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DEVISING EMPATHY: WORKING WITH DEVISING, THEATRE FOR YOUNG  
AUDIENCES, AND *THE SNOW QUEEN*

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

by

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## **Abstract**

### DEVISING EMPATHY: WORKING WITH DEVISING, THEATRE FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES, AND *THE SNOW QUEEN*

By Mary Cecilia Lennon, M.F.A.

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

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2018.

Major Director: Thesis / Dr. Keith Byron Kirk, Director of Graduate Studies, Theatre

This thesis presents a workbook for creating a course that combines researching both theatre for young audiences and devised theatre to create a touring production and company. Devised theatre is a form of theatre where the script originates from collaborative creation, improvisation, and physical movement. This course explored the past, present and future of theatre for young audiences both domestically and abroad. Students worked in a collaborative effort devising and producing a TYA piece based on Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen* and studied the child audience through reading assignments and practical experience. This thesis is intended to showcase the value of teaching college undergraduate how to perform TYA productions as well as to show how devised theatre can help foster the actor's creativity and help to reach a whole new generation.

## Chapter One

### Introduction: Devising Empathy

I'm about trying to get the text onstage. And when it wasn't written for the stage, I have to use every imaginative trick I can think of, every metaphor, every element of the theater – the lights, the costumes, songs, dance, anything I can do – to convey someone flying on a carpet. Because I'm just in a box, a black box, and I have to figure out how to bring the world into it.

-Mary Zimmerman

When I began to consider the focus of my Master of Fine Arts thesis, I was a bit stymied. The focus of my Master of Education thesis was centered on the experience as assistant director in a production of *The Merchant of Venice* at Brookline High School and looking at the importance of teaching Shakespeare in High School curriculum. What I took from the experience of writing my first thesis was to choose a topic that inspired you, one that allows to devote a great deal of time and energy to a focused topic and one that could help you in your future goals. During the Spring of 2016 a discussion in my Dramatic Literature class set in motion an idea that would provide me with one of the best experiences of my teaching career and give me the most joy as a graduate student and Virginia Commonwealth University.

My first exposure to devised theatre, or a non-traditional type of theatre based on images or texts with no set script, was a short play based on the life of the Bronte sisters at a High School Theatre festival I adjudicated in 2004. I was immediately intrigued by the story and the originality in the way it was performed, and after the festival I sought out the director to inquire about the script. She told me that it was based on a biography and that she and her students adapted the story and wrote the script together after much trial and error. I loved the

idea of a collaborative work between the director and actors as well as the performing something that no one had ever seen before. While I didn't know it at the time, the idea of devised theatre would stay with me for the next decade and half. While I had experimented with aspects of devising during my years of teaching high school; adapting my own version of *Alice in Wonderland*, collaborative movement creation in *Our Town* and composition work based on a theme, I never felt confident in my knowledge to completely devise and create an original work.

While studying Euripides classic play *Medea* in my Dramatic Literature class, we read and discussed many current adaptations of the text that focused on the themes of betrayal, otherness and female power that are found within the work. One such adaptation was *Argonautika*, devised and written by director Mary Zimmerman. Ms. Zimmerman's style of theatre, including her most popular work the Tony Award winning *Metamorphoses*, was taking a known book, story or poem and work with a group of actors, musicians and dramaturgs and create an original piece of theatre. In interviews Ms. Zimmerman described the creation of her plays as "creative collaboration" based off classic tales. After investigating more about that collaboration and devised theatre, I found that many equated the style with experimental and often radical performance. What inspired me so much about Zimmerman's work was it was relatable, from stories and tales that I also loved and was meant to bring the audience into the world of the story rather than alienate them.

As I researched Ms. Zimmerman's work for my final paper a thought began to percolate in my mind. The more I considered this idea, the more I felt that creating an original class combining devising an original piece and researching theatre for young audiences was what I wanted to be the focus of my thesis. VCU did not offer classes in either of these concentrations and I thought that both would be beneficial to young artists and to the Richmond theatre

community. In my past as a director of high school students, I had enormous success with works of children's theatre or theatre for young audience's. In my experience, the productions that were appropriate for all audiences always had the largest audiences, were the most creative, and were the productions where I had the most freedom in direction. I speculated if it was possible to combine the two ideas and create a class around the process of creating a piece of devised theatre that would be centered around a classic story but could be contemporary enough for modern audiences and have a moral that was important without being preachy.

There are several ways to measure if a university class is successful. Instructors use tests, presentations, class participation and final exams to gage if the knowledge they were trying to impart on their students was fruitful. For theatre classes, the measurements become a bit more varied, due to the subjective nature of the work. When I think back to how I measured success in my Devised Theatre for Young Audiences class, the critical component I wanted the students to leave with was a true sense of ensemble as well as the ability to create a new piece of theatre. I wanted them to be able imagine themselves as another person, be able to understand another's feelings, and be open to other opinions and backgrounds or have empathy for all the members the class and try to remove the hubris and the instinct to self-aggrandize. I was worried that without the understanding and listening to each other, we would never find the joy in creating theatre. In the end, the collaboration between students and teacher was so much more than what would be found in a typical university classroom.

As I reflect, I realize we learned together how to really listen to each other, how to accept ideas greater than our own, to raise our work ethic and to help and support the group. There were also challenging times, weather related problems and wishes for more time and help with the work. This thesis will explore the research that went in creating my class, a detailed account

of the process and practice of the course and descriptions of each performance, as well as documents, the final script of the production and photographs from the four months of work. This is an account of my attempt to devise with empathy and to help my students to do the same.

## Chapter Two

### Why Devise? or My Adventures in Maine

To experiment is to make a foray into the unknown--it is something that can be charted only after the event. To be avant-garde is truly to be way out 10 in front. Each of the key figures in this book has opened the possibilities of theatre as an art and for each of them experiment has implied something different.

-James Roose Evans

Alison Oddey, author of *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook*

defines devising as:

A method of creating original performances by gathering a group of artists who bring their unique experiences to collaborate on the creation of a new product. The process of devising is about the fragmentary experience of understanding ourselves, our culture, and the world we inhabit. The process reflects a multi-vision made up of each group member's individual perception of that world as received in a series of images, then interpreted and defined as a product. Participants make sense of themselves within their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating, and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation, and experimentation. (Oddey 1)

The benchmarks of a devised theatre piece are that the process is begun without a script but from an idea, concept, story or song. It should be a collaborative creation and the process of discovering the performance is more important than the end result. All these items make devising exciting and terrifying at the same time. This kind of work sounds great in theory, but issues tend to arise when you begin to devise, particularly when you are working with people who are new to this kind of process. it's much harder to start simply with an idea, concept or inspiration point instead of a completed script, particularly if you are working with actors who are not movement oriented. The lack of traditional leadership roles can make a piece muddy and branch off in ways that do not make sense. Students often reject or are afraid try ideas at the beginning and this is

deadly to the collaborative process. Sometimes the artists get so wrapped up in their process that the final product ends up only being understood by the performers. While that is not always a bad thing, it can lead to problems if they actors are trying to relate a message or help solve a problem.

The word devising has long been used by British and Australian Theatre companies to describe their work, while American companies call the work collaborative creation. Devising work can be one or more individuals, whereas collaborative creation refers to a group of people. During the 1950's and 1960's small groups started to rebel from the idea of making commercial theatre. They wanted to create something new and respond to the post war political climate as well as commenting on the economic status on what it meant to be an artist. Many turned to solo or street performance and had to find ways to deal with the lack of government support. There were also devising companies focused on theatre in education and community outreach whose main purpose was to help support school curriculums and enhance arts in schools. For the next five decades, devised work went from fringe groups to mainstream theatre performances. With the commercial success of productions like *Peter and the Starcatcher* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in Nighttime*, devised theatre classes are now taught at universities and devising companies have been subsidized by government funding.

Deirdre Heddon and Jane Milling, the authors of *Devising Performance: A Critical History*, assert that while devised theatre may be thought of as a new form of theatre, it's roots were planted in diverse types of performance and cultures including Commedia Dell'arte and the French mime tradition (Heddon and Milling 10-11). As more European companies began to explore the use of "found" objects, the influence of devised theatre began to permeate the culture

of twentieth century. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, many new theatre innovators were using devised productions to showcase their own social and political agendas and positions. This was also when the theatre-in education movement began to take flight with the Belgrade Theatre Company. (Oddey 4-5)

While I possess a great deal of experience working within theatre for young audiences as both a director and instructor, I believed that in order to make this proposed class successful, I required more exposure to the pedagogical methodology of devising. I began searching for workshops where I could enhance my education and found a devising intensive at the Celebration Barn Theatre, a center of experiential movement and devising in the woods of central Maine. At the intensive I spent two weeks working with a master devising teacher Davis Robinson and movement coach Karen Montero, have master classes with solo performance artists and members of current devising groups including Elevator Repair Service and Pig Iron Theatre. Though this workshop would limit my summer earning potential, take time away from my family, and stretch my limited movement experience, I felt that this was a focused, intense way to evaluate if devising was something I could excel at and teach to college artists.

The Intensive consisted of twelve people comprised of actors, directors, comedians and teachers. People traveled from all over the country as well as India and China to attend this workshop. The schedule was the same each day: we would begin at 9:00 am with two hours of movement work, followed by devising activities (see descriptions later in the chapter) till 1:00. We would have a break till 2:30, work again till 5:30 and break for dinner. We would then work from 7 till 11 on creating a piece to show to the other actors. Our work was exhaustive, creative, and terrifying. The first night we were introduced to Davis Robinson, the main

facilitator of the intensive, who is a professor at Bowdoin College and the founder and director of the Beau Jest Moving Theatre company. He asked us three questions: Why are you here? What do you want to change? Why do you want to change it? I wasn't sure I had the responses to those quires, but I hoped that throughout the course of the two weeks I would find my own answers. Davis stated that his focus for the week was to "help actors, directors and teachers learn how to work constructively with each other and prepare actors for the devised, adaptive, and innovative work that is increasingly appearing in the theatrical mainstream." (Robinson 3).

Over the course of the two weeks we focused on several activities that would be helpful to begin shaping devised work. Some were successful, some were frustrating depending on the way you interpret the work. I'm choosing to focus on a few of the activities that really worked for me and that I used in my own class this semester. They worked with all levels of actors and helped students explore their own ideas within the confines of a framework. These descriptions can also be found in Davis Robinson's book *A Practical Guide to Ensemble Devising*. Some of the following exercises that we used at the intensive became the jumping off points of creating my own devised piece:

### Lists

- 1) Give the Scene a title: A Precious Element, A Turn of Events, etc.
- 2) Make a list of actions including contrasting elements, and work with a group of four to six actors. They must create a short piece incorporating everything on the list.
- 3) A typical list could include some or all of the following:

- Three forward rolls
- One group tableau
- A kiss
- A slap
- Some Running
- A pause that is too long
- A jump

A surprising entrance  
Something said in unison  
Someone laughing or crying  
Something frightening

- 4) You can use music
- 5) Not everyone has to do every action as long as they are all in the scene in some way, and every movement should be planned, committed and rehearsed and it doesn't have to completely make sense.
- 6) You can also make shorter variations of the list activities including text.  
(Robinson 61)

When we did this at Celebration Barn, were asked to think about important objects and how they matter to our lives.

### Word Sculptures

- 1) Have someone outside of the groups of three or four call out an image and actors keep their eyes closed for at least ten seconds to really focus on the word, then open their eyes and move into sculpture on the count of three, using each other to create one dynamic shapes or image.
- 2) Hold the shape for a beat, then extend it even further to more fully realize the idea.
- 3) Start with simple words like colors, (red, orange, yellow) emotions, (betrayal, happiness, confusion) book titles (Alice in Wonderland, The Wizard of Oz) and places and times (gothic cathedral, 1950's, WWII, the future).
- 4) A variation on this would be using a detailed story, like Alice in Wonderland or Harry Potter, choose what you believe to be the most important aspects of the story, and put the pictures together in a sort of movie trailer, using movement, sounds and collective ideas to tell the story.  
(Robinson 69)

At Celebration Barn we did this in two groups working with The Wizard of Oz and The Sound of Music. It was put together in about 10 minutes and you had to collaborate and listen to ideas to create something in that short amount of time.

## Props

- 1) Gather a collection of several different items-pool noodles, gift bags, umbrellas, sticks, butterfly nets, ribbons etc.
- 2) Experiment with all the diverse ways they can move and the way you can manipulate them.
- 3) Create a story using the props as the center piece of the story, using music to underscore the actions.  
(Robinson 71)

This was one of the most successful explorations we had at Celebration Barn. Some of the stories that were performed was under the sea with pool noodles, killer bees with sticks and the creation of a human with bags for hands, feet, head and heart.

Working through a feeling of disappointment that I didn't have much time or really much support to develop my TYA ideas at Celebration, I felt that because I was not an actor, I missed out on the finer points of devising. However, what I gained was much more than what I missed. By having this experience and working with these concepts. I felt ready to begin to create my plans for my Devising Theatre for Young Audiences class as well as committing to this work as my thesis. My goal of this work was to enhance my pedagogical knowledge and I think that was successful. The information, the ideas, and the ability to make more creative choices is the best reason to do work like this. This Intensive was the first piece of real research for my thesis project and I feel that it helped tremendously in the final project.

When I returned from Maine and came back to Richmond, I began to research the origins of devised work, so I could begin to craft my syllabus and lessons. However, as it usually happens with research, it raised more questions than answers. In their book *Devised and Collaborative Theatre*, Tina Bicat and Chris Baldwin refer to the many questions and problems that devised theatre raises:

How does the instigator of the work enthuse the company with their idea? How does a set designer design without knowing where the play is set? How can music and movement be created when the emotions they express have yet to be presented? How can costume be designed and cut for a character as yet unnamed? How does the director rehearse the actors, cast the play and plan the work schedule? What does the stage manager do without a script or prop list? Where and when does the writer come in? And what on earth does the producer do about raising money, budget and publicity? (Baldwin and Bicat 7)

These were all questions I would need to answer to begin to put the pieces of a full production schedule together, and I began to question if it was worth all the extra time it would take to create an original piece. It would be so much easier to take an existing script and use the time to focus on staging and touring the production. With the time constraints for this class, would it be more educationally responsible to focus on creating the theatre piece that has more defined parameters?

As I was pondering all these questions and wondering, even with the time and money I put into a summer intensive, if I should remove the devised component from the course I came across an article in *Theatre Topics* by Liebe Wetzel entitled “Why Devise? Why Now? Why Breathe?” In this she spoke about what draws her to devise:

Why Devise? Joy. For me, the joys of creating theatre come from being in a room with six of the most intensely creative people on the planet at a table littered with evocative objects. Six pairs of hands, six brains, the objects that inspire the stories we tell...By its very nature, ensemble theatre attracts actors who are humble and hunger to create something larger than themselves. So, for me the joy is tremendous, and that is why I devise theatre. (Wetzel)

As I read this, I realized this is what I promised my students: a chance to create something larger than themselves and the opportunity to create with joy in their work as well as to focus on the process over the final product. It would be more difficult, but I wouldn't rob them of the creative freedom that devised theatre promised. I wanted to discover the joy that existed in collective collaboration.

## Chapter Three

### The Importance of Theatre for Young Audiences

Functional society's greatest asset is its children. Certainly, there have been human societies that were dedicated to some other goal-pure hedonism, or celibate religious fervor-and in which children were considered irrelevant. But for society which wants to continue to have a future, a life span, as a society-children are the means for ensuring continuity.

-Moses Goldberg

I have difficulty comprehending why understanding the child audience as well as creating and performing theatre for young audiences is left out of many academic theatre programs.

While audiences are shrinking in many theatres all over the country, shows that are appropriate for all audience show the most interest and continue to grow. Theatre companies have open positions for young actors who have experience performing in TYA productions, and many have added a larger push for more community centered performances. David Wood, referred by the *London Times* as "the national children's dramatist", discussed the differences and the difficulties between children and adult theatre:

Children's theatre has come a long way since Peter Pan paved the way. But the quality of productions, both professional and amateur, remains variable. The same could be said of adult theatre. But the difference, in my opinion, is that the lack of specialist training in children's theatre has led to very basic problems and misunderstandings. (Wood 11)

These misunderstandings, including understanding the audience, how to engage children without speaking down to them, and TYA being seen as a separate art form, are some of the many reasons why I believe all university acting programs should have at least a theatre for young audience's class, so that young artists are more informed and aware of the importance of the

child audience. Developing the child audience is not only for the child but also contributing to the viability of theatre at university programs.

While at the TYA/USA sessions conference this February, I had the great fortune to speak with many TYA practitioners. In one of the break out sessions we were asked to look back at our own experiences with this art form and what drew us to creating theatre focused for children. I was lucky enough to start attending productions when I was 5, and although not every show I saw was specifically for the child audience, they all helped foster my love of theatre at a very young age. When I started teaching and directing High School students, I knew I wanted to create productions that would be popular for the whole community. Not only did that mean more ticket sales, but more importantly, it meant accessibility for more young students to see the shows and want to be a part of the program when they got to high school. One of the most successful examples of this was a performance of *Alice in Wonderland* that I spent the summer adapting for high school actors and making it a bit more relatable for modern audiences. It was one of best attended plays that I directed in my twelve years of teaching, and we were asked to bring a shortened version to several of the elementary schools in the county. I also had the joy of watching my young nieces and nephews grow up coming to many of the shows I directed and interacting with my students. They have had the same love of theatre fostered in them and still ask me when I will be directing something again that they can attend.

In the most recent issue of TYA Connect, an online magazine for the members of TYA/USA, the Executive Director Jonathan Schmidt Chapman listed 8 reasons that he believed it was important to take your child to the theatre in 2018:

- 1) **TYA fosters empathy and understanding as an antidote to our divided world.** Young people see someone else's life manifest on stage through a character in a story, they walk in another's shoes, and they ask questions

about the experiences of others. With hatred and bigotry on the rise, this basic by-product of theatre-going seems more necessary than ever.

- 2) **TYA offers live experience in a world dominated by screen-based interaction.** We have become reliant on screen-based connectivity in our daily lives more rapidly than we've been able to track its effects on the development of young people, and debates about screen time rage on. Theatre offers young people the increasingly rare chance to unplug and experience something exhilaratingly live.
- 3) **TYA encourages young people to passionately find their voice, ask questions, and advocate for their beliefs.** Theatre can provide a young person with a self-awareness about their place in the world, while equipping them with the tools to question, organize, lead, and persuasively articulate their beliefs.
- 4) **TYA offers the powerful opportunity of representation and recognition of one's own experience validated and explored on stage.** When prioritized, choice of both casting and content can create powerful moments of confidence and self-worth for young people, merely by holding up a mirror to stories not told nearly enough.
- 5) **TYA is a rapidly growing genre as artists continue to expand its definition, allowing kids and families to experience a real diversity in style and content.** From theatre for babies to theatre for teens, large-scale commercial family theatre on Broadway to experimental original work created by small independent companies, touring international work to shows created about one's own community – there are more options than ever before for kids and families to experience.
- 6) **TYA provides a laboratory to safely wrestle with the confusing issues of the everyday.** Whether young people are tracking the daily news, or just confronting the day-to-day complexities of their school and home environments, theatre can provide an outlet to explore a variety of issues at a distance and make sense of the noise.
- 7) **TYA leads the way in providing a model for what inclusion in community can look like.** From the wave of sensory-friendly and relaxed performances that have become programmatic staples across the country, to the innovative work being created especially for audiences with special

needs, TYA is breaking ground in what it means to be radically welcoming and inclusive in creating the widest tent possible.

- 8) **TYA provides the space for joy, wonder, surprise, and connection between young people, their families, their teachers, their peers, and total strangers joined together as one audience.** Given the realities of our fast, challenging, and complex world, that is reason enough take a child to the theatre. What could be more important? (Chapman 1)

The imaginative nature of Theatre for Young Audiences lends itself to devised work and can help take old standard tales and create a dynamic theatrical work appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century child audience. To understand the true value of children's theatre, one must look far beyond merely the price of a ticket. I believe that TYA has a more value now than it ever has previously when the pressures on youth are tremendous and the challenges they face with the influence of technology, familial problems and cultural and religious divides can be too much to bear. What we need is to foster is a new generation who can use their heads to solve those problems but also their imaginations. Theatre, particularly theatre for children, inspires the imagination, it gives our children the skills and the creativity necessary to face the world, to understand it and perhaps to change it too. It crosses cultural and world divides and the lessons learned from TYA productions can last a lifetime. In today's current climate where children are constantly exposed to the horrors of society, Theatre for Young Audiences gives young people a healthy respite from their lives, provides them with opportunities for learning about world matters in a manner that is non-confrontational and educational. Furthermore, TYA can help to develop an appreciation of the performing arts for those who may not have access to the theatre within their school or community.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Devising Theatre for Young Audiences in Practice: Fall 2017**

When we get to the end of the story, you will know more than you do now...

-Hans Christian Anderson, *The Snow Queen*

With research and reasoning strong in hand, I began to create my thesis class and recruit students. My thesis goal was to link the procedures and processes of creating a devised theatre piece with a theatre for young audiences touring production. I wanted this to be done under the umbrella of a university class and be entirely student performed, designed and run. My hope was to showcase the community value of TYA company at the university level as well as giving underclassmen students an opportunity to learn more about performing for the child audience as that could be a viable avenue for employment after graduation as well as practical look at what goes into creating a touring production. I have directed and facilitated talk backs for many TYA shows and the enthusiastic responses from children to older actors has had a positive effect on the actors focus and collaborative effort. I believe that college level actors who are starting out can gain tremendous experience from performing in a TYA production, and the community outreach can increase the exposure to wide variety of theatre patrons for the college. There seems to be a stigma at upper level acting programs that theatre for young audience's performances are not a rigorous enough exploration for serious actors and technicians. I wanted to break that idea.

A secondary piece was to explore more the practices of devising and if it would be possible to create an entire devised piece in a brief period.

The more I discussed it with colleagues and my fellow grad students the more excited I became about the idea of creating a class focusing on this process, but with the excitement also came doubt. I worried that I did not have enough experience with the devising process to presume to teach it to undergraduate students, as well as doubts in my ability to create a piece of theatre in the brief time afforded to a 491 class. The doubts were not enough however, to keep me from perusing this project.

The class was proposed in the Spring of 2017 to the then Head of Graduate Studies, Dr. Noreen Barnes. Since the VCU theatre curriculum currently did not have any classes in Theatre for Young Audiences, I felt that this course would help the undergraduate students explore new avenues of performance. While Dr. Barnes was supportive of this class, she expressed concerns that the course may not have enough interest from students to be part of the Fall semester, as well as concerns to funding for 491 classes. After talking with David Leong, the head of Graduate Performance, along with Dr. Barnes, I let them know that due to my Graduate Assistantship for the Fall of 2017, I would not receive payment for my adjunct teaching load. As it would not negatively affect the fall adjunct budget, the course was permitted to run if there was enough student interest. Fortunately, that was not a problem. I had eighteen students sign up for the class, but due to schedule constraints, two had to drop out before we began. The final enrolment for the course was sixteen: three stage management students, one costume design student and twelve acting students. They were a mix of second years, third years and seniors with two graduating at the end of the class in December

With a better understanding of devising, I started to research titles of children's books and stories that could be our inspiration for the classes production. While I was very interested in more contemporary pieces, the concern for rights and contacting publishers became a factor. In the end, I chose a piece that I felt would best serve the students, the community and was in public domain: Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen*. A fable that twisted the traditional "love conquers all" theme, the story was one has lent itself to many adaptations since it was written in December 1844. I loved that in the tale there was a flexible cast with many possibilities for puppetry, the possibility for a simple set that could tour easily, and the overarching theme of friendship and empathy with a strong female protagonist. The fact that we would be performing this in November and December was also a plus, as it was something that would play into the students longing for snow. There were some major problem with the original text-the Snow Queen's origin, the transitions from land to land as Gerta travels to find Kai, the fact that the conclusion is very anti climatic and that nothing bad actually happens to The Snow Queen at the end of the story were just a few I knew we would have to face, but I felt that the subject was one we could work with and that there was enough in the story to facilitate an adaptation.

With *The Snow Queen* chosen, I began to shape my class. The overall goal of the course was to collaboratively explore how to develop a touring production using ensemble devising methods including separate and group exercises. Students would participate in class work that focused on ensemble building, storytelling, music, art, movement, voice, and problem solving. Students would also learn more about the history, literature and current practices of Theatre for Young Audience's as well as the child audience. Putting all these things together, the final project would be an original production of that would be toured to several locations around Richmond. I wanted to be sure that we included school venues, a theatre that the community could attend, as

well as performances at VCU. The class would meet for three hours once a week, for fourteen weeks. In that time, we would have to cast, costume and create a production and reach out the Richmond community for opportunities to perform. It was a huge undertaking, but I was so excited about the possibility of doing something completely different with a group of energetic students.

I wanted this class to be a dynamic course to explore the past, present and future of Theatre for Young Audiences both domestically and abroad. Students would work in a collaborative effort devising and producing a TYA piece based on Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen* and would study the children's theatre through reading assignments and practical experience. The students would do research projects, adapt the script as a class, create and name their own theatre company, facilitate community outreach and facilitate talk backs. I knew that the class had 16 students comprised of both actors and technicians who were interested in pursuing the project. The course description was as follows: This course will collaboratively explore developing and performing a production of Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen*. Alison Oddey writes in *Devising Theatre* "Any definition of devised theatre must include process (find the ways and means to share an artistic journey together), collaboration (working with others), multi-vision (integrating various views, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes) and the creation of an artistic product." Students will participate in class work that focuses on ensemble building, storytelling, music, art, movement, voice, and problem solving. Students will also learn more about the history, literature and current practices of children's theatre. The culmination of the class will be a performance piece toured to several venues around Richmond.

The student learning outcomes were that the students would gain an overview of Devising and Theatre for Young Audiences, they would create, rehearse, and perform a quality devised play for young audiences, that the students would increase their understanding of the

history and practices of TYA, and Devised theatre. Students would also be exposed to ensemble theatre Devising and production development and so that they would be able to discuss, explain, and express thoughts connected with readings done both inside and outside of class.

The class would meet for fourteen weeks for three hours on Fridays. The breakdown of the assignments included in this course were as follows:

- 1) Production Assignment - 40% -Each student will be assigned a critical role for the production and must attend all performances.
- 2) Attendance/Participation – 40% - This is a production class and therefore the students' attendance is absolutely mandatory. Students are expected to fully participate in all discussions of readings.
- 3) TYA History and Company Presentations -10% -Students will do a 15-minute presentation on either TYA history or a TYA company.
- 4) Final Reflection Paper- 10% - At the conclusion of the course, students will write a reflection paper examining their new understanding of Theatre for Young Audiences and their role in the creation of the semester's production.

The class and production were put into practice during the Fall semester of 2017 and the while not everything went exactly according to plan we did devise and create a piece of theatre that toured to several locations around Richmond. Through the course evaluations and questionnaires filled out by my students, I know that I achieved the goal of process over product. While I was happy with the final product given the limited time, my goal of having a collective, collaborative process was achieved. My students expressed excitement in being heard and seen by a faculty member and letting their imagination take them wherever they wanted to go. Many of the students who were involved with the class have auditioned for TYA companies and have plans to work either in the education departments or as actors in a repertory season. While there are some minds that can never be changed, I think that there were enough students and

community members who saw our production to help start a conversation about the need for TYA classes in BFA acting programs at VCU.

The overall goal of the course was to collaboratively explore how to develop a touring production using ensemble Devising methods including separate and group exercises. Students would participate in class work that that focused on ensemble building, storytelling, music, art, movement, voice, and problem solving. Students would also learn more about the history, literature and current practices of children's theatre as well as understanding the audience that we would be performing for. Putting all these things together, the final project would be an original production of that would be toured to several locations around Richmond. The class would meet for three hours once a week, for fourteen weeks. In that time, we would have to cast, costume and create a production and reach out the Richmond community for opportunities to perform. It was a huge undertaking, but I was so excited about the possibility of doing something completely different with a group of energetic students.

Once I knew the makeup of the class, I used the summer to begin to plan specifics. Due to time constraints, I wanted to begin the class knowing the text we would be devising for our performance. In a perfect world, I would have waited till the class began and we could decide collectively what we wanted to explore, but I knew we would never have the time to do that successfully. I read many stories over the summer and although I was interested in many new works, I ended up choosing Hans Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen*. I chose that particular story for many reasons. It was in public domain, so performance rights were not an issue. I knew we would be performing this production in late November and December, and I thought it would draw a great audience. I also loved the idea of a female protagonist going on adventures and fighting for her friend, the theme of having and recovering empathy and the larger than life

characters that could be performed by a small cast. Although this was the inspiration for Disney's *Frozen*, I felt that so much was changed from the origin story in that movie, that it may help us attract an broader audience but it would not be boring or rehashing a Disney movie.

The other piece I did before the class started was plan my budget. Due to my background as High School Theatre teacher, I was aware how much staging a production would cost, including costuming, a set that could travel, and props that could be used for multiple purposes. I received a Graduate Assistantship for the Fall semester and because of that, it allowed me to use the bulk of my student loans to pay for the production. I did apply for an adjunct research grant from VCU, but I was told that because I was a graduate student, I could not be considered for the grant. I reserved \$7,000.00 of my own money for the production, and although we did not use all of it, it ended up costing well over \$5,000.00.

The learning outcomes for the course were to 1) gain an overview of devising and theatre for young audiences, 2) increase understanding of the history and practices of TYA and devised theatre, 3) create, rehearse, and perform a quality devised production for young audiences, 4) be exposed to ensemble theatre devising and production development, and 5) discuss, explain, and express thoughts connected with readings done both inside and out of class. The course content was that 1) Each student will take on a vital role in the process and production of *The Snow Queen* including director, actor, designer, scribe, community outreach and run crew, 2) Study the child audience through reading assignments and practical experiences, 3) Attend and participate in all class performances, and) Research renowned theatre for young audience companies.

The class ended up being broken up into three separate sections that were four or five weeks each: Ensemble Building and Research, Development and Production, and Performance and Reflection. For the first five weeks we built our ensemble and named our company, did

research on successful children's theatre companies and learned more about our target audience, and built our devising vocabulary by learning fundamentals and trusting our instincts and focused on the story and characters of *The Snow Queen*. For the next five weeks we chose production roles, shaped our story and chose costumes and set pieces that would help us tour our show. We posted final videos of our rehearsals and commented on what worked and what didn't at the start of every week. We also created an ensemble script that could be added to and shaped with each rehearsal. The final four weeks were saved for performing, both technical rehearsals and traveling to performances. While our final performance was canceled due to weather, it allowed us an opportunity to close out the class together as a unit.

### **Part I: Ensemble Building and Story Research**

During the first part of the class, we focused on several aspects of Devising including 1) Storytelling 2) Team building 3) Every idea has merit 4) Doing not thinking 5) Every idea should be heard and 6) Problem solving. I let all the students know before the class began that we would be focusing on *The Snow Queen* and asked them to come with a copy of the story as well as ideas about characters and themes from the tale. Taking a group of students who all have separate ideas and points of view and getting them to form an ensemble in a few weeks was daunting. One of the things I did was give everyone a devised experience survey (See Portfolio). We did a great deal of ensemble building activities at the beginning, and although not everyone was an actor I made everyone participate. The stage management students were at first a bit taken aback, but when I explained that we all had to be on the same page and work together, and that there would be no judgement they went along with the plan. Some of the acting/performance we did at the beginning of the process was a list activity, where I gave them a theme and a list of several things that had to be included, but I gave them the freedom to decide

a story, order and a soundscape. We also did improvisational work to tell stories with different kinds of props and different types of music.

We also spent a great amount of time in the classroom creating our company and discussing themes and characters in the story on which we wanted to focus (Portfolio). One of the first things that happened was our company name: The Red Brick Collective. I set parameters that we were a democracy, and that any idea, no matter how large or small, had to be agreed to by the majority of the collective. If something wasn't working for the majority, it would be let go. I also told them that my role in this process was a guide and teacher, but that I was equal to all of them in the company. My goal was to give them the skills to create and give them guidance, but I wanted them to have the agency to create their own work. I also asked that the students write a reflection after each class and turn them in at the end of each month for review, but I wanted them to be as honest as possible, even if it was a problem with me. I wanted them to have a written diary of their feelings, so they could look back on what we did, evaluate their own work and be able to use it in their future productions. I did intend to let the students write each week, but as the class went on, more time was needed to create the performance.

We also took the first few weeks discussing information found in David Wood's book *Theatre for Children*. Wood's book gave four concise lists that we could focus on-Common Characteristics of a Children Audience, How Children Differ from Adult Audiences, Ingredients of Good Theatre for Children, and Stories and Themes that Children Love. While Wood's book is a bit out of date, I think this information is worthwhile to start formulating ideas to creating a TYA piece as well has to help inform students who have not had much experience with this specific audience.

I was surprised how quickly the students supported each other and were able to create work together. I know that many of them knew each other from productions, but in this kind of class with emphasis on collaboration, being open to new ideas and responding without overthinking is really different from what is expected of them in other classes. There were a few times that things didn't work as well, but it was an excellent opportunity to focus on the ways you deal with problems in an ensemble. I told them that we were going to be frustrated at times and perhaps our ideas wouldn't work but if we kept the focus on what we were trying to do and the story we were telling and take personal feelings out of it, it would help take the feelings out of the equation.

One of the best things in we did early on was the research presentations of TYA companies. I broke them up into small groups and gave them the opportunity to choose the company. The ones that were chosen were Imagination Stage, Lexington Children's Theatre, Chicago Children's Theatre and Seattle Children's Theatre. Seeing what these companies do for productions and community outreach was inspiring to the whole class. It helped the students realize how impactful and important this work is, and how creative and innovative TYA productions can be. If I ever teach this class again, I would make the groups smaller to do more of these, because it reminded everyone what our objectives were as well as places to apply for internships and jobs in the future.

## **Part II: Story Development and Production**

As we came to the end of the first five weeks we had discussed important themes for children today, the characters and basic scope of the story we wanted to tell of *The Snow Queen*, who our primary audience was, and the knowledge that we had three locations to perform our production. The Firehouse Theatre performance would be our first the weekend before

Thanksgiving, Orchard House School would be the following Friday, and Newdick theatre would be the first weekend in December on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Thanks to Josh Chenard, I secured the Firehouse space prior to the start of class because I thought it would be perfect for the Richmond Community at large. I was put in touch with Orchard House by Bonnie McCoy, whose daughter attends school there, and they were happy to have our production as it fit into their sixth-grade curriculum. The Newdick theatre space was booked by applying to Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre board the previous spring. We went on to add another performance at the Glen Allen Cultural Arts Center for three hundred after school students in the fourth and fifth grades. One of the difficulties with this performance schedule was that we had to work around performances of VCU's *Legally Blonde* because over half of the class was involved in that production. By doing matinees, we were able to work with everyone's schedule and we knew going into creating the piece who would have the most time to spend and how much energy would be needed for distinct roles.

Instead of doing traditional auditions and casting, I asked the students to tell me what three roles they were most interested in exploring in the piece. I did let them know that if you were an actor, you did not have to act in the piece, and if you were a stage manager you could act if you wanted to. Nothing was off limits, but I would make the final decision based on that information so think carefully about how they wanted to spend the next ten weeks. In the end, almost everyone chose a different role to explore, and my job was just to inform them. Playing off the actors strengths we had puppeteers, movement specialists, and musicians. Three students wanted to be directors and touring managers. I had one person interested in community outreach, one production stage manager, and all the characters were played by actors who were interested in those roles. I do understand that this may not be an available avenue for casting

every devised performance, and I think I was so lucky to have things work out that way.

However, because the actors knew so much about these characters, they already had ideas and understood what the trajectory of our production would be. There was no animosity or jealousy about the casting choices, and all students felt that they had agency in the creation of their characters. This is one of the most important parts of collaborative creation and beginning with a level playing field is of supreme importance. Everyone shared ideas about the different scenes.

We broke the script down into 12 parts in corroboration with chapters of the story:

- 1) The Opening
- 2) Reading the Story
- 3) The Snow Queen and her Sisters
- 4) Gerda and Kai
- 5) The Shard in Eye
- 6) Gerda and The Crow and River
- 7) The Garden
- 8) Kai and The Snow Queen
- 9) The Prince and Princess
- 10) Gerda and The Robber Girl
- 11) Gerda saves Kai
- 12) The Ending

We focused on the action on three or four scenes each class, video recording the work at the end of every class. Everyone needed to watch the recording during the week and come in with changes they wanted to make for their characters. We started with the movement for each scene with music and added the language as we shaped the scenes. The absence of a script became a

difficulty that I will discuss later. However, the first three scenes happened rather quickly. We ended up breaking up into small groups and working on creative ways to create the carriage, the river, and the flowers.

We did have some obstacles with this process. The students had trouble trusting their instincts without thinking about how they looked, and the Friday afternoon schedule created a few issues. October was the time when getting overwhelmed by outside influences, and people were starting to miss class due to sickness. One of the most difficult things about this kind of theatre is that without the entire cast, it's very difficult to create the piece. You waste so much time going back, and even with the video, you still must go and explain what was missed. By the end of the week students were tired, and only having one day a week to create this required full focus from everyone. We ended up taking a bit too much time working on certain scenes and not spending enough time on others. The biggest challenge we faced was script creation. The way a devised piece can work is not to have a finished script until the final performance. However, with all of us being new to this kind of work, a partial script would have helped tremendously as would having a dramaturg in the class to spend more time on the language. What we did do was have a student who would scribe most of the action they saw during rehearsals into a shared google doc and during the week we would shape it into a working script. All actors were responsible for crafting their own dialogue, and I added my own thoughts to stage directions and shaping of the introduction and conclusion. In the end it worked, but I would do this piece a little differently if I teach this class again.

Having one student willing to write original music for the piece was essential. Music is crucial to any devised performance and the ability to have someone be at every rehearsal, playing music that underscored the mood of the piece made things so much easier during the process. We

tried other actors playing different instruments, but in the end the use of the single ukulele plus voices in song and sound effects were the best for our production. Our musician would play music based on the mood of that day's rehearsal and then work during the week on shaping the music and finalizing it for the scene. The use of the song "You are my Sunshine" seemed a bit cheesy at the beginning but ended up being one of the Collectives favorite pieces of the production, as well as the audiences favorite.

We waited until the end of October to decide on the backdrop and order the set pieces. The stage management team and myself decided to get rolling photography racks to hang our backdrops and they could be put together and torn down in a matter of minutes. We decided to have a painted backdrop of a castle with snow in the background that would be the focal point of the show and hide the actors during quick changes. We originally planned on painting the backdrop ourselves, but after doing a trial run with paint on muslin, we realized it would be too stiff for our purposes. At the last minute we found a perfect snow background in the color of light blue that was not too distracting but set the right mood. We had three panels and made a triangle with them that went across the length of the stage, and helped the actors stay downstage. We also had so many small but important costume and prop changes, that we needed two trunks that would work as both storage as well as set pieces. Those trunks helped to shape the opening, that this story were children playing dress up acting out the story of The Snow Queen. The only other set pieces were chairs for the flowers that we borrowed from every place we went and a small black acting block.

Costumes and props were vital to this production, and although the base was all basic blacks, we wanted the pieces and color choices to engage the audience and help move the story along. One of the difficult things about devised theatre is that a few actors play multiple roles

and you need a few small but distinct costume changes to help continue the narrative and make things clear. The actors playing Gerda, Kai and the Snow Queen only played those roles, but the rest of the cast filled in with all the other roles in the production. We wanted to keep characters in simple color palettes: light blue and white for Gerda and Kai, white for the Snow Queen, brown for the Robber Girl, red for the Garden Witch and grey for the Prince and Princess. We also wanted things to transition seamlessly from one scene to the other, and way we chose to do this was using capes for the main characters. Capes can be simple or fancy to show status, they are easy to transport, and they cover a great deal of the body without struggle. Our student costume designer spent hours looking on Amazon and we would meet after class to go over her choices. Most of the costumes were in by two weeks prior to the production, but I was ordering a few things right up until the Newdick productions. I loved what the costumes added to the production and I donated them to the Shafer Alliance Laboratory Theatre in the hope that they will be used again

## Chapter Five

### The Red Brick Collective's *The Snow Queen* in Performance

Anyone who imagines that acting in children's theatre is a soft option hasn't done it.

-Susannah Bray

The last four weeks of the class were saved for a technical rehearsal and performances. We added a curtain speech, a quick addition of simple lights and last-minute additions of certain props and costumes. While a process-based production will never be finished, I knew that we had to stop adjusting and finalize choices before we performed for an audience. Our final run time was 38 minutes not including the curtain speech. One of the most difficult parts of a touring production is dealing with the obstacles at each of the venues, as well as the set up and tear down coordination. What worked the best was having jobs assigned for every member of the production team and checking in to be sure that everything was in order. While the bulk of loading in and loading out fell on the touring manager and myself, the ensemble supported and helped at each of the sites. Each performance was different, and unexpected, but brought new things to discuss and learn.

## **Firehouse Performance-November 18<sup>th</sup> at 11:30**

We were able to do a technical rehearsal at Firehouse the day before our performance, as well as a production photo shoot, which was essential for our success. The theatre, a flexible space with seating for about 100, that was in walking distance of the VCU campus. The company was performing on the raked set of *Desire Under the Elms* that was the production the space in the evening, and we needed to re-block a few of our movement sections as well as set our backdrops and entrances and exits. While it was a challenge, the addition of the rake added so much to our performance. It gave more visual interest to the some of the scenes and added levels to places where we needed them. My biggest fear was that we wouldn't have an audience. The community outreach manager had been working very hard, but because it was free admission and no tickets, we had no way of knowing how many people would attend. In the end, we had a full audience of families and the Richmond community. We had many parents and children arriving early, a few in *Frozen* costumes, and they composed about 80% of the audience. It was a magic performance, and when the company heard the response from the children in the audience, it elevated their joy in performing. Many of the actors had requests for pictures taken with the children and we had questions from parents about when we were performing again. One of things I wish we had done that day was have a talk back with the audience. It was something I had intended to do but ran out of time to facilitate it for this performance. I talked at length to the Education Director at Cincinnati Playhouse who attended the performance and gave me suggestions for post-production talks, and for the rest of the student performances we would implement a talk back. There were some tweaks we did to the show the following week, but for me, the Firehouse theatre performance was the best of the run.

### **Orchard House School-December 1st at 12:45**

We had a pick-up rehearsal the Sunday prior to this performance, because we had missed a week since Firehouse for Thanksgiving break. The Orchard House space, a repurposed ballroom with a small raised proscenium on one side, was our only audience made almost entirely of students. When we contacted their Principal for the possibility of performance, we were informed that it coincided with the curriculum of fairy tales for the sixth and seventh grade classes. While they were an older audience than we had created the piece for, we made a few changes that we hoped would better engage students of their age.

The change I like the best was the addition of having the audience begin to sing “You are My Sunshine” with Gerda at the end of the show to help wake up Kai. We also discussed our questions for the talk back, and I had been able to visit the Orchard House theatre space, so I could fill the team in on our performance parameters. The stage was smaller and there was less room in the wings than we had rehearsed with, but we were able to make the changes needed to give a successful performance. After the performance, we talked about devising and answered questions that they had. While I do think that the Orchard House audience had some issues following the narrative, the overall feeling was that they enjoyed the performance. Their reaction was mainly positive, and they loved the music! I think if we did this again, I would make sure that we could tweak the story a bit for older and younger students to help work with different audiences.

### **Newdick Theatre December 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> at 11:30**

These were the performances the company felt the least nervous about. We knew the space, the black box proscenium where we had been rehearsing during class time, the audience

would be mostly friends and family and we could set things up the previous day so there was no running around. What did surprise me was the lack of audience attendance on the Saturday performance. I didn't realize that there was a holiday parade on Broad Street that blocked off most of the streets surrounding VCU. In a space that held 75 audience members, we had no more than 20 audience members and it felt like a letdown after the first two performances. The Sunday performance had a much larger audience of about 50 and there were community members as well as students and faculty in attendance. By now the ensemble was comfortable with performing the show, but I feel that they were missing the excitement that came with having an audience of mostly children. The Sunday performance was also a bit of a rush due to the *Legally Blonde* matinee at 3:00. One of the complaints from audience members was that it was too early for a college production, but I am unsure how we could have done any other time due to competing performances. I am glad that we had the opportunity to perform on VCU's campus, but if I had to do it over again, I would have only done one performance there and tried to book another community performance.

### **Cultural Arts Center at Glenn Allen on December 8<sup>th</sup> at 4:15**

This was the performance the class was looking forward to the most. We were to perform for 300 fourth and fifth graders, many of whom have not had much exposure to theatre. It was the last day of class for us and the performance was to run after class time, but we planned to have a bit of a closure at 2:00 and then head out to Glen Allen, which was half an hour away. We did a better job preparing for the talk back and had everything ready to be loaded in the car. Then in an ironic twist, the snow came. It began to snow heavily and although it wasn't laying on the roads, it still diminished visibility. I got an email at 1:30 from the coordinator telling me that all after school activities had been canceled and therefore our production was cancelled for

that day. She asked immediately if we could try to make it work for another day the following week, but we had two company members graduating the next day. With everyone's schedule's it was just too hard to make it work, and in the end, we made the decision as a group to end the show with the Newdick performances. While we were all disappointed, I feel that it gave us a chance to reflect and close out the class, and with all the work we put into the production, it was a blessing.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion and Reflection

Drama teaching is a vocation that can be both professionally and personally demanding. Like most kinds of teaching, it depends on what we know and who we are. An effective teacher in any classroom and perhaps especially in the arts, is always an agent of change and not merely a transmission device.

-Cecily O'Neill

In the end, I feel that I was able to meet and exceed many of the objectives for my class and for the students. The students learned more about Theatre for Young Audiences and how to create Devised theatre. They found out more about national theatre companies and the internships they offer, and we wrote and created a production of *The Snow Queen* that toured to several locations in Richmond. Most importantly to me, the process really was what mattered, and we created a true ensemble that respected each other. There was an openness to ideas, support for frustrations, and joy in what were able to achieve together. Many of the actors made great strides in the “just do, don’t think” way of performing, and they found that in this process they were free of many of the problems that they struggle with in other acting classes.

That’s not to say I got everything right. If I had it to do over again, I would try to have a dramaturg and movement specialist in the class working a few days at the beginning of shaping the text of the show. I would get started a bit faster with creation, and I would try to get funding from the university before the class begins. I know if I teach this class again, I will try to make it a full year, and have more outside input on the script. I would have the company create a mission

statement that reflects the mission of VCU Theatre. I also would have students work on curriculum guides, and prepare them for student and parental issues in performance. However, I can't say for certain it would create a better outcome. This class understood and listened when I said that we needed to create a full company, where every voice was valid, or this project wouldn't work. They were the right people, at the right time, with the right project.

The students expressed how much they had gained from the process of ensemble devising and the newfound respect they had for Theatre for Young Audiences. In their final reflections they talked about how they felt that they were a part of something larger than themselves and that the opportunity to change a child's life in even a small way should never be under appreciated. Some mentioned that they loved that children are the most honest audience members and that they also have the most authentic and human reactions, so you know what they respond to and what you must fix as a performer. Many commented on how the work they did in the class could translate over into other performances and acting classes, including the importance of collaboration and being able to be a team player. The thing that meant the most to me was that the students felt it was a positive classroom and safe place to explore, and they felt joy and freedom trying new creative ways to conceive and perform theatre.

I have been a theatre educator for over fifteen years across many different age ranges and have been lucky enough to do so with many students. However, am I truly an "agent of change" as O'Neill suggests? Does devising, as a method of conveying drama, provide effective and positive outcomes for learning and retaining information? Was there joy in creation as Wetzel found?

The conception and implementation of this class was indeed a joyful experience for me, and I hope for my students, and it is one that I hope I teach again in the future. I believe in this

work and with or without payment, I know I left the students involved with a clear picture of what it means to truly collaborate in the theatre. I feel that I set achievable goals and worked hard to give the students what they needed to be successful.

Sometimes in teaching, we never know if we made a difference in the lives of our students or if they even learned anything at all. I was able to leave this class and this program knowing that I gave the students in this class an opportunity to create something they were proud of and something that could help them get a job one day. I have recommended several of the students for positions in TYA companies and I know that several have already been hired. I know that I will always strive to make a difference in the world through Theatre for Young Audiences and through education. I believe a teacher should foster a love of learning in all scholars, find what approach works best for each, and help them find their own way into the work, or create their own piece of theatre. Perhaps one day, some of those students will wave from the stage at a young audience member and encourage another career in theatre.

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## Appendix A

### Teaching Materials

## Devised Children's Theatre

Fall/2017  
Shafer Street Playhouse  
Fridays 1:00-4:00  
Course Number THEA 491

Instructor: Mary C. Lennon  
Newdick Theatre  
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Office Hours: By appointment

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will collaboratively explore developing and performing a production of Han's Christian Anderson's *The Snow Queen*. Alison Oddey writes in *Devising Theatre* "Any definition of devised theatre must include process (find the ways and means to share an artistic journey together), collaboration (working with others), multi-vision (integrating various views, beliefs, life experiences, and attitudes) and the creation of an artistic product." Students will participate in class work that focuses on ensemble building, storytelling, music, art, movement, voice, and problem solving. Students will also learn more about the history, literature and current practices of children's theatre. The culmination of the class will be a performance piece that will be toured to several venues around Richmond.

**Definite Dates of Production November 18<sup>th</sup> at Firehouse Theatre  
December 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Newdick Theatre  
More will hopefully be added.**

### STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students will gain an overview of Devising and Theatre for Young Audiences.
2. Students will increase understanding of the history and practices of TYA, and devising theatre.
3. Students will create, rehearse, and perform a quality devised play for young audiences.
4. Students will be exposed to ensemble theatre devising and production development.
5. Students will discuss, explain, and express thoughts connected with readings done both inside and outside of class.

### COURSE CONTENT

1. Each student will take on a vital role in the production process of the production of *The Snow Queen*. (actor, designer, scribe, outreach, crew,)
2. Study the child audience through reading assignments and practical experiences
3. Attend and participate in all class performances.

4. Research renown TYA companies.

## **REQUIRED MATERIALS**

- A copy of *The Snow Queen*.
- A notebook, folder and a writing utensil will be used during each class, as well as a laptop on selected days.
- You may be asked to bring in costume pieces, as well as music or props for the production.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

### 1. Attire

- Students must wear sweat pants, dance pants, or exercise/yoga pants.
- Long hair must be tied back and dangling jewelry removed.
- Shoes need to be cross-trainers, indoor soccer shoes, jazz shoes, or any shoe that is form fitting with a relatively thin sole and won't fall off (no flip-flops, heels, heavy boots, or anything clunky).
- Basically, your clothing and shoes should not distract or hinder your movement in any way. Come in COMFY and ready to move. If you cannot comfortably sit on the floor in your clothing, you are not dressed appropriately.
- Sign In Sheets will be by the door each week-it is your responsibility to sign in- Don't have anyone else do it for you! Failure to sign in means you may be marked absent even if you were in class.
- Please bring a water bottle, a notebook, a folder for handouts, and a pencil.
- No food or liquid in open containers.
- No cellphones\*, tablets, social media, or emailing in class. Enjoy the time to disconnect. \*Unless needed for a scene. Please see instructor for permission.

## **ATTENDANCE EXPECTATIONS**

This is an environment for learning, engaging and exploring and requires a positive attitude, a willing spirit, and respect for classmates. Classroom discussion will cover a wide variety of topics. This class deals with making you a better actor and audience member through an investigation of the collaborative art of theatre from both the inside out and the outside in. This class demands a highly interactive, collaborative commitment and because of this **ATTENDANCE AT ALL CLASSES IS EXPECTED.** We only have 1 day a week to create this production. You are allowed 1 absence, but if you are missing, you may be removed from the scene we are creating that day. Any additional unexcused absences will result in the lowering of your final grade by one full letter grade, and the removal from the production. You will be responsible for signing in each day. If you are over ten minutes late to class, it will be counted as an absence for that day, and two late arrivals under 10 minutes will count as one absence. Three absences will result in an automatic failure. Unless the instructor receives prior notification of absences, performances and written work missed cannot be made up. These policies will be strictly enforced.

All written assignments are due before or at the beginning of class. Problems with your printer is not a viable excuse. In the event of a **SERIOUS** and **DOCUMENTED** illness or family emergency, exceptions can be made and will be assessed on a case to case basis. Please use proper MLA format for all papers and citations.

We understand that our members represent a rich variety of backgrounds and perspectives. The VCU Theatre department is committed to providing an atmosphere for learning that respects diversity. While working together to build this community we ask all members to share their unique experiences, values and beliefs, be open to the views of others and to value each other's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

**CHEATING AND PLAGIARISM ARE WRONG AND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.** All written work must be your own. See the VCU Policy regarding academic dishonesty.

## **GRADING**

Your grade will be based on active participation, collaboration, presentations and performance.

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Active Class Participation/Attendance/Discussion | 40% |
| Production Assignment                            | 30% |
| TYA Company Presentation and Self Reflections    | 20% |
| Final Reflection Paper                           | 10% |

## **ASSIGNMENTS**

### Active Class Participation/Attendance/Discussion

This is a production class, so class attendance is crucial to the understanding and retention of classroom concepts and their application. We will be devising and trying many, many things in

class to create this production, and an open mind and heart are a necessity. Active participation and effort is expected in all class activities. Active participation means:

- Being fully engaged physically, mentally, and emotionally.
- Staying focused, positive, and enthusiastic.
- Being respectful of others and the work.
- Participating in class discussions.
- Practicing professional behavior.
- Giving constructive criticism when invited.
- Maintaining a generous spirit.

#### Grading Criteria for Active Classroom Participation

Focus

Attitude

Commitment

Engagement

Preparedness

Support for others

#### Production Assignment

You will be assigned one or several critical roles for the production. Roles may include, but are not limited to, Actor, Production, Outreach, Musician, etc.

#### TYA Company Presentations and Self Reflections

Students will do a 10-minute presentation of a TYA theatre company in groups of two. You will be required to write a typed two-page **minimum** paper about the company, including successful shows and programs they have produced, mission statements, and important information about their inception. You should be able to present your findings to the class using videos, photographs and anything else you find interesting.

At the end of each month, you will be asked to post a Response and Self Critique on Blackboard. This should include how you felt about your performances in class as well as any of the following: engagement, class material, self- discoveries, rehearsal problems or joys, something a fellow student did to help you, etc. These should all be AT LEAST a page in length. See the breakdown for due dates.

#### Grading Criteria for TYA Presentation Paper and Self- Reflections

All papers must be typed in twelve (12)-point font, Times New Roman and double-spaced with 1-inch margins. **Spellcheck and proofread your papers.**

Play critiques should be 2-3 pages in length.

How play critiques are graded:

**A** – Well-written and organized, clear with nice transitions. No grammar or spelling errors. No slang or social media speak.

**B** – Fluid, well-organized, articulate, strong conclusion, well-supported. May have some minor grammar or spelling errors.

**C** – Clear thesis statement but paper does not support it; paper dwindles out at the end without conclusion, choppy, does not flow.

**D** – Typically less than the minimum required pages, basically plot summaries or text regurgitation, a large number of grammar and spelling errors, unorganized and difficult to read.

How Reflections are graded:

Reflections responses should include at least 10-12 complete sentences about what we have been working on in class, or any thoughts or ideas you may have. These responses are to help you practice observing, writing, and reflecting honestly and thoughtfully. These will be graded on 50pt scale depending on the depth of thought and reflection put into each entry.

Final Reflection Paper

At the conclusion of the course, students will write a reflection paper examining their new understanding of devising, theatre for young audiences, and their role in the semesters production. I also **STRONGLY** encourage you to keep a journal during this class/process. This will be helpful for the devising experience, and for your final reflection.

## **GRADING SCALE**

A 100-90

B 89-80

C 79-70

D 69-60

F-59 and below

## **Weekly Breakdown**

\*Subject to change\*

## **Week One-August 25th**

-Syllabus Review and Experience Survey

- Ensemble Building
- Talk briefly about likes and dislikes Snow Queen

### **Week Two- September 1st**

- Discuss Wood Part I and II
- Assign Presentation Groups and Dates
- Define and Discuss Devising Fundamentals
- Mapping out characters, themes from *The Snow Queen*

### **Week Three- September 8th**

- Discuss Wood's Adaptation
- Guest Speaker Mark Lerman on Puppetry \*
- Work of Breaking down the script of *The Snow Queen*

### **Week Four-September 15th**

- Discuss Wood Directing and Production Team, Acting in Children's Theatre
- Look at recent devised TYA productions (Sally Cookson's *Peter Pan* and *Hetty Feather*, etc.)
- Explore characters through props and music

### **Week Five-September 22nd**

- Devising Theatre articles
- TYA Company Presentations
- Creating the Work

### **Week Six-September 29<sup>th</sup>\* Self-Reflection is Due to Blackboard by September 30<sup>th</sup>.**

- TYA Company Presentations
- Creating the Work

### **Week Seven-October 6<sup>th</sup>**

- TYA Company Presentations
- Rehearsal, Community Outreach, Production

### **Week Eight-October 13th**

- TYA Company Presentations
- Rehearsal, Community Outreach, Production work

### **Week Nine-NO CLASS READING DAY**

**Week Ten-October 27<sup>th</sup>\* Self-Reflection is Due to Blackboard by October 31<sup>st</sup>.**  
- Rehearsal, Community Outreach, Production work

**Week Eleven-November 3<sup>rd</sup>-Last Day for Drop Add**  
Dress Rehearsal with all props and costumes  
Class Time in Tech for Production  
-Photo Shoot

**Week Twelve-November 10<sup>th</sup>**  
Thanksgiving-No Class

**Week Thirteen-November 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>**  
-Possible Production at the Orchard House Friday Afternoon  
-Production at The Firehouse Theatre Saturday at 11:00 am

**Week Fourteen-NO CLASS THANKSGIVING BREAK**  
**Self-Reflection is Due to Blackboard by November 30<sup>th</sup>**

**Week Fifteen-December 1<sup>st</sup>, and 2<sup>nd</sup>**  
Production at Newdick Theatre Friday and Saturday afternoon

**Week Sixteen-December 8<sup>th</sup>**  
Clean up Space, **Final Reflection Papers Due to Blackboard by December 8<sup>th</sup>.**

**Breakdown and Characters:**

What Do we want to Keep? What Parts of the Story are important?

Story One) Mirror and the Splinters

Story Two) A Little Boy and Little Girl

Story Three) Of the Flower Garden at the Old Woman's who understood witchcraft

Story Four) The Prince and Princess

Story Five) The Little Robber Maiden

Story Six) The Lapland Woman and the Finland Woman

Story Seven) What took place in the palace of the Snow Queen and what happened afterward

## Book Characters

**Gerta:** the protagonist of this tale, who succeeds in finding her friend Kai and saving him from the Snow Queen.

**Kai:** a little boy who lives in a large city, in the garret of a building across the street from the home of Gerda, his playmate, whom he loves dearly. He falls victim to the splinters of the troll-mirror and the blandishments of the Snow Queen.

**The Snow Queen:** queen of the snowflakes or "snow bees", who travels throughout the world with the snow. She takes Kai back to this palace after he has fallen victim to the splinters of the troll-mirror. She promises to free Kai if he can spell "eternity" with the pieces of ice in her palace.

**The Goblin** (troll, sprite, minion): who makes an evil mirror that distorts reality and later shatters to infect people with its splinters that distort sight and freeze hearts. Some English translations of "The Snow Queen" translate this character as the "[sprite](#)" or the "[hobgoblin](#)".

**The Grandmother:** Kai's grandmother, who tells him and Gerda the legend of the Snow Queen. Some of Grandmother's actions are essential points of the story. \* **Possible Narrator?**

**The Old Lady who knew Magic:** who maintains a cottage on the river, with a garden that is permanently in summer. She seeks to keep Gerda with her, but Gerda's thought of roses (the flower most favored by herself and Kai) awakens her from the old woman's enchantment.

**The Crows** (Tame and Prince): who thinks that the new prince of his land is Kai. Tame crow is the mate of the field crow and has the run of the princess's palace. She lets Gerda into the royal bedchamber in her search for Kai

**The Princess:** who desires a prince-consort as intelligent as she, and who finds Gerda in her palace. She helps Gerda in her search for Kai by giving her warm, rich clothing, servants, and a golden coach.

**The Prince:** formerly a poor young man, who comes to the palace and passes the test set by the princess to become prince.

**The Old Robber Woman:** the only woman among the robbers who capture Gerda as she travels through their region in a golden coach.

**The Little Robber Girl:** daughter of the robber hag. She takes Gerda as a playmate, whereupon her captive doves and reindeer Bae tell Gerda that Kai is with the Snow Queen. The Robber Girl then helps Gerda continue her journey to find Kai.

**The Reindeer** (Bae): the [reindeer](#) who carries Gerda to the Snow Queen's palace.

**The Lappish Woman:** ho provides shelter to Gerda and Bae, and writes a message on a [dried cod fish](#) to the Finnish Woman further on the way to the Snow Queen's gardens

**The Finnish Woman:** who lives just two miles away from the Snow Queen's gardens and palace. She knows the secret of Gerda's power to save Kai.

**Narrator:**

BBC Snow Queen:

What did you like?

What didn't you like?

What aspects of this could we use?

What character choices worked? What didn't?

Use this for any notes that will help you with the story.

## Common Characteristics of a Children's Audience

1. Children eagerly respond to justice
2. Children like being frightened-within limits
3. Children are healthily subversive
4. Children are logical
5. Children will respond differently and unpredictably
6. Children make noise during the performance
7. Children respond to action
8. Children don't like to be patronized
9. Children don't like lovey-dovey stuff
10. Children love animals and toys
11. Children love stories

Taken from Theatre for Children by David Wood

## How Children Differ

1. Children enjoy being active participants rather than passive spectators
2. Children, far more than adults, generate a sense of electricity in the theatre
3. Children can become over-excited
4. Children willingly enter the spirit of the entertainment
5. Children can be uncompromisingly direct
6. Children let you know when they are bored
7. Children respond to direct audience participation
8. Not all children respond the same way
9. Children don't always choose to come
10. The composition of an audience for a children's play is so variable

Taken from Theatre for Children by David Wood

## **Ingredients of Good Theatre for Children**

1. Suddenlies
2. Humor
3. Characters
4. Life or Death Situations
5. Language
6. Silence
7. Audience Participation
8. Scale
9. Puppetry
10. Magic within the Plot
11. Colorful look on Stage
12. Lighting
13. Sound
14. Music
15. Mime and Movement
16. Climaxes and Cliffhangers
17. Justice and Fairness
18. Taboos

Source: Theatre for Children by David Wood

## **Stories and Themes that Children Love**

1. Fantasy within Reality
2. Myths and Legends
3. Old Wine in New Bottles
4. Tales of the Anthropomorphic
5. The Quest
6. Toys and Inanimate Objects
7. Real life
8. Contemporary Themes
9. Fairy-tales

Source: Theatre for Children by David Wood

## **TYA/Devised Theatre Experience Survey**

What is your complete name?

How old are you?

What is your favorite food?

What is your earliest memory?

Who is your favorite music group or performer?

What is your earliest THEATRE memory?

Have you ever been to or involved with a children's theatre production? If yes, tell me about it.

What is your favorite movie?

What is the most exciting thing you have done in the past year?

What accomplishment in your life are you most proud of?

What do you want your life's vocation to be (at this time)?

What in life are you most scared of?

Why did you take a TYA/Devising theatre class?

What are you hoping to get out of this class?

What do you expect from me, your teacher?

What are you most looking forward to this semester?

Do you have a song that you feel could be your theme song? If so, what would it be and why?

Write me a story about you: Make sure it has a clear beginning, middle and end.

## Appendix B

### Classroom and Rehearsal Photos

#### Devising Theatre for Young Audiences Class 2017





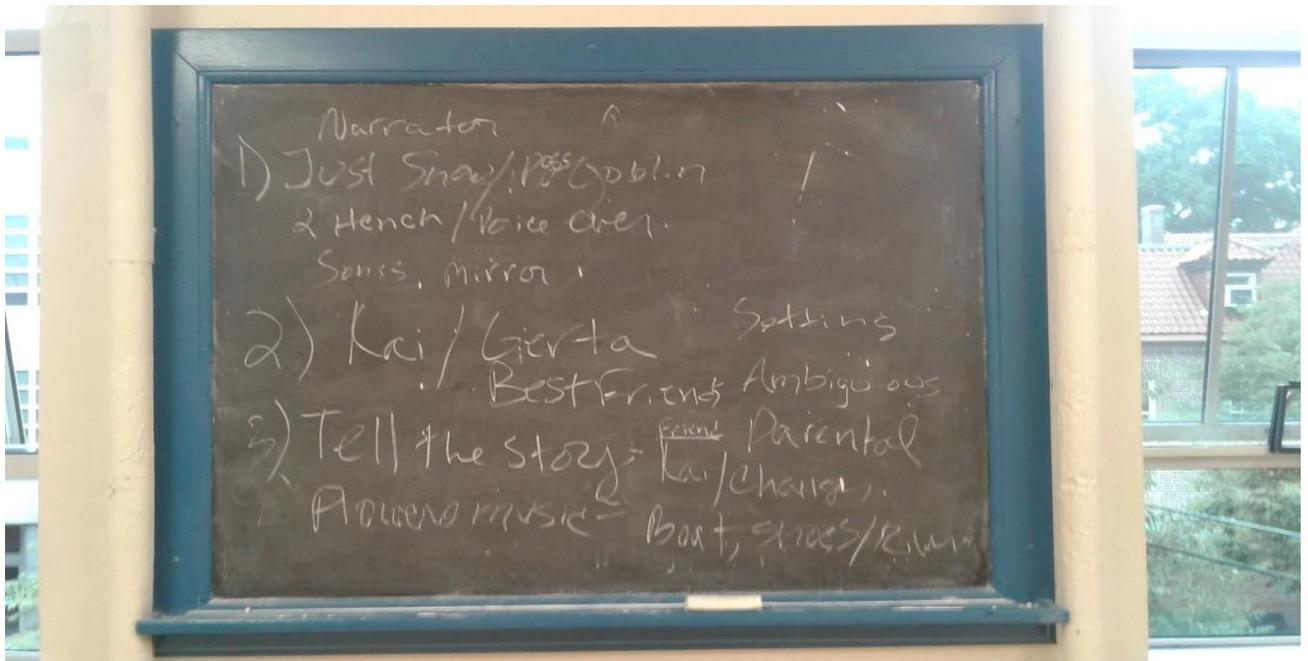
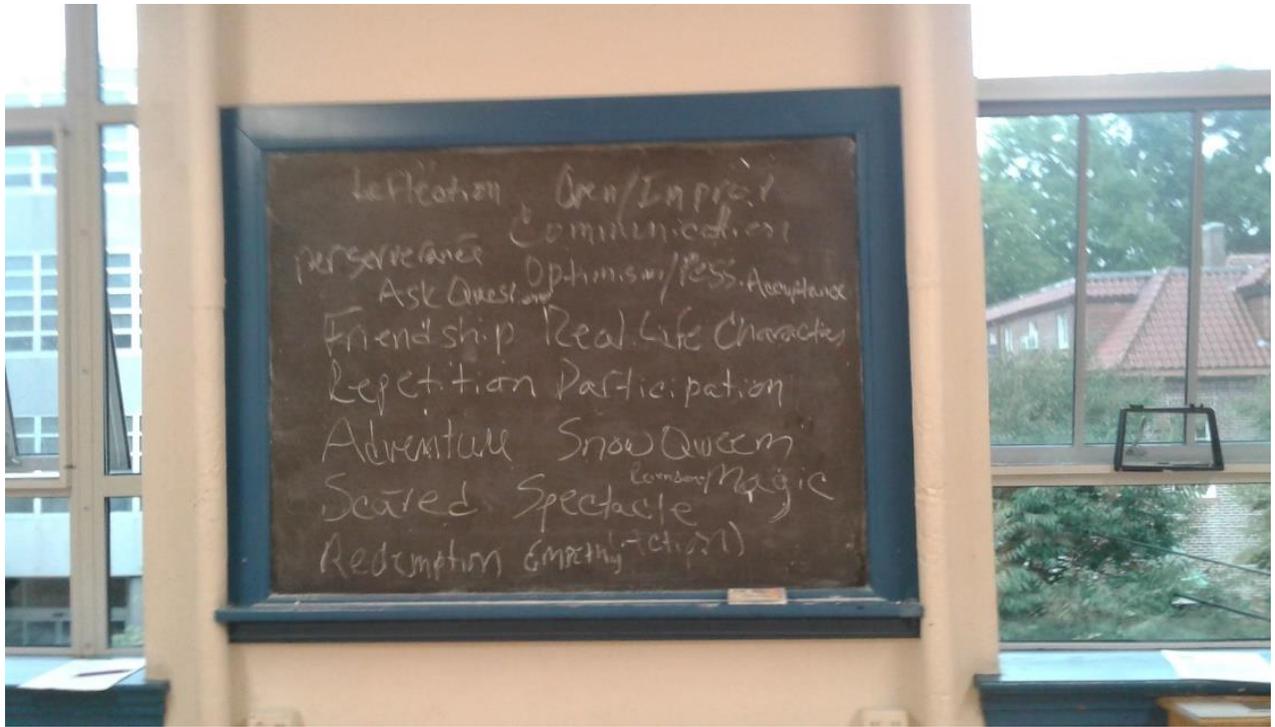


















## Appendix C

### Final Production Script

#### The Snow Queen

#### Written by The Red Brick Collective

*The show begins with all actors walking on a grid. (with the snow lamps) Once Nate arrives and strums a chord, the actors freeze, and after a second pause, they pose in something pertaining to what they do in the show. Nate strums some more, and then introduces story.*

***Narrator:** The Snow Queen by Hans Christian Anderson. (Play the song and while actors are getting set) Do you have a favorite season? Well this is a story about my favorite season, winter, and all the things there are to love about it. It's also a story about how far someone would go to help a friend.*

*He begins playing a jaunty tune and most of the actors scurry offstage, leaving only Alexandra, Dylan, and Anna in balls on the ground. Jacob, Anna Lee, Marcelo, and Annie run on from the back of the house and begin playing in the snow, making snow angels, etc. The four of them build a snowman out of Dylan, Anna, and Alexandra, and take a picture with it. Jacob instigates a game of tag and the music ramps up in speed. In the heat of the moment, Jacob shoves Anna Lee into the snowman, destroying it. Anna Lee, Annie, and Marcelo become angry at Jacob. Marcelo and Annie leave, and Anna Lee stays to give Jacob a look of disappointment, after which she goes backstage.*

*She describes the four sisters, Spring (Anna), Summer (Alexandra, with Dylan as a Rabbit), Fall (Annie, with Marcelo as a cat?), and Winter (Taylor, with Kenn as a goblin). The sisters begin to play, until Winter grows distant. The rest of the sisters leave Winter to go find a place of their own. Winter now has a palace to herself. She looks in a mirror, built by Dylan, Anna, Alexandra, Marcelo, and Annie. She doesn't like what she sees, so she breaks the mirror. She repairs it, and then asks the goblin to take it away.*

*The mother begins to talk about a boy and a girl, Kay and Gerta. These two play together until wintertime. After spending some time outside, they make a snowman, and Gerta offers to get her scarf. After she leaves, a piece of glass from the mirror (Marcelo) strikes Kay in the eye, but not before an argument between Nate and Abbey. Kay ceases to be happy, and Gerta notices the minute she gets back. Kay then pushes Gerta into the snowman, repeating the scene from before.*

*Two bullies (Dylan and Marcelo) show up to hurt Gerta, and Kay does nothing. Gerta is pushed to the ground and the bullies leave. After exchanging a look with Kay, Gerta also leaves. Kay, still on stage, is invited by the Snow Queen to go offstage.*

**Mother:** Ok children. Take a seat.

Well, I suppose it's time for a story...isn't it. (Takes out the Snow Queen Book,) This looks like a good one:

Once upon a time there were four sisters. Spring, summer, fall, and winter. They were the best of friends and did everything together! They played together, they sang together, they danced with each other, they loved each other. They were family. One day, sister Winter started to change. She didn't like playing with the other sisters anymore. When they tried to sing with her, she would turn away, and when they would grab her hand to dance, she would walk away, without looking back. Finally, the other three sisters told Winter that if she really wanted them to leave, they would. (*WINTER MAKES SOME SORT OF MOTION AND THEY ALL LEAVE WITHOUT NARRATION*) That night, Winter went to look at herself in the mirror, and realized what and who she had sent away. In a fit of anger she broke the mirror. (sometimes we do things out of anger that we regret later). So, she decided to put it back together, but it wasn't the same anymore. It became something distorted and she saw all they ugliness and pain in the world. She ordered her goblin friend to take it far, far away, and as he threw it out, everyone began to see things a bit differently (*People look into the shards and are disgusted*).

Meanwhile, there were two children. A boy, and a girl. (*Anna Lee and Jacob put on the Kai and Gerta cloaks*). They were the best of friends and did everything together! They played together, they sang together, they danced with each other, they loved each other. Through spring, summer, fall, and winter. Ah. The first snowfall. Kai and Gerta decided to go play! They made snow angels! They threw snowballs! They made snowmen. But wait! It was missing a scarf! Gerta ran inside the house to grab hers as Kai stood waiting. All of a sudden, a piece of glass from the mirror flew out of nowhere and hit Kai in his heart.

**Narrator:** Ah! It didn't hit him in the heart, it hit him in the eye.

**Mother:** Nope, pretty sure it hit him in his heart.

**Narrator:** No, it didn't hit him in the heart, it hit him in the eye. The heart is what happened in *Frozen*. This is NOT *Frozen*.

**Mother:** Ok his eye. Hit him in his eye. Suddenly, everything changed. (*Kai pushes over the snowman. Bullies come out and tease Gerda*) Kai became a whole new person, with no feelings for anyone or anything. He found he couldn't care about the things he once held so dear. (*Bullies leave. Kai is left alone on stage*)/ A coldness enveloped him--

**Narrator:** --from the shard buried within him.

*(A hand beckons to him)* At that moment, someone beckoned to him. Someone who understood the cold.

*(Kai leaves with the Snow Queen)*

**Narrator:** Days passed and there was no sign of Kai. Gerda was all alone. She knew something was wrong and she began to look for her friend Kai. *(Improv lines on Gerda looking)*

**Gerta:** Have any of you seen my friend Kai?

*(Audience interaction of some sort)*

**Narrator:** She came to a river thinking that maybe it had taken Kai away from her.

**Gerta:** *(She stands on a block and looks into the river).* Did you take my friend, Kai? I'll give you my favorite pair of shoes if you'll return my friend to me. *(Tosses shoes into river)*

**Narrator:** She threw her shoes into the river, but the river gently returned them to her. *(Dylan throws the shoes forcefully)*

I SAID GENTLY.

*CROW caws twice*

**Narrator:** Just then a friendly crow appeared to her.

**Crow:** Hello, Hello! I haven't seen you around here before. What are you doing by the river?

**Gerta:** You can talk??

**Crow:** Of course I can talk! Crows are very intelligent.

**Gerta:** Well, I'm looking for my friend Kai, have you seen him?

**Crow:** What does he look like?

**Gerta:** He has blonde hair and blue eyes.

**Crow:** Wait! And a characteristic nose?

**Narrator:** Characteristic. A word which here means "typical of a particular person".

**Gerta:** Yes yes!! That's him! Have you seen him?

**Crow:** Yeah! I think I saw a boy like that pass by the river just a few days ago. Maybe we can catch up to him if we take the boat!

**Gerta:** What boat??

**Crow:** THIS boat!  
(*Boat appears.*)

**Gerta:** Oh, thank you! This is perfect!

(*Boat begins to move across the stage*)  
(*Anna Lee mimes talking to the crow about her story about her friendship with Kai*)  
(*Garden and house are set up*)

**Narrator:** While they rode along, Gerta told the crow all about Kai.

**Gerta:** And then he completely changed.

**Crow:** That's so strange!

**Narrator:** Eventually, they came to an old cottage with a large and beautiful garden.

**Gerta:** What a large and beautiful garden! I wonder if anyone is home? Maybe they've seen Kai!

(*She runs towards the house*)

**All Flowers:** Hi! How's it goin'? Etc.

**Gerta:** Wow, you can talk too?!

**Tulip:** Of course we can talk! I've never met a flower who couldn't talk. Have you?

**Steve:** (*Shakes head*)

**Violet:** What's your name?

**Gerta:** My name is Gerda! What are your names?

**Violet:** I'm Violet!

**Tulip:** I'm Tulip!

**Steve:** I'm Steve.

(*Old Woman enters*)

**Old Woman:** Oh, hello! Aren't you just the prettiest thing I've ever seen? I've been waiting all morning for you!

**Gerta:** You've been waiting all morning for me?

**Old Woman:** Are you hungry? Please, come sit! I saw that you were talking to my flowers. You mustn't do that, you know. They are very mischievous. Sometimes they say things that they don't mean. Can you promise me that you won't talk to them again, Gerda?

**Gerta:** How do you know my name?

**Old Woman:** Oh, you worry too much dear! Let me go get you some milk. (*She exits*)

(*Anna Lee runs to flowers*)

**Flowers:** Gerda! Gerda! Come over here!

**Tulip:** You need to leave now! This is a dangerous place.

**Gerta:** But I'm looking for my friend Kai! Have you seen a boy come this way?

**Violet:** We haven't seen your friend. There haven't been children here in years.

**Steve:** Children who come here never return home.

**Violet:** That's why you need to leave before she comes back.

(*Old Woman enters again*)

**Old Woman:** Oh my word! What did I tell you? I said not. To talk. To my. Flowers! (*She cuts Marcelo*) There are many beautiful flowers in this garden, but some, some of them, my dear, are weeds! (*Looks to Anna Lee*) Why don't we go sit back down, my sweet?

(*Anna Lee begins to protest. Anna K comes in as crow, attacks Old Woman*)

**Crow:** Gerta, run!

(*While Gerta and Crow are on the way to the palace*)

**Narrator:** Gerta and the Crow escaped from the old woman and found themselves wondering where to look next. Meanwhile, far away at the snow queen's palace... (dream) Meanwhile, meanwhile, back to Gerta and the crow.

**Crow:** Hey, wait a minute! Is that the princess' palace over there in the distance?

**Gerta:** I think so.

**Crow:** My beautiful crow wife works there in the kitchen. She told me that the princess has been inviting men from all over the region in the hopes of finding a husband. Maybe Kai has been there!

**Gerta:** Great, let's go!

**Narrator:** Gerta and the Crow headed off for the palace, but before they could even enter the grounds, an even noisier crow swooped down upon them..

**Mrs. Crow:** Oh Honey! Hi! Oh you just missed it. The princess has chosen a suitor! You should've seen them all in line waiting for her. The first tried to impress her with stunts but he really just embarrassed himself. The second suitor was just too old. Like old enough to be her grandfather. And the third, oh he just smelled. Bad hygiene. But then! A handsome young fellow appeared! The princess saw him and her saw her and oh it was love at first sight!

*(Skipping forward to the palace as Mrs. Crow finishes her story)*

**Narrator:** Gerta ran straight to the palace and forced her way inside.

*(Gerta scares off the guards and runs toward the prince)*

**Gerta:** Kai!

*(Gerta reaches toward Prince and spins him around to reveal that it's not Kai, and that he doesn't even look like Kai.)*

**Gerta:** You're not Kai.

**The Prince:** Who's Kai? Who are you?

**The Princess:** What's going on? What's wrong?

**Gerta:** I'm so sorry. My name's Gerta, and I thought you were my friend, Kai. Someone told me that he might be here and I've traveled so far to find him, but I've had no luck and I'm so tired and hungry and--

**The Princess:** Listen to me, everything is going to be okay, I promise. It sounds like you've had a difficult journey. Before you do anything else, you must get some rest and eat some food. After you are feeling better, we will find a way to help you find your friend. We have a spare bed you can sleep in tonight.

**Gerta:** That would be wonderful. Thank you so much.

*(Princess takes Gerta to her bed)*

**The Princess:** Here we are, honey. Now, you get some rest. Everything will seem better in the morning.

*(Gerta goes to sleep. Guards have their bit where they fall asleep. Dream sequence. Gerta wakes up with a GASP)*

**Gerta:** Psssst. Psssst. Crow. WAKE UP!

**Crow:** Huh?

**Gerta:** I think Kai is in danger. We have to go now!

**Crow:** Okay, let's get out of here!

*(Gerta and Crow leave the bedroom and are greeted by Prince and Princess)*

**Gerta:** Thank you so much for your hospitality, but I've really got to go now.

**The Princess:** Well, you can't go on foot.

**The Prince:** We've prepared a carriage for you.

**The Princess:** And, this cloak will keep you warm on your journey. I wish we could come along to help, but we are needed here.

*(Puts cloak on Gerda)*

**Gerta:** It's beautiful! Thank you so much. You two have been so kind to me and my crow friend.

**The Prince:** It's the least we can do.

**The Princess:** Good luck to you, Gerda. Just believe in yourself, and I know you will be able to find your friend.

*(Gerta hugs Prince and Princess before getting into the carriage, created by members of the ensemble)*

**Narrator:** Gerta and the crow traveled in the carriage for quite some time (keep saying the road on and on until interrupted), until a stranger crossed their path.

**Robber Girl:** Help! Help!

**Gerta:** Stop the carriage!

Are you okay?

*(Annie and Marcelo capture Gerda)*

AHH HELP

-slow mo fight-

*(Skipping forward to the cave)*

**Narrator:** The group of bandits took the captured Gerta and the Crow and took her to their hideout.

**Crow:** Well, this is not an ideal situation.

**Narrator:** You said it.

**Bandit 1:** What a beautiful cloak. This will be a nice addition to our collection *(Takes Cloak)*

*(Annie and Marcelo begin to walk away with cloak)*

**Robber Girl:** *(to Marcelo and Annie)* Wait! Can I try it on?

**Bandit 2:** No! It's ours.

**Bandit 1:** Just go keep an eye on the prisoner! And don't let her out of your sight.

*(Annie and Marcelo exit)*

*(Crow eyes Bae suspiciously)*

**Crow:** What in the world are you supposed to be? Some kind of smelly moose?

*(Bae sticks out tongue)*

**Crow:** And rude too...

*(Other robber people have left and robber girl sulks back over)*

**Gerta:** Hey are you okay?

**Robber Girl:** What do you care?

**Gerta:** You just look sad...That wasn't very nice of them.

**Robber Girl:** I just wish I had someone to play with. Everyone here is mean to me.

*(Bae nudges her, as if to say what about me?)*

**Robber Girl:** Except Bae of course.

**Gerta:** Oh, hello. Nice to meet you, Bae.

*(Bae waves hello)*

**Gerta** ...wait...you don't talk?

**Robber Girl:** Have you ever met a talking reindeer?

**Gerta:** I thought that everything talked here. Crows, flowers...

**Robber Girl:** Yeah, not reindeer. (pause) Where were you going in such a nice carriage anyway?

**Gerta:** I'm looking for my friend. His name is Kai. We used to do everything together. I really miss him.

**Robber Girl:** Did you play games together?

**Gerta:** All the time. We loved to play games and sing and dance, and build snowmen.

**Robber Girl:** I've always wanted to build a snowman

**Crow:** Well if you let us go, maybe we could all build one together.

*(Bae scowls, distrusting the Crow)*

**Crow:** You should come with us. Stealing people's carriages doesn't seem like your style.

**Robber Girl:** *(looking at Gerta... hesitant)* You swear?

**Gerta:** Promise.

*(Robber Girl unties ropes)*

**Crow:** About time! These ropes were wrinkling my good feathers!

*(Bae rolls his eyes and sighs)*

**Robber Girl:** Where is he?-your friend?

**Gerta:** I'm not sure. I was hoping you'd seen him. He's a boy my age with blonde hair and blue eyes.

**Crow:** And a characteristic nose.

**Gerta:** Oh, yeah. And a characteristic nose.

*(Bae begins to gesture dramatically/act out a story. He finishes by pointing downstage right)*

**Gerta:** (not getting that Bae knows) (to the audience) Do you know where he is?

**Robber Girl:** (clears throat) Lady just follow the reindeer.  
(They begin their journey)

*(On their way to Snow Queen's Palace)*

**Narrator:** Gerta, the Crow, the Robber Girl, and Bae set off for the Snow Queen's palace. They journeyed long and hard through icy mountains, pelting rain, freezing winds, and confused audience members. Finally, they arrived at a wall around the creepy palace, and found a hole that led to the inside. Their journey was almost complete.

*(Gerta goes inside)*

**Robber Girl:** Go on, Bae.

*(Bae tries but doesn't fit)*

**Gerta:** I don't think he's gonna fit.

**Robber Girl:** I can't leave him.

**Crow:** Well, I can fit, but I don't think she will.

**Robber Girl:** You're gonna have to go without us.

**Gerta:** Alright. Well, thank you. For everything.

**Narrator:** Gerta ventured bravely into the palace. It was somehow colder inside the palace than out. Claspng her hands for warmth, she went deeper and deeper into the building.

*(Gerta finds Kai in the Snow Queen palace)*

**Gerta:** Kai! Kai! Kai?

*(starts to sing You Are My Sunshine. When he doesn't react, Gerta begins to lose faith. She asks the audience)*

**Gerta:** Can you help me try and wake him up? Please sing with me!

*(As they audience joins her, Kai awakes and joins in towards end of verse)*

**Gerta:** Kai?

**Kai:** Gerta!

**Narrator:** The mirror shard in Kai's eye had melted due to his tears at Gerda's song. He no longer felt nothing but the cold-he felt the warmth of Gerta's friendship surrounding him. Just then, The Snow Queen entered the room and saw Kai and Gerda embracing.

*{Snow Queen: Sound of Loud Evil Laughter and Fierce winds....Sound scape}*

**Narrator:** She saw the strength of Kai and Gerta's friendship and it made the cold well up inside her. With her magic she threw Gerta across the room. As she went to freeze Gerda into a statue....

*(Snow Queen enters and grabs Gerta, taking her upstage left)*

**Gerta:** Kai! Help!

*(Kai runs over and snatches the Snow Queen's necklace right off her neck. Snow Queen dying/losing powers or whatever sequence occurs.)*

**Kai:** No, You will not freeze my friend!

**Narrator:** Kai ran forward to pull the Snow Queen Away from Gerda, and as he tried to stop her, he pulled the necklace off her throat. When it was ripped away, the Snow Queen began to vanish piece by piece by the remnants of the shattered mirror. ...until there was nothing left of her but her crown.

**Kai:***( Looking at the necklace still in his hand)* She's Gone?

**Gerta:** Kai, let's go home.

**Narrator:** And so, Kai and Gerta left the palace of Ice and snow, and headed home, bidding farewell to Bae and Crow and the Robber-Girl and thanking them for their help. Gerta told Kai all about her adventures to find him including talking flowers and the kind Prince and Princess. The further they traveled from the palace, the more a distant memory this adventure seemed. When they got back home...

*(all take off the cloaks and return back to the present-day children, and the story goes back to Abbey with the book saying the same words as Narrator)*

*Transition back to Mother*

**Mother:** When they got back home, they sat by their cozy fire, happy to be friends. Kai was grateful to have a friend who would go to the ends of the earth for him, and Gerda knew that having the real Kai back was worth everything she sacrificed. And although it was cold outside, it was summer in their hearts.

*(Close the book)*

*(Boy and Girl look at each other and smile)*

**Mother:** Now are you ready to go back out and play? Don't forget your scarf!

*(The Boy winds the scarf around the Girl's neck, and The Girl pulls a hat on The Boy's head. They run out to where everyone else is playing out in the snow, and they build another snowman. Just at that point they see a familiar person)*

**Snow Queen:** That snowman could use a scarf. Here, take mine. Are you from the nearby village? I've been gone for a while, but I'm so glad to be back.

*(She winds the scarf around the Snowman and then looks up at the snow with happiness of a child on her face.)*

*Everyone Freezes, and the snow lights shine and for a minute everyone is frozen in a tableau from something that happens earlier in the play, with The Boy and Girl in the middle, looking at each other.*

*(While everyone starts to move in slow motion behind Narrator)*

**Narrator:** And so, the Snow Queen's reign had ended and friendships and hearts were mended. Seasons come and go and bring spring rain, warm winds and falling leaves. But every time snow falls, it seems that the earth is once again, just for a moment, a place of magic.

*Lights fade down.*

*Company Bow-Then the Sunshine Song :)*

The End

## Appendix D

### Production Photos and Materials





























































Program



The Red Brick Collective Presents:

# The Snow Queen

November 8th at 10am

# Cast

|                       |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Alexandra Bern.....   | Robber Girl      |
| Taylor Dawson.....    | Snow Queen       |
| Marcelo Guzmán.....   | Prince           |
| Anna Katogiritis..... | Crow             |
| Abbey Kincheloe.....  | Mother/Old Woman |
| Nate Lief.....        | Narrator         |
| Anna Leonard.....     | Girl             |
| Dylan Marcuson.....   | Bae              |
| Annie McElroy.....    | Princess         |
| Kenn Pridgen.....     | Goblin           |
| Jacob Todd.....       | Boy              |

*Actors will portray multiple roles*

# Creative Team

|                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Mary Lennon.....     | Creative Team            |
| Hannah Land.....     | Creative Team            |
| Cooper Sved.....     | Creative Team            |
| Emily Hambridge..... | Production Stage Manager |
| Havy Nguyen.....     | Assistant Stage Manager  |
| Emma Bilski.....     | Community Outreach       |
| Ben Zasimowich.....  | Lighting Designer        |
| Kenn Pridgen.....    | Costume Designer         |
| Nate Lief.....       | Composer                 |

# **What is Devised Theatre?**

The Red Brick Collective was born from a Devised Theatre for Young Audiences class. Devised Theatre is a process in which the whole creative team develops a show collaboratively. From actors to technicians, everyone is involved in the creative process.

## **Special Thanks**

Thank you to all of the wonderful people who helped to make this production possible.

Josh Chenard, Jane Mattingly, Mr. Marcuson, Janel Miley, Timmy Nguyen, Mat Nicholson, Wes Seals, and the TheatreVCU Costume Shop

## **Vita**

Mary C. Lennon was born June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1973 in a small suburb outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. After getting her B.A. in Theatre and Communications from Susquehanna University, she returned to Philadelphia and worked at Allen's Lane Theatre. She then moved to Boston, Massachusetts where she received her M.A. in Theatre Education from Emerson College, while working in the Education Departments of the Huntington Theatre Company and The North Shore Music Theatre and student teaching at Brookline High School. She then became the head of theatre at Urbana High School in Ijamsville, Maryland, and spent the next twelve years building a thriving theatre department directing three shows a year. In May 2018, Mary will graduate with her M.F.A. in Performance Pedagogy from Virginia Commonwealth University. During the past two years, Mary has taught multiple classes at VCU including Directing II, Introduction to Stage Performance, Effective Speech and Devised Theatre for Young Audiences. She has also facilitated workshops on devising at the Virginia Theatre Association conference and the Southeastern Theatre Conference in Mobile, Alabama, and will be presenting on the topic this August at Association of Theatre in Higher Education Conference in Boston.