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Permission to perform: a waltz with Zelda

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PERMISSION TO PERFORM: A WALTZ WITH ZELDA

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

In

The Department of Theatre

by
Sarah E Smith
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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses an artistic journey of creating a one-woman show. It is the purpose of Sarah E. Smith, creator and performer, to marry private human experience to public theatrical expression. In this project, Smith is experimenting with character development generated by abstract, physical, absurd, and unconventional explorations. This exploration will create a distance from the literal translation of the story and will allow the audience to gain a better perspective of the character and her dilemma. It is the intention of the creator to make the action and need of the character more visceral, immediate and striking by expanding expression from spoken word to gestural language (psychological and behavioral).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

An actor prepares each character's arc with needs and tactics. These needs and tactics are what shape the character's super objective. The tactics offer variation for the audience; they build the conflict and in turn the climax. A character's tactics are the foundation for the story. It is the need however, that transforms a script into a human experience. Once a character has need, she is immediately perceived to have warmth in her, to be filled with life. This need stirs up empathy in those watching and listening to her. The character's need becomes the driving force for action. The actions a character takes are directly affected by how extreme her need is. Stringing these actions together creates a journey seeming to be larger, or richer, than life. Theatrical truth is life with all of the boring bits cut out. A potent story or message becomes necessary to creating a theatrical experience.

An actor's career is the same as a character's journey. What an actor is willing to risk is directly related to what they want to gain: a chance to tell a story. Each actor has her own purpose behind telling a story. In attending graduate training I have learned an actor needs to know their own character, who they are and their purpose for communicating. Like finding specifics of a fictional character, an actor will find their artistic path easier when they discover their own greatest wants, and how far they are willing to risk personally, to obtain that goal.

Before an actor can find her own voice, let alone a character's voice, the actor must find permission to perform. This permission can come from several sources. The best source is a freedom from within the artist. An artist craves to tell a story through their craft and first must feel entitled to tell it. External sources of this drive can be influences such as directors, agents, family, loved ones, friends and fans. These other sources can either influence through a positive, encouraging manner or they can offer doubtful or negative feedback. If negative, the feedback can either fuel an actor to propel forward to prove their catalyst wrong or this negativity can break the artist. If positive, the source can coddle the artist, thereby weakening the artist's need for self-motivation. It is the internal source of drive and permission that a successful actor must come to rely on. Through the course of my graduate training, I have encountered this challenge daily. I was surprised to discover that my artistic drive comes from within.

By presenting, *A WALTZ WITH ZELDA*, I hoped to challenge my current university community, to examine how well they are taking care of their unique, artistic voices. In an academic setting, student voices are young, still tender and need guidance due to their limited amount of experience in expressing themselves. It is a hard task to resist putting parameters and rules on these artists, instead of simply allowing exploration and encouraging freedom. It is not an impossibility to raise the children of theatre in a healthy, open environment, equally accepting different voices, instead of conforming all to one mold. Ideally, a program is most successful if it equally encourages natural talent, as well as a strong work ethic. This professional approach, as well as daily interactions with more experienced artists, is what molds the student's outlook on her work for the rest of her career.

Actors are unique creatures in that they rely on a courageous sensitivity. Actors must find a skin that can allow impressions, and information, to seep through as they develop characters. The key to a healthy actor, as I am presently finding, is balancing outward and inward permission. As a young and developing artist, I am on the threshold of finding this personal permission or finding a new career. In my three-year contract with Louisiana State University I

have denied, and now recently have accepted, that I need to find my own inner source of power and permission to perform. The process and performance of my thesis, A WALTZ WITH ZELDA, was my effort to find this freedom, joy and permission while working artistically.

CHAPTER 2: THE CHALLENGE

In choosing a theme for a one-woman show, I was initially drawn to produce something from my southern roots, as I felt a great connection to that subject. I also wanted to lean on my comedic abilities, and so began working on *Tales of Uncle Remus, Briar Patch Stories*. We were working, at the time, in voice class, on specific and multiple character voices. I was taking a trip to pick up a children's book from one of the local libraries in Baton Rouge when I passed an F. Scott Fitzgerald display. I had recently reread his book *The Great Gatsby* but knew nothing of the tumultuous celebrity he and his wife had achieved in the Jazz Era of America. As I looked at the display of several different translations of *The Great Gatsby*, as well as photographs of F. Scott, a portrait of a young woman caught my eye. She was striking. She was Zelda Sayre Fitzgerald.

When a story focuses on a woman, it often devolves into the traditional "male versus female" conflict. These stories typically consist of proving that one gender is superior to the other in some aspect of living. What creates a dynamic role for a woman to portray is a story that transcends gender roles and objectification. I found that Zelda's story is worth telling, and as an artist, worth investigating, because of her human experience. She went beyond questioning a woman's worth by challenging expectations of gender, class and age. Her life's story says much more about the human condition than just focusing on femininity, sex or love. Her struggles reach to anyone who has a voice and felt it suppressed.

Zelda had such strong convictions about artistic expression, that she broke any expectations, and as many rules as she could. Her flaw was letting outward forces, like her husband, break her. Zelda was fawned over while growing up; her poems, dances and sketches were celebrated, not necessarily for the quality, but for the free, unrestricted style. Once Zelda was a wife and mother, and therefore much more influenced by F. Scott, her voice become suppressed. Like Zelda, I also struggle, as performer and educator, to sustain integrity, in a career that demands for peculiar interactions. Studying Zelda's journey, reminded me of my own search for personal boundaries, as an actor.

In *A WALTZ WITH ZELDA*, Zelda's task, or super objective, is to express her voice. This year as an artist, I have encountered this challenge. . In the piece, as she was in her life, she is successful at finding passion and venues to explore those passions, but is shut down in each attempt. She blossoms with ideas and inspiration, yet sacrifices those for the good of her husband's career. She repeatedly gives her husband pieces of herself; her experiences and writings, which he uses as his own literary material. Not only does he allow this fallacy, he enforces it, publishing her work under his name several times. Had Zelda the knowledge and the faith that her work could stand alone, perhaps she would have stood up for herself. The task of the story is to engage audiences to analyze how they are caring for their artistic voices.

I created, *A WALTZ WITH ZELDA* with the idea that she, and the audience, would experience together the predetermined, and the undetermined, simultaneously. The piece begins with Zelda living the last moments of her life in real time. However, she is hallucinating, and therefore is able to relive events that have already taken place. This surreal approach allows the audience, as well as Zelda, to take an active journey to gain perspective.

My dream as a performer has always been to change the audience's breath. Even if only for a moment, stirring the air around someone so much that they are changed opens up a world of possibilities for greater understanding. This moment is when we catch ourselves, hold our breaths, and gain deeper understanding of universal human truths. These moments are precious opportunities that illuminate human connection. This instant can happen through laughter, tears, gasps or a breath held. This collective breath is powerful. Unless a theatrical piece, or any type of art, has this potential, it is not worth producing.

Zelda Fitzgerald is one of the most evocative personalities in the History of the States. She was an artist, though stifled, by family, society, and mostly, her husband. She sacrificed for love, was hurt and became lost. Most interesting to me, is the stifling of her creativity, which in turn suppressed her life. Later in her broken life, she developed Schizophrenia, and spent years in and out of hospitalization for mental illness. Her story inspires me to fight for artistic voices. To find my own voice and inspire other artists that are denied, trapped, and tortured. Her huge presence allows me to approach a process with charcoal discoveries instead of pencil.

CHAPTER 3: FIRST SCRIPT

The first script consisted of letters that Zelda wrote to F. Scott throughout their relationship. They had been preserved, first by F Scott as possible literary material, and then by family members and fans. Each letter represented for me a step in their relationship and moreover a phase in Zelda's life. Because of Zelda's fantastic handle on language her letters became difficult for me to finesse into an active state on the stage. The set consisted of a downstage "garden" area where Zelda is introduced to the audience, an easel and chair, a chaise lounge and a rocking chair. All of the set pieces began with white linens draped over them to evoke a ghostly feel. Coaching was given by George Judy and music design was done by Jacob Sullivan.

A cacophony of sounds, jazz music, eerie quality. The sounds build to a climax as the lights dim. Once the music has grown to its loudest and we have hit the blackout, a hum of crickets fills the space. Lights discover Zelda, a young, dark mystery of 20 years. She is lying in the garden downstage left wearing a summer dress, hands under her head and legs crossed with feet going towards center stage; a yellow dusk envelops her on her star-gazing blanket.

Zelda: Scott, (she rises from gazing at the stars and looks behind her at him) my darling lover- everything seems so smooth and restful, like this yellow dusk. Knowing that I'll always be yours- that you really own me- that nothing can keep us apart- is such a relief after the strain and nervous excitement of the last month.

I'm so glad you came- (she lies back down to breathe in the night) like Summer, just when I needed you most- and took me back with you. Waiting doesn't seem so hard now. The vague despondency has gone (she smiles) - I love you Sweetheart.

(she pulls the book over her face, inhales) To breathe and know you loved the smell (she rolls over on her tummy looking out at him I think I like breathing twilight gardens and moths more than beautiful pictures or good books (throwing the book) - It seems the most sensual of all the senses-(the hum of crickets swell, an owl is heard, a soft jazz tune plays within the wind of the evening. Zelda rises and uses the evening orchestra as a song to dance to crossing through center stage) Something in me vibrates to a dusky, dreamy smell- a smell of dying moons and shadows-

(crosses down-right to chaise) I've spent today in the grave-yard- It really isn't a cemetery, you know- trying to unlock a rusty iron vault built in the side of the hill. It's all washed and covered with weepy, watery blue flowers (she pulls the sheet off of the couch and wraps it around her, picks up a flower from the chaise) that might have grown from dead eyes- sticky to touch with a sickening odor- (crosses up-left to rocking chair and sits) Why should graves make people feel in vain? I've heard that so much, but somehow I can't find anything hopeless in having lived- All the broken columns and clasped hands and doves and angels mean romances and in an hundred years I think I shall like having young people speculate

on whether my eyes were brown or blue- (crosses up-right to easel and begins to paint) of course, they are neither- I hope my grave has an air of many, many years ago about it- Old death is so beautiful- so very beautiful- we will die together- I know

(Lights become more bleak transforming the garden/bedroom into a room in a hospital)

(she continues to paint the inspiration of old death and slowly the smooth strokes turn into rigid, harsh and jerky motions as she repeats like a record beginning to skip)

I know. We

will.

die together. I

know

We will die...We

will

We will die (the strokes become wild and her intensity follows)

Die, die

DIE,

We will die together-

(she turns downstage to face him) You wrote you didn't want me to suffer any more. Please, please come here and see for yourself. I'm sick and beaten ...If there's nobody in all this barren brothel who will look after me, I demand I be allowed to go immediately to a hospital in France where there is enough human kindness to prevent the present slow butchery. Scott if you knew what this is like you would not dare in the eyes of God leave a person in it. Please help me. Please, please-

(she watches him walk away. crosses to the rocking chair up-left and picks up her book)

Dr. Squires tells me you are hurt that I did not send my book to you before I mailed it to Max.

Scott, I love you more than anything on earth and if you were offended I am miserable. We have always shared everything but it seems to me I no longer have the right to inflict every desire and necessity of mine on you. I was also afraid we might have touched the same material.

Also, feeling it to be a dubious production due to my own instability I did not want a scathing criticism such as you have mercilessly given my last stories, poor things. I have had enough discouragement, generally, and could scream with that sense of inertia that hovers over my life and everything I do. (sits in rocking chair, pages through her book) So, Dear, my own, please realize that it was not from any sense of not turning first to you- but just time and other ill-regulated elements that made me so bombastic about Max.

(revealing) I have two stories that I save to show you, and a fantastic sketch. I am going to begin a play as soon as I can find out about length.

Goofy, please love me- life is very confusing- but I love you. Try, dear- and then I'll remember when you need me to sometime, and help.

I love you-

Darling Heart, our fairy tale is almost ended, and we're going to marry and live happily ever afterward just like the princess in her tower who worried you so much- and made me so very cross by her constant recurrence- I'm so sorry for all the times I've been mean and hateful- for all the miserable minutes I've caused you when we could have been so happy. You deserve so much- so very much-

I think our life together will be like these last four days- and I do want to marry you- even if you do think I "dread" it- I wish you hadn't said that- I'm not afraid of anything- To be afraid a person has either to be a coward or very great and big. I am neither, Besides, I know you can take much better care of me than I can, and I'll always be very, very happy with you-except sometimes when we engage in our weekly debates- and even then I rather enjoy myself. I like being very calm and masterful, while you become emotional and sulky.

Sweetheart (for the first time, Zelda looks to Scott but can no longer see him)

- I miss you so- I love you so- and next time I'm going back with you- I'm absolutely nothing without you (searching)- Just the doll that I should have been born- (growing desperate) You're a necessity and a luxury and a darling, precious lover, and you're going to be a husband to your wife.

(Scott dies.)

Scott?

Scott?

Scott.

(she puddles to the floor)

I am sorry too that there should be nothing to greet you but an empty shell.

You have been so good to me- and all I can say is that there was always that deeper current running through my heart: my life- you.

(She grows old, or broken, or both) You remember the roses in Kinney's yard...we crossed the street and said we loved the south. I thought of the south...thought I was part of the south...We were gold and happy all the way home.

Now that there isn't any more happiness and home is gone and there isn't even any past and no emotions but those that were yours...- it is a shame that we should have met in harshness and coldness where there was once so much tenderness and so many dreams...I love you anyways- even if there isn't any me or any love or even any life...

(she begins to sing softly)

Oh, Do-Do

Do-Do-

(A red blaze begins to cover the back wall. Sounds swell as Zelda saunters up to watch the fire. Jazz horns wail as Zelda's silhouette dances.)

CHAPTER 4: REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

As we closed our performances of our initial scripts in the spring of our second year, I felt, as I do with most characters, unsatisfied. The feedback from my professors consisted of urgings to find a more dramatic attack on the story, dropping the southern accent and of course finding a journey that can last half an hour. As I began brainstorming for the new Zelda project, I searched for different ways to express the story and myself.

In the same spring semester, I was introduced to the ideas of Joseph Chaikin, an elite director and actor who founded the Open Theatre. The theatre was created to honor experimental theatre and the process of creating. In its beginnings, the theatre company did not produce shows, and instead the rehearsals and workshops were always open to the public. After moderate success with this type of exploration, the company began to devise pieces. By creating a theatre company whose purpose was to showcase rehearsal, Chaikin gave the company's members permission to throw away all responsibility to perform or to manufacture an end product. Because of his sensitivity to actors' obligation to the language, or script, they were given, Chaikin was able to release them and lead them into a new world of exploration. This world invited actors to bring in stories and *homework* that deepened their understanding of and connection to the material they were building. Chaikin's process seemed to call actors to become more personal and united with the work and yet less ego-driven¹.

This discovery of a different kind of theatre practice inspired me to find a piece that was mine. I had explored devised pieces before, in high school, and even in college, but each piece was either partnered with someone, or driven by an outside perspective. This was my chance to find a piece, and build it in a new way. This was my time to find a process that was unique to me, to propel me into my deepest creative journey.

Chaikin's way of working reminded me of the saying, 'the wise man speaks little'. Chaikin wanted to explore what an artist could communicate if the spoken language was taken out of the picture. He realized that by taking away words, (in his original works at least) actors could truly listen to the story, each other, and themselves². Conventional means of communication via the musicality of a voice, was given up for alternative means of communication, such as exchange of breath, and moving bodies. The dialogue moved from cognitive to visceral-therefore expanding from a private understanding, to an open transmission. Actors created scores of movements and breaths, instead of relying on the written words. I have heard that by taking away one of the senses, or in this case one of the communicators, it strengthens the others. I can only imagine that after practicing this technique, the actors of the Open Theatre grew more connected to the material, which would only deepen by then layering on the text afterwards.

I wanted, and still seek, a deeper, more visceral connection to the Zelda material. By changing my script into a *non-script*, I gave myself the freedom to go where the material wanted. Nick Erickson, professor of movement for our Theatre Department, encourages his students to become aware of *how* the body acts to achieve set goals. We often sacrifice the experience of the journey for the achievement. We should allow ourselves to reflect on how we got from A to Z,

¹ Diamond par 4

² Diamond par 3

instead of focusing on proving anything. Success will always be achieved if one can learn something from the journey. We are taught to plan ahead, to know what to expect. These limitations that we place on ourselves, cheat us out of experiences. My work with Zelda became the opportunity to experience this idea of unbound, limitless potential.

CHAPTER 5: BUILDING THE STORY FROM SOUNDSCAPE ONWARD

Because I was taking away Zelda's text I knew I would rely more on the technical aspects in order to create relationships and reactions. I wanted sound to reflect Zelda's inner/mind/psychological experience. I also wanted this to be one of the only clues to the audience that she suffers from a mental struggle. In communicating to my first sound designers, Almeda Benison and Jacob Sullivan, I gave the following notes:

Though she was diagnosed with schizophrenia, the experience shouldn't be limited by the label of schizophrenia and instead encompass expressions of a range of mental instabilities (anywhere from drowning in love to the phase between sleep and wake). Also, the tilt could be accomplished by layering several levels, types and rhythms of sounds. In other words, each layer could be perfectly enjoyable, controlled and beautiful if it was heard on its own but the sounds together become jumbled. The cruelty is from the overall flood more than any harsh sound in particular.

I also wanted sound textures that provided Zelda with settings. The action of the piece was to have three different locations: Montgomery, Alabama; New York City; and Asheville, North Carolina. The sound of the South at night was something I identified with, and knew was necessary for the piece. This sound, to me, engulfs you completely when the sun goes down, especially on a clear night. The crickets hum so loudly you can feel them. You can almost hear the warmth. I wanted winds, whispering and wailing, to be present in the woods, to evoke a dreamlike, haunted feeling. I also wanted to incorporate sounds of the roaring twenties, including the jazz sounds and instruments and the booming industrial sound of New York City. Using these sounds to create the setting seemed to confuse. Many of the big band sounds that we experimented, with seemed to sound like New Orleans, or other big jazz cities of the south.

The collaborative process, though drawn out, was one of the most promising and open collaborations I have ever experienced. The creation and building of the sound design, was a true dialogue between musician and actor. Raul Gomez, composer and sound engineer, saw the first version of the Zelda story in the spring of 2010. He showed immediate interest in the story, and began shortly after to write the music. The first piece of music that was inspired to write was Zelda's Waltz. The waltz was a major piece of the theatrical quilt we were building. It would later be manipulated and twisted to serve as the mechanism to measure Zelda's state of being. As I was transforming the script into a movement theatre piece, we spoke in depth about an underscore that could serve as environment, other characters, and support Zelda's growth and discoveries. The challenge was then to find a language we both spoke, actor and musician, to find the world we both wanted for the piece. This process would have been simpler, and quicker, had we decided to manipulate already established music, but we took the challenge to create each detail from scratch.

Once the waltz was written, Raul gathered twelve musicians to record; Paula Bujes, Joel Wilson, Paris Paraschoudis, Luis Alberto and Raul Gomez (violins), Marcelo Martinez Vieira, Pedro Huff and Julia Lee (cellos), Oscar Rossignoli (piano), Robert Cling (double bass), John Tracy (percussion) with Bill Kelly recording and Raul Gomez conducting.

After the recording, three jazz musicians stayed to improvise more material. The main goal of the improvisation was to get textures for the background, as well as to underscore, the

music Raul was building. The improv was hugely inspiring to me, as I could begin to imagine an abstract exploration of Zelda in time and space. The musicians, Bill Kelly (piano), Marcelo Vieira (cello) and Raul Gomez (violin), had been improvising together for several months, however this was the first time that text was incorporated into their creation. Before each segment, I would read an excerpt of Zelda's writing. All of Zelda's writings that I used in the creation of the project, as well as her biography, were from Nancy Milford's published collection entitled, *Zelda: a biography*. Two excerpts were letters from Zelda to Scott and one from Zelda's literature. Each piece of text gave a different point of view, as they were all from different times in her life, had different temperaments, and certainly different musicality.

The first is from a letter to Scott in the spring of 1919. She was writing him from Montgomery, Alabama and at this point the two were engaged. Zelda refused to marry Scott, even breaking off their relationship for some months, until he felt satisfied with his career. She knew early on that she might be blamed for any shortcomings in his, and wanted him to make his own mark settling down with her. Waiting for Scott to have some security seemed wise, though Scott thought the delay was an excuse for Zelda to claim her last months as an eligible debutante. All of Zelda's letters from this spring encourage Scott that she was his alone.

I've spent today in the grave-yard- It really isn't a cemetery, you know- trying to unlock a rusty iron vault built in the side of the hill. It's all washed and covered with weepy, watery blue flowers that might have grown from dead eyes- sticky to touch with a sickening odor-

Why should graves make people feel in vain? I've heard that so much, but somehow I can't find anything hopeless in having lived- All the broken columns and clasped hands and doves and angels mean romances and in an hundred years I think I shall like having young people speculate on whether my eyes were brown or blue-of course, they are neither- I hope my grave has an air of many, many years ago about it- Old death is so beautiful- so very beautiful- we will die together- I know³

The second piece was from Zelda's novel *Save me the Waltz*. Her novel was completed during her stay at John Hopkins Hospital. Although the novel serves as a kind of autobiography, the book is written from a surreal point of view, and therefore, confusing. This excerpt describes Zelda and Scott, renamed Alabama and David, kissing after Scott's proposal.

She crawled into the friendly cave of his ear. The area inside was gray and ghostly classic as she stared about the deep trenches of the cerebellum. There was not a growth nor a flowery substance to break those smooth convolutions. Just the puffy rise of sleek gray matter. The lumpy mounds rose wet above her head and she set out following the creases. Before long she was lost. Like a mystic maze, the folds and ridges rose in desolation; there was nothing to indicate one way from another. She stumbled on and finally reached the medulla oblongata. Vast tortuous indentations led her round and round. Hysterically, she began to run. David, distracted by a tickling sensation at the head of his spine, lifted his lips from hers⁴.

³ Milford 45

⁴ Fitzgerald 38

The final piece of writing was a letter to Scott late in 1930, when she was kept in L'Eglantine, a mental ward, against her will. She begs Scott to allow her reentry to the world.

You wrote you didn't want me to suffer any more. Please, please come here and see for yourself. I'm sick and beaten ...If there's nobody in all this barren brothel who will look after me, I demand I be allowed to go immediately to a hospital in France where there is enough human kindness to prevent the present slow butchery. Scott if you knew what this is like you would not dare in the eyes of God leave a person in it. Please help me⁵.

These three excerpts allowed the musicians a glimpse into Zelda's mind. Therefore, the music improvised from the excerpts, would become a texture for Zelda's thoughts and emotions. It was important for me to find three different tones, so that the musicians could find different rhythms and journeys through their exploration of Zelda's thoughts. What was interesting to me was that each piece the musicians produced seemed to still fit within the same world: Zelda's world.

As we continued collecting music that fit into the story, we realized that having such an open-ended approach drew out the process. I knew, as a performer, what points of Zelda's life I wanted to incorporate and hearing what the musicians created, helped me build the foundation of the journey. There were sessions when progress would come to a halt, because we did not know where we would be going immediately after a build, or what tone a transition should take. The organic process could only take us so far. At this point, I began to put the puzzle together. I began placing events in order, and we slowly started the process of creating a story arc.

The first piece that we successfully put together and polished was the first seven minutes of the show. Raul had composed a piece entitled, DESCENDING. I gave Raul the first image of the show:

A suggestion of the bottom of a tree (abstract) is seen behind the blacks that are hanging, lifted between 3-4 feet off the ground. At the beginning of the piece Zelda's feet will appear, and she will drip down off the "tree" like "tears of a weeping willow.

Raul wanted to find a sound that began simply and drew us into an unstable chord. The image of the tree inspired us to begin Zelda in the woods. From these two anchors, the tree and the woods, we understood how to create our sound and atmosphere.

The next step was finding the end of the play. I knew how Zelda's life ended and wrestled over whether to stay true to history, or to find an abstract, or figurative, expression. Ultimately, I decided I wanted to play close to the literal, showing that Zelda was trapped in her clinic room during a fire, and burned to the ground with the building and six other patients. I felt her actual death was dynamic, surreal and theatrical enough to serve as the last image I wanted to leave the audience with. To lead up to the death and to provide the story with a resolution, I needed to find a tone, and environment, for the last segment. I wanted an eerie stillness that we hadn't seen before. The hospital vacillated between a jail, and liberation, for Zelda, much like her marriage had been. I wanted to create a suffocating feeling, and to use sounds as an

⁵ Milford 176

overbearing presence which Zelda could react to, ultimately lending an air of paranoia to the piece. Though she was somewhat trapped in the various clinics, she continued to paint and write. The musicality of the previous sections needed to be present. Other sounds I wanted to use were doctors walking down the halls of the hospital, sounds of inspiration coming from within Zelda and noises whose origins were unknown to the audience.

The middle section was the biggest challenge to find. There were so many details of Zelda's life that I wanted to fit into the story, that this section became too busy. Because the beginning and the end of my piece were abstract and simple, I needed to follow the same tone in the middle section. My challenge was again to trim excess details, and restrict myself to one theme within this section. I knew I wanted to incorporate the fame that they both experienced in the beginning of the marriage, along with the temptation of the cities, traveling and spending. I also wanted to include the painful wringing effect that the young couple's marriage began to have on them. What I chose to focus on was the sense of exotic temptation. The roaring jazz era, booze, foreign travel, and fame, seduced Zelda and Scott. This devastated their relationship and their lives.

I was excited to have such success with this experimental process, and became confident that this work allows for future collaborations to be even more fruitful. In working this way, by finding a language, and building a story that spoke to and for me, I began to find an inner permission.

CHAPTER 6: CREATING A HUMAN FOR A STORY, A STORY FOR THE HUMAN

As our projects were extended through the summer, I had the time to dig deeper into Zelda's life. I uncovered more letters, paintings, and even doctor examination notes from her submission into mental wards. During the first version of the story, I embellished and took liberty in expressing who I thought Zelda was. Now, I was finding intimate details, and telling descriptions of who she was. The challenge of creation changed, and my efforts were focused on shaving down how many biographical details I would incorporate. Most actors feel an immense obligation when portraying a historical figure. By hand picking which details I would use to tell her story, I took ownership of it in a new way. I also decided to tell the story abstractly, therefore relieving me of worrying if the audience knew how authentic the story was.

Any character that I have ever developed and explored has had some emotional, physical or mental infirmity. In most instances I created these ailments as extra obstacles for my characters. Zelda came with her own challenges. She always had a way of skipping through conversations, ahead of those she was speaking with, and was known for her elaborate speech and descriptions. She had also been known for her childlike behavior, sometimes noted as petulant, and always wanting attention. Her obsessions were known by family and friends as well. She would spend hours creating; writing poetry, short stories, painting and dancing were some of her favorite obsessions. Though she was impulsive and explosive, no one ever suspected she was sick.

Applying schizophrenia was an important decision. I wanted Zelda to seem open, approachable, and magnetic, just as she was said to be in her lifetime. Incorporating her sickness into the characterization, would also be authentic to her life, but could put too much distance between Zelda and the audience. Another theatre theorist and practitioner I looked to, Antonin Artaud, encouraged me to explore the scary side of Zelda through his writings in *The Theatre and Its Double*. Artaud's attitude poses that the majority of people don't give in to life's magical or threatening forces; we live safely on the edge of the danger, never wanting to be overtaken with the brimstone, or be impelled by magic⁶. I believe that actors should be considered professional human beings. By this I mean that actors take on the basic and essential properties of humans, and share those behaviors with an audience in order to create a mirror. An actor's job is to report to work as an empathetic, malleable and courageous living being, instead of pushing buttons or lifting cans sixty hours a week. Can actors, or *professional human beings*, truly explore their art if they fear existing in the magic of life? More importantly, how can these professional humans evoke anything in the audience, if the expectation of the audience remains just that: calm, intent listeners with no need to engage? I knew Zelda's illness was not magical, or comforting, but without it, her story would not be as tragic. I needed to include all the aspects of her character I could in order to make any impression on the audience.

Another bold aspect of Zelda was her hunger for women's liberation. She was convinced that males, and females, suppressed women. She was a force in freeing women of stereotypes, creating sensational change in the lives of women. It was Scott who claimed that Zelda was the first flapper, but it was Zelda who lived this novel lifestyle. Zelda broke all rules under the confines of the early nineteen hundreds in the deep south, and still managed to be admired

⁶ Artaud 86

anywhere she went. This fire, of personal and artistic entitlement, is what I find more attractive about Zelda.

CHAPTER 7: FINDING THE MOVEMENT AND SCRIPTING IT

Dance and theatre productions can both be pre-staged, or improvised. In a traditional production, dancers are choreographed, while actors are blocked, to evoke specific pictures and images to tell a story. Both mediums require a specific script, or form. So what makes a theatre movement piece, as I have created, different from a dance piece? My piece is similar to a traditional dance piece since there is no spoken dialogue, but instead musical underscoring and continuous movement throughout. However, unlike Dance, in my piece the character performs every move, or action, in order to achieve something. In this way, physical theatre is similar to traditional theatre in which the actor knows how the story ends, while the character pursues their wants until the last moment. Dance, however, is an expression, a form set with an understanding of the circumstances and outcomes. Dance retells a story, while Physical Theatre lives the story.

Another device I used to differentiate from a dance piece, to a movement theatre piece, was the balance of structural movement, and behavioral movement. Many of the phrases of movement were inspired by images I saw in my mind while reading literature about or by Zelda, hearing the music we were building or by explaining her story.

To create a world for Zelda, I focused on the abstract perception she must have had. She was a person who experienced things so viscerally, and so deeply, that she perceived her world in colors and sounds. This abstract vision, however, would not stand alone as a coherent piece. I needed to find a way to tie in this abstract perception with Zelda's overall objective of learning how to express her voice. Women, especially in Zelda's lifetime, relied on the men in their lives so much that they were unable to fully express their voices. Therefore, I decided that if I was able to create the sense of the world tilting beneath her, I would succeed at portraying this different perception, in a world that didn't embrace expression. However, I struggled to find a way of differentiating this feel, and that of a drunken stumbling. Through this process, I was challenged to call on the handful of dance classes I had taken.

While sculpting the piece's movement, I allowed myself to explore free-form movement as well as choreographed. While in the master's training program at Louisiana State University, each actor takes a weekly beginner's dance class with Professional-In-Residence, Molly Buchmann. This class was my introduction to the structured form of ballet. Each week, we would learn short sequences of choreography. These brief routines gave me a vocabulary for Zelda's dance classes. The knowledge of ballet also gave me freedom to bend the form. Like wearing a corset, the structure gave me something to lean on and to pull away from in order to make a statement. The free form movement was a bigger challenge; although it came more naturally, it was more abstract. Therefore, there was a greater chance of the audience not following the story.

The free form portions of the piece came from various forms of improvised workshops. Each session of improvising was based on one of three things: text, image or sound. In Zelda's writings, both journal and published, she used all three when communicating. After reading her play, her short stories, newspaper articles and letters, I returned back to the images and stories that had stuck with me and found that the two themes Zelda used most frequently were love and abandonment. I focused on these two themes, not only because of Zelda's struggles with them, because they allowed Zelda, in my piece, to be moving either toward or away from something. I

expanded these words, and used the following variations of them to inspire movement and images: trapped, clinging, shedding, and self-annihilation. A singular action that fit each of these words was stripping. This stripping action became a major theme to my piece. A young artist is stripped and vulnerable when exposing their work, lovers strip away physical and emotional barriers to become intimate, and when we feel most lonely, we also feel stripped. Once this action was chosen, finding movement, motivation and music became simpler. The character of Zelda had an action to find, express and free her artistic voice, while my action as the performer was to strip down the character. Throughout the story, Zelda attempts to express herself by gaining permission from Scott. Zelda, like many impressionable artists, allowed herself to become invisible in order to honor the desires and goals of others. This need for external permission is what silences, or strips away, her voice.

After finding this action, I could now target my approach and find physical embodiments for all the meanings of “strip.” The costume that I designed would play an important role in finding the story. I used the literal ripping off of clothes, and other items off of Zelda’s body to express the stripping down. Zelda could shed pieces of herself to appease Scott, and the audience would perceive her self-destruction. Once I found variation in the actions, all I needed to do was string them together into a script.

An interesting challenge I faced while scripting the show, was finding a difference between including the blocking, and writing Zelda’s intentions and discoveries. My layout format for scripting my work was inspired by Peter Shaffer. His one-act play, *The Private Ear*, contains long movement segments. The actors’ only indication of the action is not given by dialogue, but instead written out with each physical movement. Below is an excerpt from his play.

They look at each other for a moment and she offers him a puff of her cigarette. He shakes his head. She persuades him and he takes a very small puff. She offers it again and he takes a very small puff. She offers it again and this time he takes a big puff and chokes. As he coughs he grabs her hand-⁷

Finding this template helped me to write my story. Before this outline, I was frustrated by writing too many of the inner-discoveries. Zelda’s thoughts and feelings were taking too much time to be explained. I couldn’t honor the difference between blocking, and writing intentions or discoveries. At first, I was skeptical of scripting the piece, but soon found I could balance the character’s journey, and what the audience perceived, in the same score.

⁷ Shaffer 40

CHAPTER 8: SECOND SCRIPT

----- SECTION A -----

A black drape hangs upstage. The bottom of the drape is suspended 2-4 feet from the stage floor.

We are in the WOODS.

Sound of Storm. Cicadas hum. Thunder roars.

Far away lightening strikes and revealed are two feet, suspended above the ground.

The storm continues as the feet hang and sway.

The feet are suddenly filled with life then return to hanging. The feet begin to stretch and reach. Soon the feet begin climbing and reaching for a good grip in the tree.

On the descending arpeggio Zelda, whom the feet belong to, drops to the ground. She is childlike though her age is unclear. She has a capable body and moves with ease. She wears a costume looking dress with a long tulle skirt.

She stands and is present in the woods, listens to the storm and watches the trees moving in the wind.

She is interrupted by a dog bark. She stands still, looks in the direction of the dog. Again the dog barks. A third time the dog barks and this time she drops to the ground.

She spots something in front of her as the waltz comes in underneath the storm. She crawls forward making her way through the branches of the woods, a la Alice crawling down the hole.

She bends the final branch out of her way and revealed is the sound of the waltz at full volume and the golden lights of her BALLET STUDIO.

Zelda realizes she is late to her dance class and rushes to put on her ballet slippers, which have been dangling from her waist.

As soon as she has put herself loosely together she joins in with the practice. She commands the stage and space. She seems to flirt with the unseen peers and enjoys herself tremendously. As she moves through the combinations she is stopped several times and her attention is brought to one of her hands misplaced or her head turned the wrong way. She has great sense of humor about the corrections and carries on with great charisma.

Her eye is caught by something beyond the audience's vision. As she continues to dance she glances at this unidentifiable figure. Her performance begins to alter and her attentions begin to focus solely on the figure, which will be discovered later as F. Scott.

At last, Zelda comes to a halt even while it seems the dancing continues around her. Her eyes are locked on Scott and as the music deconstructs she slowly and deliberately begins ripping the outer skirt off of her dress. She destroys the girlish silhouette that the tutu had created and appears womanlier.

She sets the tutu upstage in a neat pile. Giving it up.

She gives herself to him as the sound of the heartbeat plays.

The waltz reappears and Zelda dances with more vigor and ease simultaneously. She moves for him and her movements are more sensuous.

Zelda begins to lose the waltz and the transformation into the city begins.

----- SECTION B -----

Creation, Darkness of the city.

Lights change as Zelda follows Scott into the city.

She is dancing, step-dancing. As she travels she keeps her eyes locked on Scott- she is unaware of the world changing around her. She begins to swing into the Charleston, enjoying and fully submerged in the dance.

The journey of traveling and becoming wife/young woman is celebratory and wild.

This goes on as the sounds of the city are developing. Once the sound/environment is set, Zelda stops in her tracks.

She notices the city surrounding her: tall buildings, busy streets. She is in awe.

She returns to her riotous dancing and moving through the space but stops every once in a while to take a sharp look around her- as though she feels unsettling eyes on/around her.

We see for the first time her having a self-consciousness and doubt.

She glances down at her clothes and alters them. She takes off the second item* and throws it away on top of the tutu.

She checks in with the eyes around her.

She returns back to looking at Scott only to find him not there. She searches for him.

She spots him, change of spine/breath. We begin to see her dependence on him.

She resumes her dancing only to find Scott no longer approves. She throws away several items off her body. With every shredding, she becomes more invisible; she begins to lose her glow.

Zelda begins to transform into a smaller version of herself. She takes little liberty in expression and she funnels all of her creative and elaborate expressions through writing.

Her fingers discover excerpts of her writing all over her body. She rips off more items and discards them. The layer of clothing she now wears is nothing but literature, perhaps leaves of paper, or just leaves symbolizing her writing.

Scott catches her eye while she is destroying her outer layer. She considers for a moment, and then rips off one of her writings and offers it to Scott.

Finally, some satisfaction with her sacrifices, Scott is appeased. Zelda becomes hungry for this success and begins ripping off any writing she can find on herself. The fury of shedding takes Zelda back to the pile of her former self (her tutu and other traits she gave up). She digs them up and thrust them to Scott hoping he can use these materials.

Zelda has stripped herself down to nothing and she wears only a formless gown. She is invisible.

When the sound of wind with a simple piano line comes in, Zelda begins to work on her ballet again. This is the first return to dancing Zelda has had since moving to New York with Scott at the beginning of the piece. While the whispers come in with the music, Zelda desperately tries to find her young body again, and all the answers. She has nothing left to give. She reaches a physical breaking point and collapses.

-----SECTION C-----

In the clinic:

Lights up, stark lights-warmth is gone. Light source is from directly above the chair and Zelda is mostly shadowed. The chair is an old Victorian style chair and sized about 5 times too large for Zelda.

Zelda is planted while her legs hang off the chair not reaching the floor, her arms resting on the arms of the chairs, her hands falling towards her lap. She is still; slumped inward and sucked dry of life. The room is quiet. This is the first moment of silence. Zelda remains still for a long moment.

Zelda begins to rock. First her head begins to nod as if she is trying to lift it through heavy air. After several attempts and waves of effort she lifts her head. It suspends for a moment and we see her eyes, lifeless.

A sound from the hall is heard and she immediately collapses. Silence and stillness again.

After a moment, when the coast is clear again, Zelda initiates the rocking motion. There seems a great comfort in the movement. Her torso becomes involved. The rocking becomes increasingly intense, she seems to be soothing herself but the movement becomes violent and harsh. It's as if she is scratching a long existing itch.

Another sound, closer, from the hall. Zelda collapses.

Immediately after the sound disappears she springs from her chair. She thrashes her body upward and tries to pull her foot from the floor to walk. Her feet are stuck. Cemented firmly to the floor and she cannot pull them up.

Her first attempts to move are rational but she quickly becomes panicked. The panic and desperation grow. She tries to calm herself by sitting in the chair again but now it has become painful to sit. She tries repeatedly to sit, looking for comfort.

She finally shoves the chair away. At the climax of her slashing the air around her in an attempt to escape she catches glimpse of something in front of her, a light source. It's a red, hot light. The light begins to cover her. Another light source comes from the side. Another appears from behind her. She watches the one behind her grow and when she turns back around her eyes are filled with life again.

A cacophony of sound begins to emerge and swell as the red light does. She slowly begins to melt into her feet.

She is in her clinic room and the fire engulfs her.

CHAPTER 9: LOOKING FORWARD

This process has been invaluable to me. It has not only been experimental, it has shown me that this collaborative form of creating can happen and is exciting to me. While flexing my creative muscle I also explored a new kind of theatre. I learned how to find and speak a common language that is universal among artists of different practices while serving as many positions for the production. Most importantly, I reminded myself that there is a kind of theatre I believe in. Though this process asked for the same diagnostic analysis and exploration as a typical theatre production would call for, I was able to express and articulate motivations, character and story in a new way. I also reinvigorated what I crave in theatre arts: to inspire, to educate and to celebrate.

This process proved to have more freedom for the artist and also demanded more creative juices. With a script the actor must meet the words on the page halfway. In a devised piece, movement piece at that, the actor must pull the ideas down out of the ether and wrestle them into making sense for the audience.

I was able to use several different approaches to creating the material. Typically for each character I find a scent, perfume or essential oil that brings me to the character on a visceral level. I also choose an animal whose behaviors are like my character. These tools help me find keys into my character's physicality and emotional availability. I used a deeper exploration of tangible exercises. Some of the exercises I experimented with were sketching Zelda in abstract forms, building a 20x30 poster filled with textured clothes, jewelry and pieces of text as an inspiration board and molding an abstract figure of Zelda with clay. These exercises allowed for a therapeutic approach to gathering a story. Without feeling the pressure of developing the script, I found more freedom in considering character choices. Without the pressure of a typical process, however, motivating deadlines and schedules was a challenge.

The entire process of creating the piece was slow paced and, all things considered, self-motivated. The only person relying on my productivity, beside myself, was Raul. Outside of a training program and without the great strain an artist has while being a student, this process would be preferred for me. I would like, in the future, to have a team that is devoted to the project. This commitment would help as a driving force to produce work more consistently. Within this team, I would also like to have a scene partner. It would be interesting to me to join with an artist on a project like this, though it is my opinion Zelda needs to stand alone onstage.

Ultimately, any process for a piece of art needs to fulfill each artist's philosophy of art. I hope to inspire humans, of all ages, to empathize and take responsibilities and chances. By using sophisticated theatre and artists, I inspire and intrigue. In this process, I educated by stimulating audiences with visceral experiences ranging in morals, opinions, and attitudes. I am, through theatre, able to be captivating, and expand minds while provoking thoughts. I reminded myself, and artists around me, of the ability to feel, think, and articulate. I challenged myself to entertain while educating. And lastly, I allowed myself to celebrate and build community. By using unique theatre with well-rounded work, I reached out to the community and challenged them to celebrate life, joys, memories, and traditions and to ask questions.

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VITA

Sarah Elizabeth Smith is originally from Rabun Gap, Georgia. She grew up under the theatrical training of her parents, Larry and Nancy Smith, and circus training from her godmother, MaryAnn Hart. Upon graduation from Rabun Gap Nacoochee school Smith was accepted into Brenau University and as a theatre scholarship recipient into the Gainesville Theatre Alliance: a creative collaboration of Gainesville State University, Brenau University, Theatre Professionals and the Northeast Georgia community. Smith acquired several awards within this community including Most Artistic Growth of 2005-2006 and 2007-2008. Her colleagues, peers and faculty of the Gainesville Theatre Alliance selected recipients for these awards. Smith was also fortunate enough to tour *Alice and Wonderland*, written by Lewis Carroll and adapted by Gay H. Hammond, and *Oedipus Rex*, written by Sophocles and adapted by Gay H Hammond, into schools, day cares, nursing homes, libraries and universities across Northeast Georgia. Smith and the Repertory finished their tour of *Oedipus Rex* in Greece on the stages where it originated, including the great amphitheater Epidaurus. After graduating with her bachelor's degree, Smith moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to attend Louisiana State University and obtain her Master of Fine Arts.