

SOLDIERING ON:  
PLAYING THE ROLE OF A.J.  
IN ELLEN MCLAUGHLIN'S  
*AJAX IN IRAQ*

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A PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS PRESENTED TO THE COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS  
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
2013

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank the faculty of the University of Florida's School of Theatre and Dance for their help, guidance, and support, and for making me fall in love with this craft over and over. Special thanks to Kathy Sarra for her listening ear, for helping me find a new body, and for her patience; to Tiza Garland for challenging me physically and mentally as an actor, and for her always astute advice; and to Tim Altmeyer for teaching me what it is to truly act.

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Summary of Performance Option in Lieu of Thesis  
Presented to the College of Fine Arts of the University of Florida  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Fine Arts

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May 2013

Chair: Ralf Remshardt  
Major: Theatre

Published in 2011, Ellen McLaughlin's *Ajax in Iraq* conflates the story of the mythical Greek warrior Ajax, and A.J., a modern American female soldier in Iraq. This contemporary tragedy with Greek roots was produced at the University of Florida in November of 2012, and directed by Dr. David Young. In this production, I played the role of A.J. This paper documents my creative process through rehearsals and production.

This document is broken into three main sections, bookended by an introduction and conclusion. The first section is a textual analysis of the script, which provides a context and summary of the text, and a discussion of its development by the playwright. The second section is a documentation of my creative process in the rehearsal period, focusing specifically on the use of physicality to access the character, but also touching on other rehearsal explorations. The third section is an evaluation and discussion of the role in performance.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I have always placed great importance on the intellectual side of acting. As an actor, I tend to think a lot about my roles—dissecting the script for clues about my character, piecing together my character’s psyche and how it influences character actions, and creating a backstory to support the events of the script. This thinking has been both a blessing and a curse in my time as a graduate student at UF—providing me with depth to my characterizations, but also hindering me in my task to work moment-to-moment as an actor. Sometimes my thinking about a character does not stop when I go onstage, as it should—and this occasionally prevents me from honestly interacting with my fellow actors. I wanted my experience with my role in *Ajax in Iraq* to be different. I swore to myself that I would not over-think this role, and that I would pursue honest interactions and existence onstage, and not let my “actor brain” get in the way. Despite that vow, I was surprised at just how different my process for *Ajax in Iraq* turned out to be.

This process I pursued was not wholly non-intellectual—in fact, I started from a very intellectual place, which allowed me, in rehearsal, to begin to explore the character through other means. I researched my role, discovered and solidified character objectives, and analyzed my character’s role in the play, and then used that information during physical explorations in and out of rehearsal. I discovered a number of physical ‘keys’ for my character that allowed me to access the character’s mental state quickly, effectively, and reliably without a lot of thinking. In fact these keys did not require me to

think at all—apart from pursuing my objective—and launched me into the world of the play on a level that was very immediate, present, and full-bodied.

I believe that physically accessing my character allowed me to create a performance that was grounded in truth rather than thought, and that effectively embodied my character and her role within *Ajax in Iraq*.

## CHAPTER TWO: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

### **The Play**

Before the first words of the play are spoken, McLaughlin asks that the actor playing Gertrude Bell, the “noted English Arabist” (McLaughlin, *Ajax in Iraq* 4), create a sort of topographical map of Iraq onstage, using sand and a rake, arbitrarily assigning the country’s modern boundaries. This preshow action introduces audiences to the idea that Iraq, as we know it, is essentially a “made-up place” (McLaughlin, *Ajax* 15). The placement of this episode at the very beginning of the play also suggests that these boundaries have something to do with the problems that follow—and indeed, many of the current conflicts in Iraq stem from the borders Bell helped to establish in the early 1900s.

At the beginning of the play, a series of sounds emanate from Ajax’s tent onstage, and Athena, goddess of wisdom and war, addresses the audience, commenting on the human curiosity to see violence, and introducing Ajax as both the maker of the sounds and the subject of the play.

A modern chorus of six soldiers takes the stage. They discuss their various experiences with the war in Iraq: how they feel about what they have been asked to do, how their mission in Iraq has changed, what they experience in the battlefield and on return home from active duty. The final line of the segment seems to be the crux of their various messages: “Nothing makes sense anymore” (McLaughlin, *Ajax* 13).

After the soldiers exit, Gertrude Bell and a US Army Captain enter. They exist in separate worlds; as they are from separate eras, they do not actually interact onstage.

Bell describes how the borders of Iraq were drawn, while under British mandate, by men who knew essentially nothing about the place they were carving up. She reveals that the Iraqis were promised an independent Arab government, but instead received a British government with Arab advisors. Interspersed with Bell's recollections from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Captain details how the American government rushed into the war with Iraq in 2003 without thinking about what would happen after Saddam Hussein was removed from power. He ruefully describes how American forces were made to “justify doing the thing after we'd done it” (McLaughlin, *Ajax* 15) by attempting to create, and transition Iraq into, a functioning democratic government. Both characters come to the same conclusion, that Iraq cannot effectively be ruled by outsiders who understand nothing of the country—and that Iraq will ultimately shake off its occupiers to return to what it was before.

Connie Mangus, a female soldier, takes the stage. She explains that for a woman in the army, emotion is unacceptable—if someone is having a hard time, they are expected to just “suck it up.” She offers a little foreshadowing by remarking that she did not see how badly some of her fellow soldiers were doing, but takes responsibility for her actions toward them. The scene becomes a poker game between Mangus and several other female soldiers: Sickles, Abrams, and Rebo. A.J., another female soldier, is sleeping off to the side. The poker players discuss fellow soldiers and poke fun at one another, but ultimately, the conversation shifts to the sleeping A.J. The soldiers remark that she sleeps all the time—which she never used to do. The soldiers return to the poker game and wake A.J up with a loud exchange. A.J. asks for the time, and discovers that she has been asleep for fourteen hours. The soldiers are worried about

her, but she blows them off, and leaves to take a shower. Again, their conversation shifts to A.J.: Sickles mentions that A.J. has chewed all her nails off, and reveals that A.J. was the only woman in the unit for months. The other soldiers are worried about her, but Sickles ends the discussion. Charles and Pisoni, two male soldiers, enter; they tease the women about their poker game. Pisoni asks where A.J. is, and both Charles and Pisoni remark that she is acting strangely by sleeping all the time. Charles tells the others that he and A.J. used to go outside and smoke together, but have not done so lately, and that a few nights ago he discovered A.J. banging her head against the wall where they used to stand and smoke. While Charles is speaking, A.J. enters unseen, and startles the soldiers by finishing Charles' story. A.J. chastises them for gossiping, and goes back to sleep. The men leave, and the women abandon the poker game.

Athena returns and recounts part of the story of the Trojan war. She talks about how Achilles killed the Trojan hero, Hector, and then the Trojan prince, Paris killed Achilles. Ajax was supposed to receive Achilles' armor, and the Greeks had a contest for it—but the armor went to Odysseus instead of Ajax. Ajax gets very angry, and plots to kill the Greek commanders, Agamemnon and Menelaus, and torture Odysseus, but before he can, Athena drives him crazy. He falls on a flock of sheep, goats, and cows (the Greek food source), and kills them all, thinking that he is exacting revenge on the generals and Odysseus. During this speech, Odysseus enters. Athena asks him what he is doing, and he responds that he is tracking the man who fell upon the Greek herds, and believes it to be Ajax. Athena confirms his suspicions, and explains what she has done to Odysseus. She calls Ajax out of his tent so Odysseus can see him. Before returning to his tent, the crazed Ajax tells Athena that he is torturing Odysseus. Athena

cautions Odysseus that he must take care not to anger the gods, lest he end up like Ajax. During this scene, A.J. is onstage, cleaning her rifle.

Pisoni and Charles return to their quarters where the Sergeant is listening to a Garth Brooks recording. The men complain about his choice of music, and the Sergeant asks them why they are in such a bad mood. The men tell him that they have had a bad experience with the female soldiers, and the Sergeant tells them that it is because they do not know how to talk to the women. He tells them that he is having sex with one of the women, but will not reveal her name. Pisoni and Charles worry that it is command rape—but the Sergeant denies it.

A.J. awakens in her barracks, and she sneaks off to the Sergeant. In the near darkness, she tells him that she wants to stop what is going on between them. The Sergeant dismisses it, telling her that she wants it, and that she drives him crazy. She begs him to stop, and he tries to overpower her using his rank. Here, for the first time, McLaughlin begins to paint a parallel between Ajax and A.J.: both face a sort of betrayal from a commanding officer. Ajax does not receive Achilles' armor, as was expected, because Odysseus (and Athena) rigged the contest that would have won him the armor and a higher position in the Greek army. A.J.'s Sergeant abuses his rank to take advantage of A.J. sexually and she cannot do anything to stop him, because he outranks her, and she must obey his commands.

Athena returns and introduces the chorus, asking the audience what Ajax's comrades must think of the man who brought them there, now that the news is out that he is crazy. The Greek chorus appears and contemplates going into Ajax's tent, but

they realize that Tecmessa, Ajax's war bride, must be in the tent with him, and surely watched him torture and kill the animals.

A Patient and Therapist enter. The Therapist questions the female Patient about her husband, a soldier who has returned from active duty overseas. The Patient reveals that her husband has not been the same since he came home: he refuses to sleep with her, he is armed, and he does not trust himself with the children. As she speaks, Tecmessa crawls out of Ajax's tent. Tecmessa tells the chorus that Ajax has lost his mind. She begs the Chorus to speak to him, and call him back to his senses. The Patient tells the Therapist that she would be unsurprised if her husband hurt himself. Ajax cries out from within the tent, and Tecmessa rushes back into the tent to him. McLaughlin uses the counterpoint of these two stories to both advance the plot and call attention to the plight of the soldier once he (or she) has returned from service. Both women long for the return of their 'old' mate, the one uncorrupted by the violence and horrors of war.

Athena returns and talks about human cruelty, how it grows quietly inside a person, until it is full-blown—making a person capable of doing horrible things. She cautions the audience to remember that very little separates them from that person. During this speech, A.J is onstage having a nightmare: she wakes up with a gasp.

In the dark, two male voices are heard having an argument. The First Man in the Dark believes the Second Man in the Dark is mad at him, and the Second Man confirms that. He questions the First Man's actions concerning a man the First Man interrogated. It is assumed that the First Man killed or harmed this informant after he divulged his

information. The First Man denies that he did anything wrong, and ends the conversation with the Second Man.

Athena returns, she gives proof as to why Ajax was crazy: he killed the animals in the dark. Ajax was not religious—but the one time he did pray was when Zeus darkened the battlefield. Ajax prayed for light, so that he may see his enemies, and his enemies may see him when they fought.

The stage lights go green, and three soldiers appear. They are wearing night-vision goggles, or NOGs. The soldiers all talk about a dream that they have had, where they are moving through a flock of sheep at night, and begin to attack the sheep – first, with the butts of their rifles, and then by shooting them. The NOG soldiers express an unwillingness to stop killing the sheep, and an awareness of the magnitude of what they are doing, even though they know they are dreaming. This episode provides a parallel between the livestock killing that Ajax has done, and foreshadows A.J.'s slaughter of sheep later in the play.

Mangus appears, and tells the audience about a mission A.J. went out on, during a particularly bad time of the war. A.J. was the driver for her team, which was going house to house looking for insurgents. While two members of her team were inside the house, an explosion went off, and someone began firing on her vehicle. All the other members of her team were killed, but A.J. braved sniper fire and more explosions to retrieve all the bodies from inside the house. Mangus remarks that no one in the unit had ever done anything like that before, and that when A.J. returns to base, the Sergeant called her into his office. Mangus often serves as a 'messenger' for the

modern storyline, and this monologue is perhaps the best example of how McLaughlin uses the modern character of Mangus in a classical way.

We see A.J. report to the Sergeant's office. He orders her to come to him, and when she does, he chokes her. She asserts that she deserves better, but he denies her, instead ordering her to drop her pants. When she refuses and bolts for the door, he rapes her and leaves. A.J. invokes Kali, the Hindu goddess of death and time in a ritual chant, asking the goddess to give her power. Led by A.J., the cast performs a Maori haka, or war dance.

Tecmessa reveals Ajax to the Chorus. He rues his actions: because of them, his once impressive reputation is now in tatters. He asks the Chorus to kill him. A.J. appears, covered in blood. Mangus arrives and reveals that A.J. has killed a whole flock of sheep. A.J. tells Mangus that she thought the sheep were someone else, and that she does not know or understand how it happened. Ajax asks Tecmessa where their son is, and Tecmessa tells him that she sent him away when Ajax was killing the animals because she was afraid Ajax would hurt him. A.J. contemplates suicide, and so does Ajax. Tecmessa urges Ajax to reconsider, reminding him of her attachment to him, and his responsibility toward her and their son. He brushes these things aside. A.J. asks Mangus to help her to die, or at least escape, and Mangus refuses. Sirens are heard, and Mangus warns A.J. that the MP's are approaching to arrest her. A.J. gives Mangus a picture of her son and asks Mangus to tell the boy that she was carrying the picture. Mangus agrees, and A.J. goes off with the MP's. Ajax tells Tecmessa to give their son to Teucer, Ajax's brother. This episode is meant to show the strong parallels between Ajax and A.J.: both characters, and both storylines share the stage, and it seems as

though Ajax is speaking A.J.'s subtext, and vice-versa. The scene works quite well on paper, but presents several large challenges for the stage, and specifically for the actor.

The Greek chorus appears. It confronts the audience, asking them if they remember why they sent soldiers off to war. The Chorus talks about the reality of soldiers in combat—they are made to face danger day after day, and can only dream of peace, while another world away, their countrymen go about their daily lives, safe and free. Ajax appears and tells the Chorus that he is going away to wash to blood off of himself and bury his sword. He asks the Chorus to tell his brother, Teucer, that he is on his way home.

Athena poses a question to the audience: Why does anyone fight? A soldier, Debbie, asks the same question of the audience, and tells them of the many different answers she's received—none of which make much sense. Athena says that the reason soldiers fight is because the soldiers next to them are fighting, a sentiment Debbie echoes.

Fletcher, Judy and Larry, representatives of the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans, come onstage and offer statistics about homelessness among veterans to the audience. They assert that support of the troops should not stop once the troops come home—in fact, that is when they need the most support. Larry describes how he became a drunk when he returned from active duty, and Fletcher talks about how the center got started. Teucer enters, looking for Ajax. The Chorus tells him that Ajax has gone and Teucer reveals to them that Ajax had been cursed by

Athena, and by sunset the curse will wear off. Tecmessa realizes that Ajax has gone off to kill himself. She, Teucer and the Chorus mobilize to find him.

Ajax and A.J. appear together, he with his sword, and she with an M-16. They bid goodbye to the beautiful things that they thought they were protecting, but jointly discover these things were actually protecting them. Ajax and A.J. talk as one person, completing each other's thoughts, and in this moment, the two seem to become one character: both ancient and modern, male and female, the universal victim of human cruelty and war. After this poetic self-eulogy, they kill themselves together.

Mangus tells the audience that A.J. only had a few more weeks left on her tour. The unit conducts a funeral for A.J. Athena tells the audience that after Ajax has killed himself, Menelaus and Agamemnon do not want to give him a proper burial, and Teucer argues with them. It is Odysseus who finally persuades the commanders to give Ajax the burial he deserves. At A.J.'s funeral, an angry Sickles denounces A.J. and her suicide, but Pisoni argues that they, her brothers and sisters in arms, are responsible for her suicide, because they did not take care of her better. He asks the unit to honor her memory. McLaughlin has included a number of mirrored characters and moments in *Ajax in Iraq* (Ajax and A.J., the slaughter of the animals) and in this moment, Pisoni reveals himself as a mirror for Odysseus. Just as Odysseus argued for Ajax's honorable burial, Pisoni defends A.J.'s honor to her brothers and sisters in arms.

Mangus tells the audience that the officers assigned to notify A.J.'s sister of her death had a hard time delivering the message because A.J.'s sister would not let them in. It was A.J.'s little son who brought them in the back door. Mangus tells the audience

that when her tour is over, she is going to go meet A.J.'s son. The play ends on that hopeful image. What happens to the sons of Ajax and A.J.? Do they end up suffering the same fate as their ill-fated parent? Only if we let them, McLaughlin seems to indicate. Mangus could not save A.J., but perhaps she can 'save' A.J.'s son, and can protect him in a way she could not protect A.J. The moral then, is that human responsibility and compassion can prevent another such tragedy.

*Ajax in Iraq* is written in an episodic style that is reminiscent of the Brechtian epic, and is a sort of hybridization of the modern and Greek styles. It is ambitious, and I ultimately wonder if this decision to mash together two different styles is as effective as McLaughlin wished it to be: as the differing approaches sometimes seem discordant and rarely unify effectively. I have grown to love the play, and yes, some passages of it are powerful and incredibly beautiful, but at times, I wished that McLaughlin had chosen to handle the storytelling differently.

### **Context**

*Ajax in Iraq* was developed by Ellen McLaughlin after she and the American Repertory Theatre/Moscow Art Theatre School Institute at Harvard received a grant from the Theatre Communications Group and the National Endowment for the Arts to write a new play for the Institute class of 2009 (McLaughlin, *Ajax* 7). She proposed a play that dealt with the war in Iraq because, as she remarked in an online interview, "it just seemed impossible not to address the war, as we moved into yet another year of it and there was no end in sight" (Szymkowicz). This would not be the first time McLaughlin addressed the war in Iraq in her plays: her adaptations of *Lysistrata* and

*The Persians* were a direct response to the invasion of Iraq, and her *Oedipus* was inspired by the American ideas of identity and responsibility during the War in Iraq and the Bush administration (McLaughlin, *The Greek Plays* 10). McLaughlin wanted to work closely with the graduate students of the institute as artists, and the nature of the material allowed perhaps an even closer interaction.

I told them that it seemed to me that the current war is their war rather than my war in the sense that my generation is essentially sending their generation to war. I talked about the Vietnam War as being the war that had formed my political sensibility as this war would form theirs. Since their relationship to the war is so much more immediate than mine, I wanted to know what they had to say about it and what it meant to them and I would work with the material they generated. (Szymkowicz)

McLaughlin asked that the students prepare a series of presentations for her and Scott Zigler, the director of the project: the first was to be a theatrical treatment of primary source material, and the second a theatrical treatment based on interviews the students collected. (Szymkowicz) The students were encouraged to pursue their own interests—the pieces did not have to relate to the Iraq war specifically, but war in general. These pieces were presented in the fall of 2008 and through dance, scenes and monologues, and performance art explored subjects such as World War II, Vietnam, Korean comfort women, foreign policy, video games used for military recruitment, civil war letters and soldiers' blog. (McLaughlin. *Ajax* 8).

In the following, McLaughlin and Zigler paired the students off to collaborate on new pieces they would research together. After presenting these new pieces, the students were asked to pursue certain issues, and combine with others to make larger collaborations. One of these collaborations ended with a Maori dance piece, which ultimately would make its way into *Ajax in Iraq* (Szymkowicz). Of the themes that emerged, the American soldiers' experiences while on tour and after coming home; women in war; combat trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder; and the mythology of warfare were the most significant. The group also focused on homelessness among veterans, sexual assault on female soldiers, and suicide rates within the military (McLaughlin, *Ajax* 8).

Armed with and inspired by these central issues and themes, McLaughlin began her own research, and chose Sophocles' *Ajax* as the structural basis for the piece.

It [*Ajax in Iraq*] finally took the form of a direct response to the material the students had brought in, addressing their issues but never quoting directly from their work. It is also an adaptation of the Sophocles text, using that ancient play as a means to reflect on and augment the contemporary story. (Szymkowicz)

This idea of adapting a Greek text to address modern issues is not new to McLaughlin. The majority of her plays have been adaptations, or versions (as she does not read Greek) of Greek drama (McLaughlin, *Greek* 9).

I'd like to think that in writing these plays I'm doing something not wholly unrelated to what the great tragedians were doing. Each ancient play was a retelling of a myth, a variation on a story that was familiar to the audience. That

familiarity with the basic material, which modern audiences experience to a lesser extent, is vital to the way the plays work on us. The stories already have a claim on us just as we have a claim on the stories. They belong to no one and to everyone, just as they always have. (McLaughlin, *Greek* 11)

What is perhaps most important to McLaughlin is the way in which these plays are able to use familiar myths to access big issues: death, human suffering, man's relationship to the gods and the universe, and what it means to be human. McLaughlin believes that this is not something unique to the ancient Greeks.

I think we are still finding a bearable way of contemplating the unbearable truth of our times by working with a common mythology. We toy with the stories, come up with variations that suit our needs, but that doesn't make much difference to the basic strength of the raw material we are working with. Everyone finds its use for these stories. But the stories will never cease to be relevant. (McLaughlin, *Greek* 14)

For McLaughlin, the Greek 'stories' are the most relevant stories for audiences right now. Tony Kushner ventures this explanation as to why, in his introduction to McLaughlin's *The Greek Plays*:

E.H. Carr describes the march of history as serpentine. Remote periods suddenly loom close to the present as the march of time snakes on. We are in a moment when classical antiquity feels proximate, and those aspects of human life which have not changed much since the time of the great Athenian dramatists are of particular importance to us now. (Kushner 8)

And one of the largest aspects of human life that has remained a constant since the days of the ancient Greeks is the reality of war, which is perhaps why war figures so prominently in McLaughlin's work. Tony Kushner remarks that "all her plays have addressed, with horror and deep fascination, the subject of violence, of war" (Kushner 7). And perhaps this preoccupation with war is inherent within the Greek source material because, after all, McLaughlin notes, it was written by veterans, for veterans (McLaughlin, *Greek* 13).

The war that figures most prominently in both the Greek drama and McLaughlin's work is the Trojan War. For the Greeks, the Trojan War was the War of Myth: somewhat abstract, something removed enough to allow them to consider the concept of war outside of current politics. It was their vehicle for addressing and discussing war in the public sphere, the shared myth that allowed for both ownership of the story, and for deeper understanding and consideration of the issues raised. It was an excellent medium for the Greek consideration of the truths of war, so why not use it as a medium for a more modern consideration? It already *is*, McLaughlin argues, for "[w]henver Western civilization has contemplated war as a concept, since the beginning of our cultural and literary history we have thought about the Trojan War" (McLaughlin, *Greek* 11). She believes that the Trojan War operates as the template for our modern notions of war, and teaches us four important lessons:

1. Wars are profligate in woe, lengthy and vastly destructive.
2. The *casus belli* can hardly be said to justify the consequent slaughter and suffering.
3. Nobody wins.

4. The glory of war is a questionable concept at best.

(McLaughlin, *Greek* 13)

It is an illuminating argument that all modern war is seen through the lens of the great mythical war of the Greeks, and there is no doubt that McLaughlin saw the striking parallels between the war in Iraq and the Trojan War. For whatever reason, she did not unite the two wars within a dramatic work until *Ajax in Iraq*—but within that work, the lessons of the Trojan War reveal, in startling relief, the realities of the war in Iraq. By uniting these two wars, one old and one new, McLaughlin is able to transcend time. *Ajax in Iraq* is not just a play about two wars, but about all War. Through shared myth comes human truth.

The play is unquestionably modern, but McLaughlin chooses to utilize a number of Greek conventions in her storytelling: the Greek characters speak in an elevated, poetic style; there is a Chorus, both Greek and Modern, and sometimes an intriguing conflation of both, that comments on the action; the violence (except for the rape) occurs offstage and is reported to the audience via messenger (for instance, Athena tells us of Ajax's slaughter of animals, Mangus talks about A.J.'s heroism, reveals that A.J. has killed the sheep, and confirms A.J.'s suicide). The overall style of the piece is also very Greek, relying heavily on language, appealing to an audience's sense of reason as well as their emotion.

*Ajax in Iraq* is very definitely a tragedy—not necessarily in the strict Aristotelian sense of the word, but in the broader contemporary sense. The play's two heroes, Ajax and his modern mirror A.J., fall victim to cruelty. Their actions are understandable in the

light of their context: Ajax is betrayed by his gods and his countrymen and does not get the title he should receive—and in his anger, Athena drives him to madness and his own ruin. A.J. is betrayed by her superior and her fellow soldiers, who fail to recognize her suffering, and repeated abuses drive her to her mental breaking point and suicide. Fate is not really a factor here. McLaughlin seems to indicate that these deaths can and could be avoided. Hers is a message of change—not of the powerlessness in the face of destiny. The stories of Ajax/A.J. and their contemporaries are presented to the audience as a catalyst for action: these are people that can and should be protected.

*Ajax in Iraq* was first performed by the Flux Theatre Ensemble in New York City in June of 2011. Several updates were made to the script (e.g., acknowledging the death of Osama bin Laden) to reflect events that happened in the war in the two years since McLaughlin originally wrote the piece. Anita Gates of the *New York Times* called the production “fervent” and “valiant” and calls the play a “notable addition” to McLaughlin’s body of work. The *Backstage* review was much less complimentary, calling McLaughlin’s script a “theatrical misfire.” “Rather than building on and informing each other, the two stories get in each other’s way, derailing momentum, and leaving us with little insight beyond war is very bad” (Johnson).

## CHAPTER THREE: THE PROCESS

### **Pre-Rehearsal Work: The Mental Foundation**

*Ajax in Iraq* was selected for my thesis project last March, and shortly after Dr. Young told me that I would be playing A.J., I began to research the play and the role. I admit, I was a little worried about the part, as it was very different from anything I had played before, and I fretted about whether I would be able to do it justice. A.J. seemed very different from me, and I had a hard time finding a way into the role.

One of the first actions I took was to meet with Binh “Jack” Nguyen—a School of Theatre and Dance student who had served in the US Army in Iraq several years ago. I asked him about his day-to-day life while deployed, and he was very open in his responses about what he did, how he felt and what life was like while he was serving in Iraq. He talked very specifically about identity, and how his identity as a person changed while he served. He no longer was Jack or Binh when he was in Iraq, he was Nguyen: his soldier self, who was very different from the man I knew from the theatre hallway. He told me that every morning he would look in the mirror and say, “I could die today,” and accepted that as a real possibility in his daily existence. This concept made a big impact on me as I began to discover A.J.: she was indeed a mother, but she was also a soldier. It struck me then that A.J. was a very different person in Iraq than she had been in her life back home, and that the A.J. seen in the play is a product of her circumstances—an identity formed both by and for her situation. I felt that there was a correlation here for me, as an actor. I create ‘identities’ or ‘personas’ to fit a particular theatrical situation,

and soon I would create one to embody A.J. This was an important hand-hold for me: the very first similarity I felt and found with my character.

Jack also brought me a film to watch, a documentary about a US Army outpost in Afghanistan called *Restrepo*. The film showed the strange paradox of the soldier's life: the long days and hours of inaction and boredom, and the short, intense bursts of violence and danger. The documentary also showed the fierce brotherhood and love the soldiers had for one another and provided me with a number of images that I would call on later as I developed A.J.'s back-story and life in Iraq.

Initially, Dr. Young had wanted me to serve as dramaturg for *Ajax in Iraq*, so I spent the summer before my final semester researching the events of the play and its historical background. I knew very little about Iraq's geography, history, and culture, so that was the starting point for my research, and from there, I branched off to explore other pertinent events such as the War in Iraq, as well as the American presence in Iraq over the last few decades. I created an interactive document that provided background information on Iraqi history and the War in Iraq, as well as various other characters or elements of the production, with the intent to distribute it to the cast once rehearsals began. This research provided me valuable insight into the world of the play, and allowed me to better understand and appreciate the issues raised and addressed by McLaughlin. I became sort of an expert on *Ajax in Iraq*, and this familiarity with the script would ultimately help me in my characterization by providing me with the contextual framework upon which I would build.

Over the summer, I also reread Michael Chekhov's *On the Technique of Acting*. In the afterword, Mala Powers talks about how Chekhov first started to find his character by asking, "Is this predominantly a 'Thinking' character, a 'Feeling' character, or a 'Will' character?" (Chekhov 160). I asked myself this question of A.J. and decided, after consulting the text, that she was a strongly 'Will'-centered character. A.J. has a strong need to escape what is around her—which is illustrated by her constant desire to sleep and her willingness to volunteer for dangerous missions. These tasks, in their own way, prevent her from thinking or feeling anything about her current situation, and allow her to avoid the emotions and thoughts she does not want to confront. A.J.'s feelings, her overwhelming rage and pain, are what cause her to slaughter the animals, and the only thing keeping her feelings in check at the beginning of the play is her Will, her unwillingness to feel or face them. That Will is also what leads her to suicide: a very permanent escape from the Sergeant, from War, and from the shame of what she has done.

This need to escape is A.J.'s super-objective during the play. With this action identified, I went through the play to discover A.J.'s essential action in each scene. *The Practical Handbook for the Actor* defines action as "the physical pursuance of a specific goal," calling it the "main building block of an actor's technique because it is the one thing you can consistently *do* onstage." (Bruder 13) I knew that playing A.J. would demand a high degree of emotion, but I also knew, that as an actor, I could not start with emotion. "Your feelings are not within your control," asserts the *Handbook*, "so it is not within the boundaries of common sense to say "I must feel this certain way" for any particular moment of the scene." (6) The actor must find a way into their character on a

more intellectual level: “[i]nstead, you must be able to say, ‘This is what I am *doing* in the scene, and I will do it irrespective of how it makes me feel.’” (6) Finding A.J.’s essential actions would allow me to discover what specific goals A.J. was pursuing, so that as an actor, I could consistently commit to them onstage, and would not fall into the trap of only playing the emotion of a scene. I wanted to know what these actions were well before beginning rehearsals, so that I was very familiar with what A.J. was doing in each scene, and would be well prepared to attack these actions once I began rehearsals with the rest of the cast.

After the play was cast, Dr. Young asked each of us to prepare a character analysis, which we would share on the first day of rehearsals. He provided a series of questions to help us solidify our objectives within scenes, develop a backstory for our characters, and detail our character’s day-to-day existence. He included Uta Hagen’s Six Steps, a series of questions to help the actor identify their objective and better understand the given circumstances, which helped me further hone my essential actions within each scene. To further round out A.J. as a person, I also created a detailed backstory for my character in keeping with the information supplied by the text.

### **Rehearsal: Getting Physical**

I felt well-prepared prior to our first rehearsal—I had done my homework, I had thought A.J. through, and I felt ready to attack the character and the production. After our first few rehearsals though, I discovered that I was really lost. I had no idea how to be a soldier. I did not know how they spoke, or moved, or anything else. I realized that all the thinking and research I had done would do little to help me actually play the

part—it was only the groundwork. To truly find A.J., I would have to learn to access her physically.

In the following, I will discuss several physical keys—activities that ‘unlocked’ a full-bodied awareness and response—through which I was able to discover how A.J. moved and breathed, and then, through this lens, I discovered how to pursue my objectives.

### **Physical Key: Fight Choreography**

Very early in the rehearsal process, Tiza Garland was brought in to choreograph the rape scene between A.J. and the Sergeant. In spite of the charged content of the scene, it was actually rather fun to do. Rather than a minutely choreographed series of movements, it was an extended contact improvisation within a given form. I liked this freedom—it allowed my partner, Thad Walker, and myself to physically listen and respond to each other in the moment. This was not a time for thinking: it was a physical release into the moment.

The beauty of the choreography was that it boiled down to a very simple actor objective. I needed to escape, and Thad needed to keep me there. The simplicity of this need, and the full bodied physical action that accompanied it allowed me to easily and fully commit to the fight in a way that seemed very distilled from the way I usually approached my scene work. My tendency was to think, then act, and the choreography forced me into instinctual action: what I did during the choreography stemmed only from my immediate needs.

In one of our first fight choreography sessions, Tiza encouraged Thad and myself to vocalize as we performed the rape. It was a simple note, but one that drastically changed the fight for me. The vocalizing allowed me to connect to the movements on a deeper level, and I discovered an honest emotional response to the rape. Perhaps this was because I was drawing on an instinctual response, and my objective in the fight was so clear, that I did not realize the depth of my involvement until I experimented with vocalizations. Adding my voice to the fight was the last piece in the puzzle to finding a connection with the situation and the character.

Once we began to run the show, the physical movements of the rape choreography provided me with a wave of emotional feedback and energy that I rode through three-back-to-back scenes. I almost felt guilty, because I was not doing much as an actor, I was just responding to the situation. It felt remarkably effortless and honest. I began to look for that ease in the rest of my scenes, focusing especially on the physical things I could do to find my way to a new level of acting. Had it not been for the fight choreography, I do not think I would have looked for, or found the other physical keys.

### **Physical Key: Physical Training**

Dr. Young designated the first part of each rehearsal for Army-style physical training and drills, or PT. He asked Tom Foley, the actor playing Ajax, and the production's Army advisor, to run this segment of rehearsals. Tom had served in the army, and he taught us various exercises and drills—treating us as if we had actually enlisted. Under his instruction, the cast took the soldier's oath, submitted to some verbal

abuse, and did many, many push-ups. In the process, we learned how to march and to move in formation, as well as the manner in which we as soldiers were expected to talk to our superiors.

At first, I had a difficult time committing to this exercise. It seemed like a giant game. Tom was a nice guy, not some bellowing drill sergeant, and we were not actually in the army, we were just a group of actors in a play. I was terrible at the drilling, it felt alien and strange, and I could not get it right. I decided to work on it in my spare time: snapping to attention, saluting, facing right and left, about-facing. As I continued to work, the movements became more natural and I became more willing to commit to the 'game' of PT.

I discovered something of A.J. while standing at attention one day. I felt as though the formal-readiness of the stance resonated with A.J. as a character, and I was able to develop my character physicality around that discovery. I also found that PT helped me get into character, it focused me, brought me into my body, and put me into the soldier's mindset. In a sense, PT taught me what it was to be a soldier: I did what I was asked to do when I was asked to do it, without question, and I did it to the best of my ability. This helped me especially in A.J.'s scenes with the Sergeant. She does what he asks because she *has* to, because she has been trained to, not because she wants to do it.

I was happy, for a very selfish reason, that Dr. Young chose to incorporate PT into performance, because it was my jumping-off point as an actor for the duration of the

rehearsal process. It was a quick and effective way to bring me fully into the soldier's body and world.

### **Physical Key: Character Physicality**

After the first few rehearsals, I began to experiment with my character's physicality. I knew that it needed to telegraph A.J.'s strength and power but not look cartoonish or forced. I also knew that I wanted an element of standing at attention in the physicality. Standing at attention is the soldier's position of readiness, of awaiting a command—and A.J. is a perfect soldier, someone to whom her fellow soldiers revere—so it seemed proper that she would always be ready for anything. This feel of standing at attention also resonated with what we see of A.J. in the scenes with the Sergeant: she follows commands, and she does what she is supposed to, even if it brings her harm.

With these very general ideas, I came to Kathy Sarra, my Alexander Technique teacher. I explained what I was aiming for, and then showed her what I had come up with. Through hands-on work, she was able to adjust the physicality to a posture that was better aligned and had less tension than what I had created. Then I improvised within the physicality: discovering how my character walked, sat, stood, crouched, and kneeled. For about an hour, under Kathy's guidance, I explored A.J.'s movement, finding her quirks and habits, what was comfortable and uncomfortable for her. The physicality had elements of a hardened chest, broad shoulders, and strong arms; I spent a long time in it to make sure I could remember exactly how it felt and exactly how to return to it because it was very different from how I moved naturally. It made me feel

strong and imposing but guarded—like A.J. I felt as though I had finally found *her* once I had found this body, this physicality, and my embodiment of A.J. really began to take shape after I brought the physicality to rehearsal.

To that point, I was still very much in my own body in rehearsal. My own habits and tendencies were keeping me from discovering the different ways in which A.J. moved and reacted. With Kathy's help, I was able to access the character in a way that was outside of my own habits, which allowed me to experience A.J. physically in a way I had not been able to before. I think perhaps the key was that before I even began to work with my character physicality, Kathy helped me to achieve proper physical alignment. It was a blank slate of sorts, and from there, I was able to discover and experience A.J.'s physicality without having to look through the lens of my own.

### **Physical Key: Push-ups**

The episodic nature of the script was an obstacle for me: my scenes were short and discontinuous and left me no space to warm into them. I had to be fully invested in each scene from the moment it began, and this proved difficult. I realized that I needed to discover a way to keep my stakes high between scenes even though I was off-stage. At first, I thought I could accomplish this mentally by thinking of my character's backstory and objective in the coming scene, but this proved ineffective. I was so 'in my head' when the scene started that I was unable to be in the moment and be present with my fellow actors. So I kept searching.

It was actually my fellow actor, Tom Foley, who provided me with the physical key that would solve my issue with maintaining A.J.'s stakes in between scenes. I often

saw him preparing for his scenes with a volley of push-ups. One day, I decided to give it a go, and did twenty or thirty push-ups before an entrance. The push-ups got my energy up, my heart pumping, and kept me in my body rather than in my head. The physical action of the push-ups was much like that of the rape choreography: my need was distilled—to finish as many push-ups as possible in a short amount of time—and it put me in the same instinctual state that was so beneficial to me during the fight. The push-ups allowed me to launch into the scene with energy, and be present with the other actors in the more instinctual manner I had been looking for. The biological feedback from the push-ups—increased heart-rate and breathing—also mimicked what adrenaline does in a high-stakes situation, and I was able to deal honestly with these responses in my scenes. This feedback also helped to awaken unforced emotional responses in me that I was able to use and ride in my scene-work as well.

### **Vocal Explorations**

Though A.J. does not have a lot of lines, I knew that I needed to achieve a particular vocal quality to help in my characterization. I chose to drop my voice down to the lower third of my vocal register to further heighten the impression of A.J. as a powerful, strong character. I met privately with our voice professor, Russ Schultz, to discuss other ways I might be able to make A.J.'s voice match her physicality. He suggested that I work especially with the consonants in my characters' lines by emphasizing them. He believed that through them, I would be able to achieve a particular sharpness of speech that would complement A.J.'s tough and often sharp exterior. He put it this way: in the desert, long vowels could be shot at, but the shorter sounds of consonant-driven speech could not. It made sense; in Shakespeare, emotion

lives in the vowels, so for A.J., who wants to avoid her emotions, vowel-driven speech was a bad option. I could choose to vacillate between both types of vocal energy depending on the scene I was in. In the few moments where A.J. is really feeling her emotions, I switched to a more vowel-centered vocal energy.

In addition to this general approach, I also specifically worked with Russ on A.J.'s invocation of Kali following the rape. The y-buzz vowel of 'ee' (as in Ka-LEE) cannot be effectively called, and I was having a hard time with the sound. He suggested that I push sound production into the front of my mouth, and allow the vowel to move closer to an 'a' sound so that it would be easier to call. As I did so, the sound itself was something of a cross between a keen and a cry of rage, which mirrors exactly what A.J. is feeling at that moment. His small adjustment made a huge difference in my ability to commit to the call and to the moment.

### ***Other Explorations***

My only acting class this semester was an Acting for the Camera course, so when I first began work with *Ajax in Iraq*, I was approaching the work in a very filmic way. I responded quietly to my fellow actors and moved and reacted in very subtle ways to them and the situations of the play. These things could be easily caught by a camera for film, but were far too small to exist effectively onstage. I knew that I was going to have to adjust what I was doing to appropriately expand my acting for the stage, but I was worried that I would lose the authenticity of my reactions and the honesty of my work by making this change.

I went to my acting professor, Tim Altmeyer, for help and suggestions, and he advised that I raise my stakes. If my involvement in the scene was more complete, my actions would get bigger in proportion to my involvement, and I would not be sacrificing any honesty. I realized that for A.J., and especially in the scenes I was struggling with, her situations had life-or-death consequences. With such stakes, I realized that the subtleties I had been embracing in my acting to that point made no sense. People do all they can to preserve life and limb, and the honesty and reality of those situations come from their fierce resolve to stay alive. As an actor, I needed to commit more fully to my character's essential actions, and to place more weight on the negative things that might occur if I did not accomplish what I needed. When I embraced the heightened nature of these stakes, I was able to find a 'bigger' way of acting that was more appropriate for the stage.

For the majority of the rehearsal process, I also struggled with one scene in particular: a scene between A.J., Mangus, Ajax, and Tecmessa, right after A.J. kills the livestock. I had trouble making the scene work: I had a problem with connecting to A.J. during the scene, I was not reaching the emotional level I needed to reach, and I could not maintain my involvement in the scene when the scene switched to dialogue between Ajax and Tecmessa. I consulted two of my professors several times during the process, and received three pieces of advice that would ultimately help me to conquer the scene.

It was very early in the rehearsal process when I first talked to Kathy Sarra, and I was already frustrated with this 'problem scene.' After questioning me for a few moments, and patiently listening to my gripes for another few minutes, Kathy advised

that I stop pitying A.J. She explained that it seemed like I felt very empathetic toward A.J., but was not actually allowing myself to live inside her and think her thoughts. My pity kept me distanced from her. At first, I was indignant, but the more I thought about what Kathy had said, the more I realized the truth of her observations. I was not allowing myself to think what A.J. was thinking during the problem scene, or at any time in the play, for that matter. I was playing my idea of A.J., rather than finding who A.J. was. That evening at rehearsals, I got rid of my idea of A.J. as a tragic character and worked to access A.J. on the instinctual level I had discovered in my fight choreography and was beginning to discover through the infancy of the other physical 'keys.'

I also allowed myself to consider the stakes of each scene in detail. I imagined what would happen if A.J. achieved her essential action in each scene, and envisioned what she might do or say after getting what she wanted. I also considered what might happen to her if she did not accomplish what she wished to do. This was especially important for the 'problem scene,' because A.J. is grappling with the ramifications of her actions. Her decision to kill herself stems from the shame and horror she feels at what she has done. I had not actually allowed myself to consider this shame and horror in detail until this point, but after contemplating it, I realized exactly how terrifying this scene is for A.J., and was able to clarify her essential action in the scene. I realized that in the first part of the scene, A.J. is trying to find a way out of what she has done. She is looking for a means of escape, much like she does in the fight choreography, but on a far less physical level. Once I was able to make this connection, I had a much easier time of playing the scene, and was able to discover how A.J.'s essential action changes in the scene as she makes discoveries (she cannot escape her actions) and receives

new information (Mangus refuses to assist in her suicide). I spent a lot of time considering the situations of the play from A.J.'s perspectives, and, as a result discovered new ways of treating and approaching her scenes.

As I continued to work with the 'problem' scene, I discovered that I had an acute problem with remaining involved while Ajax and Tecmessa were talking. I tended to rest in the moments when I was not talking and lost all momentum I had built up in the scene to that point. I brought my frustrations to Tim Altmeyer, who advised that I maintain and sustain my intention mentally in the moments when I was not talking. When the scene switched focus, I could still maintain my own focus in the scene by keeping myself mentally involved in the situation and repeating my character's essential action in my head. He also suggested that I keep my focus on my partner and really will them to help me. My character had profound needs during this scene, and I could not abandon them when the scene switched focus. I would have to attack them perhaps even more strongly in these moments of inaction.

I brought this idea to rehearsal, and my scene partner, Stephanie Lynge, and I discovered that in some moments we could have a whispered conversation without drawing focus, so we kept each other present by communicating our mutual needs in character. These were not elaborate conversations, but short simple improvisations with very few words that helped keep us rooted in the situation. For example, I often repeated my plea for help to Mangus in the moments before and after my scripted plea for help, because the scene would quickly shift focus.

In the moments where a whispered conversation was not possible, I committed to repeating my essential action as A.J. (“*Mangus, you gotta help me!*” or “*I need to figure out how to solve this problem.*”) or considering what might happen if I didn’t achieve what I wanted. These methods helped me sustain my intention during moments of inaction and prevented me from mentally ‘checking out’ or losing momentum.

The final piece of advice I received came in the form of a permission. About mid-way through the rehearsal process, Kathy Sarra noticed that I was still struggling with the scene. She told me that I should not be afraid to go to an emotionally frightening state in order to make the scene work. For whatever reason, that was the suggestion that pushed me to find a deeper emotional resonance with the scene, and access a fear that would play as something congruent with, or comparable to what A.J. as a character may have been feeling. I allowed myself to experience truly the terror, frustration, hopelessness, and anxiety of the given circumstances of the scene. I imagined what I would think if placed in a similar situation: I envisioned killing animals with my own hands and let myself realize and discover the weight of that act. I also permitted myself the thought that perhaps my violence had extended to humans. I imagined how my real parents might react to such news and visualized their disappointment and anger. These thought experiments allowed me to find a fear and terror in myself that was grounded in honesty. Kathy’s permission was the push I needed to help me discover how to make the scene work, and to find the frightening things in myself that I could use to fuel A.J.’s panic.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE PRODUCTION

### **Performance**

In the rehearsals leading up to opening night, my characterization of A.J. really began to cohere. I was consistently able to hit my mark in my ‘problem scene’ and was discovering new and interesting moments with my fellow actors that kept my acting fresh. I felt really proud of what I had accomplished in rehearsal so far.

I knew that opening night would be very different—the presence of an audience always makes a great difference for any production: suddenly, the actor has feedback for his actions onstage, and she also is conscious that she is being constantly observed. In my experience, opening night of a production can be uneven, depending on how the actors deal with the adrenaline rush of performing in front of an audience for the first time. I knew that if I wanted my performance to be solid, I would have to work to remain present with my fellow actors and work moment to moment with them despite any nervousness or adrenaline buzz.

Although my adrenaline level was high on opening night, I still felt very comfortable onstage. I had to fight a little to remain present in my first scene and really listen, react, and not end gain. After the first scene, however, I had little trouble jumping into my remaining scenes. In fact, I found that the adrenaline helped me quite a bit: A.J.’s scenes are mostly ‘fight or flight’ situations, and so my own adrenaline helped me to embrace what she might have been feeling in those moments. My ‘problem scene’ especially benefitted from this extra jolt of adrenaline—I was better able to access A.J.’s panic with a slightly heightened energy. The real surprise of opening night, though, was

the suicide scene with Ajax at the end of the play. Onstage, I was struck for the first time by what I was really doing. I was overwhelmed by a wave of sadness and had to work hard to fight back tears as I said my lines. Backstage, I did cry; there was such a release in finishing that scene, and such relief that the first performance was over (and I had not butchered the role), that I was emotionally overwhelmed.

Each performance in the run can be very different, depending on where the actors are mentally and physically, how the audience reacts, or other variables. As an actor I allowed each night to surprise me by staying in the moment and allowing my partners and the given circumstances to affect me in different ways. During the course of the run, I found a number of surprises each night, some of which were bigger than others. One such surprise came early in the run, when the stage blood from my face ran into my eye during the 'problem scene' while I was talking to Mangus. The pain and panic of blood in my eye coupled with the high energy of the scene was just enough to cause me to burst into tears. It was a very different scene that night: Stephanie Lynge followed my lead and reacted specifically to my emotional state, even though, as she admitted afterward, she was rather surprised by my reaction. The crying worked in the context of the scene, and loaded the interaction in which A.J. gives Mangus her son's picture with a tenderness and emotion we hadn't experienced or discovered in rehearsal.

Early in the run, I was also surprised by the realization that my cry to Kali was a cry for help. Up to that point, I had treated it as a lament for my situation, an outburst of pain and anger, but mid-performance I discovered that I was invoking Kali out of need. I needed her to help me. I needed her to give me strength. This allowed me to distill my

essential action for that moment, and from that point on, my cry to Kali felt far more powerful and rooted. I do not know if it sounded any different, but it felt very different to me, because it was more active, and it quickly became one of my favorite moments in the show.

Not every surprise was so dramatic; sometimes I was simply surprised at how audience energy could drastically change a performance. The more involved the audience, the more feedback the actors received, and the performance was often better as a result, although there were a few nights where the inverse was also true. Sometimes, the essential action of a scene would become surprisingly clear to me in a way it hadn't before (as it did in with the invocation to Kali), or an interaction would occur in a surprising way. Looking for these little surprises helped to keep me present in the work every night and keep my performance fresh.

The schedule of performances also proved to be a little bit of a challenge. UF's Homecoming, Veteran's Day, and Gator football home games forced several dark nights in the theater, and so the schedule of the run was inconsistent: we ran for three weeks, but only had nine performances. I was used to a ten-performance run with few breaks so I had to adjust my process to accommodate this unusual timetable. There were times when performances were four days apart, so I went over my lines before every performance to keep them fresh in my mind, and Thaddeus Walker, my fight partner, and I would go over our fight choreography before each show—sometimes twice, or three times—to make sure we were both safe and accurate in our movements. The schedule also proved to be an asset in several different ways. Because I was not performing every night, the material stayed relatively fresh, and the days off in between

performances provided some perspective on the experience and allowed me to attack the material and scenes in new and different ways, which proved especially helpful in my quest for surprises. The schedule also demanded a higher level of focus. I think that actors can sometimes tend merely to say the lines without being present mentally or emotionally when performing the same show every night. But because that was not the situation with *Ajax in Iraq*, I challenged myself to remain highly focused every night to maintain the quality of my work. On a very selfish level, the schedule was nice because, for me, it is a highly physical show; the breaks provided much needed rest and recuperation days.

I was proud of my work in *Ajax in Iraq*. I felt that my physical approach to the character and the way in which I worked in performance to stay present with my fellow actors brought my acting to a newer, richer level.

### **Self-Evaluation**

The final performance of *Ajax in Iraq* was bittersweet. I certainly felt emotional before the show began, and it was reflected in my performance. I was surprised by a rush of tears during my 'problem scene' when I gave Stephanie Lynge the picture of A.J.'s son, and had to fight through more tears during the suicide scene. I found that fighting through this emotion imbued these scenes with a level of vulnerability that had not been achieved during other performances. It was a totally new facet of A.J. that I had not discovered until that moment. I cried again at curtain call: I was both proud of my achievement with the role, and reluctant to bid it, the cast, and *Ajax in Iraq* goodbye. It was a performance I will never forget.

From the beginning of the process I had felt that I was working in a different way as an actor and artist, and that this approach was strengthening my work and leading me to find honest and interesting choices on stage. Near the end of the run of the show, I talked with several of my professors about my performance, and was delighted to hear that they felt the same way: that, as an artist, I was discovering my craft in new and bold ways.

I was humbled by praise from Kathy Sarra, my Alexander Technique professor, who maintained that with A.J., I was opening a new door for myself as an actor. I had come into this program as a girl, she said, but was leaving it as a strong, powerful woman—an identity I had discovered through my development and creation of A.J. She told me I should be very proud of my work on the show and my progress within the MFA program. Tim Altmeyer, my acting professor, also complimented me on my work, and praised a bold choice I made in my ‘problem scene.’ He had given me advice on that scene during the rehearsal process, and he was impressed with how I integrated the note he gave about remaining present in the scene while the dialogue between Ajax and Tecmessa was happening concurrently.

A number of my students also had high praise for my performance; some said that several of my scenes had reduced them to tears. Perhaps the highest praise of all came from a handful of students who said they hardly recognized me on stage. They had a hard time reconciling the acting teacher they saw in class with the woman they saw in *Ajax in Iraq*. When I heard that, I knew I had done my job as an actor: I had set my own habits and characteristics aside and successfully embodied my character onstage.

## Conclusion

*Ajax in Iraq* was a turning point for me as an actress. During the rehearsal and performance process I was able to discover a new way of accessing my work as an actor that was highly physical but used an intellectual framework that was more familiar to me. While discovering how to play A.J., the knowledge and experience I had amassed as a graduate student came together in a way that allowed me to make this step in becoming a better actress and artist. I regret to leave this character and production, but know that the lessons learned about myself and my process through this experience will stay with me for my entire life.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B.







## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Katherine Pankow graduated from Florida Gulf Coast University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in English.

While at the University of Florida, Katie performed in *The Grapes of Wrath* (Mrs. Wainwright), *Romeo and Juliet* (Lady Montague, Valentine), *Oedipus the King* (Greek Chorus), *You Can't Take It With You* (Essie Carmichael), and *A Piece of My Heart* (Whitney). As part of her training, Katie taught several undergraduate courses at the University of Florida: Theatre Appreciation (THE 2000), Oral Interpretation of Literature (ORI 2000), Acting for Non-Majors (TPP 2100), and Acting 1 (TPP 2110).

Katie will spend the spring semester in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, interning at the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre.



**AJAX**  
**IN**  
**IRAQ**

A DRAMA BY  
**ELLEN MCLAUGHLIN**

**AJAX**  
**IN**  
**IRAQ**

STAGING/DIRECTING  
**DAVID YOUNG**

SCENIC DESIGN  
**MIHAI CIUPE**

LIGHTING/PROJECTION DESIGN  
**TOPHER STUMREITER**

STAGE MANAGER  
**ANGELA C. ROSARIO**

FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHY  
**TIZA GARLAND**

COSTUME DESIGN  
**BECKI LEIGH STAFFORD**

SOUND DESIGN  
**BEN HAWKINS**

PROPERTIES DESIGN  
**CHARLECIA JOY PAUL**

KALI DANCE  
**RIC ROSE**

DEDICATED TO THE MEN AND WOMEN OF THE US  
ARMY AND JACK NGUYEN, A UF STUDENT  
CURRENTLY SERVING HIS SECOND TOUR OF DUTY.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

<b>DAVIDA EVETTE TOLBERT*</b>	ATHENA
<b>KATIE PANKOW*</b>	A.J.
<b>TOM FOLEY</b>	AJAX, ARMY ADVISOR
<b>AMANDA SCHLACHTER</b>	GERTRUDE BELL, TECMESSA
<b>MATT MERCURIO</b>	ODYSSEUS, THERAPIST, NOG 3, LARRY'S FRIEND, GREEK CHORUS
<b>SEAN CANCELLIERI</b>	CAPTAIN, TEUCER, NOG 1, GREEK CHORUS
<b>THADDEUS WALKER</b>	SERGEANT, MAN IN THE DARK 1, GREEK CHORUS
<b>STEPHANIE LYNGE</b>	CONNIE MANGUS, FEMALE GREEK CHORUS LEADER
<b>OLUCHI NWOKOCHA</b>	SICKLES, JUDY, MODERN CHORUS B, GREEK CHORUS
<b>AMANDA YOUNG</b>	REBO, DEBBIE, MODERN CHORUS C, GREEK CHORUS
<b>MARISSA WILLIAMS</b>	ABRAMS, MODERN CHORUS F, GREEK CHORUS
<b>ANTHONY BIDO</b>	PISONI, MAN IN THE DARK 2, NOG 4, GREEK CHORUS
<b>AMOS (A.J.) JOHNSON</b>	CHARLES, LARRY, GREEK CHORUS
<b>JAVON JOHNSON</b>	FLETCHER, MODERN CHORUS A, MINISTER, MALE GREEK CHORUS LEADER
<b>SUNNY SMITH</b>	PATIENT, MODERN CHORUS E, GREEK CHORUS PATIENT, MODERN CHORUS E
<b>EMILY GREEN</b>	NOG 2, MODERN CHORUS D, GREEK CHORUS

**\* DENOTES PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS**

THIS PRODUCTION IS PERFORMED **WITHOUT** AN INTERMISSION

THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY OR VIDEO IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED  
CELL PHONES AND TEXT MESSAGING ARE NOT PERMITTED

## FROM THE DIRECTOR

THIS IS A PLAY ABOUT THE CAPACITY FOR HEROISM BY THOSE WHO ONLY WISH TO SERVE, AND DO NOT SEE THEMSELVES AS HEROES.

### **SOPHOCLES' *AJAX*:**

IN SOPHOCLES' FAMOUS RETELLING OF THE STORY THE HERO AJAX IS ENRAGED WHEN THE ARMS OF THE DEAD ACHILLES ARE AWARDED TO ODYSSEUS INSTEAD OF TO HIM. THE GODDESS ATHENA DRIVES HIM MAD SO THAT HE GOES TO A FLOCK OF SHEEP AND SLAUGHTERS THEM, IMAGINING THEM TO BE THE ACHAEAN LEADERS. WHEN HE COMES TO HIS SENSES, HE IS COVERED WITH BLOOD, AND REALIZES WHAT HE HAS DONE. HIS HONOR DIMINISHED, HE DECIDES TO KILL HIMSELF RATHER THAN LIVE IN SHAME.

### **GERTRUDE BELL**

GERTRUDE BELL LIVED AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE. SHE IS CHIEFLY REMEMBERED FOR HER PIONEERING ASSIMILATION OF ARABIC CULTURE. DESPITE BEING A BRILLIANT SCHOLAR, ARCHAEOLOGIST, MOUNTAINEER AND LINGUIST, SHE ALSO FOUND TIME TO BE A LEADING FIGURE FOR THE SUFFRAGETTE MOVEMENT. UNIQUELY FOR HER TIME, SHE MINGLED EASILY WITH ARAB PRINCES, PLAYING A FORMATIVE ROLE IN THE CREATION OF THE MODERN STATE OF IRAQ. SOME HAVE EVEN CALLED HER THE MOTHER OF IRAQ.

### **MORE ABOUT THE WAR**

WHEN SOLDIERS GO TO BASIC TRAINING THEY MEET A DRILL SERGEANT WHO SEEMS TO BE THEIR WORST NIGHTMARE. WHEN THEY GRADUATE THEY LEAVE WITH AN EMOTIONAL BOND WITH THEIR DRILL SERGEANT THAT THEY NEVER FORGET. ASK ANY VETERAN THE NAME OF HIS DRILL SERGEANT AND HE WILL KNOW IT. *NY TIMES*: MARCH 9TH, 2012: "THE RATE OF SEXUAL ASSAULTS ON WOMEN SERVING IN THE MILITARY REMAINS INTOLERABLY HIGH. A 2006 STUDY OF FEMALE VETERANS ESTIMATED THAT BETWEEN 23-33% OF US SERVICE WOMEN HAVE BEEN ASSAULTED. TOO OFTEN VICTIMS ARE TOO AFRAID TO COME FORWARD."

## GLOSSARY

**RPG'S** - ROCKET PROPELLED GRENADE; IN OTHER WORDS, A ROCKET LAUNCHER. THE NOISE A ROCKET MAKES TYPICALLY SOUNDS LIKE A PIECE OF SHEET METAL OR PAPER BEING RIPPED.

**UNIT**- ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING A "COMPANY." A COMPANY USUALLY CONSISTS OF 2-4 PLATOONS. A PLATOON CONSISTS OF 2-4 SQUADS, A SQUAD CONSISTS OF 2-4 TEAMS, AND A TEAM IS COMPRISED OF 3-4 SOLDIERS. OVERALL, A COMPANY OR UNIT HAS AN AVERAGE OF 80-225 SOLDIERS.

**SUNNI** - ONE OF THE TWO MAJOR FACTIONS OF ISLAM, THEY MAKE UP ABOUT 80- 90% OF MUSLIMS IN THE WORLD. THEY DIFFER IN BELIEFS WITH SHIITES, AND IN IRAQ, THEY STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN POLITICS WITH THE SHIITES.

**SHIITES** - SECOND OF THE MAJOR FACTIONS OF ISLAM. THEY MAKE UP ABOUT 10- 20% OF THE MUSLIM POPULATION WORLDWIDE. IN IRAQ, THEY CONSTITUTE THE MAJORITY (ABOUT 65%) AND STRUGGLE FOR POWER WITH THE SUNNI.

**JA'FAR PASHA** - PRIME MINISTER OF IRAQ IN THE 1920s. AN IMPORTANT HISTORICAL FIGURE, HE SIDED WITH T.E LAWRENCE (LAWRENCE OF ARABIA) AT ONE POINT.

**SERGEANT** - AN NCO, NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER. IN THE MILITARY RANK SYSTEM, THE NCO IS SUPPOSED TO BE THE PERSON YOU GO TO IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM OR YOU NEED SOMETHING. THEY ARE THE LEADERS OF THE JOES AND GRUNTS. THEY ARE ONE OF YOUR OWN AND THEY EARNED THEIR RANK BY EXPERIENCE AND HARD WORK, AND NOT NECESSARILY BECAUSE OF A COLLEGE DEGREE.

**NVGS NOGS** - NIGHT VISIONS GOGGLES. NIGHT OPTICAL GOGGLES. (NOG SHOULD ACTUALLY BE NOD, D FOR DEVICE.) IN NIGHT VISION, THE VISION IS GREEN, AND 2 DIMENSIONAL.

## SPECIAL THANKS

STACEY GALLOWAY, ZAK HERRING, KATE GLENNON, ROBIN MCGEE,  
TODD BEDELL, TONY BERRY, TIZA GARLAND,  
SARAH WHITE, JACK NGUYEN, ELIZABETH ADAMS,  
OFFICER RANDOLPH DELAPENA OF THE UF ARMY ROTC PROGRAM

## THE COMPANY

**DAVIDA EVETTE TOLBERT (ATHENA)** IS A 3RD-YEAR MFA ACTING CANDIDATE, WHO IS HONORED TO BE A PART OF THE UF SOTD, AND IS BEYOND ECSTATIC TO BE PORTRAYING THE BIGGEST DIVA OF ALL TIME. SHE IS GRATEFUL TO DR. YOUNG FOR HER FIRST AND LAST ACTING OPPORTUNITIES HERE. SHE'S BEEN FEATURED IN: *NOTE TO SELF*, *CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION*, *ROMEO AND JULIET*, *OEDIPUS THE KING*, *YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU*, *AGBEDIDI*, *SIGNS OF LIFE*, *BHM VARIETY SHOW* AND *AJAX IN IRAQ*. DAVIDA HUMBLY THANKS GOD, HER MAMA, FRIENDS, FAMILY, MENTORS, STUDENTS, PROFESSORS AND ALL OF HER "BOOS" FOR SUPPORT.

**KATIE PANKOW (A.J.)** IS A THIRD-YEAR MFA ACTING CANDIDATE. PREVIOUS UF CREDITS INCLUDE *A PIECE OF MY HEART*, *YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU*, *OEDIPUS*, *ROMEO AND JULIET*, AND *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*. TO THE SOTD FACULTY: THANKS FOR ALL YOUR HELP, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT, AND FOR MAKING ME FALL IN LOVE WITH THIS CRAFT OVER AND OVER. MUCH LOVE TO MOM, DAD, NATE AND BEEF, AND TO MY EXTENDED THEATRE FAMILY (YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE—THANKS FOR KEEPING ME SANE). FOR OUR SOLDIERS, PAST AND PRESENT—I CANNOT EXPRESS HOW THANKFUL I AM FOR YOUR SACRIFICE AND COMMITMENT TO THIS COUNTRY AND TO YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN ARMS.

**TOM FOLEY (AJAX)** IS A FIRST-YEAR MFA ACTING STUDENT WITH THE SOTD. HE IS VERY EXCITED TO BE TAKING PART IN A WORK THAT HONORS THE COMMITMENT AND SACRIFICES OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS SERVING IN COMBAT. HE SERVED FOR 4 YEARS IN THE US ARMY AS A COMBAT MEDICAL SPECIALIST WITH THE FIRST INFANTRY DIVISION AND IT WAS HIS GREAT PLEASURE TO SCREAM ABUSE AT THE CAST AS THEY LEARNED TO MARCH AND DO PUSHUPS IN PREPARATION FOR THE SHOW.

**AMANDA SCHLACHTER (GERTRUDE BELL, TECMESSA)** IS A FIRST-YEAR MFA ACTING CANDIDATE. SHE HAS WORKED WITH SUCH COMPANIES AS ORLANDO SHAKESPEARE THEATRE, MAD COW, ASOLO REP, THE SOURCE THEATRE AND AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ARTS. AMANDA IS SO GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRAIN HERE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA! GO GATORS  
[WWW.AMANDASCHLACHTER.COM](http://WWW.AMANDASCHLACHTER.COM)

**MATT MERCURIO (ODYSSEUS, THERAPIST, NOG 3, LARRY'S FRIEND, GREEK CHORUS)** A BONE MARROW TRANSPLANT CAN SAVE THE LIVES OF PEOPLE BATTLING LEUKEMIA, LYMPHOMA, AND OTHER BLOOD CANCERS. FOR SOME PATIENTS IT'S THE ONLY OPTION IN CONTINUING THE FIGHT AGAINST THOSE DISEASES. CHECK OUT BETHEMATCH.ORG. BECOMING A MEMBER OF THE REGISTRY IS FAST AND EASY. FOR CHRISTINA, WHO INSPIRES ME WITH HER STRENGTH EVERY DAY.

**SEAN CANCELLIERI (CAPTAIN, TEUCER, NOG 1, GREEK CHORUS)** IS A FIRST-YEAR MFA CANDIDATE FROM LAS VEGAS. HE GRADUATED FROM UNLV WITH A BACHELORS DEGREE IN THEATRE STUDIES. HE IS THRILLED TO BEGIN HIS WORK HERE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA. HIS RECENT CREDITS INCLUDE *A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM*, AND *TAMING OF THE SHREW*.

**THADDEUS WALKER (SERGEANT, MAN IN THE DARK 1, GREEK CHORUS)** WOULD LIKE THANK HIS FAMILY FOR ALL THEIR SUPPORT, AND DR. YOUNG FOR THIS WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY. PREVIOUS UF CREDITS: *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF* (NICK US), *SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER* (THOMAS/VALET) FLORIDA PLAYERS: *OTHELLO* (MONTANO) *THE CHILDREN'S HOUR* (DR. CARDIN) ENJOY THE SHOW!

## THE PRODUCTION TEAM

**STEPHANIE LYNGE (CONNIE MANGUS, FEMALE GREEK CHORUS LEADER)** IS A 2ND-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-BROADWAY: *THREE PENNY OPERA* (POLLY.) REGIONAL: *SHOWTUNE* (PASADENA PLYHS), *A LITTLE NIGHT MUSIC* (GOODSPEED), *LEND ME A TENOR* (MOUNTAIN PLAYHOUSE), *TARTUFFE* (BARTER), *EMPIRE* (HUSDON-LA). UF: *YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU* (PENELOPE SYCAMORE), *A PIECE OF MY HEART* (MARYJO). LOVE TO MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS, OLD AND NEW.

**OLUCHI NWOKOCHA (SICKLES, JUDY, MODERN CHORUS B, GREEK CHORUS)** IS A 1ST-YEAR MFA ACTING CANDIDATE FROM SUNNY CALIFORNIA. SHE IS ECSTATIC TO BE MAKING HER UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA DEBUT HERE AT THE SOTD. SHE WOULD LIKE TO THANK DR. YOUNG FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY AND FOR MAKING HER FIRST SHOW A MEMORABLE ONE. GOD IS GOOD!

**AMANDA YOUNG (REBO, DEBBIE, MODERN CHORUS C, GREEK CHORUS)** IS A JUNIOR IN THE BFA ACTING PROGRAM. SHE IS THRILLED TO SHOW HER TOUGH SIDE IN *AJAX IN IRAQ*. YOU MAY HAVE SEEN HER AS THE UNICORN/AMALTHEA IN *THE LAST UNICORN* LAST FALL. SHE WOULD LIKE TO THANK HER FAMILY FOR THEIR CONTINUED LOVE AND SUPPORT!

**MARISSA WILLIAMS (ABRAMS, MODERN CHORUS F, GREEK CHORUS)** IS A JUNIOR IN THE BFA ACTING PROGRAM. SHE IS EXTREMELY EXCITED AND GRATEFUL TO BE GIVEN THIS AMAZING OPPORTUNITY! SHE WOULD LIKE TO THANK HER FAMILY, FRIENDS AND CATS FOR ALL OF THEIR LOVE AND ENCOURAGEMENT! HOOAH!

**ANTHONY BIDO (PISONI, MAN IN THE DARK 2, NOG 4, GREEK CHORUS)** IS OVERJOYED TO BE A PART OF THIS PRODUCTION. HE WOULD LIKE TO THANK DR. YOUNG FOR HIS GUIDANCE AND WISDOM, HIS WONDERFUL AND IMMENSELY TALENTED CAST AND CREW, AND HIS FRIENDS & FAMILY FOR ALL THEY DO. HE WOULD LIKE TO DEDICATE THIS SHOW TO HIS FATHER.

**AMOS "AJ" JOHNSON (CHARLES, LARRY, GREEK CHORUS)** A SOPHOMORE, IS ECSTATIC TO BE IN HIS FIRST PRODUCTION AT UF. HE WOULD LIKE TO THANK HIS FAMILY, FRIENDS, ALL OF THE NEW FRIENDS HE HAS MADE AT UF, HIS BROTHERS GEOFF AND NATHAN SERVING IN AFGHANISTAN, ALL THOSE SERVING BESIDE THEM, AND ALL WHO HAVE SERVED BEFORE THEM.

**JAVON JOHNSON (FLETCHER, MODERN CHORUS A, MINISTER, MALE GREEK CHORUS LEADER)** IS A 1ST-YEAR MFA ACTING CANDIDATE FROM TULSA OKLAHOMA. JAVON IS A GRADUATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA AND HOLDS AN ASSOCIATE OF ARTS DEGREE FROM NORTHEASTERN OKLAHOMA A & M. SOME OF HIS FAVORITE ROLES INCLUDE DET. TULPOSKI FROM *PILLOWMAN*, JIM IN *BIG RIVER*, AND SIR TOBY BELCH IN *TWELFTH NIGHT*.

**SUNNY SMITH (PATIENT, MODERN CHORUS E, GREEK CHORUS)** IS AN MFA ACTING CANDIDATE IN HER UF ACTING DEBUT. REGIONAL CREDITS: *MISS ELECTRICITY* (LAJOLLA PLAYHOUSE), *KING O' THE MOON*, *WIT*, *DRACULA*, *JULIUS CAESAR*, *HANSEL & GRETEL* (NORTH COAST REP), *INTO THE WOODS*, *HEIDI CHRONICLES* (NEW VILLAGE ARTS), *FROZEN* (ION THEATRE), *HMS PINAFORE*, *DAUGHTER OF THE REGIMENT* (SAN DIEGO LYRIC OPERA). THANKS, DR. YOUNG!

**EMILY GREEN (NOG 2, MODERN CHORUS D, GREEK CHORUS)** IS A 2ND-YEAR MFA ACTING CANDIDATE. PREVIOUS UF CREDITS: *A PIECE OF MY HEART* (SISSY), *MEASURE FOR MEASURE* (MISTRESS OVERDONE), *ROBERTO ZUCCO* (MOTHER). MUCH LOVE AND THANKS TO DR. YOUNG, THE CAST AND CREW, AND, OF COURSE, BAM!: THE EXPERIMENT.

**DR. DAVID YOUNG (DIRECTOR)** HAS BEEN GRADUATE RESEARCH PROFESSOR IN THE SCHOOL OF THEATRE AND DANCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA SINCE 1993. HE WAS, FOR 15 YEARS, THE PRODUCING DIRECTOR OF THE KENNEDY CENTER AMERICAN COLLEGE THEATRE FESTIVAL, A NATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM WHOSE NETWORK INCLUDES 450 COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES. HE HAS DIRECTED OVER 100 PRODUCTIONS THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND INTERNATIONALLY, INCLUDING *AMADEUS*, *COMPANY*, *SIX CHARACTERS IN SEARCH OF AN AUTHOR*, *THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAS ISCARIOT*, *PRIVATE LIVES*, *VINCENT IN BRIXTON*, *CRUMBS FROM THE TABLE OF JOY*, *HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE*, *THE CLEAN HOUSE* AND *CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION*, AND *AN INSPECTOR CALLS*.

**MIHAI CIUPE (SCENIC DESIGNER)** ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN SCENIC DESIGN UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA SCHOOL OF THEATRE AND DANCE. ORIGINALLY FROM ROMANIA, HE RECEIVED A DOUBLE MFA DEGREE IN COSTUME AND SET DESIGN FROM CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY AND HIS BFA FROM ION ANDREESCU ACADEMY OF VISUAL ARTS, IN CLUJ, ROMANIA. PRIOR TO THE UNITED STATES HE WAS RESIDENT SCENOGRAPHER AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF CLUJ, ROMANIA. DURING HIS FORMER YEARS HE TRAVELED EXTENSIVELY IN EUROPE IN TOURS WITH THE SHOWS THAT HE DESIGNED, GETTING EXPOSURE TO THE VARIOUS SCHOOLS OF THEATRE FROM ENGLAND, SCOTLAND, HUNGARY, FRANCE AND YUGOSLAVIA. AS A DESIGNER HE WORKED WITH SOME OF THE GREATEST ROMANIAN DIRECTORS: GABOR TOMPA, ALEXANDRU DABIJA, IULIAN VISA, MIHAI MANUTIU, VICTOR ION FRUNZA. IN 1991 HE RECEIVED A SCHOLARSHIP TO ATTEND THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF THEATRE. SINCE 1995 HE HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF THE UNITED ASSOCIATION OF THE ROMANIAN FINE ARTISTS IN THE SCENOGRAPHY SECTION.

**BECKI LEIGH STAFFORD (COSTUME DESIGNER)**, CURRENTLY PURSUING HER MFA IN COSTUME DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY, IS FROM PENSACOLA, FLORIDA. OTHER SHOWS SHE HAS DESIGNED AT UF INCLUDE *ROBERTO ZUCCO* AND *WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?*. SPECIAL THANKS TO EVERYONE IN THE COSTUME SHOP FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND HARD WORK TO MAKE THIS SHOW A REALITY.

**TOPHER STUMREITER (LIGHTING DESIGNER)** IS A 2ND YEAR MFA LIGHTING DESIGN CANDIDATE. ORIGINALLY FROM SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WHERE HE RECEIVED HIS BACHELORS DEGREE IN THEATRE ARTS AND WORKED ON STAFF AT A LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL MENTORING AND DESIGNING. HE ALSO DESIGNED AND ORGANIZED A TOURING COMMUNITY/EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH PRODUCTION SPANNING SIX SCHOOLS WITH AGES 12 TO 68. PREVIOUS UF DESIGN CREDITS INCLUDE *SHE STOOPS TO CONQUER* AND *TICK, TICK... BOOM!*

**PATRICIA COLEMAN (ASSOCIATE LIGHTING DESIGNER)** IS A FIRST YEAR LIGHTING DESIGN MFA CANDIDATE. SHE RECEIVED HER BA IN THEATRE - DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY FROM UNLV. SOME CREDITS INCLUDE *FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF*, *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*, *A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE*, AND *A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM*.

## PRODUCTION TEAM

**BEN HAWKINS (SOUND DESIGNER)** IS A 3RD-YEAR BFA CANDIDATE IN LIGHTING DESIGN. HE HAS ENJOYED WORKING ON PRODUCTIONS AT UF SUCH AS *CHICAGO* (ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER) AS WELL AS LIGHTING MFA ONE ACTS AND BFA DANCE SHOWCASE EARLIER THIS YEAR IN THE SPRING. HE GREATLY ENJOIES FULFILLING THE ROLE OF TECHNICAL SUPERVISOR AT P.K. YONGE SUPPLY LIGHTING AND SOUND SUPPORT FOR MANY PRODUCTIONS. THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO SUPPORT ME.

**CHARLECIA JOY PAUL (PROPERTIES/ASST. SCENIC DESIGNER)** IS A BFA SCENE DESIGN MAJOR. SHE'S HAD THE HONOR OF BEING PROPS MISTRESS FOR FLORIDA PLAYERS SPRING NEW WORKS FESTIVAL AND *JEFFREY*. SHE ALSO VOLUNTEERS AT THE ACTOR'S WAREHOUSE AND LOOKS FORWARD TO CONTINUING WORKING WITH FLORIDA PLAYERS AND THE SCHOOL OF THEATER AND DANCE.

**ANGELA C. ROSARIO (STAGE MANAGER)** 3RD-YEAR BA. OTHER SM CREDITS: STNJ'S JR. & SR. SHAKESPEARE CORPS PRODUCTIONS OF *THE TEMPEST* AND *BEOWULF*. FLORIDA PLAYERS' PRODUCTION OF *THE CHILDREN'S HOUR*. ANGELA WOULD LIKE TO THANK HER PARENTS FOR THEIR NEVER-ENDING SUPPORT, SARAH WHITE & TOPHER FOR ALWAYS OFFERING ADVICE, AND KENNY & ERIN FOR KEEPING HER SANE.

**ELLEN MCLAUGHLIN (PLAYWRIGHT)** HER PLAYS HAVE RECEIVED NUMEROUS NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTIONS AT THEATERS SUCH AS ACTOR'S THEATER OF LOUISVILLE, MARK TAPER FORUM, AND THE PUBLIC THEATER IN NYC. ACTING CREDITS: BEST KNOWN FOR HAVING ORIGINATED THE PART OF THE ANGEL IN TONY KUSHNER'S *ANGELS IN AMERICA* - APPEARING IN EVERY US PRODUCTION FROM THE EARLIEST WORKSHOPS THROUGH ITS BROADWAY RUN. INSTRUCTOR: PLAYWRITING AT YALE SCHOOL OF DRAMA, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, AMONG OTHERS.

### **FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT ABOUT THE PLAY**

PAST AND PRESENT COLLIDE IN ELLEN MCLAUGHLIN'S MASH-UP OF SOPHOCLES' CLASSIC TRAGEDY *AJAX* WITH THE MODERN-DAY WAR IN IRAQ. THE PLAY FOLLOWS THE PARALLEL NARRATIVES OF AJAX, AN ANCIENT GREEK MILITARY HERO, AND A.J., A MODERN FEMALE AMERICAN SOLDIER, BOTH UNDONE BY THE BETRAYAL OF A COMMANDING OFFICER. ATHENA, GODDESS OF WAR, COOLLY PRESIDES OVER THE WHOLE AFFAIR. INSPIRED BY MATERIAL COLLECTED FROM INTERVIEWS WITH IRAQ WAR VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES, *AJAX IN IRAQ* EXPLORES THE TIMELESS STRUGGLE SOLDIERS FACE IN TRYING TO MAKE SENSE OF WAR.

ARMY ADVISOR/MARCHING CHOREOGRAPHER  
DRILL SERGEANT  
VOCAL COACH  
ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE COACH  
ASSOCIATE LIGHTING DESIGNER  
ASSISTANT LIGHTING DESIGNER  
ASSISTANT SCENIC DESIGNER  
SOUND BOARD OPERATOR  
LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR  
SPOTLIGHT OPERATORS  
PROJECTION OPERATOR  
SCENIC CREW

TECHNICAL DIRECTOR  
MASTER CARPENTER  
SCENIC ADVISOR  
SCENIC STUDIO ASSISTANTS

COSTUME ADVISOR  
COSTUME STUDIO MANAGER  
ASST. COSTUME STUDIO MANAGER  
DRAPERS/COSTUME STUDIO ASSISTANTS  
CRAFTS PEOPLE/COSTUME STUDIO ASSISTANTS

LIGHTING ADVISOR  
MASTER ELECTRICIAN  
LIGHT SHOP ASSISTANTS

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS  
POSTER DESIGNER  
WARDROBE HEAD  
DRESSERS

TOM FOLEY  
MATT MERCUCIO  
RUSSELL SCHULTZ  
KATHY SARRA  
PATRICIA COLEMAN  
ZACK TITTERINGTON  
CHARLECIA JOY PAUL  
CHARLIE MALCOLM  
KRISTI HESS  
TYRONE JOHNSON, ALLI BALDWIN  
CANDICE ALVARRAO  
HAIDEE CANO, NAZEEH TARSHA,  
ALISON GENSMER  
ZAK HERRING  
TONY BERRY  
MIHAI CIUPE  
JAIME SCOTT FRANK,  
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ANNE TULLY, JASON WRIGHT  
ROBIN MCGEE  
STACEY GALLOWAY  
KATE GLENNON  
TRACY FLOYD & ERICA BASCOM  
JANAE LAFLEUR, BECKI STAFFORD  
& LEE ALEXANDER MARTIN  
STAN KAYE  
TODD BEDELL  
RYAN BIBLE, TIMOTHY A. REED,  
PATRICIA COLEMAN,  
DAN HOPPER,  
TOPHER STUMREITER,  
JULIA LAVVAULT  
SARAH WHITE  
JOSEPH URICK  
ZACKERY RYAN  
DEAN THOMASON,  
ROSS MOGERLY, AMBER OSPINCS,  
MADISON CHERRY,  
VERONICA SALGUEIRO



# The Kennedy Center

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

**The Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival-44,**  
part of the *Rubenstein Arts Access Program*,  
is generously funded by David and Alice Rubenstein.

Additional support is provided by  
the U.S. Department of Education, the Dr. Gerald and Paula  
McNichols Foundation,  
The Honorable Stuart Bernstein and Wilma E. Bernstein, and  
the National Committee for the Performing Arts.

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, dramaturgs, playwrights, designers, stage managers and critics at both the regional and national levels.

Productions entered on the Participating level are eligible for invitation to the KCACTF regional festival. Those productions invited to the regional festival will be considered for national awards of distinguished achievement, to be presented at the KCACTF national festival at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC in the spring of 2012.

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.

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Peter Favini  
John W. Reger  
Robert N. & Beverly T. Singer

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Florida Theatrical Assn.  
Steven Pliskow & Blanca A. Luaces  
Richard & Susan F. Yost

## Director

Keith Watson Productions  
Melanie R. & William R. Leonard, P.A.  
Shelley & Steve Waters

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Lynn A. Volk  
Sylvia G. & David F. Williams

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Nancy Donahoe  
Mary G. & James G. Feiber, Jr.  
Cherie H. & Jack J. Fine  
Adriane M. Isenberg  
Roman Janos  
Leslie R. & Paul A. Klein  
R. Layton & Mary Stuart-Mank  
Maria G. & Joseph G. Martin III  
Margaret S. Mertz, Ph.D.  
Mimi O'Grady

The Orthopaedic Institute

Janice Pliskow  
Lynn K. Rollins  
Richard T. & Betsy Schuster

## Stage Manager

1st Credit Union of Gainesville  
Tiza Garland & Patrick R. Pagano  
Kristin F. Houser  
Lucinda S. Lavelli & Kenneth D. Webster  
Chris M. Morris

## Soloist

Keaton Alexander  
Timothy C. Altmeyer  
Riley M. & Peggy W. Blich  
Mrs. Dell & Robert L. Bowman III  
Starlina Bradbury & Mitchell Jim  
Kenneth E. Brandt  
Amy V. & Taylor Dickerson  
Paul F. Favini (d)  
Carol M. Fonda  
Dean W. & Emily L. Gabriel  
Ira H. & Gerri E. Gessner  
Gloucester Pharmaceuticals  
Bill & Angela A. Hoppe  
Michael G. Houser  
Norman S. & Roslyn F. Levy  
Elizabeth B. Mann  
Mrs. Lauranne C. & John C. McCraw, Jr.  
Donald E. & Jane McGlothlin  
John E. Mulvaney, Jr.  
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photo of Lauren Northing by Michael A. Eaddy.

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