

“SEZ ME”:  
A REFLECTION ON THE PROCESS  
AND PRODUCT OF DIRECTING  
*SEZ SHE* BY JANE MARTIN  
AT THEATRE TCU

by  
Rashaun Sibley

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for Departmental Honors in  
the Department of Theatre  
Texas Christian University  
Fort Worth, Texas

May 2, 2014

“SEZ ME”:  
A REFLECTION ON THE PROCESS  
AND PRODUCT OF DIRECTING  
*SEZ SHE* BY JANE MARTIN  
AT THEATRE TCU

Project Approved:

Dr. Harry Parker, Ph.D.  
Department of Theatre  
(Supervising Professor)

Jennifer Engler, M.F.A.  
Department of Theatre

Dr. Chantel Langlinais Carlson, Ph.D.  
Department of English

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: MAKING THE LIST .....	1
FROM BEING DIRECTED TO BEING THE DIRECTOR .....	2
The Directing Class & The Final Project .....	2
The Application .....	3
THE BREAK-UP .....	6
Summer Preparation & Changing Shows .....	7
BUILDING THE ARMY .....	9
Auditions.....	10
Callbacks.....	11
Casting.....	12
MAKING THE SHOW MINE .....	13
Production Meetings (Designing & Creating the World) .....	14
THE REHEARSAL PROCESS: FINDING THE PLAY .....	17
Finding the Play with My Cast .....	17
Finding the Play with My Designers .....	19
THE STORM BEFORE THE STORM: TECH & DRESS REHEARSALS .....	21
OPENING NIGHT: FINISHING THE LIST .....	22
CONCLUSION: BURNING THE LIST .....	23

## INTRODUCTION: MAKING THE LIST

If I have a good gauge on how people perceive me, I would say I'm known for my very exuberant energy. I can be spontaneous, unpredictable, and maybe sometimes a little all over the place. Having said that, I think people would be very surprised to know that I'm also a person who thrives on structure. I always have some plan, some agenda, or some list of what I need to do. This structure allows me to be the energetic, spontaneous person people know. To go even further, I admit I'm actually a bit of a control freak. I absolutely hate the unknown. Albeit unrealistic, I still want to control everything that happens in my life and pray each day that the events that unfold in my life coincide with what I've written down on a piece of paper.

Throughout my life, even as a kid, I planned when I would go to college, when I would get a certain job, what age I would have kids by, and so on. I kept all of this in a series of Microsoft Word documents with timelines of when I would achieve things and lived my life based on to-do lists. I made this system a lot more challenging for myself when I decided I wanted to have a career in theatre. I wanted to be an actor and I put myself in arguably the worst field possible where I have absolutely no control over my success or what happens because it's always in the hands of others. I began to really see how much I hated when things didn't go the way I planned or intended and that I was heading into a lifetime of that.

Therefore, by the time I was presented with the opportunity to be the director of play for my theatre department here at Texas Christian University, it sounded as appealing as it did intimidating. Along with the leadership role, I would obtain the control I so enjoyed. I would get to lead a team, pursue the vision I created, and create the show I

wanted to see on that stage and didn't have to worry about other opinions or factors. It wasn't until I got deep into this process that I learned that even when you think you're in control, there is still always something bigger than you guiding the ship.

Throughout the process, the best revelations and moments arrived when I wasn't looking. Also, at the end of the day, your play is only what you think it is until it gets put in front of an audience. The audience is last component of creating theatre. The audience strips control from you and ultimately the show becomes theirs and not yours anymore. This applies to my life as an actor. When I release those reigns and stop trying to control the reaction I want to get from the directors I want to hire me, that's when I succeed and get the job. Whether you're an actor, a lawyer, a waiter or whether you're directing a play or your own life, it's great to do the work. It's great to make the plans, get prepared, work on all the details, and make the to-do list. However, once that is all said and done, it truly is time to let go. If you let what's meant to be just be, that is when the magic of life happens.

### FROM BEING DIRECTED TO BEING THE DIRECTOR

#### **The Directing Class & The Final Project**

My journey as a director began in the fall semester of my junior year in 2012. I was enrolled in our department's directing class which is required for all theatre majors. As terrified of the class as I was, I had been looking forward to the class since my freshman year. At the end of each semester, the directing class presents a selection of ten-minute plays that each director casts themselves, rehearses throughout the semester, and produces for their final project. So I had spent four semesters watching all of my peers go up on the stage and deliver their slate, introducing their play, and I honestly couldn't

wait until it was my turn. When my day finally came, it was already slightly different than what I envisioned because I was a lot shorter than what I thought I'd be as a junior, but I decided to ignore that minor detail. I was also surprisingly calm and felt prepared. As much time as I spent working on the show, I spent just as much time trying to decide what adjectives I would use to describe my actors when I introduced them. I ended up with "amazingly talented" and "very sexy". My experience with this play was pretty near perfect. I had gotten the perfect script for me, I had a dream cast, and I had learned so much about the directing process. I learned how to strip a play down to its core values and themes. I learned why the play was written in the first place. I learned how to discover what all of the characters wanted and why they existed in the play. I learned why they did what they did and said what they said. For the first time, I was able to create and realize a world from a piece of text to the physicalized real world on the stage through my lens. That is directing: transforming an author's words into reality. And I had somehow learned how to do it. The performance of the play was successful far beyond my expectations. The audience's response was electric and encouraging and hearing their laughter solidified for me that I put real life on that stage. I had gotten amazing feedback from my professors on it as well. From a thumbs up immediately following the performance from one professor, to the words, "You should really think about directing. You have the eye for it" from another, to repeated recommendations from several to apply to direct the Studio show my upcoming senior year. I hadn't really thought about directing beyond the directing class and honestly continued not to think about it. I chose to simply enjoy the success of my project and checked it off my list.

## The Application

As the end of the following spring semester drew near, I got the annual email from Dr. Harry Parker, our department chair, with the application for students to apply to direct the next year. As a part of the department's season, each year there are four "mainstage" productions directed by the faculty but also two "studio" productions (one in each semester) that is entirely student produced. The production gets the same treatment as the mainstage shows in that they are fully produced. They have a venue, a set, costumes, lighting, sound, and weekly production meetings just like the other "big" shows. However, the director, again, is a student along with students taking on the roles of costume designer, scenic designer, lighting designer, sound designer, and stage manager. Therefore, being a student director, to be blunt, was a big deal. The studio shows for the next season were *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* by Nora and Delia Ephron in the fall and *Happy Birthday, Boris* by Matt Morris (a recent graduate from our department) in the spring. The application required a one page analysis and directing conceptual statement about the play that needed to include what we thought were the most important components and issues in the play that would affect its production here at TCU.

When it came to the application, I definitely didn't apply in the traditional and encouraged way of writing both concepts and applying for both shows and hoping to be selected for one of them. In a unique initiative for the department, we had actually just produced *Happy Birthday, Boris* several weeks prior as a staged reading. I saw the production, saw the director's vision and how it translated to the stage, and most importantly saw it work successfully. This was actually a huge deterrence for me in

wanting to direct the play. If I were chosen to direct that play, I would have struggled and struggled with ridding my mind of the successful choices that were made putting that show together and would have been unable to come up with Rashaun's interpretation and vision because I was so new to directing. Combined with the fact that I especially wanted to be eligible for casting that same spring semester for the other shows, I made the decision to only apply for the fall. At the time, I ridiculed myself for having the gall to think I was good enough to accept only one show and refuse to apply for both. But I'm definitely no stranger to making bold non-traditional choices so I went for it.

To make my odds even slimmer, *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* is an all-female monologue/vignette play centering on how clothes and wardrobe reflect women's life experiences and how they can be major components of the female identity. To my knowledge today, I was the only male applicant for the directing position among a group of women. Out of the group, I was the one who hadn't endured the struggle of bra-shopping with your mom for the first time, or didn't understand wedding dress selection, or lazy husbands. So overall, my confidence was definitely lacking. To make things worse, I read the play for the first time and hated it. I was bored. I didn't understand the point of the scenes. I just didn't connect with the script. Granted, I am a slow and terrible reader and I frequently miss many things on my first read. Slightly discouraged, I decided to do what I frequently do and put off writing my concept.

Following the recurring pattern in my life, the night before the application deadline arrived and I found myself sitting in the library debating whether or not I was really going to apply to direct a script I didn't like. More importantly, I wondered how I was supposed to come up with a director's concept for a text I didn't understand. As the

night gets later, my mind tends to be at its peak and it came through for me again. I had gotten a burst of inspiration. I decided to give the text another read, but this time, instead of distancing myself from it because I'm not a woman, I tried a different tactic and looked for the theme and ideas that spoke to me even as a man. Then I found the play. The play's voice is a woman. The play's lens is through a woman's eyes. However it speaks to all people. Its ideas are universal. This became the foundation for my 2:00 a.m. concept. The play isn't just about the right dress making you feel empowered. It's about discovering who we are and how something as simple as clothes can help us on that difficult journey to the level where no matter what we wear on the outside, it always reflects who we are on the inside. I thought I struck gold.

I submitted my application with my one concept for one show and let it go. I let it go to the point where I was okay if I didn't get it. I thought if I were really supposed to direct it would happen, and, at the very least if I didn't, I could still audition that semester and potentially be cast, which was my main priority anyway. I was an actor not a director. Six weeks flew by and I was in my musical theatre performance lab class. Because I try to be a good student, I of course was nowhere near my cell phone. However, my friend's phone vibrated and he checked to see what it was during class. To protect his identity I won't mention my phone-checking friend's name (Kyle Montgomery). About a minute later, my friend elbowed me to show me what was on his phone and it was an e-mail with the production assignments for our theatre department's 2013-2014 season. It was scrolled to the show *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*. The director listed: Rashaun Sibley. My friend was ecstatic and I was emotionless. I was experiencing a weird combination of feelings including shock that I actually got it along with fear that

I was actually going to be doing it. Eventually, I let it sink in, believed I was a hot shot big-time director, and fantasized about having a giant Hollywood director's chair with assistants bringing me coffee. After I came back to reality (I don't even like coffee), I patted myself on the back, accepted that I had successfully gotten my first directing job, and checked it off the list.

### THE BREAK-UP

My next step was to get through and finish the rest of the spring semester. Since the studio shows are entirely produced by students, we fortunately each got to have a faculty mentor. I wasted no time in asking my professor Jennifer Engler to be that for me. She had taught me in three classes (including the directing class), directed me in a musical the previous year, and was someone who really believed in me as a director and was a big champion for me. I trusted her artistic opinions, directing expertise, and trusted that she would help foster a great experience for me not only as a director, but also as a student and person. I later found out I jumped the gun and cheated the system in a way because I was supposed to wait until we got the official e-mail that listed which available professors we could choose from. This was just another example in my life that sometimes when you want something, you just have to go for it. I felt very lucky to have her because I know she was very sought after by the other directors. As the semester ended, I had my position, my mentor, and my script. Well, almost.

### **Summer Preparation & Changing Shows**

As the summer began, I learned that the *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* script that I had received to write my concept with was actually different from the one that we would receive from the publisher. Some scenes were changed with new, different ones and there

were line changes scattered throughout as well. As I started to analyze the script more over the summer, I tried not to let that be a huge hurdle and patiently waited for my new updated script to arrive. I occupied my summer with several things on top of getting to know this script better. I finished up my run as an actor at a theatre for their show, *In the Heights*, and I served as the Company Manager for the Trinity Shakespeare Festival through May and June. I was a mentor and camp counselor for the US Performing Arts Camp at TCU in the first week of July, did another show the rest of July at Casa Mañana Theatre, and headed back to campus for RA Training in the first week of August, a mere two weeks away from the beginning of my senior year, and more importantly, Theatre TCU's fall auditions where I would be casting my show. Although my summer was busy, I really did achieve some great progress with my script over the break. I got a much clearer vision of what I wanted to manifest and started to learn what kind of actresses I needed. I did all of this still not having received my final script.

Since auditions were so close, I did start to get a little concerned. So, I started to investigate what was happening with it and then my first big challenge arrived. Our department was not able to secure the performance rights for the piece because another nearby theatre company in our region had already obtained them. Since the publisher doesn't allow multiple productions of the same show within a certain area, Theatre TCU was no longer performing *Love, Loss, and What I Wore*. For me, this meant I no longer had a script to direct with auditions two weeks away. Also, all the time and work I had put into my script so I would cast it correctly, was now gone. On top of that, even after auditions, I would have to start rehearsals for the show just a few weeks after.

Looking back, I like to think of my relationship with *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* as a very passionate summer fling that tragically ended with one heartbroken and the other moving on to another fling with another director at whatever theatre that was preventing our love from blooming. The panic didn't set in immediately because I honestly had no idea what the next step was. I thought that the studio show just might be cancelled and I wouldn't be a director anymore. The panic set in when I and the faculty got the email from Harry explaining what had happened and that we needed to scramble and read scripts to determine what show we would produce in its place ASAP. I felt very fortunate that they allowed me in this process to help decide but then panicked because I had no time to read these scripts that they wanted me to. During RA training, you're in sessions every day from about 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. When I got to my room after these long days, I had no energy or desire to read plays. Out of the several options some faculty suggested, I read three in about two days and none felt right. I also tried to find some options myself, but none of them worked for what the department needed to produce. I was at the peak of hopelessness and just wanted to sleep.

About a week before auditions, my mentor, Jennifer, sent a script to all of us saying that it could possibly be an option. It was an all-female cast, which was something the department originally wanted with their choice of *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* and was a simple monologue show. I decided to give the script a shot, and, at the end of reading it, I didn't think it was bad. It was simple and my favorite play that I had read so far. The week of auditions had arrived and they were happening on Saturday. On Monday, I got a call from Harry wanting me to meet him in his office as soon as possible that day. During my lunch break from RA Training, I headed over and met him

with the script Jennifer had suggested in his hand. He laid it down and said he thought we should do it. It had several female parts and since I was so close to auditions and casting, it would be smart to choose a simple show with no demanding or complicated themes or guidelines. It gave me freedom which was necessary in this time crunch. Exhausted from the script search and since I didn't hate it, I thought this must be the one and agreed. I would now be directing *Sez She* by Jane Martin. I left the office, immediately started preparing for auditions as fast as I could, and finally had my final script which I had been waiting for since May. So I checked it off the list.

### BUILDING THE ARMY

*Sez She* is a unique script to have as a director in that it's a simple show that is just a series of monologues about a very broad range of topics that also have no connecting thread. The only thing they have in common is that they're all told by women. In other words, there really isn't much of a world that's dictated by the playwright in the script. With this show the job of the director is not just to find the world of the play, but the director also has to create it from scratch. Receiving that freedom is the beauty of *Sez She*. Receiving that freedom is also the pitfall of *Sez She*. There are no rules, guidelines, or boundaries. I could do whatever I wanted. I eventually found that scary because it made it hard to find where to start. I was very scared that I would start off on the wrong foot and make the journey that much harder for myself. With time creeping up, I had to let that fear go and just trust my instincts. The first thing on the list with auditions five days away was to figure out what girls I needed to tell these stories.

## **Auditions**

There were about 40 monologues in this full-length two-act script, and they featured a huge variety of characters. I met with Jennifer to talk about this before auditions, and we made my objective very simple to match our simple script. I needed just the best overall actresses I could find. I didn't need certain hair colors or heights. I just needed versatile actresses that could handle whatever type of character I threw at them because the show had so many. I needed girls that could play cute, tough, corky, sensitive, clueless, weak, hick, Jersey, passionate, older, younger, mature, etc. I needed girls who were ready for adventure, not afraid to experiment, and ready to play.

Audition day finally arrived and I made it to the theater with my really official portfolio and brand new pen ready to watch and analyze almost 100 people come in and perform two monologues and one song each. That experience was one of the most enlightening experiences as a theatrical artist I have ever had. I had spent the previous six semesters walking in that same room, performing, and trying to figure out what was going on in the heads of the people in the chairs on the other side of the fourth wall. Now, I was one of them, and I learned that everything my professors tried to tell me about what a director thinks in auditions was absolutely true. Directors really do start watching you and considering you from the moment you walk in the space way before you open your mouth for your first piece. They notice your look, your confidence, and what type of character your appearance lends itself to. I also, to my frustration as an actor, learned that the ten second rule is also true. A director does know if someone is right for a part within the first ten seconds of the audition. Within those first ten seconds, I saw if girls had chops as an actress, if they were comfortable in themselves, knew how to make actor

choices, and if there was a spot for them in my play. I saw a lot of the girls in that five hour audition process, and the ones I enjoyed and wanted to call back were the ones who didn't care what I was thinking and just inhabited their characters, the ones who showed potential even if they weren't perfect, and the ones that embraced who they were and put it on the stage. That's what I needed in *Sez She*. At the end of the day, I called back 28 girls for a play with a cast of five to eight.

### **Callbacks**

I was allotted a two hour slot for my callbacks the next day so I had a lot of playing to do in a very short amount of time. I spent the morning with my mentor choosing pieces from the show for the actresses to read and perform. My tactic was to give all of the girls a piece I thought they fit really well to see if they really knew how to put their true selves into a character and a piece that wasn't necessarily their type to see their versatility and malleability. It also gave me the opportunity to give them feedback on their readings and have them do it again to see if they could listen to and apply my direction since that will be the entire rehearsal process. I thought the auditions were fun until I realized the callbacks were even more fun. As the callbacks went on, some girls thrived, some girls didn't, and some pleasantly surprised me.

Once the callbacks were over, Jennifer and I went to lunch at our usual joint (McAlister's Deli) and started on the mission of creating my dream cast. We went through all of the girls and discussed their potential knowing we had many different types to cover and we could use a maximum of eight to do it. There were obvious agreements but also some disagreements between us. In particular, there was one girl who Jennifer didn't think was right for it, but for some reason I couldn't let go of. I loved when

Jennifer and I would disagree on things throughout the process. It made me challenge myself to really think about and justify why I think a choice I make is right and was a great lesson that in the world of theatre not everyone is going to agree with every single thing you do. I also had the freedom from her to do whatever I wanted, even if she didn't agree, because it allowed me to succeed or fail on my own. This definitely came into play again the next day in the casting session.

### **Casting**

In our department, all the directors (the two faculty and one student) cast their three respective shows from the semester alongside each other. Our rule is also that generally one student isn't cast in more than one production each semester. Therefore, naturally, once we all listed our first choices for our shows that Harry would scribe on the board, there would be conflicts with actors being wanted in more than one show. We would then have to discuss with each other why we needed such person and bargain with each other using our second and third and so on choices until each director had their final cast with actors only in one show. Once our choices were listed, I realized out of my eight actresses, only two of them were for sure in my show because the other six were wanted in the other shows (some in all three). Let the bargaining begin. This was another great challenge for me in that in order to get who I wanted (like I had done in so many classes and papers). I had to voice my argument for why I needed someone and back it up with evidence in order to convince the other directors I needed them more than they did. I also had to think strategically throughout when it came to exchanging one actor for another to make sure the type of actress I need gets to me while the other directors also

got what they needed. It also required having solid second choice options if someone needed someone more than me.

At the end of it all, I finished with five of my original first choice actresses, which I was still very pleased with because my cast was still filled with talented girls. I ended with a total of seven instead of eight because I felt that those seven could tell this story. However, I wasn't done yet. I got another great director's challenge from Harry in that he asked me if I was completely sure that I was content with seven actresses instead of eight. If so, that was okay because it's my show, but if I could use an eighth, it would give another person the opportunity to perform that semester. To this day, I can't say whether that spoke to me as a director or as a person who is an actor and knows that longing to be cast and to perform. All I know is that that resonated so well that I added an eighth. Not only that, to Jennifer's disagreement still, I added the actress that we had disagreed upon the day before. Casting was done and I had my cast of eight. However, I still wasn't done yet. Near the very end of the meeting after casting was done, I started to have a change of heart. I thought about another actress who hadn't been on my radar and remembered that she actually did very well in callbacks and was arguably stronger than the girl I had just added in the cast at the last minute. The professors had already started leaving the room and at the very last second I voiced that I wanted to change my cast. I ended up listening to a gut feeling in the end and exchanged my actresses for that eighth slot. This casting was one of the biggest exercises for me in forming and trusting in my judgment and being able to convince others and myself of its validity. Like this, life is full of choices that once you make, you have to commit to. And I did here. I finally had my cast for. The email with the cast lists was sent out a few hours later and I crossed casting off of my list.

### MAKING THE SHOW MINE

The first day of classes for the fall 2013 semester were now in motion, which meant that *Sez She* was also. The show would begin rehearsals in three weeks on Monday, September 9. In short, I had three weeks to discover where in the world to start in finding the world I wanted to create. To add on, I had one week to really bond with this script (which at this point I had only for a week) in order to create my concept, which I would present at my show's first production meeting for my design and production team.

#### **Production Meetings (Designing & Creating The World)**

In theatre and in our department as well, each show has a weekly production meeting where all areas (stage management, director, costumes, set, lighting, sound, props, and technical direction) discuss the show and its progress from the beginning to the end. This meeting is for updates on how each facet is doing and for updates from the director and any changes that they've decided that would affect design. Designers present their designs here and update on their progress each week. The first production meeting is typically a conceptual meeting where the director gives their concept and explains what they want the show to be and what they want from the designers. It's the opportunity to get everyone on the same track to create the same world so every aspect of the show is uniform. Because the first meeting is so vital, I felt the pressure of coming up with a clear concept that would start our show on the right foot. I actually went and reviewed my *Love, Loss, and What I Wore* concept, and I soon realized that the shows were actually pretty similar in style, theme, and message, so I was able to use that as a springboard.

*Sez She* simply walks us through the lives of many different women as they encounter many diverse situations and directly communicate these experiences and their philosophies to the audience. I emphasized its broad covering of many aspects of life from the importance of kindness, to the role of appearances, to stage fright, to regret, to keeping your mom's wardrobe age appropriate, and everything in between. It comes from the female perspective but it's for all genders. It's simple, straightforward, but universal, relatable, and impactful. One of the biggest aspects of my concept was that I found no connecting thread that linked all of the monologues together. I wanted to find one throughout the process; however, I didn't want to force one upon it for fear it would seem artificial and I challenged the design team to embrace that. Therefore, I wanted to change the entire setting every time there was a monologue change. I didn't want to fight how all over the place the script seemed. It was written that way for a reason and I planned on discovering it. I also didn't hesitate to let them know that because I had just gotten the script, I was going to change my mind about things. I would discover more things about it and realize I was wrong about things or I would find new things to add. So I told them to be ready because it was bound to happen.

After creating the concept, my next task was to cut the script. Cutting the script definitely gave me the experience of what it was like to balance the artistic side of theatre you get with the director with the business needs you may receive from a producer. For the studio shows, we have a 5:30-7:00 p.m. window to perform them in so as to not compete with sound bleed from School of Music productions whose venue is adjacent to ours. *Sez She* is, again, a two-act script with 40 pieces plus an addendum with other pieces you have the option of including. The task of cutting this down to a 90 minute

show with a great variety of material that suited my actresses was very arduous. I also had to do it quickly because my actresses still didn't know what monologues they were going to perform and they needed that as soon as possible. I cut the ones I didn't like. I cut the ones that I didn't think contributed enough. I cut the ones that I thought were weaker carbon copies of another until I finally got down to 26 pieces. My next goal was to make them as interesting and dynamic as possible. I wanted to surprise and shock the audience with every monologue. I didn't want to let a rhythm settle and the audience to get bored with monologue after monologue. Therefore, I came up with several ideas to make each monologue different. I quickly decided that some monologues would have other actresses on stage so that the speaker had someone to play off and it became more of a scene. I decided that I wanted to see if I could create a world where two separate monologues could be fused together to create a scene which ended up being very successful. After retooling the entire sequence of monologues in the show, I had created my own adaptation of the script and my new world's creation was actually underway.

In the initial production meetings before the first rehearsal, my design team stepped up to the challenges I had placed in front of them. Costumes and lighting worked hard to give me a different and distinct look for all 26 pieces without repeating themselves. That's more than 30 costumes and 100 light cues. My set designer also rose to the occasion and led the way to one of the show's first breakthroughs. She brought a few different design options for the set, and because we have 26 different locations in the show that needed to be represented, the show required an abstract and out of the box approach. My favorite of her designs featured a series of giant diaries that would represent different things. Three books in the back corner helped create a unique staircase

with different levels to play on. Two books lying near the front of the stage with one elevated on a diagonal created a ramp and more levels to use. The other book's cover would open like a book, and a doorway would appear that could be used as another entrance. The design was innovative, creative, and multifunctional. However, the best part was that this design gave the show the connecting thread I was hoping to find. With the diaries always present on stage, every monologue became a diary entry for each woman. Therefore, what connects all of these pieces together are that they are all entries in the diaries of women. It was perfect. It was simple and wasn't forced just like I wanted. It inspired an entirely new opening sequence that I created for the show that wasn't scripted where we had all of the actresses on stage appear writing in their diaries with a recording of their overlapped voices saying what they're writing in their diary, which ended up being their actual lines from the show. For a show I spent just a month with before I began rehearsals, it was starting off in great shape. I checked my preparation for rehearsal off of my list.

#### THE REHEARSAL PROCESS: FINDING THE PLAY

September 9<sup>th</sup> came so much faster than I had anticipated. This meant that opening night, October 24<sup>th</sup>, was now six weeks away and officially approaching. However, now after almost a full four-year college career, it stopped surprising me how time moves quicker than you want it to sometimes. It was that day I started feeling like a director. I was in the rehearsal room with my cast, exploring, discovering and creating life. I felt in my directing element. I love those moments when you finally see what a moment's supposed to be and you excitedly tell your actor not to change a thing because that was it. It's when you find the truth. A rehearsal is never fully that though. It's

honestly a series of failures until you finally get it right. You try all the things you can think of to get it right. You try different objectives for a character and different tactics a character will use to achieve that objective. This process was a lot of all of the above.

### **Finding the Play With My Cast**

We began the rehearsal process after the first cast read-through of the play with individual working sessions with each of the actresses for a couple weeks. We found who all of the characters were one by one. We figured out how old they were, what they do for a living, what their background was, what led to this moment, and most importantly why they are saying and doing what they are in this moment. Naturally, this came easier for some pieces than it did others. One of my favorite pieces to rehearse was a piece called “Valedictorian” with my actress, Mackie, about a girl who chokes up on her valedictorian speech. We initially took a character approach where this character didn’t like crowds at all and was nervous and awkward from the beginning and it persisted throughout. It was somewhat successful, but I felt there was more to find. So, Mackie and I tried the character with a different approach in that same session. We decided that this girl had been waiting for this moment her whole life. She had prepared for this moment and was anticipating glory and then when she got up there everything changed. This changed the monologue totally and led to it being arguably the strongest piece in the show. This character was so much funnier because you saw the character struggle and fight against the fear. You saw her want to give a great speech but the nerves continuing to win. This made the character more three-dimensional, more real, more relatable, and thus, more human and funny. Real life is funny.

Another piece whose progress was totally opposite to “Valedictorian” was “Mannequin” The actress, Caroline, and I spent several weeks trying to find who this character was and how to get her to identify with and feel what that character was feeling. This character spent a fortune on plastic surgeries to turn her into a goddess and win the world’s approval through her looks. Caroline had a very hard time getting to that place in the beginning of the monologue where the character is so full of herself, confident in her beauty, and practically all-powerful and finding that discovery where the character realizes that she’s fixed herself up so much that she can no longer see who she really is. We spent a long time trying to get her to feel that confidence and obtain that total knowledge that she’s gorgeous, which all comes down to confidence, and we worked so hard at this character’s crazy situation that it became overworked and wasn’t growing anymore. After a break, I decided to tear this monologue apart and find out what it’s about at its core and use that for Caroline to identify with. The next work session on it I talked to her about masks and how I put them on a lot to please people because I want to be loved. I fear people won’t connect with who I really am, but they will love this persona I can put on, so that’s how I live. The repercussions of this are heavy in that it actually disconnects yourself from your true self. Caroline was able to identify with this because as actors we all know how to put on masks because we have to be liked by people to be successful in this business. Most of us are very self-conscious because our work and our business consists of us constantly being judged and evaluated by others. So we’re naturally very sensitive. We then connected this to this seemingly fake woman full of collagen she was playing. We found the woman’s inner being. She’s not a monster. She’s a woman with insecurities that goes to extreme lengths to hide them and in the

process doesn't know what she has become and who she used to be. People are still people. Once this was understood, we found the woman. Throughout the process we failed, stumbled, and made mistakes. But we also discovered, unearthed, and revealed. It takes digging to find gold. And again, like in this process and in life, failures are a natural step on the way to success. They may not be on the list, but they still happen. However, once you get to success, you never have to leave. We rehearsed and rehearsed this show until we were ready for our tech rehearsals the week before opening.

### **Finding the Play with My Designers**

The digging we did for rehearsals, needless to say, definitely had to happen behind the scenes as well with my production team and me. I was faced with challenges inside and outside the rehearsal room, and my team had to keep working them out with me as tech and dress rehearsals approached quickly. Because the studio shows typically have a smaller budget than the mainstage shows, this was a huge lesson in budget management and we definitely hit our bumps in the road. With lighting, my lighting designer and I discussed and planned on various creative lighting designs to support my desire to have distinct changes in environment for each monologue. To help with this, we were going to use automated lights to do so, which helped make the job immensely easier. We also were under the impression that this was approved since the very beginning. However, later on in the process, we were denied the use of automated lights because the studio was designed to have budget limitations, so we had to craft a new plan to make these designs happen and create new ones.

The budget also affected the set design as well. The amount of diaries and the configuration of the diaries changed numerous times due to budget concerns when buying

the materials to produce this. In the initial design we had more books and also books that could be moved about the space as well. The scenic designer, her mentor, Jennifer (my mentor), and I had several meetings trying to find a compromise, and the set design changed at least three to four times. This bled over into our rehearsals as well because new set designs meant new staging and blocking that I had to create and give to my actors. However, once we finalized the design with everyone, the build of it ran very smoothly and timely.

Another aspect where obstacles had to be overcome was with costumes. Because of my concept of changing settings, each monologue required a different look as well for the actresses. Because there were over 30 looks needed, there were many designs and renderings my costume designer had to do and many pieces of clothing to obtain. She came up with a plan of using lots of pieces from our actress' own wardrobes to save time and money and nearly all the rest of the clothes were purchased. However, as I warned in the beginning, I made changes along the way including having more girls in others' pieces, which would also require more costume pieces and accessories to differentiate the characters from a previous monologue done by the same actress. Because of a miscommunication in the very beginning in that my costume designer wasn't expecting other girls to be in others' scenes, she fell behind in producing the rest of the costumes near the home stretch of the rehearsal process. Again, overall, challenges arrived in every aspect of putting together the show (inside and outside rehearsals). To work through them, it required a lot of teamwork, patience, and dedication that I'm really proud to say my team and I achieved, which led to us being prepared for our big tech. I now got to cross finding the play with my cast and team of designers off of my list.

### THE STORM BEFORE THE STORM: TECH & DRESS REHEARSALS

Tech rehearsals are pretty infamous and almost dreaded in the world of the theatre. They tend to be one of the most stressful and tiring parts of the entire process. They're long, sometimes painstakingly slow, and require constant patience and attentiveness from everyone involved. Tech rehearsals are naturally the rehearsals where all of the technical elements including sound and lighting are introduced for the first time as well as the crew that work backstage and behind the scenes. The show is ran-through as usual, but as you go you'll frequently hear the word "hold" from the stage manager. When this happens, everyone onstage must stop and freeze so that a technical cue can be adjusted or fixed. Examples include if a lighting or sound cue that occurred is late or early or if lights need to be adjusted. If anything doesn't occur according to plan, there will be a hold, it will try to be fixed, and the scene will have to be run again to see if it is indeed fixed. Again, holds happen constantly throughout the rehearsal. A show can typically take twice as long to get through if not more during tech so again it requires everyone to be as prepared, attentive, and present as possible to make it go as smoothly as it can.

Going into tech, everything seemed as prepared as it could until my next big challenge arrived. One of my actresses approached me with the news that a relative was dying and that if she wanted to have her goodbye she would need to fly home immediately. She asked if it was okay if she did that. I, of course, told her that that was more important and that we'd be able to do tech without her. I got this decision approved by my mentor and my department chair and headed into tech the next day with one less actress. Typically in high pressure situations, I actually tend to calm down, so I didn't

head into tech nervous at all. I thought we would be just fine doing tech without her, and if there were problems when she came back for dress rehearsal, we would just fix them then. It was a little weird doing my first tech as a director without my entire cast, but the tech went very smoothly and lasted about three hours, which is not too shabby at all for an hour and a half show. After tech, we headed into fall break, and once we returned from that, we went straight into our two dress rehearsals. Now that the costumes were on the stage under the light, with the sounds, props, and actresses, all the pieces were actually put together. The only thing missing to make it theatre was the audience, and they were coming in less than 24 hours. I went to bed at peace and crossed tech and dress rehearsals off of the list.

#### OPENING NIGHT: FINISHING THE LIST

Thursday, October 24, 2013. It's 4:15 p.m. and the show will have its debut performance at 5:30 p.m. I'm sitting in the house of the theatre looking at crew members sweep the set just wondering what to do with my body because I can't sit still. I keep trying to find something to do to be productive and somehow help the show be better. I un-straighten chairs just so that I can re-straighten them. I wipe dust off of dustless set pieces. I continue to bother stage management with asking if I can help with anything. I stare at my name boldly printed on the first page of the program right under the title as director. The control freak was back. It was like sending a child into the first day of kindergarten. What if they cry? What if they need me? I'm the person that knows what they need most. I know my child the best. I know *Sez She* the best. What if the other kids don't like my child? What if the audience doesn't like my show? There has to be something I can do. At 4:30 p.m., the stage was set in its pre-show light cue, it was quiet

backstage, and the actresses were finishing their final preparations. The theatre opened, the audience started to come in and I realized I was done. I directed. Theatre was about to happen for this audience and I created it. I made an idea, got the best people I could to shape it into something beautiful and impactful, and created something.

I had never felt like an artist before until then when I realized I made art. I was always and still am awful at drawing and sculpture, so I never attached myself to the title of artist. Performers are artists, but I couldn't define myself beyond performer until then. Everything I had done in my life was art whether I realized it or not. I helped make art every time I stepped on stage and now I created art from my own head and intuition. The show was all me and I was finished. Even if the show was terrible and the audience hated it, I was done. I did my job. Now, all I have to do is sit and enjoy art. Famous acting teacher, Stella Adler, said that art reminds us we have a soul. I can now say I reminded people that even in our crazy fast-paced, business-oriented world that they have souls. That might be the coolest thing I've ever done. I took my seat and watched the show with the audience like it was my first time. With every laugh, handclap, and cheer I heard that night, I knew I did something important. Typically, I would've thought that I could've crossed directing off of my notorious list. However, my directing experience was one that was too good to be on a simple list of things to do.

### CONCLUSION: BURNING THE LIST

We are all directors whether we're in the arts or not. I realized that so many lessons I learned from being a director transcend the world of the theatre and really apply to life. If you direct, you learn that hurdles always come and it's all about how you get over them. You learn to have a stand. To have an argument. To have an opinion. To have

something to say and never back down from it. To believe in what you believe. To believe that it matters and to make others believe that it matters. That's theatre. That's art. That's life.

It makes sense that directing's goal when the goal of putting life on stage is to parallel real life. I don't think these parallels are just mere coincidence. As much as I've tried to control the destiny of my life, I've learned the lesson many times that I am ultimately not in control no matter how hard I try. I've had alcoholism and infidelity tear my family apart. I've lost family that I truly didn't think I would lose. I've fallen hard many times pursuing a career as performer. I, of course, have had many auditions where nothing has come from it. I wasn't even accepted into the theatre program I'm a part of now here at TCU when I first auditioned for it back in high school. Every time I tried to control what happened, it seemed that I had failed. All this being said, it made me learn what life is supposed to be. I've learned what it means to be a living human being rather than some kind of robot performing task after task as it's supposed to and achieving the desired result every time.

Life is meant to be lived. Life should be experienced and not passed through. Life gets beautifully surprising. Once I used that failure to learn what it meant to be an actor and pursue a life in theatre, it made me the better actor and better theatre artist. With my one second chance, I did get into the musical theatre program here at TCU. I have a mother and a brother I am practically inseparable from.

In this transition of mine into adulthood in a world that can't be controlled and is totally unpredictable, I know now how to live in it. I always detested that cliché of life being about the journey and not the destination. However, that's how theatre works. The

ending of the play doesn't make sense without the journey in the story. The play is empty without it. Theatre's job is to reflect life. Therefore, life is empty without the journey. As I go forward, I have decided to destroy my list I've carried for forever. I will always have goals. I will always have a plan to try to achieve my goals. However, there is a space now on my paper left blank for life to come in and happen.

## ABSTRACT

This project illustrates my views on my journey as a first-time director of theatre while directing the play *Sez She* by Jane Martin for Theatre TCU. Specifically, I documented each step of the process from my initial applying for the director position, to my experience in the rehearsal environment, to the final product. I also give my final reflections on it all while discussing all of the obstacles along the way and how I overcame them. Through this experience, I learned how to be a better director, actor, and overall artist of the theatre. I also learned that one's life can be missed if all of life is solely a series of steps to get to the desired destination or goal. As important as it can be to be that tactical, it can also prohibit the true experience of what life's true beauty is and the unexpected things we learn about ourselves and about life while on life's journey. I use my directing experience to support this argument and apply it to my own life.