SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE 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

PORTRAYAL OF ONE OF THE WORLD’S FIRST TRUE WOMEN OF POWER:
ATHENA, THE GODDESS OF WAR IN
AJAX IN IRAQ
BY ELLEN MCLAUGHLIN

By
Davida Evette Tolbert

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:
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UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA
2013
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the courage and strength necessary, to move forward against all odds. He has blessed me to be in the company of talented and knowledgeable people who have always availed themselves to me when assistance was needed. I am blessed beyond measure, and forever grateful and thankful to the author of my life. I would also like to thank my mother, confidant and best friend, Cynthia, for having added inspiration, forbearance and fortitude in her encouragement of my following my dreams. You epitomize the true meaning of “Super Stage Mom.” No matter what was going on, you’ve constantly reminded me of the race I was in and the need to finish. I love you dearly. Thanks for being my support system.

To my classmates and friends – Jazmine, Katie, Josh, Annelih, Adam, Andrew and Joseph – you are all unique in skill, and you all have given me something to hold on to and to utilize within my own work. I truly thank you and love you for being in my life, even if for a moment. To my alma maters, Holy Angels Academy, Erie Community College and Buffalo State College and to the Ujima Theatre Family, thank you for believing in me and pushing me toward my potential. I love you and thank you for allowing me to shine and participate in giving the community something to be proud of. To the law firm of Jaeckle, Fleischmann & Mugel LLP, especially David G. Brock – you are my second family. You’ve always sent your well wishes and attended every performance with love and support. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To the University of Florida School of Theatre & Dance (SoTD) – To all of the undergrads, grads, faculty and staff, you all had a part in helping me find myself in my process. Your expertise, vast knowledge and passion for our art have prepared me for the next challenge. Thank you for your guidance. To Tim Altmeyer, my one man cheering team. Thank you for your
constant encouragement and tough love. To Dr. David Young, thank you for giving me the opportunities to contribute to our world of artistry. It was an honor portraying a lead character in my first and last productions at UF under your direction. Your humor and unique imagination has been a joy to witness. I truly hope my final performance made you proud. To all of those individuals I have met along my journey – and there are a lot of you – thank you for dropping in and reminding me why I love theatre.
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May 2013

Chair: Christina (Tiza) Garland
Major: Theatre

Athena is the goddess of war and wisdom. In Ajax in Iraq, playwright Ellen McLaughlin portrays the goddess in a unique light, marrying the archetypal figure with contemporary political and social views. The story intertwines events of the modern day War in Iraq of 2001 with the ancient Trojan War of Greece most notably told by Sophocles’ play, Ajax. The play provides the contemporary viewpoint of Sergeant A.J. Swopes, a female soldier in the Iraq War in 2001, and Ajax, a commander in the Trojan War. Their battles inside and outside of war are shown to have detrimental outcomes based on how each handled their various circumstances. Athena retells the story of Ajax from her point of view. It is further found that each individual story – both touching on themes such as betrayal and struggle – is similar to the other as the play moves forward.

In my exploration of Athena, I found greater depth than my previous acting process. This document provides a thorough account of my research, character analysis, vocal and physical work throughout the rehearsal process and performances. Using the methods and techniques I have learned over the past two years, Athena went from a character on a page to a fully embodied character in the UF School of Theatre and Dance Black Box.
**Why Is McLaughlin’s Play So Interesting?**

There are a number of translations and interpretations of Sophocles’ original Greek text which are easy to follow and understand. *Ajax* begins with Athena telling Odysseus that Ajax, in a state of madness, slaughtered cattle believing them to be Greek soldiers. The Chorus, also followers of Ajax, expresses deep concern for him throughout the play. Seeming to have a change of heart, Ajax vows to right the wrong that he has done and decides to yield to the gods and his commanding officers. After reassuring the Chorus that trouble is over, he departs to kill himself.

However, it was not until obtaining Ellen McLaughlin’s version of *Ajax* that I found the story to be compelling. McLaughlin’s play addresses the dismal and disturbing issues that plague both men and women in wartime. As the modern-day war story plays out for the audience, Athena addresses the audience and explains the plight of Ajax. She oversees everything as it unfolds to show a relatable side of human nature and imparts her thoughts and wisdom as a soldier of war and a woman, not just a goddess, to the audience. McLaughlin’s ability to combine the woes of Greek and modern-day warfare is amazing. She wrote an intriguing literary work worthy of performing and I was looking forward to being a part of this artistic experience.

When the School of Theatre and Dance’s theatre season for 2012-2013 was announced, I was most excited by this new innovative play. I had already performed in my share of period style plays and I was ready to do something edgy and modern. *Ajax in Iraq* presented an excellent artistic challenge and would be directed by Dr. David Young. Although I would have liked to have been matched with a director for whom I had not had the pleasure of working, this modernized version of the original Greek text was the one play I found to be the most exciting.
When the cast list was posted, I realized that I had been asked to meet this artistic challenge head on: I had been chosen to portray Athena, the goddess of war and wisdom. I did not expect to get the title role of this production, but was looking forward to this task tremendously.

**Crossing Period Lines: Athena in Today’s Modern World**

**Overview of the Play**

The play begins with Ajax making grunting sounds behind a tent. Athena addresses the audience by explaining, in a humorous way, the reason for Ajax’s actions. In order to keep Ajax from killing Odysseus and the other commanding officers, she sends him to a field of sheep, cows and goats where he tortures and kills them, believing them to be the Greek officers with whom he seeks revenge. In a state of madness, he also drags the animals back into the tent with him and continues to torture and slaughter them. Athena implies that she was the cause for his murderous outbursts. The scene shifts to the appearance of six modern-day soldiers speaking in detail of their experiences and what they’ve witnessed while serving in the Iraqi War in 2001. After the soldiers march off stage, a woman dressed in 1920s fashion enters. She is Gertrude Bell, a British woman who is believed to have created modern day Iraq in the 1920s. She enters with a man who is not given a name but simply called the Captain, clothed in modern-day American military uniform. Due to a similarity of the Captain’s speech to a speech delivered by the former U.S. Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, in 2003, the Captain could represent him. They both give their own opinions as to why warfare exists in their time period.

The next scene shifts back to modern day Iraq with Specialist Sickles, Corporal Leslie Abrams, Specialist Connie Mangus and Specialist Melissa Rebo, women soldiers who are seen playing poker in their barracks while A.J. Swopes sleeps. The women become disturbingly loud.
A.J. awakens and is questioned about her health. She changes the subject by deciding to take a shower.

When she leaves, Corporal Vincent Charles and Specialist Pisoni enter the barracks. Playful banter is exchanged between them and the atmosphere becomes uncomfortable when A.J. enters after overhearing Pisoni talk about her. The scene ends with Athena explaining the details leading up to Ajax being “driven crazy.” Odysseus, Ajax’s rival for Achilles’ armor and a favorite to Athena, enters as if he is tracking something or someone. Athena tells Odysseus that she has driven Ajax crazy and chooses to prove it by calling out to Ajax to appear. Once Ajax has spoken to Athena, the “Daughter of Zeus,” he exits back into his tent to finish his torture spree. What drives him to his madness is his disdain for Odysseus. Odysseus knows this fact. Ajax feels betrayed by Agamemnon and Menelaus, his commanding officers, because of the outcome of the contest that took place between him and Odysseus for Achilles’ armor. Ballots were cast and after they were tallied, Odysseus was declared the winner. Athena does, however, allude to the contest being fixed.

In the following scene, Pisoni and Charles are seen in the barracks of the Sergeant, A.J.’s squad commander and immediate superior officer. They only talk briefly as the Sergeant is preparing to have a visit with A.J. When the Sergeant and A.J. meet, the Sergeant tells her that she drives him crazy. She responds by stating, “Let. This. Stop.”

The next scene is where two worlds collide. In the modern world, a Patient is talking to a Therapist about the state of mind of her husband after returning home after serving in the military. The Patient tells the Therapist that she is afraid of her husband and that war has changed him. At the same time, Tecmessa, Ajax’s war bride taken captive during the Trojan War, is introduced. She talks of the same kind of emotional distance between her and Ajax and
how her husband is lost in his “own sick rage.” Athena appears and tells the audience that although people may not show their madness, it is, however, an emotional state that all people experience and most people do fantasize about carryout acts of rage.

Athena then goes into a nightmare-like description of the process of how a person goes crazy. Next, the women soldiers are shown sleeping their barracks and A.J. restlessly tosses and turns during Athena’s monologue. Two men are also shown creeping around in the barracks. After they sneak away, A.J. awakens. Athena then discusses a night raid that took place during the Trojan War. She says that Ajax refused any and all help from the gods until Zeus blotted out the sun to make the battlefield dark. Ajax is heard crying out to “Father Zeus” for light – his only prayer. The night raid is modernized by the entrance of three modern soldiers in night vision goggles enacting and describing a chaotic scene of gunfire and stampeding sheep, as if it is all a bad dream. Once the raid is over, the soldiers are able to survey the horrific results of the chaos.

Connie Mangus enters and talks about the heroic efforts of A.J. saving the lives of others while placing herself in harm’s way when no one else would. The Sergeant summons her to his barracks. Thinking that she was summoned to be complimented on a job well done, she experiences a deeper betrayal by him: she is violently raped. The following scene returns to ancient Greece. Tecmessa enters and reveals the mad and crazed Ajax, covered in blood. A chorus appears to respond to Ajax’s lament. He speaks of his guilt and anger at the events that have occurred. The events of Ajax’s story are interwoven with A.J.’s story as Connie comes to see A.J., who is covered in blood. Connie is shocked that A.J. has slaughtered a shepherder’s entire flock. The reason she offers is she thought they were “a whole lot of someone else.” As A.J. and Ajax try to come to terms with their actions, they request their respective confessors, Connie and Tecmessa, to carry out their last wish: to tell their siblings to take care of their sons.
Near the end of the play, five characters are introduced: Debbie, a soldier in Iraq; Fletcher, a Vietnam vet in charge of a homeless shelter for veterans; Judy, a woman who has a husband that is serving in Iraq; Larry, a Iraq veteran; Teucer, Ajax’s half-brother; and Minister, a member of A.J.’s unit. Each of these characters discuss their feelings of disgust, sorrow, loss, confusion and unfair treatment of veterans when they return home from war. Teucer and Tecmessa also tell the Chorus that Ajax has prepared himself to deal with his shame by “burying his sword,” he will commit suicide. A.J. and Ajax deliver overlapping text about their last moments before killing themselves.

In the final scene the Sergeant announces each soldier by rank. The Minister appears after A.J.’s name is called and proceeds with her funeral. As he speaks, Athena tells the audience about the conflict over what to do with Ajax’s lifeless body. According to the commanders, because of Ajax’s betrayal to his army, he was not worthy of an honorable burial. After Odysseus speaks on Ajax’s behalf, the commanders agree to give him a proper burial.

**Inspiration Behind Ajax in Iraq**

In an interview with playwright and internet blogger Adam Szymkowicz in June 2011, McLaughlin made this statement when asked what kind of theater excited her:

> I suppose I'm drawn to the Greeks because I love taking on the big stuff. I do find I get bored when nothing is risked. I suppose that kind of theater is just a product of people's fear of failure, which is virtually inevitable when you try to do anything worth doing. But why not take on the hardest things?
There are worse things than failing--usually having to do with making nice, forgettable baubles that will never matter to anyone--what's the point of that?

Why not put it all on the line? All that's at stake is the size of your soul.

(Szymkowicz)

McLaughlin had a very intense opposition to the Iraq invasion in 2003 when she was approached by the late Tony Randall to adapt Aeschylus’ *The Persians*. She stated that she used her anxiety and the despair she was feeling at that time as a means of focus. McLaughlin said “...it was like a response to a crisis.” (Guthmann 1) This opposition also caused her to begin her project at Harvard, which ultimately turned into *Ajax in Iraq*. Other dramatic works she has written include an adaptation of *The Trojan Women* and *Helen*, a testament to her passion.

*Ajax in Iraq* was a project that involved students in the 2009 Graduate class from the A.R.T. / MXAT Institute for Advanced Theater Training at Harvard University. As part of their training, the students were asked to investigate attitudes and opinions soldiers grapple with while in war and its impact on their lives and the people around them. Effects include social displacement among family and peers, physical injury and trauma (loss of limbs or rape among women in the military), and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The theatre students were required to research as much information as possible in order to gain new perspectives through someone else’s experiences. After several months of researching material, the presentations were made in various theatrical forms. Dance pieces, movement presentations, monologues and scenes all showed different viewpoints toward the military. The presentations focused around American soldiers, their experiences and how warfare has impacted their families. As the project changed and evolved, McLaughlin noticed a connection between what the students presented and Sophocles’ *Ajax* – a story of the Greek hero that was driven to suicide because of betrayal.
committed by his commanders. A fusion of the adaptation she wrote of Sophocles’ tragedy and the contemporary play based on materials collected by the students at Harvard created McLaughlin’s *Ajax in Iraq*.

**The Rehearsal Process**

The original story of Ajax was written by Sophocles in Greek. After two months of reading two different translations of *Ajax*, and McLaughlin’s play. I achieved a better understanding of Athena. I arrived at the conclusion that she was one of the world’s first women of power in literature. She holds much weight and is an important part of the play.

Soon after casting was completed, director Dr. David Young sent us internet sources for research. Included were links and references to army movies and documentaries, YouTube clips about how men and women in the military perform their duties, a list of vocabulary terms found in the play and various questions taken from Uta Hagen’s *Six Steps* for each actor to prepare a character analysis. Hagen’s *Six Steps* are included in Appendix C, followed by pages from my rehearsal journal that contains my responses to the questions posed.

According to Hagen, actors are capable of discovering their character by choosing an objective and using that objective and the given circumstances of the play to successfully give that character life. Throughout *Ajax in Iraq*, Athena’s objective is to share the story of Ajax to show that warfare affects every soldier directly or indirectly. According to Athena, emotional decision-making often leads to insufferable consequences. Once my objective was discovered, I identified the given circumstances, the facts of the play that help the actor to formulate a
character. Hagen states that they include past, present, future and all of the events that happen throughout the play.

After weeks of rehearsal, I became very confused as to the direction I was being given by my director. I had already made certain character choices that Athena is authoritative, strong and enthusiastic. Evidence of these traits are exemplified when she candidly tells the audience about driving Ajax mad. As Young’s directions kept changing, I felt Athena became more “pedestrian,” a very casual woman simply “chatting” with the audience. To add even more confusion, I felt that I needed to incorporate all of the feedback given to me by different instructors pertaining to what Athena should and should not do. Because of this feedback, I became extremely frustrated with myself and frustrated with my character.

It was not until our brush-up rehearsal during the second week of performance that I discovered what was missing in this entire process: fun. Our stage manager made the decision to have a “speed through,” meaning the cast does a fast, exaggerated run of the entire play. We just allowed ourselves to “play” with the text. It was during that rehearsal that I was able to embrace Athena’s essence as a person, an authority figure and -- more specifically -- a woman with power.

**Athena’s Vocal Exploration, Physical Presence & Demands**

**Vocal Exploration**

When an actor is exploring Greek tragedy, one must express strong and precise enunciation, clarity of projection and good breath support. (Harrop 21) The tools I used in my vocal exploration were from the Lessac vocal training approach. I dedicated significant time to
various vocal exercises using the Lessac vocal training method given to me by my voice instructor, Yanci Bukovec. I also did an extensive exploration of the text – speech by speech – with voice teacher Russell Schultz.

Working with Russell, I became aware of how one-sided I was approaching each monologue in Ajax. I had not explored the text enough. I had only read the words and was not listening to what was being said or comprehending the manner in which she spoke. In the first month of rehearsal, according to my director’s observations, Athena was too strong and not “loud enough.” Young felt I didn’t have enough breath support under my voice. I realized that my idea of “strong” was using a low-one speaking voice, which resulted in an unsupported voice. She is strong but I did not need to “show” how strong she was by lowering my voice to try to make her sound authoritative. The biggest area of frustration in this process was the fact that I confused my sense of reality for Athena with what McLaughlin’s sense of reality was for Athena. In other words, the image of who I thought Athena was differed from McLaughlin. The decision was that she was strong and authoritative, yet her dialogue seemed casual and conversational. An example of her conversational speaking pattern is found in the first monologue of the play:

You don’t want to go in there. Terrible stuff happening in there. Can’t you hear it? Not really, right? But you can imagine. He’s been at it all night. It’s OK., no one’s going to make you go in there. Well, I won’t anyway. You’ve been outside this tent before, haven’t you? It’s familiar, isn’t it? The not knowing, the not wanting to know. Still, every now and then, you can’t help it, you get a glimpse. Some grainy, jumpy, hard-to-see thing taken
from somebody’s point of view. (McLaughlin 9)

At first, I employed generic ideas of power such as high volume and forcefully and strongly pushing out the sounds of vowels and consonants of the words. However, in doing so, I missed the humor. I completely overlooked and negated the humor in my misinformed attempt at being serious and strong. Again, I was using my own ideas of who I thought Athena was supposed to be. I had not realized that each monologue was colored with humor throughout the first half of the play. Athena enjoys herself by poking fun at and engaging the audience by making jokes about human nature but she’s still a woman with power. In my work, I completely missed this fact. I was more infatuated with the idea of Athena and what I read about her, instead of using the information given to me by the playwright. In one vocal session with Russell, he reminded me of the vocal work that I was introduced to in the voice classes at UF. He guided me through, line by line, the monologues in the first half of the play. For instance, Athena’s second monologue discusses the reason behind her decision to poison the mind of Ajax. I neglected to explore the melodic variety in this speech. Each line catapults her to the next idea. There is a build in the speech and she guides the audience on a journey allowing them to understand why she did what she did to Ajax. With Russell’s help, I was enjoying the new discoveries in each line through vocal exploration. Athena and I found a common ground.

Physical Presence & Demands

Before I came to the University of Florida, my body had been plagued with physical impairments such as lower back pain, osteoarthritis and tendonitis. It was used to holding tension in certain areas in order to keep from feeling pain. As a result, my body responded violently with
muscle spasms or locking of the joints in my hips, lower back and legs. The only remedy that has helped me to use my body more efficiently and increase my awareness of self has been working with Ms. Kathy Sarra in the Alexander Technique (AT). That was part of my studies in the MFA Acting program at UF.

As we began the rehearsal process, I was concerned about falling back into the old physical habits that caused me to experience pain and muscle spasms. Before being introduced to the Alexander Technique, I would stand rigidly with locked knees and elbows, an elevated chest and “downward pulling” of the neck (lifting the head further back onto the neck resulting in discomfort). I expressed my concerns to Ms. Kathy, thus she guided me in discovering the best way to approach Athena’s physicality. She asked me to talk her through Athena’s journey in the play. Most of what I did in the beginning of my movement process was allowing my voice to lead my body. I needed to soften every area of my body, “think up” and allow my head to lead the body into the direction it desires to go. By making the necessary adjustments in my vocal approach to the text, using higher vocal tones and adding a melodic quality needed to perform the text, my body began to release tension in the muscles. Instead of trying to show Athena’s strength through tension and unnecessary contraction of my muscles, I was able to free myself from any physical compression. The connection of the voice and body was amazing. I realized that as I focused my awareness on the source of my tension, mostly being in the neck and shoulder areas, there was also a sense of lightness and release in my voice.

Another aspect of physical work that I included in my process was animal imagery. During each scene that Athena appeared, an animal characteristic came to mind: the panther’s quiet and cunning stalking of her prey. For instance, during the scene with the patient and the therapist, Athena is lying on top of the wall watching the scene. She stays there, not making a
sound, but watching attentively until she needs to make her presence known. Just as the smell of prey excites the panther and causes her to strike and kill at will, the revelation of Ajax going mad excites Athena, at which time she reminds the audience who she is and how manipulative she can be. She tells the audience that anyone at any time, given the right opportunity, can succumb to the inner thoughts of his or her mind by explaining the grim details of what happens when someone goes mad. She tells them: “So don’t get too pleased with yourself. The difference between you and the person who can do unspeakable things? Not so great. Believe me. I can turn you in a second” (McLaughlin 31).

A physical habit that I discovered was that Athena strokes her hair whenever she ponders an idea and when she is plotting the next move to exercise her powers of persuasion. I discovered it by accident during a dress rehearsal. I was waiting to enter to do the monologue that explains the contest for Achilles’ armor between Odysseus and Ajax. I was intently listening to the characters in the previous scene and I found it amusing that the soldiers believed Ajax would peacefully accept the fact that Odysseus had won the armor. I unconsciously stroked my hair as I watched bemused by the scene during one evening’s rehearsal. Dr. Young spotted that gesture and wanted me to keep it and to see if there were any other places in the play where Athena would do this action.

As I continued to work with Kathy Sarra, after incorporating animal imagery into Athena’s physical life, and developing a habit, or “ism,” for her realized that there was a habit of mine needed to be broken. I was using a lot of my normal everyday gestures in performance, which is dangerous for the actor according to Harrop and Epstein’s *Acting with Style*. There is no place in Greek tragedy for individualistic mannerisms because they weaken the strength of the character (19). Although McLaughlin’s Athena was very relaxed in speech and sometimes
action, she is still a Greek character. In previous movement work, I found that I keep my arms very close to my body. The arms need to have a sense of ease and flow. In other words, there needs to be “air” underneath the arms. At this point, I believed Athena was very modern and had thrown away the fact she was a Greek character. Movement demands in Greek tragedy were mitigated by the himation – a garment thrown over the shoulder and wrapped around the body – being held across the arm. Additionally, any gestures that were used needed to have a purpose that didn’t interrupt the flow of the rhythm of the theatrical event. According to Harrop, gestures were led by an emotional idea that should flow from the center of the body (19). I utilized this concept in my movement during rehearsals in the performance space. I used my rehearsal skirt to mock a himation in order to help find familiarity by using large sweeping gestures. Along with the use of a himation, I was able to release tension in my arms and give them the flow and ease they required. I had created a sense of power without being stiff and mechanical. By the first official dress rehearsal, I accomplished my goal of giving Athena the physical honor that she so deserved.

The Discovery of Athena’s Core Purpose

The closer we moved toward opening night, the more comfortable I became in owning Athena’s point of view. Initially, I had a difficult time removing my feelings of disgust and anger toward the character because she seemed too talkative and self-imposing for no reason. My job was to pursue the objective that I discovered through the script analysis: Athena wants to share the story of Ajax to show that warfare affects every soldier directly or indirectly.
Through run-throughs of the play leading up to dress rehearsals, it was apparent to me that Athena had a deeper message than just telling the story of Ajax and watching the same actions being carried out in the modern world with A.J. She addressed the idea that humans have always been swayed by their emotions to make irrational or detrimental decisions. I came to this realization during a run-through of the scene with Athena and Odysseus. I also found that I was speaking in a different tone from the way I spoke it previously. I originally viewed her dialogue in this scene as being condescending – as if to say that humans are unable to make wise choices before acting on them. However, one night in rehearsal, I realized that is not the case. I was suddenly able to view Athena as a goddess who has a concern for humans. She further demonstrates her concern by warning the audience that at any time in our lives, if we are not careful, we can become Ajax. What I thought to be “mindless chatter” was actually an ancient character reaching through time to address a modern-day audience with contemporary speech.

**The Performance: Athena Preparing For Center Stage**

Most actors have a pre-performance ritual or a process that gears them for a performance. My preparation begins early in the day with a physical warm-up that focuses on my legs, hips and lower back, as these areas are targets of arthritic pain. Next, I follow up with a review of my lines. No matter how much I feel I know them, nervous habit provokes me to review the text at least twice before the play begins. Once the review has taken place, I include a prayer for myself and the production as a whole that all goals and expectations will be met and the audience will be pleased with the work that we have done. Once I am in full costume, I take a moment to see if I am able to recognize myself in the mirror or if I have transformed myself enough to see the
character through my eyes. To get into performance mode, I greet all of my cast members as Athena and tell them to “have a good show.” It boosts my confidence and I ultimately use that confidence and the support of my peers in my performance.

**Conclusion: A Viewpoint Toward Work Accomplished**

My creative process has been a compelling and interesting journey. My first step in this process began with reading, researching and understanding the text. Once a clear understanding was established, I moved to finding out what Athena’s relationship is with the other characters and who she is in the realms of the Greek text and McLaughlin’s text. Then I started to employ character development and various acting techniques learned throughout my studies in the University of Florida MFA Acting Program such as the Alexander Technique and the Arthur Lessac vocal techniques. Certain choices I had made and tried to use did not work but through the application of the techniques I have learned while at UF I was able to develop a character that served the script and the production in an educated and artful way. In the final stages of rehearsals for *Ajax in Iraq*, I fully committed to the direction and notes given to me by my director and all of my acting choices. Throughout this process, I learned how to allow myself to have fun through “playing.” From rehearsal to performance, each part of my process encouraged me to trust in my discoveries and strive for artistic, professional, as well as personal growth. My use of script and character analysis has definitely increased.

Through a survey of the given circumstances and the text of the play, I was led to make choices that were appropriate for the style of the play and for the character. I now have a better understanding of how context drives my character choices. In order to devise a character that is
genuine to the author’s script, I must integrate research of the play and the text to evade the drawbacks of creating a character that is restrained by my personal predispositions. An acting process that adds attention to the context and the given circumstances of a play while not depending upon habitual or generic choices allow an actor to approach character development and discovery without personal bias or judgment. Every process has challenges and with a thorough approach, one can overcome them. In learning a more detailed approach and with the help from the faculty at UF’s School of Theatre and Dance, I was able to meet my challenges and accomplish great work. I am grateful that the techniques I have learned and the work I have done will endure. The techniques I have learned and the skills I have gained will forever be my blueprint for character creation and discovery.
Bibliography


APPENDIX A – PRODUCTION POSTER & PROGRAM

AJAX IN IRAQ

A DRAMA BY ELLEN McLAUGHLIN

DIRECTED BY DAVID YOUNG

NOVEMBER 2, 5, 7, 8, 14, 15, 16 AT 7:30 P.M. / NOVEMBER 4, 18 AT 2:00 P.M.

NOVEMBER 2 - 18
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DAVID YOUNG

CAST OF CHARACTERS

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

* DENOTES PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS

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

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’ AJELE

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

RPGL - 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.

JAFAR PASIA - 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 NOG - 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 U.S Army ROTC program
THE COMPANY

DAVID 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 has been featured in: Not to Self, Circle Mirror Transformation, Romeo and Juliet, Oedipus the King, You Can’t Take It with You, Agreed, Signs of Life, BFM Variety Show and Ajax in Iraq. David humbly thanks God, her Mama, friends, family, mentors, students, professors and all of her “boys” for support.

KATIE PANKOW (ALL) 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 Jeff. 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 sacrifice of American soldiers serving in combat. He served for 4 years in the US Army as a Combat Medical Specialist with the 1st Infantry Division and it was his great pleasure to serve in Afghanistan as they learned to march and do push-ups in preparation for the show.

AMANDA SCHLACHTER (GERTRUDE BELL, TECHNICA) 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

MATT MERCURIO (OSSYSSEUS, 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 bone-marrow.org, becoming a member of the registry is fast and easy. For Christina, who inspires me with her strength every day.

SEAN CANCELLERI (CAPTAIN, TRICER, 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, Giuseppe Verdi’s Aida and Taming of the Shrew.

TADDREUS WALKER (SERGEANT, MAN IN THE BARK 1, GREEK CHORUS) would like to thank his family for all their support, and Dr. Young for this wonderful opportunity. Previous UF credits: Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf? Nick (U), She Stoops to Conquer (Thomasina), Florida Players. Othello (Montano): The Children’s Hour (Dr. Cardin) Enjoy the show!

STEPHANIE LINSE (CONNIE MANGUS, FEMALE GREEK CHORUS LEADER) is a 2nd-year MFA. She loves the Izzy/Mama Mia! Off-Broadway: Three Penny Opera (Polly) Regional: Showtune (Pasadena Playhouse), Little Night Music (Goodspeed). Send me a Tender (Mountain Playhouse), Tartuffe (Bard), Empire (Hudson-La): UF You can’t take it with you, Pinelope (Sycamore), A Piece of My Heart (Marryo), Love to my family and friends, old and new.

OLUCHI NWOROGHA (SICKLES, JUDY, MODERN CHORUS) is a first-year MFA acting candidate from Sunny California. She is ecstatic to be making her UF 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) 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 in Matilda at the UF Performing Arts Center. She would like to thank her family for the continued love and support.

MARISA WILLIAMS (ABRAMS, MODERN CHORUS) is a junior in the BFA acting program. She is extremely excited and grateful to be given this opportunity! She would like to thank her family, friends, and cast for all of their love and encouragement. Hooray!

ANTONY RIO (PISONI, MAN IN THE BARK 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 and 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 and friends, all of the new friends he has made at UF, his brothers Goff and Nathan serving in Afghanistan, all those serving beside them, and all who have served before them.

JAVS JOHNSON (FLETCHER, MODERN CHORUS 3, MINISTER MAE GREEK CHORUS LEADER) is a first-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 Flown Away, Jon in Big River, and Sir Toby Belch in Twelfth Night.

SUNNY SMITH (PATIENCE, MODERN CHORUS) is an MFA acting candidate in her first acting debut, regional credits: Miss Electricity (Lasolla Playhouse), King O’ the Moon, Wit, Dracula, Julius Caesar, Hamlet & Gretel (North Coast Rep), Into the Woods, Heidi Chronicles (New Village Arts), Forbidden Theater, Amy Panikoff, Daughter of the Regiment (San Diego Lyric Opera). Thanks, Dr. Young.

EMILY GREEN (NOG 2, MODERN CHORUS) is a first-year MFA acting candidate. Previous UF credits: A Piece of My Heart (Marryo), Measure for Measure (Messiaes Overdone), Roberto Zucco (Mother). Much love and thanks to Dr. Young, the cast and crew, and, of course, BAM! The Experiment.
THE PRODUCTION TEAM

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 BFA from Ion Andreescu Academy of Visual Arts, in Bucharest, 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: Gabi Tompa, Alexandru Dabija, Iulian Milea, Mihai Manuțiu, Victor Ion Frunza. In 1993 he received a scholarship to attend The London International Festival of Theatre, since 1993 he has been a member of the United Association of the Romanian Fine Artists in the Scenography section.

REBECCA LEIGH STAFFORD (COSTUME DESIGNER) is currently pursuing her MFA in costume design & technology, from Penn State, Pennsylvania. 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.

TONI NEUMARKER (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: Stroops 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.

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 enjoys 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.

CHARLENE JOY PAUL (PROPERTIES/ASST. SCENE 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 actors' warehouse and looks forward to continuing working with Florida Players and The School of Theatre 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 MCALURGH (PLAYWRIGHT) Her plays have received numerous national and international productions at theatres such as Actor's Theatre 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 betrayals 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.
### PRODUCTION TEAM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army Advisor/Marching Choreographer</td>
<td>Tom Foley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drill Sergeant</td>
<td>Matt Mercucio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vocal Coach</td>
<td>Russell Schultz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alexander Technique Coach</td>
<td>Kathy Sarra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Associate Lighting Designer</td>
<td>Patricia Coleman</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Lighting Designer</td>
<td>Zack Titterington</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Scenic Designer</td>
<td>Charlecia Joy Paul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Board Operator</td>
<td>Charlie Malcolm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light Board Operator</td>
<td>Kristi Hess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spotlight Operators</td>
<td>Tyrone Johnson, Ali Baldwin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Projection Operator</td>
<td>Candice Alvarrao</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenic CRB</td>
<td>Haidee Cano, Nazeeh Tarsha, Alison Gensmer, Zara Herring, Tony Berry, Mihael Ciupu, Jaime Scott Frank, Mackenzie Ottes, Anne Tully, Jason Wright, Robin McGee, Stacey Galloway, Kate Glennon, Tracy Floyd &amp; Erica Bascom, Janae Lafleur, Becki Stafford, Alex Alexander, Martin, Stan Kaye, Todd Bedell, Ryan Bible, Timothy A. Reed, Patricia Coleman, Dan Hopper, Topher Stumreiter, Julia Lavault, Sarah White, Joseph Urice, Zackery Ryan, Dean Thomason, Ross Mogety, Amber Ospinas, Madison Cherry, Veronica Salgueiro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dress Rehearsal: Davida Evette Tolbert (Athena) and Katie Pankow (Sergeant A.J. Swopes).
Athena
Athena and Debbie (Amanda Young)
APPENDIX C – DESCRIPTION OF UTA HAGEN’S SIX STEPS ANALYSIS

UTA HAGEN
THE SIX STEPS

1. WHO AM I?
   - What is my present state of being?
   - How do I perceive myself?
   - What am I wearing?

2. WHAT ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES?
   - **What time is it?** (The year, the season, the day? At what time does my selected life begin?)
   - **Where am I?** (In what city, neighborhood, building, and room do I find myself? Or in what landscape?)
   - **What surrounds me?** (The immediate landscape? The weather? The Condition of the place and the nature of the objects in it?)
   - **What are the immediate circumstances?** (What has just happened, is happening? What do I expect or plan to happen next and later on?)

3. WHAT ARE MY RELATIONSHIPS?
   - How do I stand in relationship to the circumstances, the place, the objects, and the other people related to my circumstances?

4. WHAT DO I WANT?
   - What is my main objective? My immediate need or objective?

5. WHAT IS MY OBSTACLE?
   - What is in the way of what I want? How do I overcome it?

6. WHAT DO I DO TO GET WHAT I WANT?
   - How can I achieve my objective? What's my behavior? **What are my actions?**
ANSWERS TO UTA HAGEN’S SIX STEPS

1. Who am I? My name is Athena. I am a woman who holds a high position — a goddess of war and wisdom. I am strong, extremely beautiful, and more than talented on the battlefield. I am wearing my war uniform, armor, and a helmet. Although I can choose to help other soldiers in time of battle, I can choose to give counsel to soldiers because of my previous experience.

2. Circumstances? It is the year 1187 BC. It is the summer season and the sun is high in the sky, and war. It is extremely warm, dust fills the air and the area is in complete disarray because of numerous killings and shootings. The atmosphere is diagonal and depressing. Bodies lay in the street, vehicles and and bullet-shell casings scattered in the sand. An eerie silence periodically sounds among the remaining soldiers. Ajax and A. J. have just killed Ga. A multitude of animals our blind rage and their peers are alarmed and concerned as to how this has occurred.

3. Relationships: As a soldier, myself, I know how it feels to be unsure about your next course of action during war. When something terrible happens to someone close to you, it takes a toll on your mental and physical being. You can become blank or empty in thought, socially displaced or awkwardly uncomfortable.
4. **Want?** My objective is to get my point across.

Humans need to think about their decisions before they make them. If they act on emotion alone, consequences that are detrimental could have horrific results.

**Immediate need:** To stop A.J. and Ajax from making a horrible mistake.

5. **Obstacle:** Humans are going to do whatever they choose whether good advice or talked to about their choices. Unfortunately, as I've traveled between both periods, this is something that continues to happen all the time. Look at the U.S. government and how their country is run. Look at the outcome of the Iraq war and how long it took to remove soldiers from the war. Soldiers also lost their lives, unnecessarily.

6. **How to?**

Achieving my objective? Until humans are able to make wise decisions by their own, as a goddess will choose not to interfere in human affairs unless absolutely necessary. I'll continue to speculate, watch over the situation closely and keep a close eye on every person involved.

**Actions**

*to: allow, supervise, narrate, monitor, audit, advise, counsel, spectate, inform, oversee, guide*
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Davida Evette Tolbert received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Theater from Buffalo State College. During her undergraduate studies she performed in various productions including *Hair: The American Tribal Love Rock Musical* (*Dionne*) - under the direction of Andre De Shields, *The Grapes of Wrath* (*Granma, Mrs. Wainwright*), *Anything Goes* (*Angel Virtue*) and she worked as stage manager in the *Myth of Miles* Dance Concert, based on the musical works of Miles Davis. Davida performed in two musicals, *In De Beginnin’* (*Eve*) and *The Green Pastures* (*Ensemble/Multiple*), with Buffalo’s Ujima Theatre Company.

As a graduate student in the School of Theatre and Dance at the University of Florida, Davida performed in numerous productions: *Circle Mirror Transformation* (*Marty*), *Romeo and Juliet* (*Queen Escalus/Prince*), *Oedipus the King* (*Chorus*), and *You Can’t Take It with You* (*Mrs. Kirby*). Davida was also a member of the hip hop theatre group, Signs of Life, and the student improv show, *The Funny Women Show*. Davida was also a teaching assistant for various undergraduate courses at UF, including Theatre Appreciation, Oral Interpretation of Literature and Acting for Non-Majors.

Having concluded her studies, she plans to give back to her community of Buffalo, NY by re-joining the group that introduced her to theatre. At Planned Parenthood of Western New York she will work with the Community Engagement department. Her focus will be with the Teen Reality Theatre (TRT) Peer Education and Mentoring Group.