Camping in the Classroom: Ridiculous Theatre as Serious Drama

John Kenneth DeBoer
Virginia Commonwealth University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd

Part of the Theatre and Performance Studies Commons

© The Author

Downloaded from
https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/etd/874

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at VCU Scholars Compass. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of VCU Scholars Compass. For more information, please contact libcompass@vcu.edu.
CAMPING IN THE CLASSROOM: RIDICULOUS THEATRE AS SERIOUS DRAMA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

JOHN KENNETH DEBOER
Bachelors of Arts, Indiana University Bloomington, 2004

Director: JANET B. RODGERS
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF THEATRE

Director: DR. NOREEN C. BARNES
DIRECTOR OF GRADUATE STUDIES, THEATRE

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
December 2007
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis is the culmination of a journey that I began in the fall of 1996 when Mrs. Ashley Bennett cast me in my first main stage High School production, *Noises Off*.

I dedicate all that is courageous to Professors Murray McGibbon, Matthew Harding, Martha Jacobs, Bruce Burgun, Julia Rademacher, and Charles Railsback of Indiana University who taught me to explore the world without fear.

I dedicate all that is whimsical to Professors Janet Rodgers, Noreen Barnes, Gary Hopper, and Aaron Anderson of Virginia Commonwealth University who taught me that discipline and craft are the beginning of discovery not the end.

I dedicate all that is structured to Paul Meier, Wayne Mangum, Debbie Rynberg, Kathleen Legault, and Glynn Brannan who trusted me when I needed my freedom.

I dedicate all that is ridiculous to the students of THEA 491/791: Seminar in Camp: Ridiculous Theatre as Serious Drama, Spring 2007.

I dedicate my sanity to the many friends who have held my hand along the way; Manda Wishin, Jenny Bachtel, Anthony Bishop, Danny Meuninck, Kim McInerny,
Bridget Krull, Keely Burke, Jill Boruff, Katie and Todd Ball-Boruff, Nick Westrate, Chris Barth, Maura Frailey, Michael Henry, Megan Baskin, Matty Zaradich, Stephanie Dodge, Taylor James, Sachin Bhatt, Kerry Kyle, Hannah Smith, Lane Bonstein, Hilary Krishnan, Jenna Weinberg, Michael Paolini, Katie Bradley, Lisa Jackson, Tonia Camponella, Drew Vidal, Patrick Coleburn, Eric Jacobs, Jane Frazier, Diego Villada, Danny Devlin, Ali Angelone, Sarah Yount, Emily Oye, Tommy Pruitt, Joe Carlson, Julie and Mike Phillips and many more...

And most of all I dedicate my love of theatre to my family... who came to all the plays... laughed at most the jokes... and usually understood my need to play.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .............................................................................................................. ii
Abstract ............................................................................................................................... vii
Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter

1 ‘Camping’ in the Classroom .............................................................................................. 4
   Getting the Gay Out .......................................................................................................... 4
   A Pedagogy of Camp ........................................................................................................ 7
2 Gender Theory/Queer Theory .......................................................................................... 12
   Learned Gender and Sexual Performance ...................................................................... 12
   Gender, Sexuality, or Camp? ......................................................................................... 19
3 Melodrama and Musical Comedy .................................................................................... 21
   Melodrama ..................................................................................................................... 21
   Musical Comedy ............................................................................................................ 28
4 Divas, Drag and Ridiculous Theatre ............................................................................... 32
   Divas and Drag .............................................................................................................. 32
   Ridiculous Theatre as Serious Drama ............................................................................ 37
Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 43
Work Cited .......................................................................................................................... 45
Appendices .......................................................................................................................... 47
A Syllabus ............................................................................................................. 47
B Revised Class Schedule and Important Dates ............................................. 54
C Musical Comedy Exercise ............................................................................. 55
D Musical Comedy Score Example .................................................................... 57
E Ridiculous Theatre Project Handout ............................................................... 60
F Camp Goldyhood Poster .............................................................................. 65
Vita ..................................................................................................................... 67
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table Number</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.1</td>
<td>Course Objectives</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.2</td>
<td>Publicly Disclosed Demographics</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.3</td>
<td>Course Packet</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.1</td>
<td>John Kenneth DeBoer, Personal Identity Ranking</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.2</td>
<td>Characteristics of Anatomical Sex</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.3</td>
<td>Physical Characteristics of Gender</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.4</td>
<td>Vocal Characteristics of Gender</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.1</td>
<td>Melodramatic Emotional Postures</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.2</td>
<td>Melodramatic Emotional Postures</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.3</td>
<td>Pure Emotional Vowels</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.4</td>
<td>Melodrama Preparation Questions</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.5</td>
<td>Melodrama Emotional Score</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.6</td>
<td>Silent Scene Exercise One</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.7</td>
<td>Silent Scene Exercise Two</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.1</td>
<td>Drag Performance Rubric</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.2</td>
<td>Selected Drag Monologues</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Abstract

CAMPING IN THE CLASSROOM: RIDICULOUS THEATRE AS SERIOUS DRAMA

By John Kenneth DeBoer, MFA

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2007

Major Director: Janet B. Rodgers
Associate Professor, Department of Theatre

My first semester pursuing my MFA in Voice and Speech Pedagogy I vocal-coached an openly gay student playing a straight character who would mask his sexual identity in such a manner that his performance became stiff and uninteresting. Rather than using his personal identity as an asset in the pursuit of a successful performance, his chosen vocal tactics removed any sense of theatricality from his performance. I confronted the student and suggested such extreme vocal suppression diminished the quality of his overall performance. He replied, “So you want me to get the gay out.”

His use of the phrase, “get the gay out” to describe a fuller adaptation of his sexual identity to suit the character fascinated me and led to me to create a performance seminar
course that used open acknowledgement of Camp performance styles as a valuable way to prepare students, gay or straight, for careers on the stage and screen. This thesis is a record of the course taught in the spring of 2007; CAMP: RIDICULOUS THEATRE AS SERIOUS DRAMA.
INTRODUCTION

During my first semester at Virginia Commonwealth University I was the Assistant Vocal Coach to Janet Rodgers on the Fall 2005 main-stage production of *Wait Until Dark*. One of my assignments on the production was to coach a gay student playing a straight character. Early in the rehearsal process I noticed that he was making vocal choices for the character that were bland and monotone. He was playing a stereotype of the straight male without using the theatrical vocal variety necessary to make his performance interesting to listen to or watch. From the audience, he seemed overly concerned that such choices might cause his own sexuality to overpower the implied textual sexuality of his character. The character as written was an archetypal hero with a dark secret. He was charming, protective of women, and he spoke in strong direct sentences unless he was being evasive on purpose.

This student’s ability to create a performance identity for this complex character had very little to do with sexuality, except in the student’s mind. He was focusing on suppressing his own sexual identity so much so that it took him out of the moment and interfered with any playful theatricality that would have might have allowed the audience to connect with his character. During a private coaching session I urged the student to be more theatrical in his performance, use a variety of pitch and intonation, and allow the
vocal engagement of his female acting partner to reflect their flirting and intimacy. While I did not want the student to obsess over an accurate sexual performance of his character, it had to be acknowledged that neither the actor nor the character was asexual. So rather than suppress his own sexual identity, I wanted his own experience of sexuality to inform this performance. The student responded to my request for a playful adaptation of his own sexual identity to the characters with the phrase, “So you want me to get the Gay out?” (*Wait Until Dark*). His colorful way of describing of my belief that he was suppressing rather than adapting his sexual identity was perfect and began a dialogue about theatricality, performance, and sexual identity that made the coaching environment much more open and productive.

After my work on *Wait Until Dark*, I began to explore how an actor’s identity affects the choices he or she makes in the performance of a character’s identity. I came to realize that all performances of identity—sexual, cultural, anatomical, and theological—are inherently theatrical and a playful appreciation of this is necessary to create performances that engage the audience. This thesis is a record of the years that followed my work on *Wait Until Dark* and the resulting research and coursework that allowed me to explore the playful adaptation of an actor’s identity to theatrical performance.

For the purposes of a standardized vocabulary I will use the words *male* and *female* to describe only anatomical sex. The words *masculine* and *feminine* will describe performative gender, and will not be exclusively linked to the male and female sexes. The descriptors *straight* and *gay* will be used interchangeably for both male and female sexual identity performance, while the acronym *LGBT*—Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and
Transgender—will refer to the subaltern—non-dominant—cultural community associated with Gender and Sexual minorities. A *performance identity* refers to any facet of a student’s identity, which can be performed physically or vocally.

Words and phrases that I redefined or coined in the process of researching and writing this thesis will appear in italics. Material appearing in quotation marks refers to cited material.
CHAPTER 1
CAMPING IN THE PERFORMANCE CLASS ROOM

Getting the Gay Out

In the fall of 2005 I began writing an essay for the Voice and Speech Trainers Association’s [VASTA] Voice and Speech Review, titled, “Getting the Gay Out: Addressing Sexual Identity in the Voice Classroom.” The purpose of this essay was to emphasize the need for a pedagogy that acknowledged sexual identity as an asset to vocal performance. As I began to research the concept of “getting the gay out” I grew concerned that some students, gay and straight, might have had little experience with overtly theatrical performance styles and would resist such concepts as trite or possibly even dangerous.

The theatricality I hoped to develop in students is an acknowledgement by the performer that theatre is life portrayed on a grand-scale with vocal and physical performances of identity extended to the necessary scope for the both the piece and the space in which the actors perform. While this in no way means that these performances should be in anyway false or insincere, I feared students might find such methods trite because of the Stanislavski training begun so early in the acting curriculum at VCU. As a
voice and speech instructor it is a constant battle to make student actors understand that realistic acting must still be *theatrical* if it is to resonate from the stage.

After much deliberation I began to realize that Stanislavski’s method could also be an asset in the pursuit of theatricality because it involves the adaptation of personal experience to theatrical circumstances. If a teacher can guide students to also adapt their physical and vocal identities to create a performance identity that is both theatrical and realistic then the work would compliment as well as expand on the skills learned in a traditional performance class. However, the open acknowledgement, adaptation, and amplification of identity can seem dangerous to a LGBT student. While homophobia is rare in theatre today, the business can still be just as harsh as it was decades ago. Men and women who openly and exclusively perform subaltern identities—especially sexual ones—are often left to scrounge for a limited number of character roles. So any adaptation and amplification must also encourage the student to explore their own versatility and range as an actor.

In order to understand how young college students become aware of issues of identity and how I could use that knowledge to guide students towards theatrical performance identities, I turned to the book, *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators*. In the handbook, Patricia Sullivan identifies five stages that students experience as they come to terms with identity—specifically sexual identity—that for my purposes seemed coincide with the process theatre students endure as they begin to develop performance identities.
As children, students are born “naïve” to the fact that differences in sexuality exist that do not necessarily coincide with differences in anatomy. While they might be superficially aware of skin color and gender, recognizing sexual identity requires a more mature understanding of the nature of sexuality, which young children do not possess. When they move into the “acceptance stage” these children become aware of a heteronormative society and as they reach college-age, their newfound independence plunges them into the “resistance stage.” In this stage students undergo a paradigmatic shift and firmly held beliefs begin to conflict with their new awareness—for theatre students, the clash between high school and college training is a good example. In terms of sexuality, straight students might begin to feel guilt for being members of the dominant oppressor, while LGBT students may be hesitant explode out of the closet, fearing a loss of benefits—which in theatre could be read just as easily as, “not getting cast”. (Sullivan 3-5)

So, for some students, theatrical performance identities might function as an unwelcome coming out party. After all, the descriptors theatrical and gay were interchangeable for many years. To understand why some students might be hesitant to carry the label theatrical I began to research the phenomenon known as Camp. At the time I mostly attached the term to British popular culture, and specifically the famous Monty Python sketch titled “Camp Judges”. In the sketch Michael Palin and Eric Idle—two self-identified straight men—play traditional English jurists dressed in elaborate robes and powdered wigs. The camera holds on a private study as the judges enter the frame underscored by authoritative orchestral music. As they disrobe after a long day in court, it
is revealed that underneath their traditional vestments they are adorned in outrageous female undergarments, and speak as a stereotypical British “queens.”

As I began my research into Camp I equated it almost exclusively with such flamboyant gay male performance identities. It was Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp” that demonstrated the breadth of what Camp represents. In this essay—or maybe it would be better to call it a list—she describes Camp as “[ . . . ] Dandyism in the age of mass culture” which, “[ . . . ] makes no distinction between the unique object and the mass-produced object. Camp taste transcends the nausea of the replica” (Sontag 63). The “Camp Judges” sketch begins with a hint of “Dandyism”—a knowing appreciation of the successes and failures of culture and society. The actors dress in arbitrary aesthetic of the British legal system that the “Dandy” would surely prefer it to the gaudy decadence that follows. However Monty Python chose to apply an aesthetic to the circumstance that celebrated the Camp pageantry of both the courtly outfits and the lingerie hidden beneath. I had misunderstood the meaning of the word “Camp” in “Camp Judges.” It was not entirely about them being flamboyantly gay—although that was part of it—but rather a playful theatricality that acknowledged the value of all identities in performance.

A Pedagogy of Camp

The hidden undergarments in “Camp Judges” are symbolic of the way I wanted my students to approach their identities in performance. The straight identity created by the gay student in *Wait Until Dark* was lacking in its appreciation of the theatricality inherent in performative sexual identities. This character may not have been wearing panties and a
corset under his costume but a drab raincoat and a cocked fedora can be just as theatrical
given the circumstances of the performance. The circumstances of a play dictate the
theatricality necessary to create a successful production and these mass-produced standards
of performance are perfect examples of theatrical Camp.

For instance, the Theatre VCU season that included *Wait Until Dark*, also included
*Shakespeare in Hollywood*, *The Three Sisters*, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to
the Forum*. Each of these productions required a different standard of theatricality.
Versatile student actors must be able to audition for seasons and cattle call auditions at
regional theatre conferences that endorse a theatrical canon of mass production. This
statement is not meant to imply that 1960’s thrillers, screw-ball comedies, Russian
Realism, and musical theatre farces are not challenging. In fact the specific expectations of
their Camp theatricality make them rewarding challenges for a student actor. As
Christopher Isherwood pointed out in his novel, *The World in the Evening*, “You can’t
Camp about something you don’t take seriously” (Isherwood 51). With this in mind, I
endeavored to create a specialized training regimen that acknowledged Camp performance
and theatricality in the curriculum and encouraged students through playful exploration to
breakdown the boundaries of their self-imposed performance limitations. In the spring of
2006, I created the syllabus for the course; “Camp: Ridiculous Theatre as Serious
Drama”—herein referred to as *Camp Class*.

The goal of Camp Class was to foster the stage of identity development which
Patricia Sullivan calls *redefinition*. I wanted my students to redefine all performance
identities as natural, useful, and unique so that they might develop more dynamic and
playful vocal and physical performances. To achieve this goal, the objectives for the course as outlined in the syllabus were:

Table 1.1 Course Objectives

- To develop the student’s understanding of historical and alternative forms of popular performance
- To introduce the student to gender and sexual identity’s influence on modern popular theatre
- To allow the student to explore their own talents in ways unexplored in traditional performance classes

The course was approved by the performance faculty at VCU and scheduled for the spring semester of 2007 with ten students enrolled by the first day of classes. While I had heavily advertised the course to the gay men of the department, hoping I could continue my research into “getting the gay out”, not a single self-identified gay male registered for the course. Instead the publicly disclosed demographics were as follows:
Table 1.2 Publicly Disclosed Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Identity</th>
<th>Sexual identity:</th>
<th>Academic Rank:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine:</td>
<td>Straight: 4</td>
<td>Graduate: 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine:</td>
<td>Lesbian: 3</td>
<td>Third Year: 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bisexual: 1</td>
<td>Second Year: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>First Year: 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As preparatory inspiration for each lesson, I prepared a packet of readings for each topic.

Table 1.3 Course Packet

- Camp - *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject, A reader*, Edited by Fabio Cleto
- Basic Gender and Queer Theory - *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer*, by Riki Wilchins, and “Two Opposite Animals? Voice, Text, and Gender on Stage,” by Pamela R. Hendrick
- Melodrama - *The Production of Later Nineteenth Century American Drama*, by Garrett H. Leverton and *The Vampire, or the Bride of the Isles*, by J. R. Planché
- Ridiculous Theatre - *Ridiculous Theatre: Scourge of Human Folly*, by Charles Ludlam
Students were asked to respond in writing to the readings listed above on the online classroom www.nicenet.org. Anonymous samples of their reactions will be provided in the chapters that follow.

The class met on Fridays for two hours and forty minutes in room B72 of the Singleton Performing Arts Center. Students were encouraged to violate the department dress code and wear t-shirts with Camp images and phrases printed on them. For instance, on the first day of class I wore a ringer-tee with a picture of Mickey Mouse, circa 1930, as an example of mass-produced art—wholesome, yet Camp and one of the female students wore a black t-shirt with green writing that read, “Don’t make me sic my flying monkeys on you.” The performance space was filled with shabby prop furniture, some heavy flats, and the screeching noises of sets being built in the scene shop one floor above. This was the perfect setting to begin our explorations, expanding the physical limitations of the space and the students’ imaginative play to create the theatrical worlds necessary to perform Melodrama, Musical Comedy, Diva and Drag theatre, and Ridiculous Theatre.
CHAPTER 2
GENDER THEORY/QUEER THEORY

Learned Gender and Sexual Performance

A discussion of basic Gender and Queer theory was an important starting point for the course because many of Sontag’s “Notes on Camp” linger on an awareness of sameness and a fondness for mass production. If theatricality is an imaginative extension of society and the natural world, then there is no more mass-produced commodity in nature than anatomical sex. While sex is a natural process of chromosomal transmission from parent to offspring, the Gendered behaviors which have been applied to anatomy are much more nurture than nature.

As preparation for our work with theatrical Gender and Sexual Identities, students were assigned the chapters “Can Sex Have Opposites?” and “Butler and the Problem of Identity” from Riki Wilchin’s primer Gender Theory, Queer Theory to introduce students to the binary gender relationships society has constructed regarding gender and sexuality. Binary relationships created by society assume that everything has an opposite. Male has female, masculine has feminine, gay has straight, rich has poor, and black has white. Wilchins book distills the mass amount of research in this field in the last twenty years into
a concise gloss, showing how western society’s views regarding Sex and Gender have been evolving for millennia and are much grayer than black and white—proven through the existence of tri-chromosomal humans, androgyny, bisexuality, the middle class, and the American melting-pot. However, a clear understanding of the dominant societal perceptions of binary relationships allowed students to discover the Camp theatrical value of modern masculine and feminine archetypes like John Wayne or Marilyn Monroe. An expectation of sameness is crucial for such icons to have meaning.

Wilchins poses an open-ended question in the chapter titled “[Judith] Butler and the Problem of Identity,” which became a thematic thread throughout the course. She asks, “[ . . . ] How does biological sex produce a gendered identity that invariably expresses itself into the same binary gender displays we inevitably see around us: dresses and high-heels or suits and ties, pipe smoking or big hair and long nails?” (Wilchins 130). In order for students to begin to understand binary relationships as they worked within a paradigm, the class did an exercise. On a sheet of paper, I had them rank the different categories of their personal identities from most dominant to least dominant within the twenty-first century American paradigm. For example my own ranking looked like this::
Students were then instructed to draw each identity classification as a circle as shown above. The most dominant would be largest, with the lessers orbiting. However, some lesser circles might overlap with the dominant identity. For instance, in the chart above Gay overlaps with Caucasian because in the Gay community a binary relationship exists along racial lines reflecting the larger racial binary of white/non-white. Being a gay white male brings with it some implicit societal dominance in our modern paradigm—regardless of whether it is earned. I then asked the students if the worth of their identity was affected by its categorization as dominant or non-dominant within the given paradigm, and I was met with a resounding no.

After examining the broader categories of identity I returned to the original crux of my reason for creating Camp class. If I wanted students to see their Gender and Sexual Identities as useful theatrically, I had to teach them that Gender and Sexuality were naturally performative. The problem with a dominant/subaltern paradigm is that the assumption of normalcy by the dominant group results in an assumption that one blends in with the crowd, and has few performative cues associated with identity, for instance

Table 2.1 John Kenneth DeBoer, Personal Identity Ranking

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gay overlaps with Caucasian because in the Gay community a binary relationship exists along racial lines reflecting the larger racial binary of white/non-white. Being a gay white male brings with it some implicit societal dominance in our modern paradigm—regardless of whether it is earned. I then asked the students if the worth of their identity was affected by its categorization as dominant or non-dominant within the given paradigm, and I was met with a resounding no.

After examining the broader categories of identity I returned to the original crux of my reason for creating Camp class. If I wanted students to see their Gender and Sexual Identities as useful theatrically, I had to teach them that Gender and Sexuality were naturally performative. The problem with a dominant/subaltern paradigm is that the assumption of normalcy by the dominant group results in an assumption that one blends in with the crowd, and has few performative cues associated with identity, for instance
“Everyone else in the Southern United States has an accent but people in the North do not.” In the northern paradigm of the United States, the General American dialect of television and movies is assumed to be the dominant way of speaking. However, in comparison, all people regardless of their dominance have performative vocal cues based on their region.

The student in *Wait Until Dark* made a similar assumption about the dominant straight-white-male identity while performing his character. Since it was “normal” and “unremarkable” he assumed that no theatricality was necessary to create such a “regular guy.” One student commented on the fact that if Gender behavior and performance can be learned and are not necessarily natural givens, then at some age children must be “betty-crockered” or “G.I. Joe-d” (www.nicenet.org). So our first task was to decide what characteristics of identity are naturally male and female, and which are learned masculine and feminine behavior. To do this, we utilized exercises created by Pamela R. Hendrick and outlined in her article, “Two Opposite Animals? Voice, Text, and Gender Onstage”. In her writing Hendrick identifies typical vocal gender attributes. Using these attributes as a guide, I had the class list characteristics that divide both anatomical sex and stereotypical Gender Performance into binary relationships.

First we separated the sexes based on anatomy. We used the basic male/female binary, but out of respect for the Transgender community, we acknowledged it is by no means a perfect binary. The following are examples students suggested in class as well as some they borrowed from Hendrick. For the purpose of readability I have categorized them
based on Anatomical Sex, Physical Gender Characteristics, and Vocal Gender Characteristics.

Table 2.2 Characteristics of Anatomical Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Anatomy</th>
<th>Female Anatomy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>XY Chromosomes</td>
<td>XX Chromosomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Gonads (Testicles)</td>
<td>Internal Gonads (Ovaries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Gametes (Sperm)</td>
<td>Large Gametes (Ovum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Mammary (Chest)</td>
<td>Large Mammary (Breasts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large Protruding Larynx (Adam’s</td>
<td>Small Un-Protruding Larynx (No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple)</td>
<td>Adam’s Apple)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.3 Physical Characteristics of Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine Physical Behavior</th>
<th>Feminine Physical Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large kinesphere, ownership of</td>
<td>Small kinesphere, around heart/breast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bound in the shoulders and neck</td>
<td>Bound in the pelvis and hips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arm movements lead from the fists</td>
<td>Arm movements lead from the wrists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protected Neck during interactions</td>
<td>Exposed Neck during interact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.4 Vocal Characteristics of Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masculine Vocal Behavior</th>
<th>Feminine Vocal Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Isolated chest voice</td>
<td>▪ Isolated head voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ “Plain talk”, Monotone Pitch</td>
<td>▪ Tonal dynamism, emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Patterns terminate in lowest pitch.</td>
<td>▪ Up-glide in pitch, asking for affirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Active agreement, “Yeah”</td>
<td>▪ Passive agreement “mmmhmmm”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Direct commands</td>
<td>▪ Use intensifiers, Emphatic vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Imperative action</td>
<td>▪ Soft commands, modals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students were able to look at these lists and discern the fact that none of the expected physical or vocal behaviors were intrinsically unique to the male or female sex (Hendrick 119-21).

As was discussed earlier, theatre students are exposed to a variety of identities and are mostly aware that masculine and feminine behavior transcends anatomical sex. However stereotypes that reinforce the modern binary paradigm must be acknowledged they to later be proved arbitrary rather than natural relationships. Sontag writes that only a performer who remains naïve to such things can be considered truly Camp.

Camp rests on innocence. That means Camp discloses innocence, but also, when it can corrupts it. Objects, being objects, don’t change when they are singled out by the Camp vision. Persons however, respond to their audiences. Persons begin
‘Camping’: Mae West... ...Tallulah Bankhead in *Lifeboat*, Bette Davis in *All About Eve*. (Sontag 58)

My students were already corrupted in this fashion so they could never truly be innocent theatrically. So the next logical step was to create knowing Camp performances based on gender binaries. Each student was given a selected piece of text from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The men were given lines spoken by either Blanche or Stella, and the women were given lines from Stanley or Mitch. Their assignment was to rewrite and perform the given lines as the opposite gender based on the rules of feminine and masculine speech.

(Hendrick 116-123)

When asked to respond to this exercise, one student wrote how impossible it was to remain innocent once the performer has discovered the arbitrary nature of performed identity.

I think it is important to remember that even if it is not the intention, the performance of [a] character that goes against the grain of [the performers] perceived sex or gender (even [if it is in] an outlandish manner, like drag kings and queens) [it] draws attention to the fact that these things are [societal constructions]

(Nicenet.org).

I appreciated this student’s observation that perception strongly influences whether or not a performance is considered Camp. According to Sontag, theatre and performance styles only become Camp with the passage of time. As the initial innocence of performers turns to self-aware Camp their audience begins to demand repetition and mass production.
Gender, Sexuality, or Camp?

The next class was devoted to the discussion and exploration of readings from *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject, A reader*. Both assignments—selections from Christopher Isherwood’s *The World in the Evening* and Susan Sontag’s “Notes on Camp”—emphasized camp as mass-produced commodity, just like Gender and Sexual performance identities. However, both readings were written over forty years ago and Camp sensibilities have continued to evolve since then. I wanted to provide my students with a more recent frame of reference from which to approach their explorations of Camp. To do so, I asked them to share with the class examples from film, television, or theatre that represented Camp and mass-produced performances of identity.

The selection I chose to screen was a television show that has studied the modern American paradigm through their own special Camp sensibility for nearly eighteen years—*The Simpsons*. The eighth season of the series had recently been released on DVD and I bought this collectors set specifically for the episode “Homer’s Phobia.” In this episode, Camp filmmaker John Waters guest-stars as a store owner named John who appreciates the Camp value of the plastic American home life the Simpson represent. The entire family welcomes him as a new friend, until Homer realizes that John is Gay. The rest of the family shrugs this information off as no surprise but it traumatizes Homer. He does not understand how John could be missing the performative cues of sexuality. Homer puts it best in the episode when he cries, “I like my beer cold, my TV loud, and my homosexuals fuh-laming” (“Homer’s Phobia”)! Soon Homer fears that John’s sexuality is rubbing off on Bart and they embark on a hilarious journey involving steel mills, slim cigarettes, and
hunting Reindeer at Santa’s Village as Homer discovers that performances of Gender and Sexuality are completely arbitrary and rarely infectious.

The purpose of screening this episode was to inspire the students to undertake a similar journey as we progressed through each section of the class. The performance styles we would cover in the days to come would reinforce the lessons learned from “Homer’s Phobia.” In the episode John’s sexuality was just one part—albeit an important part—of his identity that made him a whole character. One student commented that if she were to have to give up her feminine Gender Identity performances, she would feel incomplete. “I love wearing a dress and heels and lipstick, the iconography of ‘woman.’ If I wear jeans and a hoodie for a few days in a row, I start to feel non-sexual” (www.nicenet.org). On The Simpsons, the fact that Homer had not yet learned to read the iconography of John’s Sexual performance did not mean it was not there. John openly acknowledged his Sexual and Gender identity through its performance, but confused Homer by not making it the sum total of his whole identity. He “got the gay out” in the same way that I hoped my actors would as we continued on in the course.
CHAPTER 3
MELODRAMA AND MUSICAL COMEDY

Melodrama

To explore the performative evolution from innocence to self-awareness our first Camp exploration of a specific theatrical genre centered on the melodrama. Since my interest in Camp was initially incited by a Gay male student’s resistance to committing his voice and body theatrically to a role, the historical melodrama with its emphasis on vocal power and sweeping gesture in performance, was the natural place to begin. The elements of melodrama,

Table 3.1 Elements of Melodrama

- Archetypal Characters
- High-stakes situations
- Music cues to set mood and create aural imagery
- A simplified moral universe
- Episodic, repeatable action
- Impressive Spectacle
These elements from historical Melodrama forced theatricality on the performers and players due to historical circumstance. The only methods of amplification visually and aurally were those employed by the actors’ own bodies. The audiences also had a limited paradigmatic awareness that precluded complex plotting and social commentary. Exploring these historical circumstances would serve as a foundational step towards the complex theatricality necessary in modern performance styles.

In order to establish a standard of melodramatic performance that could be referred to throughout the course, I developed a system of melodramatic emoting and phonating to serve as a class warm up. The exercise began with four of the six basic emotions identified by Susana Block in her “Alba Emoting” work—Joy, Sadness, Fear and Anger. I felt that the final two Alba Emotions, Eroticism and Tenderness should be combined to create the single melodramatic emotion, “love” for the purposes of our work (Rodgers). This would allow us to flirt with eroticism as an extension—or even a corruption depending on your personal beliefs—of innocent love in later Camp explorations. I further altered the Alba Emoting work; deciding to make these melodramatic emotional postures that create the physical and vocal impact of an emotion, rather than sustaining a continuous breath pattern to create an actual emotional response. The student begins the exercise with a neutral aligned body. Depending on the character’s position on stage—standing, sitting, etcetera—the impulse for the emotional posture begins in either the sternum or the pelvis and fans out from the body.

Once the student located the center of impulse emotional breath and facial expressions were added. The initial step for each posture was to decide whether the
emotional posture would radiate from the sternum or the pelvis. Listed below are the instructions that were given to the students as they practiced each emotional posture.

**Table 3.2 Melodramatic Emotional Postures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Turn up the corners of your lips into a smile posture and inhale through the mouth. Hold the breath and the posture until you are told to release it. Upon release exhale through the nose. Repeat two times to get the posture in your body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Pull the corners of your lips down into a frown posture and inhale through the nose. Hold the breath and the posture until you are told to release it. Upon release exhale through the mouth. Repeat two times to get the posture in your body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Form your lips as if about to release an /f/ but keep the lips slightly apart and furrow your brow. Inhale through you nose and hold the breath and posture until you are told to release it. Upon release exhale through the nose. Repeat two times to get the posture in your body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Drop the jaw into a relaxed open position and raise the brow. Inhale through the mouth and the hold your breath and posture until you are told to release</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
it. Upon release exhale through the mouth. Repeat two times to get the posture in your body.

Love  
Allow the jaw to relax and form a slight grin, less extreme than the smile involved with joy. Inhale through the mouth and hold your breath and posture until you are told to release it. Upon release exhale through the mouth. Repeat two times to get the posture in your body.

The function of the controlled exhalation through either the nose or the mouth during this phase of the work was to reinforce the emotional posture using traditional Alba Emoting techniques.

Next, a fully phonated pure long vowel sound placed either in the chest or pharyngeal resonance was added to each emotion in place of the exhalation.

**Table 3.3 Pure Emotional Vowels**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Vowel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>/i/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>/a/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>/u/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>/e/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>/o/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After repeating each emotional posture with the pure vowel sounds added, we moved on to following physical impulses. Having already chosen either the pelvis or the sternum as the starting point for each of their emotions, students were next asked to use their limbs to create emotional gestures to compliment each posture and vowel. They were instructed to
follow the impulse to move from its point of origin all the way through their extremities sending energy out in all directions.

Once the students had practiced and experienced each emotion, they were instructed to choose a scene or monologue from *The Vampire or the Bride of the Isles* by J. R. Planche to perform for the class using the emotional postures we practiced. I chose this particular Melodrama because of its simple moral universe of good and evil where pure emotions would work easily. It also functioned well as an “issue Melodrama” which explored a sensational topic of its time—godlessness and the fear of foreigners—in a manner similar to modern melodramas like *Law and Order: Special Victim’s Unit*, which would become relevant again later in the semester when we explored Ridiculous Theatre. Before preparing their performances from *The Vampire*, I asked students to consider a set of questions related to our previous conversation about arbitrary binary relationships.

**Table 3.4 Melodrama Preparation Questions**

- What recent crime or controversy is the focus of the piece?
- Who are the dominant characters and who the subaltern characters?
- Who are the dominant supernatural characters and who are the subaltern supernatural characters?
- How does gender play a role in the melodrama? What qualities do characters have that make them typically masculine or typically feminine? Is this dictated by their anatomical sex?
The students were then to go through their scripts and score the emotions within the chosen scene. For example:

**Table 3.5 Melodrama Emotional Score**

LORD RUTHVEN: [LOVE] Come nearer, charming maid.

EFFIE: [FEAR] My lord, I - I dare not, my lord.

LORD RUTHVEN: [LOVE] Fear nothing. [Aside.] [ANGER] Yet, she has cause to fear.
- Should I surprise her heart, as by my gifted spell I may, the tribute that prolongs existence may be paid and Margaret may (at least awhile) be spared. [LOVE] How delightful 'tis to gaze upon thee thus! - An atmosphere of joy is round about thee, which whosoever breathes, becomes thy slave.

EFFIE: [FEAR] My Lord, what mean you?

LORD RUTHVEN: [LOVE] My heart ne'er throbbed but for one woman, and you have just her features. This morning the flame of love was extinguished in my soul; but now, now it burns with redoubled ardour.

EFFIE: [FEAR] But the lady whom you admir'd, my lord -
LORD RUTHVEN: [SADNESS] She is dead!

The scenes and monologues were primarily intended to be workshop pieces and not finished Melodramas. As the pieces were performed I wanted students to pay attention to the gestures used by the actors and tableaux created by their interactions. If the students watching felt that a gesture could be more radiant from the point of impulse or if the composition of the two actors in space could be improved, they were allowed to yell freeze. The actors performing had to freeze in their current tableau while classmates adjusted them. When told to resume, they were to return to the beginning of the previous line and attempt that portion of the scene again.

These performances were exercises in pure uncorrupted Camp Theatricality. While, the students were completely aware that they were attempting a woefully outdated performance style, the exercise was purely about a particular technique and not “good acting”. My reasoning for this was my belief that to be theatrical without being artificial, you must first understand the theatrical styles such as melodrama as expansions of reality. As a dancer must learn the principles of ballet first before attempting advanced choreography, acting students must learn the basics of craft before exploring advanced styles and deeper issues of psychology and truth. For this reason I wanted them to play their scenes from The Vampire as pure Melodrama in preparation for the work layered on in the next section of the course.
Musical Comedy

While our work with the melodrama focused on the individual performer, the musical comedy section of the course was designed to emphasize ensemble play as well as a continuation of our journey through the history of popular Theatre. I have always been a fan of Cole Porter and the other great Musical Comedy writers of the Golden Ages of Broadway and Hollywood. I find him to be a convenient link between Musical Comedy and the Camp aesthetic since he spent much of the time between the wars living in Europe as an American expatriate Dandy. When he returned to the United States to begin his career writing Musical Revues and Comedies, he brought with him both the Dandy’s affection for the finer things in life—music, poetry, love—as well as a knowing Camp awareness that heavily influenced his lyrics and composition.

I wanted the Musical Comedy section of the course to use the previous Melodramatic acting style applied to short silent choreography, or physical scoring exercises. The purpose of these “Silent Scenes” was to acknowledge the Camp value of Melodrama while still playing for theatrical effect. One student who was working on a production of Titus Andronicus at the time had mentioned in an online post that, “Oftentimes in rehearsals ideas come up that would be hilarious, but alas we aren't presenting this show as a camp or comedy” (Nicenet.org). I hoped that this exercise would be the chance for students to play imaginatively and see what they discovered.

First we discussed the loose structure and archetypal characterizations of early Musical Comedies and how they had evolved from classic melodrama, burlesque, and vaudeville. The “Silent Scene” exercises taught by Professor Murray McGibbon at Indiana
University were perfect in allowing students to explore through imaginative play while also operating under the rules of our Melodrama style. The structure of the scenes required the students to compose stories to create an expanded theatrical world using only the basic scenery and props supplied in the room and bodies choreographed in space. Following are instructions for the first silent scene students were assigned during our work on musical comedy. It was designed as a cumulative reinforcement of the lessons learned in previous weeks’ work.

**Table 3.6 Silent Scene Exercise One**

Take the next 15 minutes to outline a five-minute silent story about a dominant character(s) whose status is usurped buy a subaltern(s). Try to incorporate the emotional postures of melodrama whenever possible. You may not use spoken text to tell your story. You may use the entire space and contents of the room (except rehearsal properties) in whatever fashion you like, but remember to provide space for your audience. You will have ten minutes to stage the scene with your actors, so be clear and concise in your storytelling and directions.

The next incarnation of the “Silent Scene” added background music to evoke a mood and imply imagery but the actors were still required to be silent:
Table 3.7 Silent Scene Exercise Two

Take the next 10 minutes to outline a five-minute silent story about a sacred space set to music. The story can either tell the tale of a violation of this space, or of its integrity being honored. Try to incorporate the emotional postures of melodrama whenever possible. You may not use spoken text to tell your story. The music you have brought with you to class should dictate how your story will unfold. You may use the entire space and contents of the room (except rehearsal properties) in whatever fashion you like, but remember to provide space for your audience. You will have ten minutes to stage the scene with your actors, so be clear and concise in your storytelling and directions. You may not play the music for your actors until it is time to perform your piece.

Prior to spring break the class was given a final choreography project incorporating each storytelling element from the prior scenes, as well as the challenge of timing the story to music. The original handout from the assignment and an example of a physical score are located in Appendix C and D respectively. One particularly strong piece titled “Gender/Shmender” involved a man and woman dressing in appropriate masculine and feminine attire, and using public restroom facilities in the traditional masculine and feminine manner. The initial phrase of choreography ended with both characters appearing dissatisfied with their performative gender identities. After a tense encounter they swapped clothing and physical gender cues, returned to their anatomically assigned restroom facilities, tore down the iconic male and female signs above them, and relieved themselves
in the manner of their desired Gender identity. The students’ work attained a level of knowing Camp because the characters in the piece showed affection for the current binary system of Gender Identity performance, even as they revealed it to be completely arbitrary by attaching it to the non-traditional anatomical sex. The exercise allowed the students to adapt the imagery associated with bodies, clothing, identities, and even the performance space to create an expanded theatrical world that existed to serve the story they wanted to tell. “Getting the gay out” had evolved into “setting the imagination free.”
CHAPTER 4
DIVAS, DRAG, AND RIDICULOUS THEATRE

Diva and Drag

With the innocence of my students corrupted by our work with Melodrama and Musical comedy, the time had come to explore deliberate forms of Camp: Diva and Drag performances. This would not be an exercise in cross-dressing, such as was done in Elizabethan theatre when the audience accepted as natural the performance of a female character by a male performer. The modern Drag performer subconsciously challenges societal expectations of Gender performance, revealing it to be learned behavior rather than an anatomical imperative. We began our work on Divas and Drag by reading chapter four of From Mae to Madonna titled “Women Movie Stars as Role Models” and chapter four of Something for the Boys titled “Here She is, Boys!: On Divas, Drag, and Immortality.”

In From Mae to Madonna June Sochens writes about strong female performers working in the 1930’s and 1940’s and the duality of their lives as they attempted to navigate the juncture between their public and private personas. In Something For The Boys, John Clum describes how the triumph and tragedies of these women made them icons of the Gay male community throughout the 1960s. Both readings explored the
different ways which performers such as Katherine Hepburn, Joan Crawford, Bette Davis, and Judy Garland maintained traditionally feminine public personas while managing their careers and personal lives with masculine vigor. Their public personae were Drag acts—Gender performances associated with the opposite anatomy used to assert or subvert dominance—as they attempted to resolve the tensions existing between the expected feminine public figure and their own personal ambition.

To explain the dilemma of the Hollywood divas, Sochen quotes the once widowed and thrice divorced Bette Davis saying,

When a woman is independent financially and eclipses her husband professionally, the man suddenly finds it necessary to be a nineteenth century lord and master. He falls back on symbols that are insupportable to the self-supporting wife. My mistake was to attempt the duality. I couldn’t be both husband and wife and I tried to be.” (98)

The Gay men who elevated Hollywood and Broadway stars to diva status empathized with this struggle to survive as both masculine and feminine Gender performers in life. What Bette—the Diva—sees as a personal failure, the Gay male considered a triumph over their common adversary: the Straight male. The Drag queen was the Gay performer’s celebration of this triumph. John Clum writes:

Feminine assertiveness and survival are the hallmarks of a diva. The drag queen is the male intercessor between gay fan and diva, emphasizing the gender politics involved in diva worship. The tough brassy broad, the bitch, or the vamp get their way over the enemy [. . . ]. (137)
Early Drag performers who impersonated their favorite Divas knowingly performed the arbitrary Gender characteristics of the opposite anatomy as well as the unconventional Gender characteristics—masculine ownership of space, use of isolated chest voice and so on—which set Divas apart from non-Divas.

The middle decades of the twentieth century that saw the birth of the Diva and the Drag Queen were the same decades that inspired Christopher Isherwood and Susan Sontag to write down their observations about the phenomenon known as Camp. My students had already experienced Gender performance as a massed produced commodity earlier in the semester, but it was an important topic to return to as we embarked on Drag as a performance style. The earlier exercises were simple imitation using an expansion of Pamela Hendrick’s voice and gender work, similar to that of cross-dressing in Elizabethan England, but using the voice and body rather than masculine or feminine clothing. During that exercise, the students were to assume that the characters were actual men or women, even as the actors were performing the opposite anatomical sex. The goal of the drag performances was to embrace the theatricality of masculinity and femininity as valuable in performance while also knowingly using the performances as commentary on the arbitrary relationship between anatomy and Gender. The characters were to be played with a wink and a smile, embracing the absurdity of the Drag performance.

Initially I considered having each student perform a full drag queen or king production number for this section of the class. However, time and resources precluded this and I eventually decided on a more straightforward exercise, which harkened back to the work we did with text from *A Street Car Named Desire*. I asked each student to bring
in a monologue they believed highlighted the stereotypical performative aspects of the opposite anatomy. After a discussion of the week’s reading, the students read their monologues cold, without any significant preparation. I asked the students not to reveal the play or the character to the class until after they had finished reading so as to limit any pre-conceived notions regarding a character with which students might be familiar. After each reading I asked the class to identify particularly feminine or masculine aspects of each student’s monologue, work-shopping each briefly. At the end of class students were asked to have their monologues ready to perform the next week, I gave them the following rubric for a successful Drag performance in Camp Class:

**Table 4.1 Drag Performance Rubric**

- Attempt an accurate performance of the opposite gender without relying on costumes or make-up. Refer back to our list of the performative aspects of Gender from earlier in the class.
- Your performances should make a specific statement regarding societal perceptions of relationship between Sex and Gender in performance
- They should also be camp—show a fondness for the Gender binary even if it is broken and arbitrary.
- Reflect on the process by which you resolved these two seemingly opposing tasks.
- Have the piece memorized and staged for the next class meeting.
This was the first exercise I designed in reaction to my work “getting the gay out”. In order for students to discover how ingrained Gender and Sexual identity were in their performance identities, they had to both attempt and observe performances of masculinity and femininity by performers lacking the traditional genitals.

When it came time to perform their monologues the students fell naturally into the Gender performances of the roles they had chosen. A few examples of monologues included:

**Table 4.2 Selected Drag Monologues**

- Martha from *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee
- Roy from *Plaza Suite* by Neil Simon
- Arsinoe from *The Misanthrope*, by Moliere
- Fun Loving from *Five on the Black Hand Side*, by Charlie L. Russell
- Amanda from *The Glass Menagerie*, by Tennessee Williams

To my dismay, most of the students in class were not fully memorized as they performed their monologues. However, I decided that one-week was a very short time in which to create such a difficult performance and decided that the constant stopping and starting was a perfect opportunity to coach Gender performances rather than punish students for their lack of discipline. This turned out to be a valuable experience for teacher and student alike. I was impressed by how conscious students were when a performer missed a Gender cue. Their ability to articulate what was missing and coach the performer towards a stronger
gender performance of the chosen text was fantastic. What could have been a perfectly disastrous day in Camp class instead became our own “Rain in Spain” number from *My Fair Lady*. I positively beamed as Henry Higgins watching the perfect Eliza Doolittle’s my students had become. The class was showing a true Camp affection for the exercise, embracing the sameness and expectation inherent in Gender performance and using it to both celebrate the conventional while embracing theatricality. It was now time to introduce the final topic of the semester: Ridiculous Theatre.

**Ridiculous Theatre as Serious Drama**

Charles Ludlam’s work in Ridiculous Theatre was some of the most self-aware Camp ever created. One student pointed out that his work complemented Riki Wilchins belief that, “[. . . ] the extraordinary energy we invest in embodying these moving mutating, impossible heterosexual roles [is] funny [. . . ]” and “that the gay and transgender positions we try to embody are, in their own way, intrinsically comedic as well” (134-135). Ludlam’s Ridiculous Theatre embraced the inherently ridiculous nature of Gender and Sexual performances as well the rest of mass-produced societal behavior. While sexuality might be a biological fact, the Sexual and Gender performances linked to it have more to do with nurture than nature. Ridiculous Theatre was also the perfect topic to link the arbitrary rules that establish an “accepted” Gender and Sexual performance, to “traditional” yet ever changing theatrical aesthetics.

While Melodrama, Musical Comedy, and Diva performances reflected the Camp nature of changing cultural paradigms, Ridiculous Theatre was inspired by these innocent
examples of Camp and corrupted them into self-aware political Camp. Ludlam’s process for creating Ridiculous Theatre was an extremely personal one, so the goal of our Ridiculous Theatre work in camp class was to create in the spirit of Charles Ludlam rather than to replicate his process. Students were assigned readings from *Ridiculous Theatre: Scourge of Human Folly*, which came with the instructions from Ludlam,

> Test out a dangerous idea, a theme that threatens to destroy one’s whole value system. Treat the material in a madly farcical manner without losing the seriousness of the theme. Show how paradoxes arrest the mind. Scare yourself a bit along the way, (Ludlam 158)

and,

> Theatre mustn’t just ape our daily, literal existence. It should provide us with a vicarious emotional life, for many things that we might like to explore as human beings are really too dangerous to explore firsthand. Theatre is a place where we can try out dangerous ideas in a relatively harmless way. (Ludlam 250)

Using his “axioms to a theatre for ridicule” (Ludlam 157) students were divided into two groups and given a sacred text with which to test out dangerous ideas in a theatrical manner. At the suggestion of one member of the class the sacred texts used were the Fairy Tales—*Little Red Riding Hood* and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. The pairing was perfect as both stories involve archetypal masculine and feminine characters with a young female in danger as the title character. The danger faced by each character in the stories was caused by either their own poor decisions or society at large.
I asked the class to use all of the performance techniques we explored throughout the semester to create a performance piece that deconstructed and challenged a firmly held American belief—one that has become so repetitive it could be viewed as Camp. Students were instructed to meet outside of class and discuss how they might want their stories to develop. During the next class period students were asked to turn their brainstorming ideas into a silent scene to flesh out the theatrical world of their story and were given a handout that outlined the official requirements of the final performance (Appendix E).

Soon **Little Red Riding Hood** became an unsuspecting drug mule that skips through the forest with a basket of medicinal brownies for her poor ailing grandmother. Each supporting character in the story represented a reversal of what was expected of their original counterpart while also embodying a recognizable modern archetype. Little Red’s mother was a gaudy lower-class American housewife with outlandish hair, a harsh accent, and a penchant for ‘gansta rap.’ The big bad wolf was a drug addict, gunned down by Federal Agent Woodsmen. The only character in the piece whose behavior and characterization remained consistent with the source material was pretty Little Red who behaved just as she would in a traditional performance of the character, missing all the subtlety of events happening around her. The students use of contrast between the familiar American Paradigm and the classic fairy-tale archetype of Little Red Riding Hood increased the theatricality of the piece and emphasized the dangerous idea they explored. It worked both as an indictment of US Drug Policy, as well as jab at the casual attitude certain members of the VCU Theatre department have towards marijuana.
The group assigned to *Goldilocks and The Three Bears* used an hilarious acknowledgement of double entendre and Gender performance to create the non-traditional family of ‘Daddy Bear,’ ‘Bitch Bear,’ and ‘Baby Bear,’ all played by women with copious amounts of fake beard and chest hair. In the students’ version of events the Bears’ quiet home-life and “Porridge Party-ing” is suddenly interrupted by the loud, Anne Coulter-esque, Goldilocks who is on the Campaign trail stumping for “John Jack Jefferson, the American’s American.” Both the Bears and Goldilocks find the other’s lifestyle repellent. The unwelcome cuisine, decorating, and fashion advice offered by Goldilocks is met with violence from the rifle-toting “Bears” and the story ends with these hyper-masculine Gay males taking on the performance characteristics of their animal-namesakes and throwing a “mauling-party.” The female students playing the “three bears” were able to appropriate the masculinity prized so highly by both gay men identifying themselves as “Bears”, and conservatives like Anne Coulter who deplore effeminacy in men to indict the verbal violence of political debate and the physical violence that exists within the Gender binary.

While the masculine Drag performances were successful for the most part, the male student in Drag playing Goldilocks chose to use only an isolated head voice so far out of his natural pitch range that his performance of the character was grating. He did not sound naturally feminine, or even inappropriately masculine. His scene partners as well as the performers in Little Red Riding Hood, established through their performances a standard of theatrical Gender performance which the audience had grown accustomed to and now expected. His failure to replicate mass-produced feminine vocal characteristics was
distracting and anti-theatrical, imploding the world created by the other actors and singling out that actor’s failure.

The final day of class was devoted to a performance of *Little Red Riding Hood* and *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* titled, *Camp Goldyhood*. The piece ran twenty-minutes and was open to invited guests. Students created their own costumes and props. The performance took place eleven days after the April 16 massacre at Virginia Tech, so I made it a point to make sure students understood that all the firearms used in the production had to be “Ridiculous” in nature and I debated whether or not to allow the Goldilocks character to speak a line praising the Bears for using their Second Amendment rights by shooting her. The students decided to create the weapons using large cardboard cutouts and shouting “BANG BANG” rather than using a realistic sound effect. However, I did find some unintentional symbolism after revisiting the DVD recording (Appendix F) of the performance. In the “Goldilocks and the Three Bears” sequence baby-bear, the child, had the largest Gun and shoots it the most.

With the possibility of raw and dangerous controversy regarding firearms having been taken care of the public performance of *Camp Goldyhood* was a delightful, slightly under-rehearsed, success. People laughed at all the right moments and the students’ Camp performances were very successful. After watching the female students playing the “Three Bears” adopt masculine performance identities I asked myself a question, “Should these students adopt similar performance identities when auditioning for a cross-dressing production such as *Twelfth Night*?” Perhaps not, but I would love to see Viola played as a Drag King washing up on the shores of the Castro and falling in with a group of Leather
Bears. I believe that after participating in this Camp exercise in Ridiculous Gender performance, these students will have a greater ability to be versatile theatrically, regardless of the role they play.
CONCLUSION

KEEP CAMPING

If I had to do it all over again, I would mostly likely structure the semester to give the students more time to explore. With so much intellectual information and research to impart to the students about identity and theatricality early in the semester, the class often got bogged down in too much theory and not enough action. Ideally I would have preferred to spend a few weeks playing with each topic, work-shopping the Melodrama, Musical Comedy, and Drag pieces allowing the students’ reasoning and imaginative skills to inform their discoveries rather than my direction. However, because events like Spring Break and SETC—Southeast Theatre Conference—are inevitable in an academic year at VCU, I would probably assign formal written reading responses rather than using the Internet forum and class discussion as I did. A stricter enforcement of the outside intellectual preparation for class exercises would have given the students more time to make bold choices and polish the theatricality of their performances.

Taken out of the context of Camp, any of the exercises I have described would fit neatly to a voice, movement, choreography, directing, or acting curriculum. Pamela Hendrick’s Vocal Gender Characteristics are simply called Character Voices in my sophomore Voice and Speech class. The silent scenes and choreography exercises used to
physicalize societal binary relationships in the Musical Comedy section of the course had their origins in the undergraduate-directing curriculum at Indiana University. However, the application of these basic exercises to Sontag’s tenets of Camp allowed students to find pleasure and joy in the mass-produced, unique experiences in the mundane, and surprise in the expected. Most of all, students were encouraged to appreciate the expansive nature of theatrical performance as complimentary to realistic styles utilized in the modern training. This pedagogy of Camp reinforces basic performance concepts of exploration and imaginative play and applies those skills in ways students may never have considered.


NiceNet: Internet Classroom Assistant. 26 Jan 2007. Virginia Commonwealth University, THEA 491-005. 31 Jan 2007


Rodgers, Janet. THEA 501-001 - Vocal Extremes. Virginia Commonwealth University.
   Richmond, VA. Fall 2005.


Sullivan, Patricia. "Sexual Identity Development: The Importance of Target or Dominant."

Wait Until Dark, private coaching sessions with a student whose identity was withheld upon mutual agreement, Virginia Commonwealth University, 2005

APPENDIX A
SYLLABUS

The following is the original syllabus given to students on the first day of Camp Class. The research presentation listed as an assignment in the syllabus was cut from the class during the first eight weeks of the course. No content has been changed from its original incarnation, but the formatting has been adjusted to fit the requirements of the VCU Thesis Template.
Camp taste turns its back on the good-bad axis of ordinary aesthetic judgment. Camp doesn’t reverse things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad, or the bad is good. What it does is to offer for art (and life) a different – a supplementary – set of standards. – Susan Sontag

Course Description
This advanced performance course will survey theatrical “Camp” and how its many manifestations affect the actor and the audience. Through experimentation with esoteric styles such as Melodrama, Musical Comedy, Diva Theatre, Drag, and Ridiculous Theatre students will learn how Camp traditions in theatre history have influenced the evolution of popular performance in the twentieth century. Ideally students will leave the course having discovered a variety of new performance identities.

Required Materials
- Course Packet #22 available at Uptown Color.
- Movement Clothing

Objectives
- To develop an understanding of alternative forms of performance
- To introduce the student gender and sexual identity’s influence on modern popular theatre
- To allow the student to explore their own talents in ways they might not have the opportunity to in traditional performance courses
- To devise a short performance piece combining elements of Melodrama, Musical Comedy, Diva Theatre, Drag, and Ridiculous Theatre

Attendance and Promptness
Acting is participatory: there is no way to learn without doing, no adequate substitute for a missing partner, and no way to “make up” missed experience. You are therefore allowed no more than two absences from any core class. With a third absence, your final letter grade will automatically drop one full letter and will continue to drop one letter grade with each additional absence.

Furthermore, besides adversely affecting your own learning process, arriving late for class disrupts the learning process of fellow students, therefore tardiness in excess of 20 minutes will be considered a complete absence, and every two instances of tardiness—of whatever duration—will equate to one absence for grading purposes. In addition, every
acting teacher reserves the right to declare a “no lateness” policy should the need arise. Briefly put, this means that if the door to the class is shut and you are not inside by the time class begins, you are absent: no exceptions.

If an illness should cause you to excessively miss class to the point of failing, it is up to the student to pursue a medical withdrawal so that the course can be attempted again once the student has recovered.

**Graded Work**

**Participation Materials**
- 15 Reading Responses: 10%
- Subjective Participation: 20%

**Performances**
- Melodrama: 10%
- Musical Comedy: 10%
- Drag: 10%
- Ridiculous: 10%
- Final Performance: 20%

**Other**
- Performance Evaluation: 10%

*Subjective Participation is based on the student’s attitude and personal/professional development throughout the course, which owing to the participatory nature of the course can have a significant impact on the student’s final grade. Showing up is only half of participation.*

**Grading Scale**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90 – 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80 – 89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70 – 79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60 – 69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59% and Below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reading Responses**

Responses to each reading assignment must be posted to nicenet.org by 5:00 PM the Thursday prior to the class in which the assigned text will be discussed. Responses should be thoughtful, creative, and show the student has taken something away from the reading. Failure to post on time will result in half credit for that week’s response. Failure to post at all will result in no credit.

**Research Presentation**

Each student will research a Camp theatre event, or icon of their choice and give a ten-
minute presentation to the class. More specific details on this assignment to be announced.

**Melodrama Performance**
Students will present scenes and monologues from *The Vampire, or The Bride of the Isles* by J. R. Planché, 1820, with traditional melodramatic flair as discussed in that week’s reading. Students can suggest other material for performance if they have a particular piece they are dying to perform.

**Musical Comedy Performance**
Students will partner off into pairs and create a Musical Comedy choreography piece. Using what we have learned in class about the structure of and characterizations in Musical Comedy, the piece will be a silent story set to a musical comedy song provided by the instructor.

**Drag Performance**
This performance will not be what is traditionally thought of as drag. There will be no lip-syncing, heavy make-up, or outlandish costumes required. Instead, this work will help the student understand gender representation and just how much of it is a performance. Students will have the opportunity to play roles they traditionally would not have the opportunity to attempt. The student will choose the material for these performances. It can be a scene, a monologue, or a song, but must be performed without a costume. Your transformation must be manifested physically, vocally, and mentally. (If the student chooses to sing a song they must secure their own accompaniment and rehearse with them before hand.

**Ridiculous Theatre Performance**
Students will be divided into groups and use ridiculous theatre to create a piece, which fuses popular modern theatre with classical material and archetypes to comment on a modern societal concern. Specific expectations for this assignment will be outlined later.

**Final Performance**
Students will be divided into groups again to create a final “Camp” performance representative of all of the styles we covered over the course of the semester.

**Growth/Development/Participation**
Students should strive to participate fully in class activities, with an open mind and a willingness to work. This portion of grading also takes into account the individual’s progress acquiring the skills of the course as well as consistent appropriate attire.

**A FEW NOTES ON FORMAT AND CREDIT**
All written work must be MLA format, typed, and STAPLED. I will not accept it otherwise. Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day posted to be considered for full credit. Assignments may be turned in the next class for partial credit. After that, all credit is forfeit.
**Honor Policy**
Honesty, truth and integrity are essential values not only in the academy, but also in the theatre, and the world at large. Cheating, plagiarizing or other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Please refer to the VCU Honor Policy in the VCU Resource Guide.

**Disabilities**
If you have a visual, auditory, mobility or learning disability, it is your responsibility to inform me by the second week of class so that I can accommodate your needs. I will do everything in my power to work with you. Please see the VCU Resource Guide for further information.

**Religious Observances**
It is the policy of VCU to accord students, on an individual basis, the opportunity to observe their traditional religious holidays. Students desiring to observe a religious holiday of special importance must provide advance written notification to each instructor by the end of the second week of classes. Instructors are encouraged to avoid scheduling on these dates one-time-only activities that cannot be replicated. Faculty members are expected to make reasonable accommodations to students who are absent because of religious observance through such strategies as providing alternative assignments or examinations or granting permission for audio or video recordings and the like.

**Personal Comfort**
The study of voice and movement often requires the instructor or peers to touch each other or be in close proximity in order to adjust or align the body and voice. We all have bad days when we do not want such contact. Feel free to bow out of a particular exercise if you are having such a day. However, frequent sitting out is a sign that you might not be ready to advance in your training. If deemed necessary by the instructor, any student with such issues will be asked to meet with the head of performance and the instructors to discuss how we might better facilitate you through the course.

In addition, by its very nature Camp identities can be very personal and the emotions attached can become very raw. Respect is for your fellow classmates is required. Derogatory comments and disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated. Any student who does not abide by this requirement will be asked to leave the for the period, and will be required to meet outside of class with the instructor to discuss their behavior. Freedom of expression in a class such as this is of the utmost importance, and class morale will suffer if we cannot leave our inhibitions at the door.
### Class Schedule and Important Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>What's happening?</th>
<th>What should I read?</th>
<th>What's due?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/19/07</td>
<td>Introductions, Explore syllabus, &quot;What is Camp?&quot; (Drag Monologues Assigned)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/26/07</td>
<td>Gender Theory, Queer Theory - In a Nutshell</td>
<td>“Can Sex Have Opposites”, “Butler and the Problem of Identity”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/2/07</td>
<td>Camp</td>
<td>Excerpt from <em>The World in the Evening</em> and “Notes on Camp”</td>
<td>VHS or DVD of something you feel is Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/9/07</td>
<td>Melodrama</td>
<td>“Techniques of Acting of the Period” <em>The Vampire, or The Bride of the Isles</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/16/07</td>
<td>Melodrama – Scene Work</td>
<td>Melodrama Scene</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/23/07</td>
<td>Silent Exercises</td>
<td>TBA Musical Comedy Reading</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/2/07</td>
<td>Silent Scenes – Musical Comedy</td>
<td>Three to five minutes of music</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9/07</td>
<td>No Class for SETC – Please still post!</td>
<td>“Here She is, Boys!”: on Diva’s Drag, and Immortality</td>
<td>Rehearse Musical Comedy Scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/16/07</td>
<td>No Class – SPRING BREAK!!!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23/07</td>
<td>Musical Comedy Performances, Drag</td>
<td>“Women Movie Stars as Role Models” and “Costume Fetishism or Clothes Make the Man”</td>
<td>Silent Musical Comedy Scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/13/07</td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Introduction, Silent Scene (Groups Assigned)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/20/07</td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Pieces</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/27/07</td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Pieces (Round Two)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Final Ridiculous Theatre Showcase</td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Pieces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# APPENDIX B
## REVISED CLASS SCHEDULE AND IMPORTANT DATES.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>What’s happening?</th>
<th>What should I read?</th>
<th>What's due?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/23/07</td>
<td>Silent Exercises</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/2/07</td>
<td>Silent Scenes – Musical Comedy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Three to five minutes of music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/9/07</td>
<td>No Class for SETC – Please still post! REHEARSE YOUR MUSICAL COMEDY PIECE!!!</td>
<td>“Here She is, Boys!”: on Diva’s Drag, and Immortality</td>
<td>Rehearse Musical Comedy Scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/16/07</td>
<td>No Class – SPRING BREAK!!!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/23/07</td>
<td>Musical Comedy Performances, Drag</td>
<td>“Women Movie Stars as Role Models” and</td>
<td>Silent Musical Comedy Scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/30/07</td>
<td>Drag Performances, Walking in Heels Workshop with Vanessa Passini</td>
<td>“Costume Fetishism or Clothes Make the Man”</td>
<td>Drag Scene, Practice Heels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/6/07</td>
<td>Research Presentations</td>
<td></td>
<td>Research Presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/13/07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/20/07</td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Pieces (Fractured Fairy Tales)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/27/07</td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Pieces (Round Two) Technical Rehearsal</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ridiculous Theatre Pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>Final Ridiculous Theatre Showcase Tentatively Scheduled for Friday May 6 at 6PM in B072 – Cast and Crew call, 4:30 PM.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Final Ridiculous Theatre Pieces</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

54
APPENDIX C

MUSICAL COMEDY EXERCISE

The following is the original handout given to students prior to their final Musical Comedy project. No content has been changed from its original incarnation, but the formatting has been adjusted to fit the requirements of the VCU Thesis Template.
Musical Comedy Exercise Three: Due March 23

Assignment Overview
Take the next two weeks to outline a five minute silent story choreographed to a specific piece of music. This story should have an implied sexual subtext between at least two actors, however they are not allowed to touch until the very end of the scene, and it must be tender not overtly erotic. You may use any actors you like for this presentation but they must be available during our scheduled class time.

Use what you have absorbed from the previous silent activities about sacred spaces and status relationships to devise your story. Your scene can either tell the story specified in the song, or a story that might be implied by the song. Try to incorporate the emotional postures of melodrama whenever possible. You may not use spoken text to tell your story. You may use the entire space and contents of the room (except rehearsal properties) in whatever fashion you like and you may also bring in your own props and costume pieces. Remember to provide space for your audience. You will have the next two weeks to stage the scene with your actors, but use this time wisely, as I expect to see polished pieces of theatre when I return. Please keep in mind: I would like you to choreograph your work in the spirit of a musical, but it does not have to incorporate traditional dancing in any way.

Scoring your Story
For this assignment I would like you to score your story in a very specific manner, breaking down the music and planning out the action that will take place during the song. You do not have to know how to write music to do this work; you just need a CD, MP3, or iTunes and a lot of patience. It would behoove you to complete this portion of the assignment before you begin working with your actors.

Your outline should be divided into two columns (on Microsoft Word simply go to the Format menu and choose columns). The column on the left side of the page will describe what is happening during the music at any given time. The column on the right side of the page will describe what is happening on stage at any given time. Please note the time on the track any noteworthy instrumentals take place, and also when the lyrics are sung. You must line up the noteworthy changes in music to the action taking place on stage as you type up your outline. Please refer to the example provided to get the basic idea of what your score should look like.

Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>10 points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melodrama</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacred Space</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Subtext</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polish</td>
<td>50 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D

MUSICAL COMEDY SAMPLE CHOREOGRAPHY SCORE

I prepared this score at Indiana University in the Spring of 2003 as an exercise in THEA 340: Directing I, taught by Professor Bruce Burgun. It was given to the students in Camp Class as an example of how I wanted their Musical Comedy scores formatted. The content of the original exercise from IU had nothing to do with Camp or Theatricality performance. See Appendix C for specific instructions regarding the content of the score expected in Camp Class. No content has been changed from its original incarnation, but the formatting has been adjusted to fit the requirements of the VCU Thesis Template.
0:00 – Four counts of four with just acoustic guitar

0:06 – On the fifth four-count the rest of the band comes in.

0:20 – After the twelfth four-count they begin to sing

0:21 – “Joseph’s face was, black as night. The pale yellow moon shown in his eyes.”

0:32 – “His path was marked by the stars in the southern hemisphere, and he walked his days under African skies.”

0:45 – “This is the story of how we begin to remember. This is the powerful pulsing of love in the vein. After the dream of falling and calling your name out. These are the roots of rhythm and the roots of rhythm remain.”

1:11 – Eight four counts of music

1:23 – “In early mem’ry, mission music was ringing round my nursery door.”

1:35 – “I said take this child lord from Tucson, Arizona, give her the wings to fly through harmony and she won’t bother you no more.”

1:49 – “This is the story of how we begin to remember. This is the powerful pulsing of love in the vein. After the dream of falling and calling your name out. These are the roots of rhythm and the roots of rhythm remain.”

58

- The old man sits watching his television contentedly flipping through the channels with his clicker because his attention span is too short for him to appreciate anything that is on. The only light in the room comes from a table lamp.

- His door opens and his children enter, light from the overhead lights begin to come in. The son carries a birthday cake with lit candles indicating his age and the daughter has a wrapped present. The old man is utterly surprised to see them and really has no clue who they are. They walk over to him and hug and kiss him. The cake is placed in front of him on the end table and the daughter puts a party hat on his head.

- Together all three of them blow out the birthday candles.

- The Son cuts a slice of cake for his father. And hands it to him. His father cannot grip it and it falls to the floor.

- Distraught the son cuts another slice for his dad while his sister cleans up the dropped piece. The dad settles into watching some TV.

- After the piece has been cut and put on a plate the son considers giving it to his dad, but instead resigns to the fact that he will have to feed his father the cake himself.

- After enjoying a few fork-fulls of cake it is time to open presents. The daughter puts the package in his lap.

- He has no idea what to do with this package and looks repeatedly back and forth between the present and his daughter.
-His daughter finally gives up and opens it for him. Inside the package is a memory book full of photographs from the man’s life.

-His daughter places it in his lap and flips the pages for him. He looks at them confused and she mouths words like “Mom,” “Grandma,” and “Pop.” Then he finally gives up and starts looking for his channel changer. These are the roots of rhythm and the roots of rhythm remain.”

2:13 – Drum riff

2:15 – Sixteen 4 Counts of Da-Oombas
2:15 – “Da Oomba, Oomba, Oomba, Oh-oh-oooh-oh”

2:20 – “Da Oomba, Oomba, Oomba, Oh-oh-oooh-oh”

2:27 – “Da Oomba, Oomba, Oomba, OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOH”

2:40 – “Joseph’s face was, black as night. The pale yellow moon shown in his eyes.”

2:52 – “His path was marked by the stars in the southern hemisphere, and he walked his days under African skies.”

3:05 – Nineteen four-counts of play out music that slowly fades out

-They sit with him while he changes the channels

-They pick up the remote and bring their father back to the bed.

-They are hugging the father gets up and goes to the TV to change the channels manually.

-Frustrated with his lack of memory and concentration the daughter grabs his clicker and throws it at the wall and begins to cry. She had spent a lot of time on the book.

-The brother goes over to calm her down. While they are hugging the father gets up and goes to the TV to change the channels manually.

-The brother and sister realize this and watch him.

-Smiling to himself, the son begins feeding his father bite after bite of cake, sometimes taking one for himself, sometimes feeding one to his sister. Slowly the lights fade back to the simple table lamp until the song ends with the two children savoring the time they have left with what remains of their father.

-Frustrated with his lack of memory and concentration the daughter grabs his clicker and throws it at the wall and begins to cry. She had spent a lot of time on the book.

-The brother goes over to calm her down. While they are hugging the father gets up and goes to the TV to change the channels manually.

-The brother and sister realize this and watch him.

-Smiling to himself, the son begins feeding his father bite after bite of cake, sometimes taking one for himself, sometimes feeding one to his sister. Slowly the lights fade back to the simple table lamp until the song ends with the two children savoring the time they have left with what remains of their father.
APPENDIX E

RIDICULOUS THEATRE PROJECT HANDOUT

The following is the original handout given to students prior to their final Ridiculous Theatre project. The quotations are all taken from Ridiculous Theatre: Scourge of Human Folly, and some content was adapted from Pamela R. Hendrick’s “Two Opposite Animals: Voice, Text, and Gender Onstage.” No content has been changed from its original incarnation, but the formatting has been adjusted to fit the requirements of the VCU Thesis Template.
Final Project: Ridiculous Theatre

All Quotes taken from Ridiculous Theatre: Scourge of Human Folly, by Charles Ludlam

Discuss with your Fairytale Group...

“If one is not a living mockery of one’s own ideals, one has set one’s ideals too low.”

What does each of the important characters in your story take seriously?

“The things one takes seriously are one’s weaknesses.”

How might they be a living mockery of their own ideals?

The Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red Riding Hood Characters</th>
<th>Goldilocks and the Three Bears</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Goldilocks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Red</td>
<td>Papa Bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wolf</td>
<td>Momma Bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>Baby Bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Woodsman</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Who is your **Audience** for this piece? What do they take seriously?

Do you think this statement holds water?

“It’s the grand effect the audience responds to. If the overall effect is evoked, the details fall away.”

Will it work on your audience?
Consider...

“Theatre mustn’t just ape our daily, literal existence. It should provide us with a vicarious emotional life, for many things that we might like to explore as human beings are really too dangerous to explore firsthand. Theatre is a place where we can try out dangerous ideas in a relatively harmless way.”

TURN OVER [Original Page-Break]

What “dangerous idea” in 2007 (perhaps regarding gender and sexual identity, or perhaps something else)

Could you explore through your fairy tales?

How can our fairytales make a “dangerous idea” seem “relatively harmless”?

Keep in mind...

“I don’t like theatre that tries to proselytize, that always tries to reprimand people or reform them. It assumes that the audience is dumber than they are."

“Sometimes the greatest effect comes from treating a comic situation seriously.”

“I personally become alarmed if a performer tries to involve me in a play. I find it terrifying. And I’m an actor.”

“Why is it so good to be young? Is life so bad that the less one has lived it the better? Being young never got me anywhere. I just had a miserable time trying to prove that what I wanted to do made sense.”

“They’ll like some plays and they won’t like others. It was ever so.”

The Assignment

With your group, devise at 10 to 15 minute fractured Fairytale, in the spirit of Charles Ludlam’s inspirational quotes. A successful piece will...

Include all members of the group
Be memorized and polished
Make me laugh

A successful piece can but will not necessarily honor/parody...

Melodrama
Musical Comedy
Drag

Have fun, be free. Remember, Camp kids because it adores. By the end of the semester your fairytale should have answered the questions set forth in this handout and be a rollicking goodtime!

TURNOVER [Original Page-break]
remember **MELODRAMA**?

**Simple Moral Universe. People are who they are.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Inhale</th>
<th>Exhale</th>
<th>Facial Posture</th>
<th>Sound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joy</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Smile</td>
<td>/i/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadness</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>Frown, Scowl, Furrowed Brow</td>
<td>/e/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Nose</td>
<td>Frown, Raised Brow</td>
<td>/a/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>Brow</td>
<td>/o/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>Mouth</td>
<td>Slight Smile</td>
<td>/u/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

remember **TYPICAL GENDER PERFORMANCE?**

**M@LE/M@LE/M@LE/M@LE**

- **Anatomy**
  - External Gonads
  - Small Gametes

- **Learned Vocal Behavior**
  - Isolated chest voice
  - “Plain talk”
  - Monotone Pitch
  - Patterns terminate in lowest pitch.
  - Active agreement, “Yeah”
  - Direct commands
  - Imperative action

- **Learned Physical Behavior**
  - Large Kinesphere, ownership of space
  - Bound in the shoulders and neck
  - Arm movements led from the fists
  - Unexposed Neck during interactions

**FEM@LE/FEM@LE/FEM@LE/FEM@LE**

- **Anatomy**
  - Internal Gonads
  - Large Gametes

- **Learned Vocal Behavior**
  - Isolated head voice
  - Varied Pitch
  - Up-glide in pitch, asking for affirmation
  - Tonal dynamism, emotional
  - Passive agreement “mmmmmm”
  - Use intensifiers (so and such)
  - Emphatic vocabulary, “fabulous”
  - Soft commands, modals “would, should, could, can may, might” turn commands into polite requests

- **Learned Physical Behavior**
  - Small Kinesphere, Focus around heart
  - Bound in the pelvis and hips
  - Arms lead from the wrists
  - Exposed Neck during interaction
APPENDIX F

Camp Goldyhood Poster

I drew the following as marketing for the class’s final performance of *Camp Goldyhood*. It was used in all posters and programs for the performance.
VITA

John Kenneth DeBoer was born on April 11, 1982 in South Bend, Indiana. He received his Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and Drama, with a pre-professional minor in Speech and Hearing Sciences in May of 2004. He has coached many productions in Indiana in Virginia including Medea and The Three Sisters for Theatre VCU. He is an active member of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education and the Voice and Speech Trainers Association. The essay that inspired this thesis, “Getting the Gay Out: Addressing Sexual Identity in the Voice Classroom” was published in the 2007 “Gender and Voice” edition of the Voice and Speech Review.

John currently lives in Richmond, VA teaching Voice and Speech at Virginia Commonwealth University and the University of Richmond.