clearly now. Below is an excerpt from a journal I kept:

Friday, September 16, 2011. This entire *You Can't Take It With You* process has been...interesting. I can't remember feeling more disconnected from a role. I keep coming up against this hurdle. This feeling of resistance has finally crept its way

into how I explore Tony. I've found a set rhythm, and have gone on auto-pilot most nights in rehearsal. I am so concerned with my voice; everything else has taken a back seat.

This entry is dated exactly one week before the play opened. The concerns that I note should have been rectified by this point in the process. But the truth is my voice became my foremost concern.

The unusual concentration I placed on my voice was sparked by an instructor. About one week into the rehearsal process, I received a note and had a subsequent meeting with an instructor involved with the rehearsal process. I was told, quite frankly, that I was standing out like a sore thumb, that the way in which I was handling the text was subpar. The person was concerned because this would be my thesis performance, the showcase of all that I have learned throughout my tenure at UF. This person strongly encouraged me to go back and specifically deal with the text, to score it, to do the vocal markings, to play the end consonants and “ng oboes,” etc. Every day I struggled to minimize my “regionalisms” and maintain the crisp articulation and pronunciation befitting of a man who studied elocution as a child and abroad at Cambridge as a young adult. My acting was reduced to hitting my mark and hitting the endings of my phrases. Much of my creativity was devoured by the fear of looking out of place, of looking untruthful because of the way I spoke. So, while Lessac and Yanci Bukovec, my voice teacher of two years, encourage the complete harmony of body, voice, and text, I reduced their system to the mechanics of pronunciation and diction.

Diverse Techniques Employed

As the title suggests, this section describes the diverse techniques I employed to create Tony. The first of these came from Reginald Wilson, a former castmate of mine. He taught me a

wonderful lesson while working on his thesis role, Solly in *Gem of the Ocean*. Since our characters were longtime friends, he believed it was important that we create a rapport that honored the love Eli and Solly have for each other. Though Reggie and I didn't know each other well prior to *Gem of the Ocean*, I believe the time we spent together outside of rehearsal made our chemistry onstage more palpable. Hopefully the audience saw the bond. Having personally felt the difference onstage, I applied Reggie's technique in getting to know Chelsea Sorenson, my castmate, in *You Can't Take It With You*. Since Alice and Tony's love story is at the core of the play, I thought it was vital that Chelsea and I get to know each other on a personal level. Prior to our first rehearsal, we spent about an hour together "breaking the ice." Though I was once her Acting II instructor, I didn't know her personally. Throughout the entire rehearsal process and performance run, during every free moment we had offstage together, I found something to talk with her about. I don't think I ever explained my motive for spending so much time with her, but I believe our connection as actors helped solidify our bond onstage.

Another technique I employ is using the people around me as a source to help inform my understanding – and eventual interpretation – of my character. While I probably won't know the zodiac sign of my character by the time the play opens, I have a pretty good idea of his idiosyncrasies, and how he functions in the world around him. Much to their credit, a great deal of help comes from the people closest to me. Much discussion with the director, my peers, and loved ones helps to narrow my focus.

An example of this process happened on Wednesday, September 7, 2011. Sparked by a discussion with one of my peers, I had a breakthrough in my Alexander Technique class. I discovered that Tony is more like me than I realized. After talking about several moments in my romance scene with Alice, Jessamyn Fuller, my classmate, mentioned that Tony's desire to be

loved is not far removed from my disposition when I first arrived at UF. She was right. I wanted so badly for people to see me as the nice person I know myself to be. In doing so, I probably appeared overeager, and maybe insecure. Despite how I was perceived, the need to be loved and accepted was supreme. This personal experience deepened my understanding of what Tony was undergoing. In rehearsal, I synthesized all of this information, and it began to slowly materialize in my performance.

The people around me help flesh out the complexity of my character's disposition and personality in other ways. Their collective experiences expand my field of awareness. In other words, I can live vicariously through the encounters they have with other people. For example, I may not know how to physicalize the feeling of "butterflies," or being smitten by someone. Despite thorough observation of other people, I may still fail horribly at attempting to physicalize this emotional state. The encounters of people around me inform my characterization of being in love. They give me physical observations they have witnessed. They tell me how their roommate constantly wipes his clammy, moist hands on his jeans when he is around an attractive woman, or how an ex-girlfriend followed every sentence with a strange giggle when she attempted to flirt. From these conversations, my character begins to illuminate, and my characterization becomes fuller, hopefully yielding a more believable interpretation.

Finally, while crafting my character and beyond, I pray for guidance. Denzel Washington once said that aside from all of the training, technique, or luck to which people attribute his success, the single most effective tool that served him was his ancestors (*Inside Man*). He said that he prays for their guidance. He asks them to be with him as he seeks to tell their story. In that same vein, I pray, though not in the traditional sense. I do it right before I go on stage. I look up at the catwalk, and imagine I can see the stars. I ask for all of the help I can get. I tell my

Ancestors and the universe that I want to make them proud, and I ask for them – or it – to use me as a vessel as I attempt to tell a story. I try to focus and drown out the noise around me. In these brief moments of stillness, when everyone is doing their own thing, I am encouraging myself to remove any fear, believing that everything will be just fine.

CHAPTER 4 THE PERFORMANCE

My pre-show warm-up ritual stays pretty consistent from production to production. As in the past, I arrived to the theater about an hour before my call time. I have a tendency to get worked up when I am pressed for time. So to minimize the nerves, I come to the theater early to do just about anything I want. Since I didn't have to apply make-up for *You Can't Take It With You*, I had ample time to relax. I milled around, checked my hair, and made sure I had water and snacks for later. This ritual is solely for me to transfer the point of concentration outside of myself as Meisner explains. In other words, I am enabling a clear mind, free of anxiety when I busy myself with arbitrary things like facial hair, water, etc.

About an hour before call for places, I get into costume. I start my warm-up by doing constructive rest, an Alexander Technique exercise. For this production, I found it very helpful to listen to music while warming up. I didn't listen to anything appropriate to the era of the play; in fact, I listened to music with a heavy bass line. Drake's *Uptown* usually fit the bill. This pumped me up and enabled me to constructively release any tightness I discovered while stretching. Some people might find it unusual to stretch while in costume, but I actually prefer it. Doing so helps me get comfortable. As the saying reminds us, I want to wear the costume, and not have the costume wear me.

Before opening night, I wrote the following in my journal:

I don't fully know if I have a handle on this character. I can trust one thing. I will be present with the actors on stage with me, no matter what happens. I might not feel 100% confident, but I will do the best that I can.

On opening night, I did just that. I plunged in, and had a great time. The audience was responsive as we'd expected them to be, and the presence of family and friends made the night special for many of us in the cast. My confidence in my interpretation of Tony grew as I could feel the energy of the audience radiating during several of my exchanges. This feeling was destroyed soon after. On the Sunday after opening night, I wrote the following:

I just got off the phone with a friend who saw the play. She said that she couldn't see *me*. The "voice" that I was using, the veneer of the character, and my overall being was hard for her to believe. ... I have so much racing through my head right now. ... Her saying she couldn't understand why I was using "that voice" hit me the hardest.

A surefire Acting 101 pitfall is listening to a friend's opinion about one's performance. A host of reasons exist why embracing their notes is a bad idea. First, they weren't in the rehearsal process with you, and most importantly, they have no idea how your performance folds into the director's vision. Needless to say, this admonition didn't keep me from feeling down on myself. The next day, however, I decided to take charge of my destiny. I made a conscious effort to lift myself up, to be gentle with myself, to love myself. Throughout the day I received reminders from the universe that I was being taken care of, that no matter how challenging things felt, everything was working for a greater purpose.

That same morning, I made a discovery. I did not devote myself to the text as I have done in past productions. I had been stretching myself thin during our four-week rehearsal process. I

approached this role as I thought I would in a professional setting. I figured in the “real-world” I’d work a day job while having to explore a role creatively in the evening. I realized that in my attempt to simulate “real-world” circumstances, I failed to give myself the time necessary to find Tony. I promised myself to never let this happen again, no matter what the project entailed. On Monday night after opening (“dark” Monday), around 9 p.m., I spent two hours working and exploring the text anew, despite being in the middle of the performance run. After Tuesday’s performance, I wrote the following:

If we are constantly in a state of discovery, why should I settle for mediocrity?
Deep down inside I already felt like I didn’t nail this role. So why stop now? ...
Tonight was a gift from the universe. My vision was clearer. My heart was freer. I
was still nervous, but not because I felt unprepared. I was nervous because I
wanted to be in the moment.

The haze began to dissipate. I finally found clarity. As I worked on “dark” Monday and continued to work on subsequent days, I found a way to blend everything we had worked so hard to create during rehearsal. The language finally began to fuse with my core. It was a simple shift that hadn’t yet taken place.

The following is one example of many that embodies the artistic shift I experienced. In the second scene of the play Tony is trying to convince Alice that their love can withstand the test of any challenge, that despite how different their families may be, their love for one another is supreme. Tony says, “All that matters right now is that we love each other. That’s so, isn’t it?” (Hart and Kaufman 33) For four weeks of rehearsal and until “dark” Monday, I blazed through this line. When I reexamined it, the word “now” stood out, and the question he is asking had a deeper meaning. In other words, the question isn’t rhetorical. He is sincerely asking if she really

loves him. When I said, “All that matters *now* is that we love each other,” in performance, there was complete conviction. And when I asked, “That’s so isn’t it,” I was genuinely asking if she loved me. Asking in that manner created a real longing for her to say, “YES.” These subtle moments of discovery activated the text and catapulted me into the moment. No longer was I on auto-pilot, regurgitating fixed line readings. I was immersed in the world of the play, experiencing it anew. The reality that Tony was experiencing these moments for the first time was deepened because as the actor, I was experiencing these moments with renewed freshness.

My field of awareness grew exponentially as I wasn’t weighted by voice work. I could still maintain diction, poise, and etiquette while honoring the ease that comes with being prepared. As the performance run continued, my scene work felt more and more connected. In fact, during the adjudication of our second to last performance, Chelsea and I received great reviews from the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Respondent. Afterwards, Charlie Mitchell told me that my performance had gotten progressively better and better, saying that it was wonderful watching me grapple with, then ultimately settle into the character. Each night he saw growth, and thought the connection Chelsea and I had forged was truly a joy to watch.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

When one thinks of their thesis role, they think of the culmination of their MFA, the pinnacle of their tenure as a fine arts graduate student. There is a shared belief that this role will showcase all that they have learned. A belief that their hand-crafted technique, once applied to their role, is then shared with the world and applied to their work as a professional actor. The truth is that one’s process is never “finished.” We are always in a state of discovery. We are

never “finished” in our development as artists. We relentlessly grow and change and move forward. There is progression, always. My creative process is constantly evolving because *I* am constantly evolving.

I came into this program believing that at my feet knowledge would be deposited, and upon my exit from this endeavor I’d leave a deity. The truth is, I am more confused now about this craft than I was when I entered. I understand, however, that this art form can be many things. It can be scientific. It can be organic. It can derive from one’s spirit, and it can come from meticulous examination of the text, of oneself, or of the world around them. This role has taught me that my artistry is not hinged on someone else’s theory of how best to approach a character. My artistry *is* hinged on my willingness to plunge into the world of the play, to surrender to the given circumstances, and to give of myself unapologetically, despite how strange the process may feel.

I thought “Tony” would be my opportunity to prove my chops as a leading man. As it turned out, some nights felt better than others. Some performances felt rooted. Some moments felt rushed, others felt magical. This role challenged me to no end, as I struggled to find me. I convinced myself that the way I speak, the way I exist and function was a barrier to being wholly perceived as a well-to-do romantic. As much as I wanted to hold tight to the lesson, “There is no separation between you and the character; you *are* the character,” deep down inside I didn’t believe in me. I hadn’t given myself the opportunity. However, half-way through the performance run, on “dark” Monday while drilling and exploring the text in an empty Constans Theater, I found myself. And I was freed. My thesis role was exactly what it was supposed to be – a wonderful lesson. We are never finished growing as artists, because *we are never finished growing as human beings*.

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Why has *You Can't Take It With You* been called a distinctly American classic? Is it because its characters follow the beat of their own drummers? Individuality is not a uniquely American characteristic, but it is certainly one of our most celebrated. Our sacred civic document, the Declaration of Independence, states that we are both born with the right to be free and the right to pursue happiness. This right to happiness is even given equal billing with our right to live.

In *You Can't Take It With You*, a frequent visitor to the Sycamore family home reminds us that not all nations embrace this philosophy. By 1936, the year the play debuted, all of Russia was under the heel of Joseph Stalin. As part of several five-year plans, Russian peasants were forced onto collective farms to fulfill the economic goals of the state. Dissent was greeted with death or imprisonment. Trapped within their own borders, most Russians who wished to leave never got to join the waves of European immigrants that revitalized the cultural fabric of the United States. Arriving by ship, these pilgrims were greeted by the words inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor: "Give me your tired, your poor/Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." It is no accident that, in the play, the 4th of July is right around the corner.

As playwrights Kaufman and Hart comically remind us, we can react impetuously when we feel that our freedoms are being threatened and sometimes, we trample on the very freedoms we seek to protect. But more often than not, we quash this impulse to be free from the inside. We confine ourselves to the expectations of others, assuming that happiness is a matter of luck or fate instead of something precious to be claimed.

As I channel-surfed one evening after a rehearsal, I was reminded why this play has resurfaced so faithfully. As makeover shows encourage conventionality, and so-called reality shows ask us to sneer at outrageous behavior, it's refreshing to find a depiction of a family that puts aside judgment for love and the pursuit of wealth and status for chasing dreams. Conformity may bring comfort but it won't bring joy. If you ask me, to be weird is downright American.

A Few References...

The W.P.A. — The Works Progress Association was one of President Roosevelt's jobs programs designed to put Americans to work during the Great Depression. WPA jobs did not pay well so as not to compete with private industry. However, so desperate were U.S. workers that by 1936, one third of the country's unemployed took a WPA job. One of the many subsets of the WPA was the Easel Project and Mural Project. Artists received \$38 per week to either paint a mural on a government building or turn in one painting a month to a government office. Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Mark Rothko were among the 6000 artists employed by this program.

Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers — An enormously popular dance team that made ten movies together, most in the 1930s. Astaire insisted that whenever the two were dancing, their entire bodies would be shown on the screen and no edits would be made.

Child's Restaurant — A chain of popular cafeteria-style restaurants, a prototype of the modern McDonald's.

Schraff's Restaurant — A more upscale, white tablecloth establishment.

—Dr. Charlie Mitchell

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This production is entered in the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF). The aims of this national theater education program are to identify and promote quality in college-level theater production. To this end, each production entered is eligible for a response by a regional KCACTF representative, and selected students and faculty are invited to participate in KCACTF programs involving scholarships, internships, grants and awards for actors, directors, dramaturges, playwrights, designers, stage managers and critics at both the regional and national levels.

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Last year more than 1,300 productions were entered in the KCACTF involving more than 200,000 students nationwide. By entering this production, our theater department is sharing in the KCACTF goals to recognize, reward, and celebrate the exemplary work produced in college and university theaters across the nation.

CHARLIE MITCHELL (Director) has directed and acted in a variety of theatres in New York City, Chicago, and Baltimore. After completing his BFA training at Ithaca College, he studied playwrighting with Nobel prize-winning author Derek Walcott at Boston University and later earned a PhD from the University of Colorado at Boulder. For three years, Dr. Mitchell was an artistic associate and company member of the award-winning Chesapeake Shakespeare Company. He has directed over twenty productions including *The Grapes of Wrath* and *In the Blood* at UF. Other credits include *Epic Proportions*, *A Flea in Her Ear*, *How I Learned To Drive*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Cabaret*, *The Marriage of Bette and Boo*, *City of Angels*, *Under Milk Wood*, *Oleanna*, and *Wayzack*. Dr. Mitchell would like to thank his tremendous design team and technical staff for their imagination and dedication. As for the cast, never has he seen so much love on one stage. Special thanks goes to Paul Favini—my hero and inspiration.

PRODUCTION CREW

Alexander Technique Coach	Kathy Sarro
Assistant Stage Manager	Dana Humphrey
Sound Board Operator	Gabriela Barrios
Light Board Operator	Mike O'Brien
Technical Director	Zak Herring
Master Carpenter	Tony Berry
Scenic Studio Assistants	Jovon Eberhardt, Molly Ilten, Anne Tully, Tim Watson, Jaime Frank
Costume Studio Manager	Lisa Davis
Asst. Costume Studio Manager	Kate Glennon
Costume Studio Assistants	Lee Martin, Tracy Floyd, Becky Strafford
Master Electrician	Todd Bedell
Light Shop Assistants	B Lussier, Mike McShane, Tim Reed, Tophier Stumreiter
Director of Operations	Sarah White
Poster & Program Designers	Joseph Urick, David Collins
Stage Crew	Catherine Perez, Brittany Bokzam, Talia Medina, Anton Williams, Hailey Hayes
Wardrobe Crew	Katie McMillen, Alexis Dufries, Amanda Young, Erin Connelly, Ryan Oates
House Management	Students of THE 4950

MEET THE CAST

ANTHONY BIDO (Mr. De Pinna) is a transfer student majoring in Theatre Performance. He is proud to be a part of this production and would like to thank Charlie for his amazing direction and the opportunity, the cast for their warm welcome and kindness, and his friends and family for everything they do.

IAN BLAKE (G-Man) is proud to make his debut here on the UF main stage. He wants to thank Charlie Mitchell for this opportunity and is happy he got to work with such amazing people. Break a leg everybody!

ROBERT COPE (Paul) is a first year MFA Acting student at UF and is thrilled to be making his premier on the Constans stage in this classic American comedy. Previous credits include *Macbeth*, *Lonestar*, *An Ideal Husband*, *Working*, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Camelot* and *The Sound of Music*.

NICK ERKELENS (Ed) is a BFA Acting candidate. Recent credits: *The Madwoman of Chaillot* (Dr. Jadin), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (Connie). He would like to thank Paul and Charlie for the opportunity to play this wonderful character and the cast and crew for making this such an amazing experience.

STEPHANIE FRATANGELO (Olga) is a Senior BFA Acting candidate, and was most recently seen in *Oedipus the King* and *Romeo & Juliet* on tour in Greece! She would like to thank the cast and crew, Charlie for the opportunity to finally play a Russian, and her family and friends for their undying support. BGC, ride or die.

JOSHUA HAMILTON (Henderson) is a 2nd year MFA acting candidate. Joshua has a BA in Theatre Arts from the wonderful Quirk Theater at Eastern Michigan University. Joshua was last seen in UF's productions of *Oedipus the King*, *Romeo & Juliet* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Thanks to Annelih, my family and Charlie.

COLIN HUDSON (Boris) is thrilled to appear in another Dr. Mitchell Joint. Recent credits include *An Evening of Improv*, *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Love to all family and friends. As-Salamu Alaikum.

RYAN JOHNSON-TRAVIS (Tony) is a 3rd year MFA candidate and a proud graduate of Syracuse University and Fort Valley State University. Of his 13 stage productions at UF, Reverend D (*In The Blood*), Eli (*Gem of the Ocean*), and Man (*Harmony*) are his most cherished memories. Since his arrival, Ryan has longed to compose his "thesis bio". While that time has finally come, he is, however, at a loss for words. "Thank you for believing in me" is most befitting. With supreme love and humility, he blows kisses to his Ancestors and Chelsea. "For Paul Favini who teaches me how to live."

STEPHANIE LYNGE (Penny): 1st year MFA; Broadway: *Beauty and the Beast* (Sugarbowl), u/s Mrs. Potts and Wardrobe). National Tours: *Mamma Mia* (Ensemble, u/s Donna, Rosie), *She Loves Me* (Amalia). Off-Bway: *Three Penny Opera* (Polly.) Regional: *Showtune*

(Pasadena Plyhs), *A Little Night Music* (Goodspeed), *Lead Me A Tenor* (Mountain Playhouse), *Tartuffe* (Barter), *Empire* (Hudson-LA). Love to all of my families.

MATT MERCURIO (Mr. Kirby) is in his twelfth UF production. He was an acting apprentice at the prestigious Williamstown Theatre Festival & has represented the southeast at the American College Theatre Festival as a National Scholarship finalist this past year. Thanks to Christina, his undyingly supportive family, Dr. Mitchell, and God for everything. Matt hopes you continue supporting theatre & all types of art everywhere.

ANGELICA-NAIA GABOR (Rhaba) is a senior BFA theatre major. She'd like to thank the cast and crew for making the process so enjoyable. Charlie for letting her try an array of accents, her lovely roommates and friends for always having her back, her crazy asian family for their love and support, and her man, Quansu, for everything, even Lol.

JOEL ORAMAS (Donald) is a first-year MFA candidate from Western Connecticut State University. NYC credits include *I Love A Piano* (T86 Theatre) and *The Will of Love* (Turtle Shell Theatre). Other credits include *Seussical! the Musical*, *The Three Sisters*, and *A Flea in Her Ear*. He has performed at HBO studios, INTAR, and KCACFE.

KATIE PANKOW (Essie) is a second-year graduate acting student. She was last seen square-dancing in *The Grapes of Wrath*, dancing a poevan in *Romeo & Juliet*, and (thankfully) not dancing in the summer production of *Oedipus the King*. She is lucky enough to have a family as crazy and wonderful as the Sycamores. I laaahve you!

MICHAEL PEMBERTON (G-Man) is excited to be in his first production at the University of Florida. He would like to thank his family and friends for all their love and support.

ANASTASIA PLACIDO (Gay Wellington) is a 3rd year BFA and thoroughly enjoys being able to show her inner physical comedienne. She would like to thank her friends and family for their patience and support. Thanks also to Charlie Mitchell for the opportunity. "It is the voice of life that calls us to come and learn."

ARNAU ROBLES (G-Man) a sophomore Finance major and is glad to participate in his first UF mainstage production. Recent Credits include *Grease*, *Peter Pan*, *The Crucible*, *My Fair Lady*, and *Estrella Del Memento*. Special thanks to his family as he wouldn't be here without them.

CHELSEA SORENSON (Alice) is a senior in the BFA Acting program. She would like to thank the cast and crew for this truly enjoyable experience, and her loving family for extensively preparing her for the role of Alice.

DAVIDA EVETTE TOLBERT (Mrs. Kirby) is very elated to be in this production! She has been in productions during her undergraduate studies at Buffalo State College and at the Ujima Theatre in her hometown of Buffalo, NY. She has also performed in *Circle Mirror Transformation*, *Romeo & Juliet*, and *Oedipus the King* this past summer at UF. Davida thanks her family, friends, director Charlie Mitchell and the cast and crew for welcoming

me and giving their support.

FILIPE VALLE COSTA (Grandpa) returns to the University of Florida's theatre for one last time, where his acting credits include: *Romeo and Juliet* (Romeo), *In the Blood* (Baby), *The Mousetrap* (Mr. Paravicini) and *Damn Tankees* (Bryant.) At the Hippodrome State Theatre, Filipe has performed in *End Days* (Nelson) and *Dracula* (Simmons.) As a third-year MFA in Acting student hailing from Lisbon, Portugal, he especially thanks Charlie the milkman for trusting, Matt, Jessamyn and Colin for listening, and my family for loving. Filipe wishes to dedicate his performance to Paul Favini.

MEET THE CREW

ERICA BASCOM (Costume Design) is currently pursuing her MFA in Costume Design/Technology here at UF. Her love for theatre blossomed while completing her BFA in Dance at Western KY University. It was there that she shifted from dancer to seamstress. Since then she has had the great pleasure of working four seasons at the Tony Award Winning, Utah Shakespearean Festival. She is now enjoying her life as a grad student and brand new mother!

RYAN BIBLE (Lighting Design) is thrilled to be designing *YCTIWI*. Ryan holds a BFA in Lighting Design and Technology from the College-Conservatory of Music at UC. Design credits include: *The Madwoman of Chaillot*, *Postcard from Morocco*, and *On the Verge*.

CAITLIN CALLAHAN (Properties Mistress) is a 4th year BFA production major in scenic design. This is her second mainstage properties design with UF and she looks forward to also designing properties for *Roberto Zucca* in the Spring. Thanks to everyone involved for making this production great!

DANA HUMPHREY (Assistant Stage Manager) would like to thank the cast and rest of the crew of *You Can't Take It With You*, for making this a wonderful experience. She would also like to thank her friends and family for all their love and support. Humphrey is a senior studying Political Science and Theatre.

CJ ROELL (Stage Manager) is a 4th(ish) year general theatre student focusing on Stage Management. Recent Credits include *Dark Play* (SM), *Lenny* (ASM), *Noises Off* (SM), *Dance 2010* (SM), *American Dance Competition* (SM). CJ is proud to work on his last main stage show before he graduates in December (hopefully). Break a leg ya'll.

ANNE TULLY (Scenic Design) is a second-year MFA Scenic Design student. She received a BA in Theatre/BS in Journalism from UF. Previous credits include *Agbedidi* (UF 2010), *Madwoman of Chaillot* (UF 2011) and *Rosecrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (Florida Players 2009).

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Kelly Drummond Cawthon
Meredith Ezmann
Dr. Joan French
Stacey Galloway
Tiza Garland
Zak Herring
Pamela Kaye
Kirsten O'Neal
Stan Kaye
Tony Marx
Kevin Marshall
Dr. Charlie Mitchell
Dr. Mikell Pinkney
Nera Pulvermacher
Dr. Ralf Remslaudt
Isa Garcia-Rose
Ric Rose
Kathy Sarra
Dr. David Shelton
Jill Sombke
Dr. Albert F.C. Wehlburg
Dr. Judith Williams
Dr. David Young

Interim Director
Undergraduate Advisor
Performance
Professor Emeritus
Performance
Scenic Design/Design Coordinator
African Dance
Costume Technology
Dance
Dance
Dance
Costume Design
Movement/Combat/Performance Coordinator
Technical Director
Rendering
Dance
Lighting Design
Musical Theatre
Center for Arts and Public Policy
Performance
Theory/Performance
Dance
History/Dramaturgy
Dance
Dance Coordinator
Performance
Professor Emeritus
Dance
Professor Emeritus
Performance
Graduate Research Professor

Master Electrician
Master Carpenter
Secretary
Costume Studio Assistant Manager
Director of Operations

Staff

Todd Bedell
Tony Berry
Mary Byrd
Kate Glennon
Sarah White

DRAMATIST PERSONAE

Martin Vanderhof (Grandpa) Filipe Valle Costa*
Penelope Sycamore Stephanie Lynge#
Paul Sycamore Robert Cope
Alice Sycamore Chelsea Sorenson
Essie Carmichael Katie Pankow
Ed Carmichael Nick Erkelens
Rheba Angelica Gabor
Donald Joel Oramas
Mr. De Pinna Anthony Bido
Henderson Josh Hamilton
Boris Kolenkhov Colin Hudson
Tony Kirby Ryan Johnson-Travis*
Mr. Kirby Matt Mercurio
Mrs. Kirby Davida Tolbert
Gay Wellington Anastasia Placido
Olga Katrina Stephanie Fratangelo
G-Men Ian Blake
 Arnau Robles
 Michael Pemberton

* Denotes work in partial fulfillment of MFA Thesis Project
#Appears Courtesy of Actor's Equity Association

Appendix B – Production Photos



Act II: Mr. Kirby and Tony. “Are we going to stay?”



Act II: Gay Wellington, Ed, Essie, and Grandpa. “OOOO.”

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ryan Johnson-Travis is a graduate of Syracuse University and Fort Valley State University where he earned a MA in Pan African Studies and a BA in African World Studies, respectively. For his master's thesis project in Syracuse University, Ryan wrote and performed *June 16*, a one-man show that explores phenomena of single-parent homes in impoverished Black communities. Ryan served as a drama teacher for the Boys & Girls Club of Georgia Heartlands in Fort Valley, GA and a theater arts instructor for Peaceful Schools Initiative at Huntington Elementary School in Syracuse, NY.

He has written, directed, and performed for regional theater, independent production companies and dance companies; including, The Black Academy of Arts and Letters in Dallas, Texas, Conscious Quest Productions, Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company, and Happy Nia Dance Company also in Dallas. Regional credits include appearing as Dereque in *From Then to Now* and various roles in *Wine, Watermelon, the Word* for two consecutive seasons. Of his 15 stage productions at the University of Florida, Reverend D (*In The Blood*), Eli (*Gem of the Ocean*), Man (*Harmony*), and Othello (*Othello*) are his most cherished memories. Other favorite roles include: Sykes in Zora Neale Hurston's *Sweat*, and Blind Louie in *Beauty's Daughter*.

While at UF, Ryan directed several independent projects. One of which, *belonging to the time after the present. (on) the day after today*, traverses the origin of human existence to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. This original play reflects his passion for multiple artistic mediums, including movement and dance. Ryan later received a Kennedy Center American College Festival Irene Ryan Scholarship Nomination for his portrayal of Eli in *Gem of the Ocean*. He also received the Friends of Theater and Dance Graduate Student Scholarship Award for his numerous contributions to the School of Theater and Dance. He had the pleasure of teaching

numerous courses including Oral Interpretation of Literature, Acting for Non-Majors, Acting 1, and Acting 2.