

PERFORMING THE ROLE OF
COUNTESS AURELIA
IN THE PLAY
THE MADWOMAN OF CHAILLOT
BY JEAN GIRADOUX
ADAPTED BY MAURICE VALENCY

By
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“We want a few mad people now. See where the sane ones have landed us.” –Mark Twain

To all those who see the world for its beauty, seek to change what is ugly, and in doing so, are considered mad.

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Abstract of Project in Lieu of Thesis Presented to
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Chair: Ralf Remshardt
Major: Theatre

The Madwoman of Chaillot by Jean Giraudoux was written in 1943 and adapted to English in 1958. I am creating the title role of the Madwoman, Countess Aurelia, at the University of Florida, directed by Timothy Altmeyer. This paper is a document of my creative process from first casting through final performance

The first portion of this document is a thorough analysis of the play: when it was written, the genre, and the importance of the piece and the playwright to dramatic literature. This also includes historical and cultural context of the original text as well as the modern adaptation. Next is an account of the acting process, including the physical and vocal challenges of the play and the process of creating the character in the rehearsal period. Finally, the paper chronicles the performance itself, further challenges posed, accomplishments, and faculty and peer reviews.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

It is rare to have an experience of a lifetime. An experience when all elements come into play in a symbiotic relationship, paving the path for discovery and personal growth. It is through the role of Countess Aurelia, the title role, in *The Madwoman of Chaillet* that I had that experience. It was fortuitous that I was cast in this role for my thesis project. It was a time to access all that I have learned in three years as a graduate student at the University of Florida. It is also through the direction of Timothy Altmeyer, who asked me to take an adventure into uncharted territory, that I was able to allow myself to try a new approach and lose myself in the character, a character whose nature allowed me to create and play, implementing all the techniques I have learned while at the University of Florida. The Madwoman was an opportunity to bring myself into the character, own her point of view, and enjoy what it means to play again.

CHAPTER 2 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The Play

In the opening moments of *The Madwoman of Chaillet* (originally *La Folle de Chaillet*, 1943 by Jean Giraudoux), under the direction of Timothy Altmeyer, an antique radio plays music or a news report circa World War II. A door opens and a nearly naked and half-dazed woman appears. After some thought, with finger poised in the air, she begins to turn the dial on the radio as if by magic, and the audience hears the sounds that move the environment forward in time, ending with the contemporary pop song by Lady Gaga, “Bad Romance.” This song underscores a sequence of movements that sets up the environment of the Café de l’Alma where bohemian

characters such as a juggler, a deaf-mute, a flower girl, and a poet enjoy all the beauty the Parisian district of Chaillot has to offer.

However, this day is unique in that there is a President, Baron and Broker in their midst discussing big business. This ultimately sets up the Giraudoux's social juxtaposition of ideal and reality. An addition of a Prospector completes the "machine of greed," as he informs the other businessmen that he has discovered that the Chaillot has an untapped vein of oil. He has been denied a drilling permit and has planted a bomb in the permit office across the Seine, as a tactic to persuade them to grant him his wish to drill.

The Madwoman, Countess Aurelia enters, looking for leftover bones and gizzards to feed to her cats. The President is disgusted by her and begins a rant regarding how the world needs to be ridded of people who respect beauty, love, and the mad, as that respect would be the businessmen's demise. The clock strikes twelve and much to the men's surprise, the bomb does not detonate. Pierre, the young man who was to deliver the bomb, because the Prospector is blackmailing him, has attempted to drown himself in the river because he did not have the unethical backbone to execute the task. Thus begins the rising action.

After the men disperse in fear of being caught, Pierre reveals the men's plan to the Madwoman of Chaillot. At first, as an idealist, she does not believe these men have any power and that life is too beautiful to be changed by their efforts. The Ragpicker, an earth-bound character who is somewhat a counterpoint to the more ethereal nature of the Madwoman, provides a persuasive argument. She concedes to the citizen's concerns for the protection of the city and devises a plan to exterminate all the wicked of the world.

The second half of the play consists of Madwoman's attempts to be just in the matter – does she have the right to destroy these wicked men? She gathers the other madwomen from

surrounding districts of Paris— Constance, Gabrielle, and Josephine - to deliberate. The solution is a trial. All gather in the cellar of her home to conduct a mock trial, with the Ragpicker standing in for the accused. The wicked men are ultimately found guilty and the Madwoman is allowed to exterminate them. The men arrive, and after concluding that they are in fact greedy and destructive, she sends them all into the stairs below the cellar and shuts the door so that they are never to return. Once they have “evaporated,” the citizens return to inform her that the world is changed, the voices of animal and plant spirits thank her, and life and humanity has been restored to its perfect beauty.

The Playwright

Jean Giraudoux was born in 1882, a period in France known as *La Belle Epoque* (The Beautiful Era), which is apropos, considering his love for the ideal and beautiful in the world. Giraudoux grew up in a small town called Bellac in the district of Limousin and was considered an awkward yet apt student and could be considered the epitome of Frenchman. It wasn't until he traveled to Germany at the age of 22 in his third year as a student of German literature that his outlook on life drastically changed. “While the French could analyze and classify with rational rigor the facts, feelings, or concepts constantly surging in them or around them, the Germans were able, through instinctive, intuitive insight, to establish an intimate, almost mystic, communication with the core of the universe” (Lemaitre 9). His time in Germany seemed to have a truly profound effect on his way of thinking, as if courting a new love. Unfortunately, World War I would blemish this romance and World War II would sever it altogether.

Continuing his travels as far afield as America (studying at Harvard), Giraudoux became less and less concerned with academia and more interested in living the life of a bohemian. In

order to live this lifestyle he began his preliminary career as a writer – short stories, reviews and sketches, etc. After somewhat unsuccessful attempts and nearing the age of thirty, he entered the Ecole des Sciences Politiques. Following the footsteps of his father, he decided to focus on becoming a French diplomat. But Giraudoux continued to write - even during the outbreak of World War I when serving in the military and while suffering illness and injury. “At the end of the war, Giraudoux was still smiling appreciatively at the wonderful gifts of life” (Lemaitre 18).

Near this time, Giraudoux also courted the woman who would eventually become his wife, Suzanne Boland. Her personality and their relationship can be reflected in many of his works – from the younger tender years of love to the horrible marital conflicts in the latter years. They had one son not long after marriage, Jean-Pierre. Giraudoux continued his diplomatic career as well as ventures as a novelist. At the progress of the Nazi party and the nearing of World War II, Giraudoux wrote *Siegfried et le Limousin* to reflect the French reaction to the changing world. Against his expectations, this novel would be adapted and become his first, and highly successful play.

Giraudoux met Louis Jouvet, a successful actor and producer, in 1927 and was asked by him if he would write a script of *Siegfried* for the stage. This adaptation and extremely well received play set Giraudoux on his path as a dramatist. Because of his optimistic outlook on life, proven intellect, experience as a diplomat, and demonstrated authorship, Giraudoux was poised to become the most important playwright of French drama during the period. His relationship with Jouvet was one of kindred spirits and they would find themselves to be lasting collaborators.

The Period

In 1943, at the completion of *La Folle de Chaillot*, France had been occupied by Germany for approximately three years. Now aged 61, Giraudoux had seen France prosper in “The Beautiful Age” and defeat German forces in “The Great War,” but was now observing the melancholy mood of an oppressed people. “In France, a succession of nauseating scandals – the Marthe Hanau affair, the Oustric affair, the Stavisky affair – revealed the extent of the venality and corruption prevailing in high French political circles. Until the end of his life, he [Giraudoux] remained haunted by the depths of foulness and evil into which he had peered” (Lemaitre 27). France had made no real efforts to re-establish political ties with Germany after the first war and was now in some ways paying the price of revenge from an old nemesis.

Giraudoux was also a man who had passed his midlife crisis in his fifties but could not repair the damage it had created in his relationship with his wife. He had moved into the Hotel Castille in Paris where he completed *La Folle* along with three other works. Although the plays were considered very different from one another, they seemed to reflect the various sides of himself and stages in his life, as though he knew death was imminent and was seeking solitude to reflect through his art.

La Folle de Chaillot was the most political of the four plays he wrote while at the Hotel Castille. It was not only a reflection of how the French were reacting to the invasion and occupation, but a hopeful vision of how they would work towards a post-war life. Giraudoux never saw it produced, having died in 1944. “On the title page Giraudoux had written, ‘This play was presented for the first time on the 15th October, 1945, by Louis Jouvet, at the Theatre de l’Athenee.’ The prediction was off by only two months and two days, and the splendid Jouvet premiere, subsidized by the state, signaled the postwar rebirth of French theater” (Cohen 117).

Style, Theme, and Symbolism

Giraudoux's style is so full of ambiguity, and the dramatic structure is so often elusive, that it could only be given its own term, coined for its uniqueness, as Giralducian. To defy naturalism, Giraudoux brought back the theatricality and fantasy that French playwrights were experimenting with, but that the French theatre had been lacking of late. To create more complex literature, he mated the fantastical settings with real human conditions and their conflicts, thus creating a dialectic form. His plays have been categorized as sexual, metaphysical or political (Cohen vii), and although he has been called an absurdist, he is better categorized as an absurd existentialist. His style was successful where Antonin Artaud's Theater of Cruelty had failed, "From existentialism to absurdity is but a step, and the theater of cruelty just a step beyond that. Existentialism recognizes the absurd and tries to find ways to meet it. Absurdity accepts the absurd and submits to it. Cruelty adopts the absurd and becomes its blood brother. Cruelty uses absurdity as a weapon" (Cohen 151).

The Madwoman of Chaillet is classified as one of his political plays and best demonstrates how he uses the tragedy of absurdity in a comedic way by mixing allegory with satire. The theme of good versus evil is evident in a nearly black-and-white fashion. The café dwellers and their bohemian love for life is opposed by the wicked businessmen who want to destroy the city for monetary gain. Poised in the middle is the Madwoman, Countess Aurelia. She is an idealist who is most likely considered "mad" because of her ability to stay true to her ideals, those rooted in the past, ideas of love, beauty, and honor for the universe and its ever-unfolding mysteries. But she is faced with the reality of the evil and what must be done to rid the world of its desire to destroy. Thus begins the dialectic argument "If you could rid the world of

all its evil – would you have the right to do it? In the act of destroying, do you not become the thing that you destroy? ”

The Madwoman feels no need to be merciful in her plight, but wants to be just. The first action she takes is by calling her friends, madwomen from other districts in Paris, to assist in rationalizing her course of action. Countesses Constance and Gabrielle are the first to arrive. They, like Aurelia have their own conventions for ignoring the ugliness of the world in order to maintain their illusions of beauty. Constance uses the memory of her dead dog Dickie, and Gabrielle uses her imaginary friends. Much to Aurelia’s dismay, she cannot convince her friends to wake up to the realization of man’s destruction of the world, and that they must do something to set it right. Here, Giraudoux demonstrates there can be opposition between like-minded people as well as the difficulty in changing another’s perspective. Countess Josephine is the last to arrive and proves the most valuable, as she represents the law and justice and most likely, the democratic nature of the French republic, whether it supports Aurelia’s demands or not. Her solution is a mock trial.

The device of the trial is two-fold. Firstly, as a call to action through the convention of plot, the trial is a reminder to the audience that it is the people (not one person) who must decide what is right or wrong in this case, and whether a verdict of guilty is truly just. In order to make a difference in the world (rather than sitting idly by and complaining about it), they can take legal matters into their own hands. Secondly, as dramatic convention, the trial serves as the play-within-a-play, the theatricalism that Giraudoux was known to implement in his plays. There are “theatrical allusions which serve to remind the spectator that he is in a theater watching a play – not peeping in on a domestic quarrel” (Cohen, 146). By reminding the audience that they are an

audience, in a self-conscious way, they can also be reminded of what or whom they represent, and their ultimate responsibility as citizens when faced with real events.

Once the trial is over, and a verdict of guilty has been established, giving Countess Aurelia full authority to carry out the sentence of extermination, Pierre returns. Aurelia plays a game with him, calling him Adolphe (one of her own conventions of a lost, unresolved love). The positioning of this scene minutes before the arrival of the wicked is perhaps done to redeem Aurelia of her past regrets, so that she may truly be pure of heart when condemning the men to the bowels of the earth. Adolphe is not a common French name and can only be understood to represent the most famous “Adolphe” in history – Adolf Hitler. At this turning point in the play, one could either interpret the Countess as a proxy for Jean Giraudoux and Adolphe as Germany, alluding to the battered relationship and betrayal Giraudoux felt in regards to his first love, or perhaps more representative of all that is love and beauty in opposition to that which destroys. Aurelia knows that Adolphe has always loved her, but needs to hear him say it. Pierre offers this gift of make-believe, and Aurelia seems to be restored to the purity she so desperately seeks.

Pierre then reveals to Aurelia that he has found her missing boa when he removed the mirror from her wardrobe door, as per her request. With much excitement she asks if he found her child’s sewing kit as well, to which he replies “no.” This suggests that the evil of the world stole pieces of her soul and quietly returned them to fool her, but did not return her innocence, her youth that she misses the most, that which the child’s sewing kit symbolizes. She also speaks of the golden thimble and how she would never use another, and realizing what reality is stealing from her idealism, her fingers are badly scarred. When the wicked men arrive, she gives them one last chance, asking if they brought with them the child’s sewing kit or the gold thimble.

When their response is “no,” she reaches her final decision and sends the men downstairs into the cellar and locks the door behind them forever.

The café dwellers return to inform her that the world has changed –that pigeons can fly, the air is pure, and the land that once could not grow grass where the evil men tread is now producing fresh green grass. Here, Giraudoux’s device of using the metaphysical is applied as the voices of the “friends of animals, plants, friendship, etc.” as they thank the Countess for her gift. Even the Adolphe Bertauts of the world appear to ask for forgiveness, claiming they are no longer frightened, and ask for her hand in marriage. She replies, “Too late! Too late! Too late! Too late!” (Valency 65). Pierre and Irma ask her what she means. She provides three specific dates that she believed gave the Adolphe Bertauts of the world time to do something, say something, but they did nothing. “Through the character of Adolphe Bertaut, Giraudoux shows his own love affair with Germany, his disgust at being jilted in world War One and being stolen from (the melon) at Alsace-Lorraine, and his final and complete repudiation of the German nation in World War Two” (Cohen 122). These dates represent specific markers in unresolvable French-Germanic relations that finally caused Giraudoux to give up faith on restoring the relationship to what it once was.

Despite the Madwoman’s loss, regret, and wounds, she knows there is hope. She turns to Irma and Pierre, the lovers, insisting they kiss and convincing them that if they let a single moment pass, Pierre will become old and Irma will become the next madwoman in Paris. Giraudoux seems to communicate that even when justice has been served, the world may continue to be lost in hatred unless we recognize the moments that we can seize in order to restore beauty. In this case, it is a kiss that Irma and Pierre must seize, allowing them not to be afraid of love, and rather embrace it and nurture it. If they can, the world will be happy. “These

values are not frequently spoken for in literature, not at least in good literature, for they smack of the obvious and the oversentimental. Yet Giraudoux laced them with such brilliant measures of irony, wit, and savage understatement that they have become quite palatable” (Cohen 128).

Context

In 1943, it is evident that Giraudoux was reflecting on the current social and political atmosphere in France. But within this reflection was a plea to the French for a return to idealism, to hold true to all that the culture was known for – art, poetry, love, beauty, and freedom. It was a petition for how life could be in the post-war years. The audience responded. “It ran for nearly three hundred successive performances and carried Giraudoux posthumously to the pinnacle of his fame as a dramatist” (Lemaitre 142). Despite some critics’ disapproval of a more elementary approach to his writing style, the success of the play proved that the French were in agreement with Giraudoux’s vision.

To put this work into a contemporary context, specifically in 2011 for a primarily young American audience, the script underwent some necessary “dusting off.” The director eliminated specific historical dates and locations, added more colloquial language, and streamlined the content to get to the meat of the matter or universal themes – the effects of greed, reality coexisting with idealism, proactive solutions, love and revenge and the costs of both. In an academic atmosphere, the script was most likely chosen to accommodate a large body of student actors, but also for its topical sense, as we are a culture obsessed with oil and capitalism, greed. The irony is that we as a culture are often in denial of this obsession with greed, much like the character of the Madwoman. The allegorical nature of the play can still be teaching tool, even though at times we may seem too far gone to return to a state of grace.

Although America is a mere child compared to the nearly 1600-year old history of France, comparisons can be made between the countries in context of the play's message. Both France and America were countries founded on a set of principles and ideas where a man is to be his own master and freedom is to be protected. Now, over two hundred years later, America is no stranger to fraud, greed, and enslavement to capitalism. The Gulf War, The Iraq War, the War in Afghanistan (and now the Libyan conflict) are all examples of conflicts that were launched ostensibly as campaigns to eliminate terrorists and preserve freedom but many believe to be products of the world's fight for oil. A series of bank frauds beginning in 2008 that have yet to be resolved (led by such brokers as Bernie Madoff) sent the country into a state of financial ruin comparable to the Great Depression of the 1930s. But perhaps the greatest lesson from Giraudoux for this generation is to be cautious of the machine. Giraudoux was concerned with the advent of technology brought to France by the Germans, and its hostility to conservation. "Though often thought of as a liberal (as he would probably be called in America), Giraudoux was a staunch conservative. He wished to conserve the trees, conserve the simplicity of rural life, and conserve the importance of love, nostalgia, beauty, and communality" (Cohen 127). Implementing this concept of conserving into his writing, one could consider Giraudoux a prophet. He may have unwittingly predicted the current environmental effects of the Industrial Revolution not only on the human condition, but also on nature itself. This concept of conservation is one that the current generation still has the power to use towards protecting the planet and the human spirit.

CHAPTER 3 THE PROCESS

Casting and Concept

Originally, this play was to be directed by professor Yanci Bukovec. He decided to hold casting auditions among the graduate students who had been selected to perform their thesis project roles for this production. Over the next several months leading up to the rehearsal process, I read the Giraudoux adaptation by Maurice Valency to prepare. Although I did not intend to memorize lines, as it can often interrupt the process and the director's concept, I wanted to become as familiar with the script as possible. As the rehearsal period neared, it was decided that professor Timothy Altmeyer would take over the direction of the production. When I returned to campus at the beginning of the spring semester after having been away for summer employment and a fall internship, it became apparent that although the design concept had been established, the direction would change and the script would undergo some major revisions. As I had discussions with professor Altmeyer, it became apparent that I needed to stop reading the Valency script and be patient while waiting for the edits.

Professor Altmeyer was very specific about the actor's approach to this production. As a cast, we were asked to recognize the entertainment value of the piece. It is a satire about what it is to be human and a citizen of the world and about this hunger, this greed at all costs that is killing our society. It is a war between what is essential and what is not. Although it is a satire, the actors were asked to avoid "commenting" on the characters or the situations. Our portrayals of the characters were to be exaggerations, yet rooted in truth and realism – as if we were convincing cartoons. It is a lesson that throughout the dark times, love and comedy is what

brings us hope, and it should be informed by the outrage over the absurdity of the human condition.

The first sound the audience hears at the beginning of the play is a World War II is a famous radio address by French General Charles de Gaulle, an appeal to the French people to resist the German occupation. The radio then changes to Edith Piaf's "La Vie en Rose," a song that describes a lover's ability to view the world with "rose colored glasses." When the Madwoman enters, she begins to change the radio, searching for a song that will inspire her to begin the day. The music skips forward in time, sampling French music through eras such as disco and rap, finally ending with Lady Gaga's "Bad Romance." Other Lady Gaga songs, "Poker Face" (for when the characters prepare for Act II) and "Just Dance" (the final song leading into curtain call that acknowledges the fun and celebration of the theatre) were selected to echo the themes of the play. A current cultural icon, her music is revolutionary and she is known to be a bit of madwoman herself. Her music is fun, lively, and ludicrous yet there is a seriousness underlying it.

Scenically, in the pre-show before Act I begins, the walls were covered in cloth and the stage was bare except for the antique radio. When the radio began to play, there was a bright sharp shaft of light cutting across the space from house left to the radio, the light that draws the madwoman into the room. Once the music played, actors carrying café chairs and stools entered to set the stage in a choreographed dance. During this time, the madwoman, having found her motivation, tears down the cloth from the walls, revealing curved, slatted, metal walls alluding to transparency. In the final moments leading into Act I, she picks up the radio, takes in the scene, and exits upstage. There was no intermission, so the actors changed the scenery into Act II in another choreographed movement piece. The metal walls were fixed, but the scenery changed

from café to a living area – bar, stools, couch, coffee table, and two chairs. However, these pieces were molded out of mannequin parts to further reflect the non-realism of the cellar location; this was an old room where men (“wicked plastics”) have gone to die before. Another interesting aspect of the cellar set is that the room “responded” to characters. Shelves jutted out from the walls when needed – to set drinks down on, present needed items, etc.

The costuming was as eccentric as the other elements in the design concept. Actors were costumed in extravagant variations on contemporary fashion. The café citizens were more flamboyant in color and cut than their businessmen counterparts, but the most outrageous of all were the madwomen. Each madwoman had elements that made a nod to the original 1943 design concept for the characters – a parasol for Constance, a corset for Gabrielle, double French hair rolls for Josephine, and a Victorian blouse for Aurelia.

Characterization

One of my greatest challenges was eliminating my personal habits that can interfere with the process and limit me as an actor. In regards to the psychophysical relationship, I am an actor who tends to work with the external approach. I determine the character’s posture, how she will physically respond to the atmosphere, and what her voice sounds like, often before rehearsals begin. The director, Tim Altmeyer, has commented about a “tightness” he has seen in my acting over the past three years. Working with Mr. Altmeyer in more than one setting challenged me to approach the process differently, to explore first the internal approach and then let the physical and vocal choices evolve from discovery, rather than predetermine them.

In attempts to “get out of my own way,” I was met with anxiety of expectations from the director and peers. Being the Madwoman, I was concerned people expected me to come in to the

process with a certain set of “physical ticks” or a dialect to demonstrate the character’s eccentricities. But this habit of demonstrating may be from where the perceived “tightness” stemmed. I decided rather to trust a new, altered process and that the eccentricities of the character would become her choices rather than actor impediments.

Although the Stanislavski system was the technique I used for a foundation in my acting for this process, another technique proved worthy of exploration to assist in this new approach. The method has been termed “Practical Esthetics,” created from the work of the Atlantic Theatre company founded by David Mamet and William H. Macy, “Mamet refined Meisner by demonstrating the difference between what the *character* wants – the character’s objective – and what the *actor* wants – the actor’s objective” (Luckhurst and Veltman 63).” This is not to say that I denied the character’s objective, but instead, as a modification, I made the character’s objective my own – as Mr. Altmeyer has stated on numerous occasions, “to own the character’s point of view.”

It proved to be a liberating concept, bringing the value of myself to the character. It rid me of actor guilt that I have had in the past. A great amount of focus is required to be completely in the character’s emotional state at all times. When dual consciousness distracted me from that concentration, I felt that I had failed in some way. That may have been a reason that I often demonstrated a particular state of mind, rather than owning it, melding my own intent with the character’s intent. In hindsight, it may have also been a safety mechanism so that I did not have to indulge in any scenarios that may be too similar to those in my own life. However, using the Practical Esthetics’ “as if” (similar to Stanislavski’s “Magic If” or Meisner’s “Emotional Recall”) allowed me to be vulnerable to the scenarios and provided for more truthful moment-to-moment work.

Although Countess Aurelia is an allegorical character, an actor can't play a metaphor, an actor can only play action. This is another reason Practical Esthetics served me well, as it was difficult and somewhat unnecessary to create a backstory for her or provide given circumstances, other than those supplied in the script. She begins as a somewhat one dimensional character. She is a metaphor for all that is beautiful in the world. She views life through rose-colored glasses and finds splendor in all that is around her. It is when the Ragpicker informs her that the world has changed, and that the people are different and no longer happy, that she becomes more complex. It is through this opposition that a more complex character began to develop, dualistic and dialectic in nature.

Developing the exaggerated aspects of Countess Aurelia, although challenging, was the most fun. Under the director's advice, I looked to the British television sitcom, *Absolutely Fabulous*, for an understanding of the style he was attempting to create. For inspiration on women to emulate, I looked to filmed interviews with Katherine Hepburn (the actress who played the title role in the 1969 film), Bettie Davis, and Bette Midler as real life "madwomen," women who are a bit eccentric in physical or vocal modalities or even in their outlook on life, going against the social norms. I also brought the more exuberant side of my own self into the process of developing the character. When the world changes for Aurelia, and a specific scene called for more serious tones or nuanced work, I introduced the "as if," drawing from events in my own life to create a deeper emotional investment.

One particular example of this is the scene between Countess Aurelia and Pierre. Although my "as if" changed quite often in the rehearsal period, it was always rooted in the fear of abandonment which can be very true for many people. It has been stated that the relationship may be symbolic of historical relations, but this scene calls for something playable, actions

rooted in truth. In this scene, Pierre provides a gift for Aurelia by playing Adolphe and acting out a scenario that Aurelia had always wanted but was never able to experience. The result is the redemption of her spirit. I used my own personal need for resolving conflict, relationships, and abandonment to create a realistic scenario.

Another technique I found helpful to emphasize her dialectic nature was the modified use of Michael Chekhov's Psychological Gesture. "Each individual psychological state is always a combination of thoughts (or Images), Feelings, and Will-Impulses. Therefore the psychological state in which the actor finds his character gives him the full opportunity to see it as the Action (or Gesture) with appropriate Qualities and Images" (Chekhov 59-60). My use of psychological gesture was somewhat happenstance. Many times throughout the rehearsal process, I found myself contracting at my center, rounding in the spine as if I had the physical gesture of being sick at my stomach. This was usually connected to the state of frustration in either not succeeding in my objective or in reality, searching for the exact text. Conversely, when the objective had been achieved, and the obstacle of a person, an idea, or searching for the text had been overcome, the gesture became a release in the spine, with the body moving upward and forward as if I had an idea or inspiration come to me. After a few weeks of rehearsal and a run through of the play for professors and crew, it was suggested that I consider a physical gesture that would embody the character and allow the audience to understand the character's state throughout the entirety of the play due to her complex, dialectic journey. I began to heighten or diminish this psychological gesture according to the psychological state in specific moments throughout the play.

Vocal Explorations

Having studied a Lessac-based vocal approach, the role of Countess Aurelia was a perfect opportunity for me to apply numerous aspects of the technique, due to her eccentric nature.

Arthur Lessac defines NRGs as “an acronym that stands for ‘energy’ and refers to pure, harmonic, intrinsic, vitalistic motion as opposed to movement” (Lessac 273). The foundation of the Lessac approach asks the actor to indulge in these vocal, tonal, and consonant NRGs in the text, depending on the character’s nature, intent, or clues found within the textual structure, such as Shakespeare’s use of alliteration or onomatopoeia. This concept goes beyond the mere diction of the character, but asks the actor to kinesthetically explore the language. In the introductory paragraph of his book, *The Use and Training of the Human Voice*, Arthur Lessac states, “Someone once wrote: ‘Like all true art, theatre should enhance the desire, and strengthen the capacity – to live!’ (3). What a perfect method to use, as Countess Aurelia even exclaims within the play, “they can’t kill me because I have no desire to die” (Valency 26).

By surrendering to the idea of kinesthetically feeling the words, per Lessac’s theory, as if I were playing the music of the text, matching each consonant to its respective orchestral instrument, I experienced a fuller, richer character. This was perhaps psychophysical symbiosis at its best. If I indulged in the structure of the text (using the external approach first), vocal eccentricities informed the intent. If I indulged in the intent (using the internal approach first), vocal eccentricities developed organically. It was a constant shifting, much like the psychological gesture. The shifting demands of the character and the Giralducian plot structure also demanded a more diluted approach. The more tender or sobering moments that needed to be rooted solely in actor truth were the moments I let go of that indulgence. The voice was still fully

supported, but specific NRGs were lightly played. It was necessary in those moments to let go of the character's choice or tactic to be eccentric, but instead to understand the truth.

One of the biggest challenges was the language itself. An adaptation in English by Maurice Valency, written in 1958 from the original text in French and then "dusted off" again for 2011, created some tricky phrasing. It was also a challenge simply due the nature of how Countess Aurelia phrases text. Many statements or arguments were repeated to various characters, but the wording was always slightly varied. I am an actor who prefers to get off book immediately, working towards word-perfect dialogue from the first rehearsal. When experimenting with this new approach, I still managed to get off book early, but I had memorized the thoughts, the intents of the character, plot, and units of action. This proved to be challenging as we neared technical rehearsals. I had ingrained the paraphrasing so well in my memory, it was difficult to become word-perfect. I had even gone to the extent of complaining that there was no rhythm to the language, only to realize that it was my rephrasing that was at fault.

Physical Explorations

I have often been called an "overthinker" in my acting. I have a need to intellectualize and overanalyze every moment of the character and the script. This may be another attribute to the aforementioned "tightness" observed in my acting. I decided that for this role, I would "get out of my head and into my body." The first action I utilized was the actor warm-up exercises from Kelly McEvenue's book, *The Actor and The Alexander Technique*. "The warm-up is a gentle procedure of connecting breath and movement to engage the actor's body into a state of readiness to act. The goal of the warm-up is to open the joints, and to free the musculature

through a series of specific extensions and contractions of the muscles and joints as a way of waking and alerting the body to the possibilities of movement” (37-38).

Typically, my warm-ups before rehearsals consist of vocal exercises, a brief meditation, and some physical stretching. Over the course of the last semester, I began to entertain new ideas being introduced into Alexander Technique classes and became interested in the use of the spine. This led me to realize that the stretching I did before rehearsals was more athletic in nature and made me feel two-dimensional. Incorporating the spine and the concept of unraveling from the core used in stage combat, made me feel more like a three-dimensional actor. This new warm-up was approximately twenty minutes of redirecting the awareness of the use of the body. The sequence began with lying on my back in semi-supine position and executing awareness similar to that achieved in constructive rest. “[Constructive rest] releases tension and allows the skeleton and the organs to rest, supported by the ground” (Olsen 13). The next step was rolling on the floor and connecting to the breath. After taking time to lengthen the spine, I began to bring myself to a standing position. Working from the top of my head to the arch of my foot, or sometimes in reverse order, I began to focus on areas of the body. Rather than isolating areas, such as shoulder rolls, I would use an undulating movement so that even though the point of the shoulder joint initiated the movement, the rest of the body followed and the movement became a full body experience.

The use of this warm-up and the use of contact improvisational techniques not only helped me to succeed in opening my dynamic field of awareness and create a greater state of readiness to listen and respond in the moment, but it helped manifest the psychological gesture. I found that by thinking of myself as a three-dimensional being (both as the actor and as the character), a fluidity or undulation was created in my movement. In the gesture, it defined where

the character's center lies, particularly in those dialectic moments. When contracting, my center was in my stomach or gut and when expanding, the point of contact moved to my heart and released from there. Whether heightened or softened, this exploration in movement polished and refined the psychological gesture and character essence.

At the beginning of the play, Countess Aurelia comes out "nearly naked" when preparing for the day, has one costume for Act I and a complete costume change for Act II.

Chronologically, as the actor, the first challenge for me was to be comfortable in my underwear as it can cause the actor to feel vulnerable at such close proximity to the audience, thinking they may be scrutinizing the actor's body rather than the character's intent. The next challenge was to make the first costume change. Although there was an interval of approximately twenty minutes, there was great detail to makeup and wig as well. The biggest technical challenge of all was to do a full costume change into Act II, as there was less than five minutes to transition into hose, dress, jewelry, etc. As an actor in character, some of the challenge was to inhibit a desire to fight the costume because of its extravagance, and rather let the costume add to the eccentricity of the madwoman and "do the work for me."

One of the greatest challenges in the physical explorations stemmed from the use of high-heeled shoes. With the exception of the prologue, I was costumed in four-inch heels. Standing at 5'11", and adorned with a wig and hat, this added to the statuesque physicality of the character. I may have reached a height of 6'3", making me the tallest person in the cast. Although I am comfortable working in high heels, there were many physical choices I made that led me to re-evaluate my alignment and use of Alexander Technique in these shoes from moment to moment.

The first step I took after the character's shoes were introduced in rehearsals was the use of an exercise called "identifying landmarks for alignment" from *BodyStories: A Guide to*

Experiential Anatomy by Andrea Olsen. The exercise asks the participant to visualize lines within the body, much like geometry, starting from the occipital joint within the cranium. I was then led through the body, heightening the awareness from joint to joint, ending at the second toe. This helped me to experientially understand the natural alignment of the body. The next step was to execute this while wearing the heels. I immediately noticed the shift that needed to occur. The lift through the arch and heels prompted me to review the exercise, but noting the new sense of physical alignment in space. This gave me a good physical starting point on which to base my physical explorations.

Physical actions within the play included running, dancing, spinning, bowing, etc. I found if I did not implement Primary Control from Alexander Technique or an awareness of proper alignment, I could be thrown off balance. However, the use of release, as per the Alexander Technique principle of releasing into a movement, helped to make it a character choice and encourage safety. In Alexander Technique we discussed the “startle effect” and how the body can get locked into a state of misuse if we do not release ourselves from it. An example would be rising from the bow, a greeting with the character Josephine. I found that I often became off balance and the result would be stepping forward on my right foot. Rather than getting locked into a need to counterbalance, I would allow this forward step, exhaling, and releasing it so that it became a character choice and I was able to fluidly move into the next action without getting locked into a startled pattern. This concept of release proved to be beneficial throughout much of the production due to the ever-changing moment-to-moment action and response.

CHAPTER 4 THE PRODUCTION

Performance

Over the course of rehearsals, I made great efforts to focus solely on the role of the Madwoman. I tend to overbook myself in activities and events, as I am eager to create and participate. However, for this particular production, I decided not to agree to any side projects so that I could dedicate my energies to the character and the experience. I also made very sure to stay rested, take my vitamins, exercise on a regular basis and constantly wash my hands, to avoid getting ill (as many actors did). In the end, these efforts paid off as I stayed healthy and well and my focus never faltered.

After four days of relatively smooth technical and dress rehearsals, the night of opening arrived. I planned ahead so that I was well-rested, well-fed, and had a little exercise to ensure a feeling of well-being and preparedness for the evening's performance. Despite my best attempts, much of the day, I felt as if I was "floating" or having an "out of body experience." Rather than let the feeling overwhelm me or send me into a state of anxiety, I remembered my Alexander Technique (notice, inhibit, and redirect) reminding myself to just keep breathing, trusting myself, and trusting that the preparation and the process would pay off in the end.

Before curtain, there was much excitement in the hallways and in the dressing room. Instead of getting swept up into the noise and enthusiasm exuded by my cast mates, I remained calm and focused on my routine – physical and vocal warm ups, fight call, checking of props, make up, and wardrobe. I listened to my "character playlist" I create for every production. This one consisted of Lady Gaga's music, the Beatles, and other various inspirational songs whose lyrics or music inspired me to become emotionally connected to the story. Some other artists on

the playlist included Tom Waits and Billie Holiday and song titles such as “Revolution,” “Wake Up,” “She’s Electric,” and “Don’t Look Back in Anger.” Once I had felt I had done all my preparation, I proceeded to the green room and found that I was beginning to relax, as if once I knew that everything was set, I could allow myself to play.

When I stepped on stage for the opening moments of the play, I felt I had finally woken up, and I was starting my day not only as the character, but also as the actor. It’s as if I had been wandering around all day looking for my purpose, and when I opened the door to the theatre for my entrance, all my senses were awakened - by hearing the music, seeing the radio, and smoking the cigarette, I felt I had returned to my body and mind. As “Bad Romance” began to play, the calmness I had focused on in preparing helped me to harness the energy that was building. The opening dance and furniture placement was executed sharply, and we were off and running for what proved to be a highly energetic and entertaining night of play.

Towards the middle of the run, I noticed that some challenges posed in the rehearsal period were becoming evident. My jaw was becoming very tight and my voice very tired from all of the dialogue. I counteracted this by resting my voice during the day and doing extended vocal warm ups before performance. I found exercises such as the “Silent Ah” from Alexander Technique to relax the jaw. I also found that my torso was becoming tight and my right ankle joint was becoming blocked. I discovered that one particular action in the opening dance of the performance was causing these problems. I realized that I was isolating areas rather than using full body engagement. After focusing some attention on this in warm-ups, in order to integrate new muscle memory and release the habit of misuse, the issues resolved themselves.

The individual performances throughout the run of this production varied from night to night, as is the case with theatre – one audience was more vocally responsive than another, one

night might have had more line delivery troubles than another, actors may have become more alert or lax in timing and backstage manners than others. But one aspect was consistent – we were a united cast with purpose. It was truly a gift to be a part of an ensemble that uniformly believed in what they were doing. And it was because of the direction of a man who believed in us and asked of us to have fun and find the truth in each moment. It was a reminder to us, and the audience, of why we first fell in love with theatre.

Self-Evaluation

After the final curtain of *The Madwoman of Chailot* on Sunday, March 27, I left the stage crying. This crying was a release, a kinesthetic response to the joy I felt from the performance, the sadness that I would not be able to perform the role again, and a great amount of pride for what I had accomplished. The new approach to working and the role of Countess Aurelia had freed me from standing in my own way. I felt that I had owned the character's point of view from moment to moment and that her truths nightly became my truths. Even when I had moments of being distracted from the story, becoming aware of Nichole rather than living through the character, they were brief. I did not linger in a lost joke or flubbed line but moved on to the next moment. I no longer had to use "as ifs" in performance or "demonstrate" a feeling, but I was truly living them, listening and responding to what was happening. The critical voice that often sits on my shoulder and tells me what I am doing wrong as I'm acting disappeared completely, allowing me to do my job. I felt such an ease and presence that on the last performance I often did not know what I the lines going to say until they were coming out of my mouth because I felt so attuned to the truth of the moment.

The success I felt from this different approach and from applying new sensibilities to a role was validated by the overwhelming response I received from professors and peers. Complete strangers were coming up to me with respect and admiration in their eyes to congratulate me. Some phrases I heard were “tour de force,” and “beast.” My acting students who had seen the production before delivering their final monologues added so much specificity to their work. I can only presume it was because they were able to watch what I was teaching and were able to apply it. One undergraduate acting student exclaimed that it was a very “talky” play but at no moment did he ever get bored with my performance, being entertained by Countess Aurelia and impressed that I never broke character.

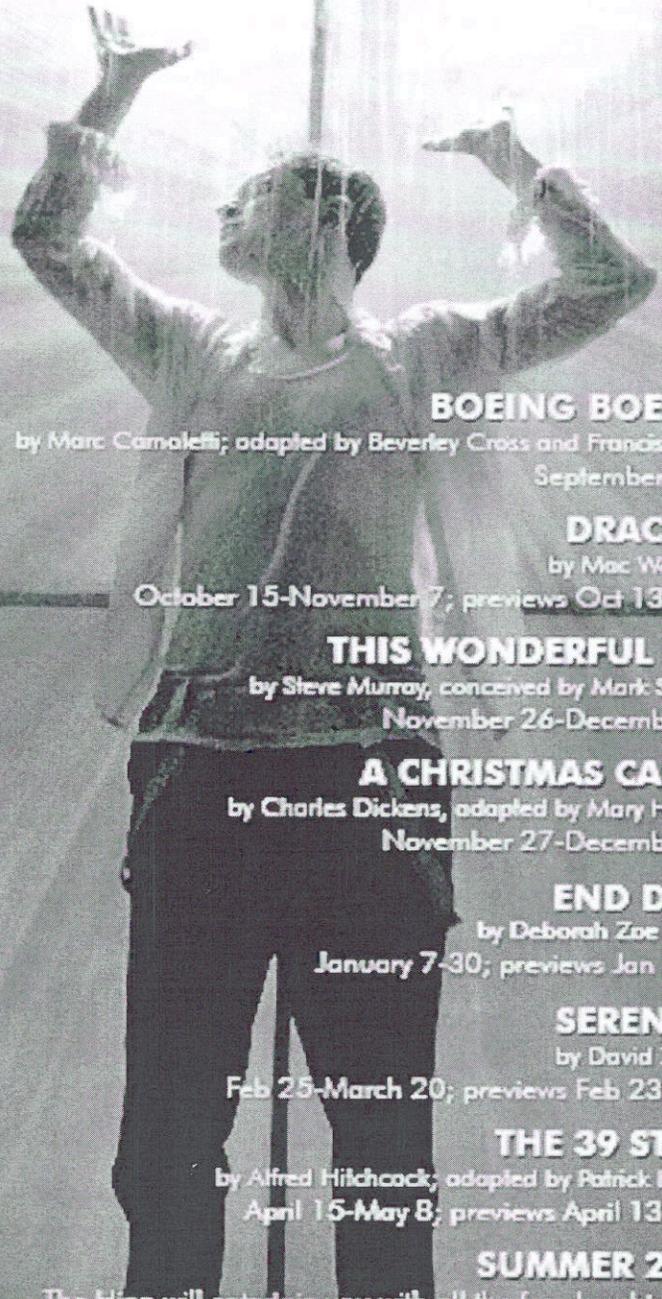
The difference of receiving the accolades for this performance was that in the past, at times, I sought the approval of peers and of the audience. When approaching this process and production, I had done this for my personal growth, my work, not for someone else. This shift in perspective allowed me to join in the celebration of how much fun the experience was - both for myself the actor, and for the audience members. I think some of this may have been an echo of how I have treated audience response in the past – seeking their approval as the character. Although I was aware of them in this performance, and understood the need to adjust my timing because they provided new information and insights through their responses, I did not seek their approval, because I was focused on the character’s intent, not the actor’s. I think that is why it may have been so successful in their eyes.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

I could not have asked for better timing with the role of Countess Aurelia. My thesis project felt like the perfect ending to my graduate work at the University of Florida. Because of working with Tim Altmeyer as the director in conjunction with work in Acting for the Camera class which provides new sensibilities for the actor (the value of finding myself in the role), and because of applying Alexander and Lessac Techniques that have been processed over three years, and because of the nature and context of the story, I was able to let go of myself and play. Post-production, I was concerned about becoming morose because I was sad to see the play end, worried about losing this new approach to my work, and afraid of forgetting the personal growth from the experience. But I believe because of its profundity, the role and the project has had such a strong influence on me, that I will carry it into my work for years to come.

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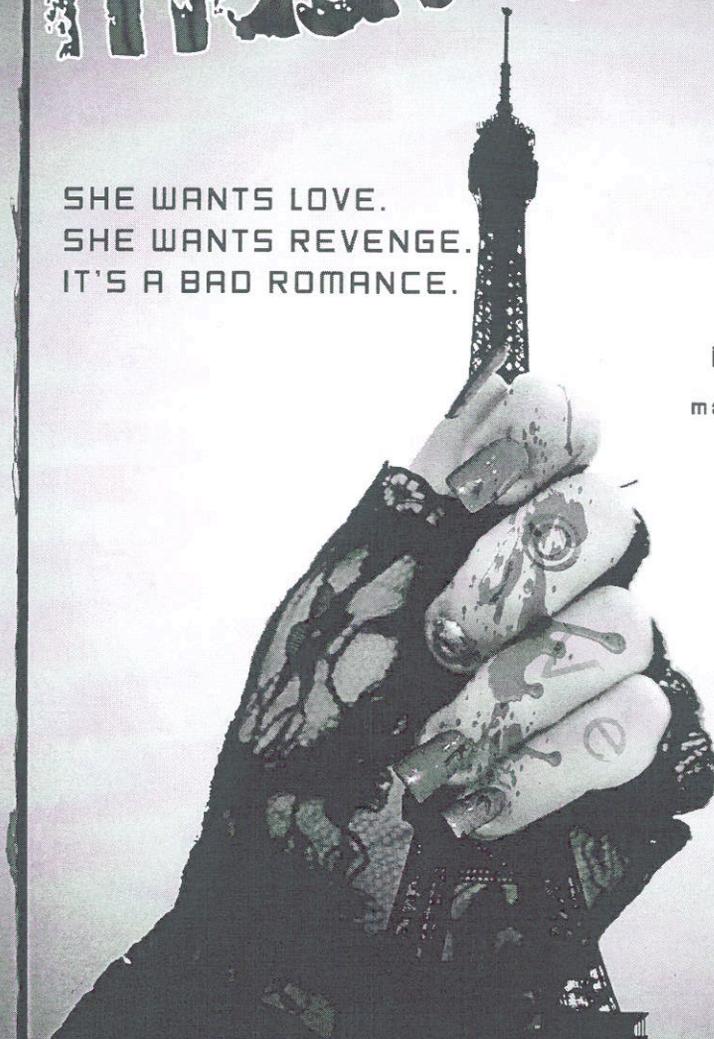
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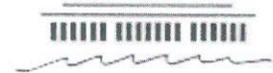
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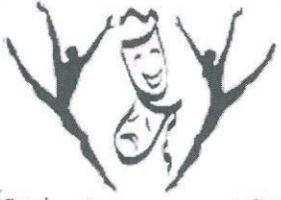
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Place: *Paris*

directors notes

Jean Giraudoux wrote *The Madwoman of Chaillet* in France in 1942 during the French Occupation. It was first produced in the months following the war to great acclaim, and was hailed as "the rebirth of French theater". In many ways, the play is a product of the war; at its center, buried in his fable, is the estrangement of France and Germany, and the "inhuman invaders" who live among Frenchmen in Paris. It is highly national and, in many ways, *about* France. But the questions that Giraudoux asks go beyond French nationalism—questions about avarice; politics; progress; moral, social and environmental responsibility; and love. These questions, posed with ridiculous humor and unapologetic righteousness to a nation ravaged and humiliated by war, are still worth pondering nearly 70 years later by a modern American culture that is strangely, presciently reflected in the imaginary world of Giraudoux's invention. Louis Jouvet, the great French actor and director who helmed the world premiere of *The Madwoman of Chaillet* in 1945, said of his good friend's plays, "Each...anticipates what is happening and is yet to happen, and warns us." *The Madwoman of Chaillet* indeed remains a warning to us—and, perhaps more importantly, a challenge.

Tim Altmeyer

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Performance
Graduate Research Professor

Staff

Todd Bedell
Tony Berry
Mary Byrd
Kate Glennon
Sarah White

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

meet the cast

Stefanie Anarumo (Deaf Mute), a first year BFA Acting candidate, is thrilled and honored to be in her first show here at UF! She would like to thank Tim, Kristin, and Kim for this amazing opportunity, her wonderful cast members for their friendship, and her family for their endless love!

Natalie Chin (Gabrielle) is a 3rd year BFA candidate who is in love with the Madness of "Madwoman!" Gainesville credits include *For Colored Girls*, *Chronophobia* and *Circle Mirror Transformation*--"Thank you, Tim for helping me grow, the Cast/Crew for being AMAZING, and my Family and Love for their never ending support.

Candace Clift (Josephine) is a third-year MFA candidate last seen as Granma in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Other UF credits: Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (here and on tour in Europe), Chorus in *Oedipus Rex*, Mrs. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* and Martha Washington in *George Washington's Boy*.

Jazmine Lynette Dinkins (The Broker) is a proud first year MFA at UF. While pursuing a professional career in dance, Jazmine fell in love with the wonderful world of ACTING! She has been featured in regional and educational productions, including *The Blu-est Eye* and *I Dream*, with actor and director Jasmine Guy.

Nick Erkelens (Dr. Jadin) is a third year BFA acting candidate who was last seen as Connie in *Grapes of Wrath*. He would like to thank Tim, the cast, and crew for making this such an "eeexcelemnnt" experience. Thanks Viejo, Mamita, Japes, and Ita for all the love. TRIPPOD.

Carson Firth (Street Juggler) is a first year Classics student that is happy to represent UF's juggling club, *Objects in Motion* by juggling in this great production. *Madwoman of Chailot* is his acting premier and he'd like to thank his friends and family.

Nichole Hamilton (The Countess) UF: *The Women* (Sylvia), *How I Learned to Drive* (Female Greek Chorus), *Cloud Nine* (Ellen/ Betty), *Pride and Prejudice* (Lady Catherine). Hippodrome: *Dracula* (Lucy), *Boeing Boeing* (Gabriella), *Dead Man's Cellphone* (Jean), *A Christmas Carol* (Mrs. Cratchit). Selected Regional:

Weathervane Playhouse - *Hairspray!* (Velma von Tussle), *Alice in Wonderland* (The Red Queen); Calaveras Rep - *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Nurse Ratched); City Lights Theatre Company - *A Few Good Men* (JoAnne Galloway); Nichole is a 3rd year MFA Acting candidate and a proud member of Actor's Equity Association. Special thanks to UF faculty for assisting me in this journey.

Amelia Harris (Constance) is a second year MFA candidate. Recent credits: *Grapes of Wrath* (Elisabeth Sandry), *A Christmas Carol* (Mrs. Dilber), *Noises Off!* (Dotty Otley/Mrs. Clackett), *In The Blood* (Amiga Gringa), *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (Player). She would like to thank Tim for reminding her that acting should be fun.

Colin Hudson (Baron/Sewer Man) is ever so excited to be performing in this production. Past credits include *Dark Play* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. He would, once again, like to thank Tim for this chance, his mother for being a mom, and all of his friends for their next-level friendship maneuvers.

Alexander Johnson (Street Singer), a 1st-year BA Theatre major, is flabbergasted at the opportunity to be apart of such an amazing production. Family, Friends, and Weezie, all I can say is thank you. [Seeking Inspiration. Seeking Falsetto. Seeking Beauty's Meadow. We Be Kings.]

Ryan Johnson-Travis (The Prospector) is a 2nd year MFA candidate and a proud graduate of Syracuse University and Fort Valley State University. *The Madwoman of Chailot* marks his 10th production at UF. "With supreme love and gratitude to my Ancestors and Chelsea. And many thanks to Tim, Kimberly, and The Crew!"

Troy McCray (Pierre), a BFA candidate, is proud to participate in this great production. He enjoyed every moment spent with this amazing cast, learning something from each individual. Some credits include most recent, *Gem of the Ocean*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Streamers*. He thanks his family/ friends for love and support!

Matt Mercurio (The Policeman) thanks Tim for his guidance and mentorship, his family for their sacrifices & support, Christina for filling his life with love & laughter, and God for an infinite amount of things. Matt hopes you continue supporting theatre & all types

Production team

Director	Tim Altmeyer
Assistant Director	Robert Martinez
Stage Manager	Martina Harte
Assistant Stage Manager	Cassie Perez
Assistant Stage Manager	Tiffany McKenzie
Scenic Designer	Anne Tully
Costume Designer	Lee Martin
Lighting Designer	Ryan Bible
Sound Designer	Jordan Reuter
Props Mistress	Caitlin Callahan
Costume Advisor	Stacey Galloway
Costume Studio Manager	Lisa Davis
Asst. Costume Studio Manager	Kate Glennon
Costume Studio Assistants	Susan Bucciero
	Lee Martin
	Erica Bascom
	Jaime Samson
	Ryan Bible
	B. Lussier
	Mike McShane
	Tim Reed
	Zak Herring
	Tony Berry
	Jovon Eberhart
	Molly Ilten
	Anne Tully
	Tim Watson
	Sarah White
Director of Operations	
Stage Crew	
Wardrobe Crew	
Poster & Program Design	Joseph Urick
House Management	Students of THE 4950

technician and designer professionally. Recent design credits: *Ice Glen*, *All in the Timing*, as well as props design for NCSF's *A Christmas Carol*. Thanks to everyone involved in MADWOMAN for making this a great piece of theatre.

Anne Tully (Scenic Design) is a first-year MFA Scenic Design student. Previous credits include *Agbedidi* (UF 2010) and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (Florida Players 2009). She also enjoys working with community and volunteer oriented theatre, and with her theatre group, the Con Artists.

Jordan Reuter (Sound Design) is a freshman microbiology major making his design debut at UF. A big thanks to B for the opportunity to work this show, and of course a giant thanks for the godsend that is Tim Altmeyer! This is a great beginning to a wonderful four years in the Theater here!

Kristin O'Neal (Choreographer) is a Visiting Assistant Professor in the SOTDance area is delighted to shake a leg with such freed up human beings! Many thanks to Tim for your trust, support, collaboration and mostly your generosity in the sharing of your creative process. It's been a great ride!

of art everywhere. www.actormattmercurio.com

Emilyann Offutt (Irma) is a recent addition to the BFA acting program and is excited to appear in her second UF production. She sends her love to her family, Chris, and friends for their love and support in her endeavors.

Cassie Perez (Asst. Stage Manager) is a junior BA Theatre Major. She is a recent transfer, and she would like to thank Tim, Kimberly, and the rest of the cast and crew for making her first UF production such a wonderful experience.

Anastasia Placido (The Waiter) is a second year BFA and feels so blessed to be part of this extravaganza! Credits include *True Genius*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Bakkhai*. Saving the world each night with this cast is an honor. "So much thanks to Tim, Kimberly, and my wonderful family." Just dance, it's gonna be OK.

Tayliz Rodriguez (The Press Agent) is a 2nd year BFA Actor last seen in *In the Blood* and *City of Angels*. She thanks Tim for his wisdom and guidance, the cast for their humility and inspiration, and God for an infinite amount of things. To Ricky, Mom, and Dad: "Los quiero mucho!!"

Stephen Ruffin (The Poet) is a first year BA candidate. FRESHMAN, CLASS OF 2014. Soooooo happy to be a part of this amazing show with this incredible cast.

"Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." -MLK

Russell Shultz (Ragpicker) is a third-year MFA candidate at UF and is performing his thesis role in *The Madwoman of Chailot*. Previous credits at UF include: *Oedipus The King* (Chorus Leader), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Mitch), *Pride and Prejudice* (Collins), *Electronic City* (Director) and George Washington in *George Washington's Boy*. Russ was also the Assistant Director on *Fool For Love* and the Assistant to the Director in *Oedipus the King*. Russ has appeared in such television shows as *Walker*, *Texas Ranger*, *Wishbone* and *Dallas-The Reunion*, as well as the film *Lackluster*.

Rhiannon Tasker (The Flower Girl) is a third year BFA acting student and is excited to be making her mainstage debut. She

was previously seen in *Note to Self* and the Florida Players production of *Pippin*. She would like to thank her friends and family as well as the cast and the lovely, Kimberly.

Wayne Willinger (The President). This role as The President represents the thesis project for Wayne's UFMFA program. Wayne has had an incredible journey here at UF and would like to thank everyone!! Some of favorite roles here at UF include: *Oedipus the King* (Cathy/Harry), Bagely in *Cloud 9*, Mr. Bennet in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Steve Hubbell in *A Street-car Named Desire* (which toured Germany and the Czech Republic). Wayne is thrilled to reprise the role of Oedipus here at UF and then on a tour of Greece. Wayne will be moving on but will be a Gator for life. Spasibo!!

Amanda Young (Mrs. President), a first year BFA Acting major, is thrilled to be making her UF debut in this production. She would like to thank her family and friends for their endless support. "This is the true joy in life, being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one."

meet the crew

Robin C. Martinez (Asst. Director) is a third year theatre major focusing on stage direction. He last directed *Art* for Florida Players 2010 fall season. He would like to thank Tim for the opportunity to work on such a wonderful project, his mother, sisters, friends and the cast. *Pecca bene, pecca saepe.*

Kimberly Wistedt (Stage Manager) is so thrilled to be stage-managing her first UF production! She's a third year Theatre B.A. major who dreams of one day pursuing a career in casting! Many thanks to Tim and the precious cast who made her job such a joy. Love to mom, dad, and sis.

Tiffany McKenzie (Asst. Stage Manager) is a third year Theater and Linguistics dual major. She thanks everyone in the cast and crew for being awesome and allowing her to be a part of their awesomeness, her parents for practically raising her to do this job, her friends for being her friends, God for everything, and Cariffany!

Ryan Bible (Lighting Design) is thrilled to be designing *Madwoman*. Ryan holds a BFA in Lighting Design and Technology from the College-Conservatory of Music at UC. Design credits: *Postcard from Morocco*, *On the Verge*, *CCM Drama's 25th Anniversary Gala*, *Regional Premier of Tan Dun's Water Passion after St. Matthew*. Associate Design credits: *Altar Boyz*, *Drood*, *Spelling Bee*, *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, and *On the Town*.

Caitlin Callahan (Properties Mistress) is ecstatic to make her properties debut with the amazing *Madwoman* cast and production team! She is a third year Production B.F.A. Previous credits include *Robots vs. Fake Robots* (Florida Players-Scenic Design), *Carousel* (RMRT-Scenic Artist), and *Susannah* (UF-Asst. Scenic).

Lee Alexander Martin (Costume Design) is a first year MFA Costume Design student, who completed his BFA in costume Design at Ole Miss. He has worked as both

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UF director adds modern edge to French play

UF faculty member Tim Altmeyer is adding a modern touch to the March 18-27 production of "The Madwoman of Chaillot," a play first done in the months following World War II.

Written amid the German occupation of France during the war, the play by Jean Giraudoux signaled the rebirth of French theater.

Staging Giraudoux's lunatic dramatic poetry with the angry, exulting heartbeat of current outrage entertainer Lady Gaga, director Altmeyer and choreographer Kristin O'Neal bring this classic French comic fable into 21st-century America.

"Through ridiculous humor and unapologetic righteousness, the questions presented to the French nation, then ravaged and humiliated by war, are still worth pondering nearly 70 years later by a modern American

culture that is strangely, presciently reflected in the imaginary world of Giraudoux's invention," Altmeyer said.

At a café in the heart of Paris, a group of powerful promoters, political and financial, scheme to unearth a vast store of oil believed to be beneath the Chaillot, with no regard for either the city or its inhabitants. Their devious plot comes to the attention of Aurelia, the Madwoman of Chaillot, who, serving as protector of her home, devises her own scheme to thwart them, enlisting her strange cadre of friends in a war of good and evil.

The fantastical, outlandish world of this updated production is realized by designers Anne Tully (scenic), Ryan Bible (lighting) and Lee Martin (costumes), and features Nichole Hamilton (Hip-

The Madwoman of Chaillot

McGuire Theatre and Dance Pavilion
Black Box Theatre

March 18-19, and March 22-26
7:30 p.m.

Matinees March 20 and 27
2 p.m.

Tickets are available through the University of Florida Box Office on the Reitz Student Union Colonnade. Tickets are \$13 for UF students, UF faculty and staff, senior citizens and \$17 for the general public.

podrome Theatre's "Dead Man's Cell Phone" and "Boeing, Boeing") in the title role.

The University of Florida College of Fine Arts School of Theatre and Dance presents "The Madwoman of Chaillot" in the Nadine McGuire Theatre and Dance Pavilion Black Box Theatre on the UF campus.

For ticket information, please call 352-392-1653 or visit the University Box Office website at <http://www.union.ufl.edu/ubo>. Tickets may also be purchased online at www.ticketmaster.com.

Director off to Broadway

Tim Altmeyer, assistant professor of acting and director of "The Madwoman of Chaillot," will leave Gainesville for Broadway



Tim Altmeyer

after the UF production opens.

Altmeyer will be the understudy for Broadway veteran Stephen Kunken in Matthew Lombardo's "High," opening April 19 at the Booth Theatre. It stars film and theater actress Kathleen Turner ("The War of the Roses," "Romancing the Stone").

He has a master's degree in fine arts from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and has acted extensively in theater, including Broadway and off-Broadway. Altmeyer will return to UF in the fall after a research leave.

Survey starts March 15

Undergraduate Gators will again have a chance to speak up and improve the college experience with a 20-minute questionnaire called the 2011 Student Experience in the Research University, or SERU, survey.

The survey opens March 15. Students can access it on ISIS. Students eligible to take the survey include all currently enrolled undergraduate students and class of 2015 freshmen ages 18 and over.

Show comes to Phillips

The 2010-2011 national tour of "Spring Awakening" comes to Gainesville March 22 for one performance at the Phillips Center for Performing Arts.

The eight-time Tony Award-winning Broadway musical features "The most gorgeous Broadway score this decade," according to Entertainment Weekly.

Tickets are on sale now and start at \$40. They can be purchased at the Phillips Center Box Office, University Box office at the Reitz Student Union and all Ticketmaster outlets. Online purchases can be made at www.ticketmaster.com. To charge by phone call 352-392-2787 or toll-free in Florida at 800-905-2787. Group orders for 10 or more may be placed by calling 352-392-2787.

InsideUF is produced by the University Relations Office for faculty, staff and students.
Editor - Ron Wayne

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UF Calendar of Events

For a listing of events, or to submit an event to the calendar, click "UF Calendar" at www.insideuf.ufl.edu

Photo by Ani Collier



Prologue: Countess Aurelia.

The Madwoman of Chaillot

March 18-27, 2011

University of Florida

Nadine McGuire Black Box



Act I: Aurelia, Officer, Pierre, Deaf-Mute.
"Then I am armed. I am strong. I am ready to begin again."



Act II: Aurelia and Sewer Man.
"Nasdrovie."



Act II: Constance, Aurelia, Gabrielle. "And I don't mean Dickie."



Act II: Countess Aurelia and Pierre. "Why did you leave me Adolphe Bertaut?"

Act II: Countess Aurelia and Wicked Men. "Watch your step."



Act II: Pierre and Irma with Company. "Bravo. If only you'd had the courage to do that years ago, what a different person I would be today."

Appendix D – Criticism

April 8, 2011

Dear Nichole,

I thought your poise and glamour were used well by the director. The part required strength, crazy comedy and the ability to drive the play forward and bring it to its very serious conclusion.

It's a major role, and considering the difficult and wild style that the director chose, I thought you pulled it off magnificently.

Best regards,
David Young, Ph.D.
Graduate Research Professor

April 5, 2011

"As noted above, the cast ranged from young actors with little experience to a third-year MFA student with Equity standing. Consequently, the execution of the parts also varied. Nicole Hamilton (Equity actor and MFA student) excelled as Countess Aurelia, the Madwoman of Chaillot. She created a thoroughly eccentric physicalization for the role, one that developed organically from her. Every move she made emanated from within and never seemed "a choice" the result, clearly, of a hard-working talent. Another actor who found a truthful ground for the caricature-approach to the play was Colin Hudson, both as the Baron and the Sewer Man. In part, the truthfulness in his performance came from his understanding that something was at stake, and, as with Hamilton, he created a physical and vocal "mask" that in a Brechtian sort of way commented on the character without losing a moment-to-moment believability."

David Frankel
University of South Florida
Kennedy Center Theatre Festival Respondent

April 3, 2011

I am please to provide feedback to you regarding your performance as the lead character in Madwoman of Challiot at the University of Florida's School of Theatre and Dance in the spring of 2011. I must qualify my perspective as I am not formally trained as a performer, but I am a thirty-year veteran of theatre as a professional designer and academic. I have played a direct or indirect part on over 500 productions from coast to coast in academia and the profession.

I cannot offer you a critique on technical points of acting and specific elements that

others more skilled in the craft could, however I feel qualified to offer your a perspective as a knowledgeable audience member and theatre professional and hope you will find my comments useful.

First, this seems to be a role that requires a delicate balance between a serious look at the human condition and the moral behavior of humans while being wrapped in a comic facade within a pseudo-carnival atmosphere. How an actor is to achieve believability in such a context is quite frankly a mystery to me, its some kind of magical alchemy that must be manifest. I must tell you that in my imagination I had an image of what this character would look like and how she might behave. I can say that not only did your performance match with the character I had imagined but you brought her to life in the most vibrant and believable way. It's often said that casting in 90% of it, in this case I do think you were miraculously a perfect fit for this role, but you also gave it such life, vitality and variation.

Two of the things that I often find lacking in performance are emotion, and a modulated performance from moment to moment. On the first point, for a audience to be invested in the character the actor has to develop an emotional landscape for the audience to invest in, you did this for me, without being precious, or pretentious, never over done, but never weak either. I just wanted to enjoy your engagement, you entertained me, but when you wanted to make me feel, and care you did, in a most natural way. On the second point, often I find performances that are what I call a "flat line" no peaks and valleys in emotion, intellect of character transformation. While this character does not appear to go through major transformations, your energy level did vary, high to low like a good symphony with its emotional high and low points, you made music with your character and I was carried away by it. You were able to transform yourself physically, vocally and made excellent use of your costume and makeup. Your voice seemed to be derived directly from a character, and matched with your eyes, eye make-up and facial control it was hard to take my eyes off of you, when you were speaking you could not be ignored. Your presence demanded attention and kept me transfixed, which helped me comprehend the story. What more could we expect from a performance!

BRAVO!
Stan Kaye

March 31, 2011

Nichole,
Congratulations!!!

As per your request I think you are an actor with stellar power, magnitude and insight. I trust you will do very well if you persist! I look forward to your continued blessings and success!

P. S. I wish we had done a musical together.

Fondly,
Tony Mata

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Biographical Sketch

Nichole Hamilton earned a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre at the University of Montevallo in Birmingham Alabama. She went on to work in Atlanta Georgia for various community theatres and independent film companies. After attending Unified Professional Theatre Auditions in Memphis Tennessee in 2000, Nichole was given the opportunity to work in the Bay Area of California for The California Theatre Center performing locally and touring regionally in children's productions. After fulfilling her contract, Nichole stayed in the Bay Area and continued to freelance as an actor, director, stage manager, and theatre instructor for numerous companies. Some of her favorite roles include Nurse Ratched in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* at Calaveras Repertory Theatre, Lieutenant Commander JoAnne Galloway in *A Few Good Men* at City Lights Theatre Company, and Pam in *Santos y Santos* written and directed by award winning Octavio Solis. Some other memorable opportunities include directing *Humble Boy* for Dragon Productions and *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* (both recipients of WAVE Magazine's "Outstanding Production" awards), stage managing for Festival Opera productions of *Carmen*, *Tosca*, *Don Giovanni*, scenic and properties design for *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* and *Enchanted April* at Bus Barn Theatre and serving as Director of Educational Outreach at Peninsula Youth Theatre.

While at the University of Florida, Nichole played Sylvia (*The Women*), Female Greek Chorus (*How I Learned to Drive*), Lady de Bourgh (*Pride and Prejudice*), Betty/Ellen (*Cloud Nine*). While in Gainesville, Nichole worked extensively with The Hippodrome Theatre: Jean (*Dead Man's Cellphone*), Gabriella (*Boeing Boeing*), Lucy (*Dracula*), Mrs. Bob Cratchit (*A Christmas Carol*). To further her desire for community outreach, Nichole worked with Playback Theatre (an improvisational troupe that visits patients at Shands hospital) co-founded Fight Club

(a current UF club for stage combat) worked on the devised piece *Where Can We Run?* (based on an Arts in Healthcare trip to Rwanda) and directed Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* (independently performed at local venues). She also had the pleasure of teaching numerous undergraduate students in courses of Theatre Appreciation, Oral Interpretation, Acting for Non Majors, and Acting I. Nichole is a proud member of Actor's Equity Association.