

Teaching and Research Statement

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As a performance as research scholar/artist, director, and interdisciplinary teacher, my teaching and research goals converge on the question of human transformation. I have cross-trained in multiple acting and directing techniques to develop a method that is holistic, psycho-physical, and adaptable to all areas of theatre. By focusing on community, curiosity, and transformation, I integrate theory and practice into my classes, directing, and design work to create an approach that is accessible and provides growth within an artist's process and their daily lives. The major influences on my teaching and directing have been Michael Chekhov and Augusto Boal.

I teach with Acting and Directing with Chekhov's model of triplicity, meaning that I teach tools and concepts in three's; we warm up and learn a tool, we improvise with the tool, then we apply it to a critical problem/scene/ design work. Creating breakout spaces in the classroom, students go through guided rehearsals using a tool, then we have working preview presentations of their work, along with audience feedback. I ask the students to focus their critiques on observation and the curiosities of why the actors made specific choices. This offers the actor insight into how their work is being received, and it reminds the audience that they are actively engaging in this relationship in the theatre space. By exploring Boal's Forum Theatre and games for actors and non-actors, we explore the relationship between audience and actor and the power dynamics involved in storytelling models. Boal believed that the audience needed to be motivated to revolution and that theatre had the ability to raise the audience to a cause. My classes devise work based on personal experience, mythology, or improvised from the productions in which they are working. Chekhov's work is about total transformation into the character by way of the imagination, and Boal's theories center on the transformation of the audience by way of empowerment.

As a director, I choose productions by first asking the question, "how will the artists involved and the audience with whom we commune be changed by this work?" Joseph Campbell said, "it has always been the prime function of mythology and rite to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward." At the beginning of each directing process, I find the core image of the story. An example of this is the image I chose for Phantom of the Opera; the Phantom is an innovator, and he is a man way ahead of his time. So, the image I chose was a mechanical music box. This led to our production utilizing the technical visions of the Industrial Revolution, as though the entire show were produced inside a Victorian music box. While some characters were the porcelain figures that dance inside the music box, others were the clanging cymbal monkeys. The Phantom was represented by the gears that were made the box work. His mask was not a representation of his weakness and self-pity but a bold statement of identity. This deconstruction of the traditional Phantom's look, and the overall production's presentation took audience members by surprise and opened up dialogue about the Phantom's psychological state and the disparity between Raoul and Phantom, as well as provided our Christine with a more meaningful choice to make by the end; does she choose a life of invention and adventure or a comfortable life of wealth and prestige.

Whether my students become life-long artists or life-long patrons of the arts, they know the power that the arts have to change the world for the better because they are changed by the arts. Storytelling is in our DNA, and for some, it is buried as deep as the memories of childhood. As an artistic mentor, I seek to unlock those memories, that hidden DNA, and bring it to the surface to enliven the artist and improve the world around them.

*"I don't believe people are looking for the meaning of life as much as they are looking for the experience of being alive."
Joseph Campbell*