

2015

Joan: A Play With Broken Songs

Colton James Neidhardt

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

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JOAN: A PLAY WITH BROKEN SONGS

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

Colton Neidhardt

M.A., University of Nebraska- Omaha, 2012

B.A., Chadron State College, 2010

May 2015

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ABSTRACT

This thesis details the writing process, rehearsals and performance of the author's devised play, *Joan: A Play With Broken Songs*. The play aims to reimagine events occurring the evening before the death of French folk hero and Catholic Saint, Joan of Arc. The play exists in the moments between sleep and waking, in which Joan is visited by her own patron Saints (Margaret and Catherine,) as well as the Archangel Michael. The Saints then guide Joan through the dreamscape revealing to her images of the past, present, and future that allow her to come to peace with the sacrifice she will soon make. The piece is presented in an abstracted reality that supported the author's artistic aesthetic by incorporating forms of dance, movement, percussion, and spiritual music, which were heavily influenced by the landscape and eclectic nature of life in Louisiana. The script was devised by LSU's M.F.A. Acting ensemble as a collaborative project that featured the core ensemble of eight actors as well as two undergraduate performers and three undergraduate technicians. The challenges and difficulties throughout the writing and performance process are detailed: theoretical and practical implications are examined, and a written copy of the script is included.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The Master of Fine Arts in Acting program at Louisiana State University culminates in the creation and performance of a new theatrical work. Traditionally, this manifests as a solo performance in which the author/performer proves that he or she is capable of holding the attention of an audience by themselves while simultaneously creating a work that could be self produced in the future. Based on my prior experience as a graduate student in directing at the University of Nebraska, as well as the notion that directing and acting are strengthened by gaining experience and communication skill in both areas, I set out to direct and act in a larger work than typically occurs as a culminating activity.

In 2009 I became aware of the work of Chicago's New Colony Theatre. MFA Graduates of DePaul and Charleston University who set out to generate new plays based around an ensemble cast founded the theatre. One of The New Colony's first plays, *5 Lesbians Eating A Quiche*, quickly became a hit in Chicago and I reached out to their Artistic Director, Evan Linder, to inquire about rights to the script. He graciously gave me the rights to produce the second production of *5 Lesbians...*, which premiered in Omaha at The Shelterbelt Theatre, and eventually at the Kansas City Fringe Festival where our audiences awarded us with the title of 'Best in Fringe.' The New Colony then submitted their own production of *5 Lesbians...* to the New York Fringe Festival where they too were awarded 'Best In Fringe' and were also offered a six month run at an Off-Broadway Theatre, as well as having their script published by Samuel French.

This experience came at time where I personally was unsure of my voice as a theatre professional. However, the relative success of *5 Lesbians* proved to be proof of concept that not only could a group of motivated artists create new work that was relevant to contemporary audiences, but they could also generate success outside of the antiquated regional theatre model that has hindered American theatre practitioners in the last 25 years. The experience of directing and self producing a new American play that had found a loyal audience was massively formative to my current sensibilities as an artist and generated an ambition that has carried over into my graduate studies at LSU.

Armed with this ambition, I set out to create a newly devised play for my thesis project. A project that could pull from my experience with *The New Colony*, as well as provide performance opportunities for members of the M.F.A. Acting ensemble that had been less featured in university and Swine Palace productions. I knew I wanted the opportunity to direct and devise a piece...but what would the subject of the project be?

On July 25th, 2013, shortly after moving to Louisiana, I took my first trip to New Orleans. I was immediately struck by the eclecticism and artistic vibrancy that course through the narrow streets of the city. After sampling a few local delicacies at The French Market with friends from the M.F.A. class we took a short stroll to Jackson Square. There, sitting atop a majestic steed, banner in hand, stands a statue of Joan of Arc. “The Maid of Orleans” rests within view of open water on one side and a vibrant cityscape on the other. The formality of the statue juxtaposed with the art vendors selling their works around Jackson Square in a way that I could only describe as being ‘New Orleanian.’ I was struck not only by the beauty of the statue, but also by the experience of seeing it in this landscape. The street musicians playing banjos and

harmonicas, the smell of oysters being chargrilled, and as always the buzz created by bodies in motion, hundreds of bodies milling through the Square setting off joyous vibrations. The vibrations of prideful people. People who are proud of their city, their food and drink, their sound, their heritage. The experience left a deep impression on me.

Not only was I inspired by the person Joan of Arc was, by her attitudes toward gender roles, androgyny, piety, her sense of national pride and heroism, but I was also inspired by the emotional experience of being in New Orleans. I now had a subject and an experience that I could attempt to recreate for an audience.

The first chapter aims to address the research of both fictionalized and biographical source material regarding Joan. The second chapter addresses the process of gathering inspiration for what would eventually develop into our own expression of a musical and poetic language. The third chapter details the process of rehearsing and producing the play. The fourth chapter offers a post-mortem evaluation of my personal experience as a performer and as the director of the production. The fifth chapter offers a conclusion, and in the sixth chapter you will find the script.

CHAPTER 2 RESEARCHING JOAN

One of the appeals of this project was that the source of inspiration was based around an actual person who is not only present in French folklore, but also Catholic tradition and world history. A rich amount of material was at my disposal. From epic poems and songs of the 17th century, to Shakespeare's depiction of her in *Henry VI*, all the way to contemporary cinema; Joan of Arc has served as inspiration to many artists from a variety of mediums. Her enduring popularity led me to question how much of what contemporary society believes about her is truth and how much has been embellished by her admirers.

Through my research I found that yes, of course, not all representations of her were true to history. She could not fly or heal soldiers wounds simply by touching them, and if she did in fact hear voices they were likely not from a divine source. Modern science has diagnosed Joan posthumously with a range of disorders from epilepsy and schizophrenia to bovine tuberculosis contracted by drinking unpasteurized milk.

In reality Joan never fought as a soldier on the battlefield. She was, however, a brilliant military strategist. She rode into battle carrying a religious banner and was somehow able to serve as a pacifist and an inspirational mascot for the French Army. Her pacifism nearly cost her life during the assault on Orleans and later during her failed raid of Paris; both times arrows struck her. She credited her recovery to her connection with the divine. The voices that instructed her first to seek out King Charles to demand an army unit to drive the Burgundians out of France and later when her success led to King Charles being crowned at Rheims Cathedral. Historians

universally agree that without the presence of Joan of Arc, the 100 Years War would have been a much different playing field.

Separating the truth from fiction regarding Joan of Arc is difficult because she operated on faith and charisma. She was a polarizing figure but ultimately served as inspiration and a source of national pride in 15th Century France, a time when the country was virtually bankrupt. The people of France were looking for a reason to be optimistic about their future. Joan provided exactly that by being fearless in the face of adversity, by going against established gender norms, and by operating on faith. Regardless of whether Joan was guided by the voices of Saints or not, she operated on faith: blind, raging, undeniable faith, and piety. She was determined and unwavering in her beliefs and became somewhat of a celebrity for her persona as well as her military exploits. So at a point, whether it's truth or fiction simply comes down to how much you can believe Joan herself? It would have been politically astute of her to tell some half-truths or to over embellish details when we are talking about rallying an entire country against invaders.

Her charismatic persona is best displayed through performance by her depiction in George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan*. I was drawn to Shaw's work as a potential jumping off point for my own project. Once plays enter the public domain they often become the playground for avant-garde experimentation. Every Fringe Festival in the world is comprised of numerous attempts at reimagining Shakespeare, Ibsen, Moliere, et al.. I thought I would be able to take a similar approach to working with Shaw's *Saint Joan*. I would cut down the massive five-act structure into something that could dynamically play in 60 minutes. I would still have the challenge of cutting and directing the play, but at least I would have a completed script. Unfortunately, after spending perhaps too much time working with Shaw's script and not enough

time looking at issues of copyright, I discovered that Shaw's *Saint Joan* would not be entering the public domain for another 10 years. My hopes were dashed and I felt a bit foolish for having spent so much time working on something that for issues of artistic integrity couldn't see the light of day. My own faith wavered on the project, but thankfully it was Joan herself that eventually roped me back in. As cheesy as it may sound I knew that she would never give up on something she set out to do, and that if more people worked through obstacles they were faced with instead of crumbling under the weight of them we would have a more functional society; less pessimistic, less lazy.

Joan's own piety led me to question if we have any contemporary equivalent to her? Would contemporary audiences even be able to identify with her journey? Do we still have heroes? Do people still commit acts of faith?

After all, Bertolt Brecht had borrowed Joan as the heroin of his 1930 play *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*. In it she is portrayed as the leader of a 20th century Salvation Army-like group known as the Black Hats. The Black Hats battle against the capitalism and consumerism in Chicago represented by meat packing billionaire Pierpont Mauler. The play makes a strong statement on workplace conditions during the industrial revolution and pokes fun at captains of industry, but even Brecht had to borrow a hero to save his society. He doesn't create a new heroine but rather plucks one from history. It again raised the question of 'do we still have heroes?'

Although I couldn't borrow anything directly from Shaw or Brecht I was able to take a few clues from them. Namely, that they both wrote sweeping epics for their Joans. The plot would need to be structured in much the same way that we would view *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus*,

Jason and The Argonauts. The epic nature of what Joan accomplished was right on par with Grecian sensibilities of folklore and theatre.

Joan is universally depicted as a French national hero. Yet all of the aforementioned examples of heroes were men; and not just men, but men with privileges living in grand societies. Joan was a peasant girl who had to scrap tooth and nail to be respected in a society that thought she would be best fit tending a flock of sheep. Yes, Joan was a hero all the same, but she deserved better than to have her story told in a structure appropriated from her male counterparts. She deserved her own theatrical identity.

This inspired me to create a new structural take on Joseph Campbell's "Monomyth." The monomyth is first described by Campbell in his 1947 book, "Hero with a Thousand Faces." In it he details the 17 steps of a hero's journey from their departure, to their challenges, to their eventual return. Campbell sums the formula up by saying..."A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man." (Campbell 147)

Much of Joan's life parallels the desired events of Campbell's monomyth. The one key difference was that at the end of this play Joan would not be able to return and share newfound insights and prosperity with her subjects; she would be dead. This meant that within the structure of the play that the climax would coincide with Joan's death because there is not an opportunity to establish a true denouement after she is gone. The climax and the end of the play needed to exist virtually simultaneously.

I also knew that one of the key elements I wanted the script to address was the presence of Joan's voices as her guiding force. In most of the representations of Joan seen throughout history, her voices serve as dark matter to her narrative. They are not personified, but rather serve as a question of sanity and legitimate connection to God. In my version I wanted the voices to be manifested in the physical world. I wanted them to have the power to directly affect Joan's journey as the audience watched. I also thought it necessary that their method of communication was of another world; I did not want them to become so human that they were no different than Joan. Music and movement became the focus of the Saints and Angels' communications with Joan.

When researching the personification of the Saints, I was only able to find one other example of this being done in theatrical history. St. Therese of Lisieux wrote *The Mission of Joan of Arc* in 1894. St. Therese was a Carmelite nun who had taken Joan as her patron saint. She greatly admired Joan and had written numerous poems and plays that praised Joan's life and beliefs. *The Mission of Joan of Arc* was written to be performed during a feast day in 1984 for the elders of her church and fellow nuns. The show has not been commercially produced since, but I found it to be a charming and poetic resource; a work of love that explored issues of faith, but most importantly showed interaction between Joan and her Saints. From this play I was able to gain a sense of what could possibly be gained by having the Saints directly interacting with Joan. The world of the play could afford to have a more narrow focused and personal approach to Joan's inner life as opposed to the past epic works of theatre that mostly focused on her as a highly social figure and military savant. This play could instead be about the most intimate of relationships in the sphere of her world; her relationship with God and with herself.

Perhaps the most powerful insight into Joan's actual life was found in Mark Twain's *Joan of Arc*. Twain, like many others who have come before or since, was inspired by the figure of Joan who had become beloved by many. He found her to be an important historical determinist. After all, no one in the history of time had been in full command of a country's military at the age of seventeen. Prior to its 1896 publication, Twain had spent years in Paris pouring over archival documents which yielded incredible results. His key find was the exposure of a once defunct document written by Louis DeConte titled, *Personal Reflections of Joan of Arc*. In it DeConte details his life as Joan's childhood friend and his eventual appointment as her page. In essence the document takes us all the way from the earliest childhood memories all the way through the public backlash that was experienced after her execution. Written lovingly by her childhood friend, Twain became virtually obsessed with seeing that the document was translated into English so his work as an adapter could begin. French National Archivist Jean Francois Alden completed the translation and Twain's work soon began.

Of particular value to my project was DeConte and Twain's gorgeous depiction of their childhood growing up in the farmers' village of Domremy:

Our Domremy was like any other humble little hamlet of that remote time and region. It was a maze of crooked, narrow lanes and alleys shaded and sheltered by the overhanging thatch roofs of the barn-like houses. The houses were dimly lighted by wooden-shuttered windows—that is, holes in the walls which served for windows. The floors were dirt, and there was very little furniture. Sheep and cattle grazing was the main industry; all the young folks tended flocks. The situation was beautiful. From one edge of the village a flowery plain extended in a wide sweep to the river—the Meuse; from the rear edge of the village a grassy slope rose gradually, and at the top was the great oak forest—a forest that was deep and gloomy and dense, and full of interest for us children. (Twain, 34)

In addition to the beauty of the place, the contents of the woods became the lifeblood of the imagination of the children of Domremy. They often played at a

particular tree in the forests surrounding the village that was thought to be inhabited by fairies:

In a noble open space carpeted with grass on the high ground toward Vaucouleurs stood a most majestic beech tree with wide-reaching arms and a grand spread of shade, and by it a limpid spring of cold water; and on summer days the children went there—oh, every summer for more than five hundred years—went there and sang and danced around the tree for hours together, refreshing themselves at the spring from time to time, and it was most lovely and enjoyable. Also they made wreaths of flowers and hung them upon the tree and about the spring to please the fairies that lived there. (Twain, 35)

The sense of nostalgia and love depicted in this excerpt eventually became one of the first scenes of the play in which Joan is returned to the fairy tree prior to her death. This was also inspired by De Conte's belief that all the children of the village returned to the tree when they died regardless of how far from home they were. These beliefs demonstrated the power of memory and association that human beings share regardless of any separating factors including place in history. I knew the power of Twain and De Conte's ideas could be relevant to a contemporary audience. I only had to find a way to connect the classical ideals with contemporary sensibilities.

In an attempt to establish exactly that, I administered a questionnaire to my cast. Their responses ultimately served to enrich a world that would be based in poetry and memory, ephemeral and true to contemporary attitudes. The actors were asked to verbally respond to each question as I recorded them. I found this to be important as to avoid it becoming an intellectual activity and to hopefully gauge the sense of passion and truth in their responses. The questionnaire (partially borrowed from Bernard Pivot) reads as follows.

Questions of Life and Death:

What is your favorite color?

What is your favorite taste?

What is your favorite smell?

What sound or noise do you love?

What sound or noise do you hate?

What is your favorite word?

What is your least favorite word?

What were you like as a child?

Did you have any pets?

Favorite place in nature?

What turns you on creatively, spiritually or emotionally?

What turns you off?

What is a soul?

Is life sacred?

Is it bad to die?

If you could live forever, would you?

What happens right before you die?

What do you hope happens after you die?

What do you fear happens after you die?

If heaven exists what would you like to hear god say when you arrive?

What would be your last meal?

In summation, the structure was influenced by the life of Joan of Arc contrasted with Joseph Campbell's monomyth. The concept was inspired by the work of St. Therese of Lisieux, the content was inspired by Mark Twain and included contributions devised by the cast. The script, although largely still a work in progress, was beginning to take shape. The next step of the writing process would be to address how the show would look and sound.

CHAPTER 3 THE MUSIC

Choosing the music for the show was one of my favorite parts of the process. I was able to dig through volumes of music, both contemporary and classical, close my eyes and let my imagination take over. I have always taken pride in being fairly knowledgeable about music history; outside of theatre, music is one of my main passions. With the help of streaming music sources such as Spotify and Pandora, I was able to expose myself to new artists and songs that opened up a new world of possibilities.

I soon realized that the majority of the music I was drawn to for this project fell into the genres of Rhythm and Blues or Soul. Another interesting motif that developed was that most of the songs I was finding myself listening to on repeat were about rivers, oceans, and lakes. I began to ponder the significance of this and was ultimately led back Mark Twain's *Joan of Arc*. In it he details Joan's childhood spend growing up on the Seine River in the French countryside. He credits the Seine as being the force that gives life to the community. Similar things are also true of Louisiana's relationship to the Mississippi River. A parallel began to form between the French countryside of Joan's youth and the life giving power of the Mississippi River in the French influenced state of Louisiana. How many parallels could be made between the two remote locations? Could the dreamscape of Joan's night prior to execution in someway be influenced by the American south?

My fascination with rivers eventually led me to a quote by Heraclitus that helped to greatly influence my attitudes about the structure of events in the play: "No man ever steps in the same river twice; for it is not the same river and he is not the same man." (Conche, 109)

The quote is often misappropriated in contemporary society as an inspirational meme of sorts, however, I believe Heraclitus was getting at something else; the ephemeral nature of existence. In essence, Heraclitus felt that all aspects of our self and our surroundings are drastically changing moment to moment. We all exist in a flux or flow of energy and time that is perpetually moving forward. In a Heraclitian system guilt would not exist. If he witnessed a murder and someone asked him who had committed the crime, Heraclitus would say that the murderer no longer exists. In short, the man who committed the murder could not be responsible for his actions because he was now a new man, and looking back is a wasted effort when every force in the universe is pulling us forward to the next moment which is inevitably changed.

This notion of a grand cosmic universe working against our measly human hopes and dreams led me to question what the Catholic equivalent of this kind of omnipotence was. The answer came in the form of the hierarchy of angels. This Catholic concept details the different flights of angels that populate heaven, leading all the way to the top of the pyramid where the archangels sit at the right hand of God. It then occurred to me that the Saints who spoke to Joan would have a pretty good view of humanities actions looking down from the top of this hierarchy. This omnipotence paired with Heraclitus's notions of universal forces led me to feel that it was perfectly rational that the Saints and Angels could move Joan through her past as well as through the present. Their knowledge of music, social custom and overall rationality could be justified by their position in the hierarchy of angels. The Saints were now able to sing any song that proved to be inspirational regardless of what time period it came from. Most importantly to me, this device allowed for the musical language of the show to justifiably carry the same eclectic musical language that I had been drawn to on my first visit to New Orleans.

Joan's piety could now be refracted through the lens of spiritual music from the American South. Due to copyright restrictions on contemporary music, our selections would need to be taken from public domain. The solution to this issue was provided by the beautiful lyrics, melody, and religious sentiment found in Negro Spirituals. Again, parallels began to form between the oppression of African Americans in U.S. slave states with the oppression Joan was faced with by her captors. I hesitate to blur the lines between these issues because I fully recognize that the American Civil Rights movement was rooted in more wrong doings than were done to Joan herself; however, the sincerity of expression and blind faith present in the songs echoed eerie similarities.

One of the most notable similarities was found in the spiritual "Run, Mary, Run". This song is first mentioned in J.W. Johnson's 1926 "Book of American Negro Spirituals." The song specifically mentions the children of a country having a right to the tree of life. This strongly resembled Twain's earlier description of the Fairy Tree of Domremy, which Joan had played at as a child.

To marry with Joan's willingness to sacrifice herself for the good of her country, the song "Soon Ah Will Be Done" was selected. The song's origin traces back to slaves who were in servitude on Virginia tobacco farms. As is the case with most spirituals, no one person is attributed to its creation. Regardless, the song has stood the test of time and has been covered by numerous minstrel show performers and their contemporaries. The song beautifully states an acceptance of one's fate. "Soon I will be done, with the troubles of this world, I'm going home to live with God." (Southern, 213) This phrase accurately summed up Joan's mental state in the moments before her death.

I wanted the show to open with a religious invocation of sorts; the sense of angels descending from their ranks to come to Joan in her moment of need and doubt. To accomplish this I chose an a capella arrangement of the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes were originally mentioned in the Gospel of Matthew in the Old Testament during The Sermon on the Mount. They serve as a list of proclamations and affirmations of humanity. They are all inclusive of society and remind us that we must love even the outliers of a society's ranks; and an outlier Joan certainly was.

CHAPTER 4

REHEARSALS/PERFORMANCE

The rehearsal period for *Joan: A Play With Broken Songs* began on October 28th, 2014. The first rehearsal featured a read-through of the play as well as the first opportunity to formally explain my conceptual approach to members of the cast. The cast was comprised of eight M.F.A. actors and two undergraduates from LSU's Physical Theatre Club. The night was highlighted by a lively discussion about the show's themes of life, death and faith. These conversations proved invaluable to future drafts of the script, which remained in flux throughout the first two weeks of the rehearsal process. For this project we were able to ration out time for 16 rehearsals, including technical rehearsals, prior to our opening on December 6th, 2014 at LSU's Studio Theatre.

The course of the rehearsal process was dictated by a blend of needing to develop additional material for the script, while simultaneously attempting to solidify moments of the show. This task proved to be especially difficult. As a director exploratory time is invaluable, but at a certain point issues such as staging, choreography, and the use of music need to be set in order to give the actors adequate time to adapt to the tasks with which they are charged.

The first six rehearsals of the process were used to develop a physical vocabulary for the scenes as well as to rehearse the music. In lieu of having access to any specific technical elements, we chose to use the actors themselves to create as much of the scenic environment of the play as could be supported. This manifested itself primarily in the form of the Fairy Tree of Domremy as well as the world of King Charles' throne room. The bodies of the actors working in space created both the tree and the throne. An ensemble approach to the creation of the scenes soon became an obvious essential to flesh out the world I had envisioned.

The tree and throne room were created through rehearsals that focused heavily on Viewpoints and Contact Improvisation sessions. These sessions allowed the actors to take ownership of their individual movements while still adding to a unified picture. This approach was particularly important to me because no two actors move exactly the same. Amongst my multi-talented ensemble were a variety of body types and movement experiences, yet ultimately I felt that the ensemble pictures were clear yet individualistic. Amongst the highlights of these rehearsals was a truly unique living tree.

Music rehearsals also occurred during this period of the process. The music was primarily directed by MFA ensemble member Amar Atkins and featured an a capella chorus as well as violin strains provided by Tim Moriarty. From an early stage of the process the music proved to be a strength of the production. Actors who were less comfortable with the movement aspects of the show seemed to flourish in the musical aspect and vice-versa. The collaborative spirit of the project was especially present in the work that went into learning and retaining the stacks of harmonies that were essential to making the a capella music pleasant and not abrasive or pitchy.

At the end of the initial two-week period of the rehearsal process, a meeting was held between myself and other members of the cast to flesh out aspects of the script that were not finding success within the rehearsals. The main topic that was addressed was Joan's overall arc in the piece itself. Original drafts of the script left little room for Joan to be changed by her experience; she appeared devout and strong throughout the play and showed little doubt of her religion or fate. To better create the need for Joan's journey, as well as to include a more diverse tactical range for the role, it was suggested that Joan be found in dire straights at the beginning. Joe Morris, fellow M.F.A. ensemble member, suggested that Joan in her moment of need may

pray directly to one of her patron saints. The Catholic prayer of Saint Margaret soon became a welcome addition to the play as well as the ominous Cauchon simultaneously reciting a litany of the charges with which she would soon be faced. These additions allowed for the conflict of the piece to ring more soundly and set the body of play more strongly into action. The character of Joan would now have a clear obstacle to work against: her own wavering faith in the face of death.

After one last series of rewrites the script was locked. It could not be changed from this point forward, with exception to cuts of material or scenes that we could not fully justify in our limited rehearsal period. In addition to the ensemble movements and music in the play, dances also proved to be a welcome addition, namely a step dance choreographed by Amar Atkins, which added a dynamic rhythmic breakdown during “Run, Mary, Run.” Amanda Clark also provided a sequence of ballet postures on pointe to her performance as Joan to symbolize Joan’s ascension and willingness to accept death during “Soon I Will Be Done.”

Much of the rehearsal process was spent coordinated how all of these disparate elements could coexist in the same world. At times I felt like I was working more as a choreographer than a director, asking to work transitions in and out of songs and dance numbers multiple times. I felt that achieving a certain level of precision and intention in the actions we were attempting would help to justify the use of dance and song in the play. In short, I didn’t want anything to look sloppy or unintentional. Unfortunately, as is often the case when directing, there is never enough time. Every choice to do something or to focus on something is simultaneously choosing to not

do or focus on something else. In this kind of a truncated rehearsal period you have to trust your instincts and hope that you've made as many good decisions as were possible.

The time spent on music and movement was well spent, however it meant that at times the acting suffered. In highly poetic or stylized language it is incredibly important that the actors do not simply say beautiful words beautifully. They must have a deep subtextual understanding of their character's point of view about each line that they say. This level of specificity was difficult to achieve in a short time. I often encouraged actors who were struggling with intention to simply say the line in their own words. This is often done with Shakespeare and other heightened language so the actor can develop a more personal sense of what the character's intention is. This approach was largely successful, however time soon became a prohibitive factor.

Feedback during the rehearsal process was provided by LSU Graduate faculty members Stacey Cabaj, Nick Erickson, and George Judy. George's primary specialty as a theatre practitioner has been to support the development of new works through his position as the Artistic Director of Swine Palace. His insight into the shortcomings of my script helped to mold my touch as a director and encouraged me to highlight certain elements of the play while simultaneously avoiding pitfalls in other areas. Nick Erickson provided moral support as well as his expertise as a physical theatre practitioner and also allowed us to use some of our movement classes with him to rehearse the piece. Stacey Cabaj also provided moral support, emotional insight, vocal and acting notes throughout the final runs of the show.

Technical rehearsals began November 30th, 2014 and were led by undergraduate Stage Manager Ginny Goodson. Undergraduates Georgia Foor and Sara Stevens designed lights and

acted as Production Manager respectively. Costumes were provided by the ensemble and supplemented through generous donations by LSU's Costume Shop Manager Kyla Kazuschyk. The technical rehearsals for the show proved to be some of our best performances and truly rewarding to me as a director. Through the hard work and generosity of numerous individuals the show began to take shape. The question remained: how would an audience respond?

Joan: A Play With Broken Songs played in LSU's Studio Theatre for two performances- December 6 and 7, 2014. Our opening performance was well received and was ultimately one of our most engaged and energetic runs of the show. The audience was small but mighty and showed their appreciation through laughter, cheering, and sincere moments of silence. Our performance on December 7 was a Sunday matinee that was plagued by poor attendance and low energy: two hallmarks of Sunday matinees in Louisiana. Nonetheless, the audience was engaged and appreciative in spite of my awareness that we were not performing up to the standard we had set for ourselves in our runs of the show the prior week. Time would be needed to process what had become one of the most exciting and stressful projects I have ever undertaken.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

The process of creating *Joan: A Play With Broken Songs* was a rewarding one. However, at the end of the day I felt like we only began to scrape the top layer of what could eventually be a much larger work. I hesitantly admit that the ambition of the project was out of reach for the limitations that were placed on us in terms of resources, budget, and time. This is often the case with any creative endeavor and I wholeheartedly hope that we still found a relative level of success within our exploration of the subject matter.

One of the chief observations I feel confident making about this process is that it is a very challenging political move to employ your classmates to execute your thesis project. What I set out to accomplish was different than any of the other projects that my classmates undertook and at times I was worried that I was asking them to give too much to my project while simultaneously having to work on their own. I attempted to remedy this by making myself as available as possible to assist with any technical, set, or house management issues that may arise. I did not want anyone to perceive their involvement in my project as being a one way street.

As a director I became acutely aware of the balance that is necessary when casting a show. Performers can generally be sorted into those who have directorial instincts and those who have primarily acting instincts. By this I mean that some actors are able to function within the context of play while simultaneously remaining aware of the whole picture of the play, whereas other actors become so lost in what they are doing as an actor that they can't help but lose this awareness of the whole. In an ideal situation a director would be able to cast a healthy balance of these two types (actor/actors and actor/directors). Too many actor/actors in a process can lead to

things being grounded in an inflated sense of self involvement; things become too precious and evenly weighted until nothing actually carries significance. In essence this brand of actor loses sight of what exists outside of their performance in a given moment; things such as rhythm, tempo, and clarity of story telling can suffer.

The same concerns are true of those of us who fall into the category of actor/director. Too many actor/directors in a process can lead to things being far too considered or labored. They have a tendency to bowl over one another to get to the climax of a scene and often become too concerned about the same areas that actor/actors are negligent in. It is essential to balance these two types in order to provide the necessary tension of working styles that makes a play dynamic. Neither approach is preferable to other; however, balance and evenly applied force in each direction can create magic.

In the case of *Joan*, I often felt that the balance between these areas was not ideal. The actor/ directors would take shots at one another; competing for whose idea was the most useful. The actor/actors, on the other hand, were far too passive and willing to accept the louder personalities of the actor directors, but would then sort out their own feelings of being bullied in passive aggressive ways. This made rehearsal particularly challenging, and ultimately the process became a microcosm of the same conflict of personalities that has been a hallmark of my experience with my classmates for the past two years.

Now this was not entirely unexpected, but the difficulties of navigating these complexities were far more difficult in the thick of things than I thought it would be on paper. At the end of the day I felt confident that we had achieved some sort of a middle ground that

allowed us to move forward and successfully perform the show. Some members of the cast had to make more compromises throughout the project than others, but ultimately I do believe that we achieved some sense of balance.

As an actor in the production I felt virtually uninvolved. The character of Gabriel only entered for the last scene as a way to say that the coast was clear and that Joan's journey toward heaven was nearly complete. The character served an important role in the piece and marked the beginning of the climax, however my performance was not on par of the work that the rest of the cast had created. I never felt entirely comfortable stepping away from the project as a director and entering the scene as an actor. I now look back on this as a chance to gain some self-knowledge; I have no interest whatsoever in directing and acting in the same production. The conflict of interest made me a poor scene partner and robbed my cast of the chance of having an appropriately crafted ending to the play.

As a producer I was horrified by the lack of attendance for the production. *Joan* kicked off what would become a weeks worth of thesis performances however we had the poorest attendance out of any of the nights. This was surprising considering the size of the cast and the number of mutual friends that we all have; yet, as is often the case with anything related to Swine Palace- we assume that doing the show is enough. Why would we want to tell people we are doing it? The lack of publicity by my parent organization felt like a slap in the face. Work that had been so painstakingly created went out with a whimper before it had even been viewed. I know that the ultimate success of a theatrical venture is not how many people saw it; yet, at the

same time I felt proud of what we had accomplished and certainly felt like the hard work of my cast deserved to be viewed. They also desperately needed the energy of an audience to help them perform the show to the best of their ability.

Future plans for *Joan: A Play With Broken Songs* include a revision of the text, a workshop, and eventual participation in the Fringe Festival circuit. Through the rehearsal process I gained a strong sense of what worked about my script and what proved to be problematic. These thoughts will be reflected in future drafts. Following these revisions a workshop of the text with mostly new performers will occur. This will give me the opportunity to gain new insights from actors who are unfamiliar with the first production and will help to bring a fresh energy to the synthesis of new ideas. I would also like to include instrumentations in the new draft, which will allow collaboration between musicians and actors. The New Orleans Fringe Festival will likely be the next step in producing this work. This is a local festival that would financially be the most practical way to give the play its next incarnation.

Overall, I'm proud of the work that was created. I appreciate the efforts of my classmates as well as the LSU Faculty that helped to bring this project from a concept to a partially realized performance. I have learned a great deal about the political nature of theatre companies, universities, and relationship issues that can arise between actors and directors. Most importantly, I look forward to the next incarnation of this project so I can have the opportunity to apply my prior experiences in an effort to reach a standard closer to my own standard of perfection.

CHAPTER 6
JOAN: A PLAY WITH BROKEN SONGS

Written By:
Colton James Neidhardt

Devised by:
Ashley Adams, Amar Atkins, Addie Barnhart, Amanda Clark, Maggie McGurn, Tim Moriarty, Joe Morris,
Colt Neidhardt, SanChavis Torns, Devin Williams

Dramatis Personae

Joan of Arc: The Maid of Orleans.

Saint Michael the Archangel: He is the commander of the Lords army of angels in heaven.

Saint Catherine of Siena: She is the patron saint of firefighters, against fire, bodily ills, illness, miscarriages, mothers in labor.

Saint Margaret of Cortona: Her sin was having a son out of wedlock. She is the patron saint of the falsely accused; hoboos; homeless; insane; orphaned; mentally ill; midwives; penitents; single mothers; reformed prostitutes; stepchildren; tramps.

Gabriel: an angel, a messenger.

Charles: a King.

Cauchon: a bishop.

Bruno: Attendant to Charles.

A Chorus of Angels, Children, Royal Subjects, Soldiers.

SCENE 1 JOANS DESCENT

(a pool of light rises on Cauchon reading the charges against Joan)

Cauchon: Joan of Arc, the Maid of Orleans- the accused. She is faced with the following charges... She has made herself a diviner; she has caused herself to be adored and loved by falsifying the word of God. She has made compacts and treaties with witches. She has invoked demons. She has consulted with evil spirits and made use of their power. She has aided those who stand against the Catholic faith. She dresses like a man. She is insistent in the belief that she hears the voices of Saints. She is a sorcerer, a witch, a heretic. Death will rise like the sun to greet her in the morning.

Joan: My beloved Archangel Michael and my Saints Catherine and Margaret. On this night I offer and consecrate myself to you- and place myself, my family, and everything I own under the power of your protection.

I beg you to not look at how little I have to offer- I am only a wretched sinner. I am small and so very far from my family. In spite of all my short comings I hope that you see me through favorable eyes and remember that I have always been loyal to you. During my life you have assisted me, helped me to find my purpose, helped me to love God with all my heart.

I need you to come to my aid one last time. Defend me always from my spiritual enemies, especially now, in the last moments of my life.

(She waits)

Come then, glorious Saints...

(She waits)

I have been forsaken.

(She falls asleep)

(A chorus of angels appear in Joan's cell. They are led by the Saints- singing)

Blessed are the poor in spirit

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

Blessed are they that mourn

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted

Blessed are the meek and lowly

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth

Blessed are they—seekers after righteousness

Who are hungry and thirsty, they shall be filled

Blessed are the merciful
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy

Blessed are the pure in heart
They shall see God

Blessed are the peacemakers
For they shall be called the children of God

Blessed are which are beaten down
Blessed are ye----

Blessed are they when men shall revile you and persecute you and
say all manner of evil against you falsely for myself, rejoice and be
exceeding glad, for theirs is the kingdom, for so persecuted were
those who came before you

(The Chorus shifts into soldiers on the battlefield. They begin to march. The sounds of chains falling can be heard. To this beat the Saints sing...)

The Saints:

I am on the battlefield for my Lord.
I am on the battlefield for my Lord,
and I promised Him that I would serve Him 'til I die;
I am on the battlefield for my Lord.

Joan: No-no away! I will not let you steal me away like thieves in the night. I must see one more sunrise before I am taken to the gallows. If you deny me that I had rather strangle myself with the chains you have bound me in, than see your 'church' find justice. I must see the light...

Chorus of Angels: Joan. *(stomps again)*

Joan:you are? You are...angels. *(Joan whispers)* They must not see me speaking to you.

Catherine: poor girl

Margaret: Be not afraid

Joan: My voices? My Saints. Catherine, Margaret, Michael. You have come for me!

Catherine: Sweet girl, did you doubt us?

Margaret: we have much to show you before the sun rises.

Michael: We must fortify your soul. For the battle which is soon to come, you'll need a love made all of flame. You will have to suffer-

Margaret: and to suffer has-

The Saints: Charms of its own.

Joan: Can the Lord not spare my suffering?

Margaret: Suffering and death are as much a part of life as love and joy are.

Catherine: Sweet girl, when day breaks you shall rise like a song, a prayer-

Margaret: like smoke twisting and climbing toward heaven.

Michael/Catherine: Shadows.

(Joan chains are removed- she examines her wrists.)

Catherine: Poor girl, these bruises will not last long.

Margaret: Bruises are for the living. Your sacrifice will bruise your family to the bone. But with time the shadow of that bruise will become less (and less)- until one day- your mother will be working in her backyard and she'll bend over to pick up a basket of apples- and in a mysterious way a memory of you will cross her mind. That day she will feel the bruise again as if for the first time. She will not be sad. She will be grateful to know that she still carries you with her.

Catherine: this is the power of memory.

Margaret: of death

Michael: of life.

Margaret: you will ascend

Catherine: climb

Michael: rise

Joan: to heaven? I don't know how to do that. My bones are not hollow- I cannot take flight like a bird.

Margaret: have you ever tried to ascend?

Catherine: climb

Michael: rise

Joan: No..I haven't. I get my strength from the Lord. If he wishes me to rise, then I will.

(she tries. nothing)

(she tries again. nothing.)

Margaret: easier

Michael: said

Catherine: than

Margaret: done

SCENE 2 FASCINATION

Catherine/Michael: not ready.

Margaret: You are uncertain. unfinished.

Joan: Facing death is....difficult. So much is left undone, unspoken. I wish I had never left my home, my family.

Margaret: do not be afraid

Catherine: You will learn.

Michael/Margaret: we will teach you.

Catherine: Gabriel will teach you.

Joan: The angel Gabriel?

Michael: when the time is right

Margaret: Gabriel will arrive

Catherine: to take you

Michael: home.

Margaret: but first, your earthly home

(The Saints and chorus begin to form a tree)

Michael: your origin.

Catherine: your roots

Michael: A cypress tree

Catherine: Dripping in moss

Margaret: With wide arms reaching

Michael: A grand spread of shade

Catherine: and on summer days the children went there

Michael: the tree of life

Joan: I recognize it but I know it is not the same.

L'arbor De Bourlemont

This tree is from my childhood in Domremy

I would play around it with all my friends.

(The Chorus become the Children of the Tree- they play throughout the following..)

That was a very, very long time ago.

We would hold hands and sing songs around its trunk.

We carved our initials into its bark and hung ornaments from its branches.

We sweetened our tea with its sticky sap.

We gathered wild flowers from the banks of the river and wove crowns

to signify queens, and carved branches to signify warriors

and we danced, and moved, and danced and laughed

and moved, and laughed, and danced, and breathed

That air was sweet and crisp. Coneflowers and honeysuckle.

Wild plums that stained our faces and our clothes.
The happiest time in my life...

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a soldier, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

Margaret: from their death beds the children turn their longing eyes toward home,
and there, far shining, as through a rift in a cloud that curtains heaven
they see a soft picture of the tree, clothed in ribbons of golden light.

Catherine: Its important that you see the tree in bloom and that you carry a memory of its beauty
with you on our journey.

Michael: In life it will not remain that way- but through memory it will live in you.

Joan: Why? What will happen?

Margaret: Mankind will suffocate the tree. The air will become heavy and burn like too many
cannons gone off at once.

Catherine: A thousand years of loneliness will pass and the tree will become weary.

Margaret: it will no longer have the resolve to keep away the banished serpents and stinging
insects that it had once protected the children from. They will grow and multiply and torment the
tree.

Michael: With one last gasp of life the tree will reach out its roots as far as it can. Breaking
through bedrock, soil, granite, cement.

Catherine: it will reach and stretch its limbs desperately grasping at the earth- trying to reclaim
what man has taken. Pulling and straining until it snaps- until it breaks.

Michael/Margaret:
a breaking- it broke

Catherine:
the children, their souls, will rise from the buds and flowers of the tree toward heaven- fleeing
from the world. We will cry out to them...
(The Saints begin to sing)

Run, Mary, Run
Run, Martha, Run
Tell Mary, Run I say

You got a right to the Tree of Life

Run, Mary, Run
Run, Martha, Run
Tell Mary, Run I say
You got a right to the Tree of Life

Oh Hebrew children got a right
You got a right to the Tree of Life
With all them sorrows, they got a right
You got a right to the Tree of Life

I come to tell you, you got a right
you got a right, you got a right

Battered Woman you got a right
you got to know you got a right
that homeless man he got a right
he got a right, he got a right

Run, Mary, Run
Run, Martha, Run
Run, Mary, Run I say
You got a right to the Tree of Life

Joan: The tree...my friends...Why would mankind go so far?

Michael: Ego. War. Greed. Money.

Catherine: man becomes image obsessed. God creates man in his likeness and man wishes to improve upon God. To trim and clip and shave bones- to suck the fat from their bodies. To defy aging, death.

Margaret: You have seen the past- a moment of joy. Now see the future- a warning.

Michael: You must be strong Joan- from your seat in heaven you will watch the unimaginable lengths mankind goes to.

Catherine: from the poor to the wealthy.

Michael: from the least to the most.

Margaret: Even a King such as Charles could become self absorbed and vapid in the future...

Joan: No- surely not Charles- he is a fair ruler- he has supported my mission.

Margaret: Until now.

Catherine: Has he come to visit you?

Michael: Has he reached out to help you?

SCENE 3 FRUSTRATION

(the sounds of a royal processional is heard- a crowd of Kardashians and fashion plates enter and form a throne.)

Bruno:

The agenda of the Dauphin Charles
on this, the _____ day of December, in the year of our Lord 2014

CHARLES: Get the fuck on with it! *(ingesting sugar)*

Bruno:

Yes, m'lord. Of course...

The most pressing issue on todays docket
is that of the whereabouts of Duke John the Fearless of Burgundy.
His wife Lady Mary the Fearless of Burgundy has sent word that neither
he nor his men have been seen since meeting with you on the bridge at Pouilly.
Did you meet with Duke John the Fearless of Burgundy?

(Charles produces a cellphone from his pocket and takes a lewd selfie of some kind - and proceeds to post it to social media.)

Bruno: m'lord?

CHARLES: Ugh, fuck- WHAAAAAaaaaaaaaaaat? *(ingests more sugar)*

Bruno: m'lord. Did you meet with Duke John the Fearless of Burgundy?

CHARLES: tchh- ummm Maaaaybe? I.D.K

Bruno: m'lord. you D.K?

CHARLES: Fuuuuuuck- when a man says that he D.K. He means that he D.K.!

(ingests more sugar)

Bruno: m'lord. Did you meet Duke John the Fearless of Burgundy at the bridge at Pouilly- and did Duke John the Fearless of Burgundy somehow end up 'accidentally falling' into the river below?

Bruno: HAHAAAAAA- O.M.G yesss. Now I totes remember! #totallypushedhim

(ingests more sugar)

Bruno: uh, yes... Very good m'lord. We will send word to Lady Mary the Fearless of Burgundy.

CHARLES: yah- send her some flowers or something #stupidbitch. can I go now #hungry

JOAN: Charles?

CHARLES: whoa, whoa! Who is this?? I didn't give you permission to look at me under natural light.

Joan: It's me- Joan.

Charles: Joan! Whatsup? How you doin? *(screaming to his attendants)*

Fuuuuuck *(he kicks an attendant in the gut)* would you guys get the hell outta here- you're invaaaading MY privacyyy!

(the chorus exits)

Joan? yeah girl, its me. I had a little work done- can you tell?
I wanted that 'I woke up like this' look.

JOAN: well, you are certainly different than I remember.

CHARLES: do I look rested? give me a compliment...

Joan: Your highness?

CHARLES: Where the hell have you been? after you ran off and got your ass killed for witchcraft, or bein a lesbian, or whatever I had to find a new way to hear God. He would never talk directly to me- the only messages I ever got from him were through you- because of those spooky ass Saints that were always whisperin in your ear.

JOAN: you found a new way to talk to God?

CHARLES: maaaaaaaaaybe, fiiiirst you've gotta give me my present :)

(Joan returns a blank stare)

CHARLES: Fuuuuuuuuuck- just giiiiive meee my present!!!

JOAN: Your highness, I did not bring you a—

CHARLES: You dare to come into my court, to invade my privacy, and not bring me a present? an object? a dedication to my vanity??

JOAN:

I drove the English out of France for you and made it my personal mission to crown you King. What more could you possibly feel entitled to? You left me to rot in prison. Why would God talk to you? You are a coward- You didn't even fight in your own war!

CHARLES:

Me- fight? I've never considered war before. I suppose its a good thing for a poor person to do- to fight a war, but I cant imagine what help I would be. Im not exactly a 'doer' i'm more of an 'ideas' guy. I have people who do things for me, that depend on me to tell them what to do...and what if something happened to me? What would happen to all my Instagram followers? Who would take care of my throne? Who would take care of my phone?? Ohhhh, you've made me think, and that upsets me. I wish you would just mind your own damn business!

JOAN:

My business? My business was helping my poor mother and father tend the flock at home. I followed the word of God and saw you crowned King- I am going to die because of you. Now that you have a new way to talk to God, you no longer need me. How, Charles? Does he answer you??

Charles: *(barely paying attention)* hmm? Oh, Cauchon- I drop a little extra coin in the offering plate every Sunday and he acts as the middle man between me and the big guy upstairs. You really fucked up Joan- this whole time you've been in love with religion boo-hoo that must be hard for you. Try ruling a country- thats real hard work. I have to constantly be thinking of ways to keep stepping on the heads of the less fortunate. Speaking of which, I have an appointment to get to- TTYL. *(he starts to exit)*

If I were you Joan- I would drop to my little knees and pray that God forgives you for not fulfilling your duty to this country. For being blinded by religion- pray that he forgives you for that..

Joan: Hail Mary,
Full of Grace,

The Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit
of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary,
Mother of God,
pray for us sinners now,
and at the hour of death.
Amen. (x2)

SCENE 4 NIGHTMARE

(The court gathers around Joan- interrupting her prayer.)

Bailiff: All Rise...

The Chorus: ALL RISE.

Cauchon: Do you swear to speak the truth in answer to such questions as are put to you?

Joan: I do not know what you wish to examine me on. Perhaps you might ask such things that I would not tell.

Cauchon: Will you swear to speak the truth upon those things which are asked you concerning the faith, which you know?

Joan: Concerning my father and my mother, and what I have done since I took the road to France, I will gladly swear to tell the truth. But concerning my revelations from God, these I have never told or revealed to anyone. I will not reveal them to save my head.

Cauchon: Do you know whether or not you are in God's grace?

Joan: If I am not, may God put me there; and if I am, may God so keep me. I should be the saddest creature in the world if I knew I were not in His grace.

Cauchon: What of these Saints that you claim to see?

Joan: I saw them with my two eyes, and I believe it was they I saw as firmly as I believe in the existence of God. God has created them in the form and fashion I saw.

Cauchon: Did they have hair?

Joan: It is a comfort to know that they have.

Cauchon: Was Saint Michael naked?

Joan: Do you think God has nothing with which to clothe him?

Cauchon: Did Saint Margaret speak English?

Joan: Why would she speak in English when she is not on the English side?

Cauchon: Did not the angel fail you when you were taken prisoner?

Joan: . . . since it pleased God, it was better for me to be taken prisoner.

Cauchon: and what of your clothes? you said you wore the mens attire because these angels told you to take up arms as a soldier. Is this true?

Joan: yes.

Cauchon: Yet you agreed to wear women's clothes during this trial and here you sit before us once again dressed as a man?

Joan: To dress as a woman in this world is to be vulnerable. My guards have threatened to rape me unless I admit my Saints are a lie- which I will not do. They look at me as though I were an animal- they stare through me as they lick their chops and caress the bars of my cell. I dress as a man because I am no less than a man, I am a soldier, and I have saved myself for the Lord who has made all beauty possible in my life.

Cauchon: rape? you?? surely not.

(snickers from the chorus)

Cauchon: Will you agree to change back into the women's clothes?

Joan: I will not.

Cauchon: will you recant the belief that your voices speak to you?

Joan: I will not. My voices are divine in nature.

Cauchon: You realize that the charges brought against you are severe and any one of them could mean your death? Surely it is in your best interest to denounce your foolish beliefs.

Joan: I will not.

Cauchon: Very well Joan. You shall return to your cell to wait for death which will rise like the sun to greet you in the morning...

(the chorus filters back upstage. Joan is left seated and distraught.)

Margaret: You see Joan- Judgements are not holy or fair. You of all should know better than to pass them on mankind so rashly.

Joan: yes...I see that. But death, how does one go about facing death?

SCENE 5 DEATH AS AN ESCAPE

Catherine: When I died my mouth filled with (ash) and I was deafened by white noise. I heard a silence that (screamed) and sent shivers (down my spine) and back (into the earth.) The earth reached back with (roots and branches) that hobbled my legs and (weaved) back and forth as they became (knotted.) Knots that were slippery and hard to (grasp.) As I pulled them away from my legs I could feel a (snapping.) Something inside of me was snapping, (pulling away) from itself. I pulled and they (snapped), and they (snapped,) and they (snapped.) When I was done I felt like a puppet with no strings. My body fell limp. I felt a warmth and I heard a voice say-

The Chorus of Angels: "well done my good and faithful servant."

Michael: Time is short Joan- the sun is rising.

Catherine: The angel Gabriel is come to escort you.

(Gabriel approaches- wearing rags and pushing a shopping cart. He barter with the chorus of Angels. He has brought them things from other times and places.)

Joan: but...are you sure he is come for me? He doesn't look like much of an angel.

Gabriel: and you don't look like much of a man or a woman...but who am I to judge?

Joan: You are Gabriel? come to take me away to heaven with a legion of angels? This is not exactly what I expected.

Gabriel: what a complicated little girl. in such a rush? no time for pleasantries??

Joan: well, yes, of course-

Gabriel: *(he jests)*Hi Joan- Im Gabriel- come to take you away to heaven with a legion of angels. I am a free thinker- a traveller, a messenger. I move things between places and times- I play different characters. I am all things to those who care, and invisible to those who don't. I will be with you in your final moments until the light leaves your eyes- until the last breath passes your lips and then ill guide you home.

Joan: oh- I am ready to be at home. Death is the part that scares me. Im empty. I thirst. *(Joans stomach growls)*

Gabriel: when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but now that you are older you stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. But I wont take you on an empty stomach. What would you like for your last meal?

Joan: ohh I...

Gabriel: No, don't be silly- everyone deserves a last earthly delight. Cheesecake? ham, mac and cheese? ice cream sundae? medium rare steak and an oaky chardonnay? shrimp and grits with all the butter and cheese you can imagine? sweet potato pie? a porkchop wrapped in bacon?? Whadya want? I'll get it for you.

Joan: ...an apple.

Gabriel: the humble apple...aan apple? I spend all day carryin around a side of beef and all she wants is an apple.

Joan: its not just an apple. Its an apple from my mothers tree in Domremy.

Gabriel: oh- sentimental, are we? yeah sure, kid. *(produces an apple from his grocery cart.)* the Lord God said, "Behold, Joan has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest she reach out her hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and"—

(Joan takes the apple, she eats- the chorus of angels are in ecstasy.)

I like to think that we are not all that different from that apple. We are fruit- withering on the vine as we somehow jump from ripe to over-ripe in a matter of minutes. Some of us hang on to the branch, we choke the vine with great desperation because we are too afraid to fall to the ground- to subject ourselves to the uncertainty of what would be there to catch us if we did let go. We can't face the thought of falling forever so we are content to not risk anything. To let ourselves be picked at by all the sparrows circling the tree of life. To be made a home for parasites, to rot from the inside out until our flesh melts away to the pit. The part the birds cant eat...the core, the soul, the real self.

(he takes the apple core from Joan.)

(The Saints sit Joan down- Gabriel produces pointe ballet shoes- The Saints begin to put them on Joan)

Margaret: Time to ascend

Catherine: climb

Michael: rise

(Michael sings- Gabriel and Joan dance.)

Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world,
troubles of the world,
troubles of the world.

Soon I will be done with the troubles of the world
Goin' home to live with God

no more weeping and wailing

I want to see my mother
I want to see my mother
I want to see my mother
I'm goin' home to live with God

(The chorus of angels files out and Joan is left- returned to her bed and chained. The saints and angels watch. a guard enters- played by Gabriel)

Joan: It is finished. Into your hands I commend my spirit. Amen.

Guard: Day has broken Joan. I am come to prepare you for death.

Joan: When will it be?

Guard: Now. The time is at hand.

Joan: What death is it?

Guard: By fire. *(The marching of the angels is heard in the distance- Joan collects herself.)*

Joan: I am ready. *(The marching builds- as Joan is led out the Saint sing.)*

I left my friends and kindred, I'm bound for the Promised Land,
the grace of God's upon me, the Bible's in my hands.
In distant lands I trod, crying sinner come to God;
I am on the battlefield for my Lord.

(The marching fades- lights out.)

END OF PLAY

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VITA

Colton Neidhardt, a native of Crawford Nebraska, received his B.A. in Theatre from Chadron State College in 2010. Thereafter, he attended the University of Nebraska- Omaha where he received his M.A. in Theatre in 2012. After working in American Regional Theatre, Neidhardt was inspired to continue his training through Louisiana State University's M.F.A Acting Program. He is a candidate to receive his Masters Degree in May 2015 and plans to work regionally as an Actor/ Director, specifically in the development of new American plays.