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Critiquing the Critic: A Case for Journalistic Criticism in the Theatre

Tara Nicole Haas

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Critiquing the Critic: A Case for Journalistic Criticism in the Theatre

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This thesis suggests that journalistic theatre criticism is a necessary and vital aspect of the theatre, promoting a healthy theatre community and culture. A healthy theatre community is supported by critics and artists alike, and is one where citizens are excited about the theatre, desiring to participate and engage with it often. It is one where artists and spectators listen, respect, and trust one another, being open to opinions and suggestions that may enhance and improve the theatre community. A healthy theatre community strives to provide theatre that may be multi-faceted in purpose, but allows for opportunities to challenge, uncover, teach, or simply entertain to become magnified, creating transformative experiences within the viewers. In the most utopic state, healthy theatre causes epiphanies that provide glimpses of a better world, one where individuals and societies may know peace. These interactions, with the magic that theatre can bring, may benefit communities on a level ultimately akin to changing the world. Journalistic criticism supports such healthy theatre by increasing interest and viewership, contributing to the theatre's growth, and recognizing ways in which it can utilize its deepest potential.

In this thesis, I have performed qualitative and action research in order to evaluate myself as a critic. The thesis also explores how criticism functions in our society and, further, how it should function. I have analyzed various theatrical reviews I have written, and placed them into three sections, each representing a distinct element of theatre criticism. These elements comprise the most fundamental and vital functions of a review that leads to a healthy and improved theatre community. These sections are: "Increasing Promotion," "Honest and Specific Feedback," and "Emphasizing Social Justice." Grouping the reviews into these sections, I will identify how I have contributed to the field of theatre criticism, and to these three realms in particular. I will also be able to recognize and indicate how I can progress as a critic to help support the field of journalistic theatre criticism. This thesis is very insular, personal, and beholden to me, presenting distinct limitations. The value of this work lies primarily in giving aspiring critics the opportunity to learn from my experiences and insights. Above all, this thesis holds value because of the improved critic I have become from completing it, ultimately able to better serve people in my writing for years to come.

Keywords: theatre criticism, journalistic criticism, critic, review

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“We live in an age which is very frightened of value judgements [*sic*]; we even flatter ourselves as being somehow superior if we judge less. Yet no society can exist without ideals. The confrontation between an audience and a dramatic action therefore asks each spectator either to agree or disagree with what he sees and hears.”

–Peter Brook, *Theatre Criticism*¹

Journalistic theatre criticism can be viewed as an accessory to the theatre, an adjunct profession that is loosely tied to the art. This thesis argues that journalistic criticism is less of a service to the theatre, but an indispensable and necessary aspect *of* the theatre. Theatre critics are needed and valuable, contributing to the development, sustainability, and improvement of a healthy theatre community. As a critic, one that considers herself more of a theatre artist than a journalist, I want to share my experiences and discoveries with other theatre artists. This thesis takes an insular approach, examining experiences that are uniquely my own. While this poses limitations, the thesis is meant for critics and theatre artists who may “eavesdrop” on the conversation, allowing their opinions and knowledge of the profession to expand, and their practice to become improved and enlightened.

As a critic, I write about theatre and review productions because I have an immense adoration for the theatre. I desire to share that love with others, and to see the theatre’s success. I have hope in the theatre’s ability to provide life-altering and deeply efficacious moments, not easily produced elsewhere. Theatre criticism can directly aid in the making of such moments,

1. Irving Wardle, *Theatre Criticism* (London: Routledge, 1992), 33.

and makes the theatre community of which it is apart stronger. Theatre is an important art form for individuals to involve and occupy themselves with because of these moments and experiences, and as such can be a central part of communities. It is because of this that theatre criticism is imperative, and needed to create the healthiest of communities. Though my passion may seem excessive, it is my wish that as these beliefs are further explored and examined throughout this thesis, the reader may experience and understand a portion of my enthusiasm.

Due to the fact that critics potentially sit through countless flawed productions, it makes sense to conclude that a critic may become disenchanted over time, and that this passion as I have described it will wane. In his book *The Critics' Canon: Standards of Theatrical Reviewing in America*, Richard H. Palmer states that “a degree of genuine devotion to theatre protects somewhat against this disenchantment. *New York Post* critic Clive Barnes describes critics as ‘informed enthusiasts.’”² Supportive critics are these ‘informed enthusiasts’ who are able to remain positive because of their deep love for the theatre. This love and euphoric excitement keeps critics engaged in their work, hopeful of what the theatre can achieve.

EXPLORING THEATRICAL MAGIC: A JUSTIFICATION FOR CRITICISM

There are many theatre artists and scholars who explain the potentiality of the theatre, having been touched by the power and emotion of it. I share much the same sentiment as theorist and critic Jill Dolan does in her book, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre*. Dolan argues, “live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture

2. Richard H Palmer, *The Critics' Canon: Standards of Theatrical Reviewing in America* (Westport: Greenwood Press, Inc., 1988), 15.

fleeting intimations of a better world.”³ These intimations may provide insights that have the ability to change people, ultimately offering moments that have the capacity to change the world. Theatre historian Marvin Carlson, beautifully states his similar feelings and experience with the theatre in the following quote:

I also have experienced moments of such intensity that they might be called *epiphanies*...theatre is perhaps particularly well suited as an art to generate such moments because it constantly oscillates between the fleeting presence and the stillness of infinity... Such moments will be different for every theatregoer, but I feel certain that we all have them, and treasure them. In an art that lives by, and survives largely in, the memory, such experiences have served me as touchstones, as permanent reminders of what I have been seeking in a lifetime of theatergoing.⁴

Carlson’s passion, hope, and belief in the theatre remind me of such epiphanies I have had while watching a performance. Engaging with the theatre has shaped my life, and I can credit specific shows or moments within them that have helped to shape my personal ideologies and beliefs, either by reaffirming feelings that I already possess, or by providing new modes of thought, realizations, or epiphanies. Engaging in enough moments such as these supports Dolan’s theory of the theatre being able to reach a utopic state.

The theatre is unparalleled in offering experiences that may alter the human perception, allowing the individuals involved to have cathartic moments that may otherwise never be realized. Because theatre artists and critics have more than likely experienced this wonder and

3. Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005), 2. By using this quotation, I am not implying that Dolan would support the kind of theatre that gives me hope for my views of a better world.

4. *Ibid.*, 5.

enchantment in the theatre and have learned of the magic the theatre holds, they want to share it with others. Theatre critic Irving Wardle's simple, "obstinate conviction that sitting in the dark for two hours watching people pretending to be someone else could do you good" is at the heart of all professions in the theatre, and I would imagine that this is fundamentally why we are all involved.⁵ Critics certainly write and are able to remain positive because of the love they have for the theatre, the hope they have for it, and the desire to share this with others. Richard Steele, arguably establishing himself as the first journalistic critic for the theatre in 1709 after he created the famous literary journal, *The Tatler*, defends the critics' intentions when he says, "It is a very good office one man does for another when he tells him the manner of his being pleased."⁶ As a critic, I enjoy complimenting actors, directors, and designers on their accomplishments in providing theatrical magic, and in hopefully providing encouragement for these theatre makers to continue their pursuit.

As 'informed enthusiasts,' critics support the theatre by ensuring and promoting its future. Wardle states, "[a critics'] starting motive is the same [as artists']: they write notices, as other people write plays, because they can do it."⁷ While I believe most theatre critics have been involved in the theatre helping to mount a production in some capacity, and that this is a pronounced qualification, it is not necessarily essential. A critic's skills lie most heavily in analyzing and evaluating what is in front of them. After critiquing many shows, a critic has gained necessary practice to recognize which elements and techniques work on stage and which do not, possibly even with more ease than a director, making them qualified to judge. A critic becomes one because the specific skills are suited to them and they recognize the value in

5. Irving Wardle, "What is Theatre For?" *Intelligent Life Magazine*, July/August, 2013.

6. Wardle, *Theatre Criticism*, 23.

7. *Ibid.*, 36.

criticism as a necessary aspect of the theatre, just as important as directing, design, and dramaturgy.

One of the values of theatre criticism lies in the larger conversation that occurs because of it. Dolan verifies this, while also effectively defending the critic:

Critics—good, professional critics—are experts... Many of us are experts in particular kinds of theatre and performance... But that doesn't make me *superior* to the work about which I write. I don't want to stand above the work. I want to see myself in conversation with what it means, how it feels, what other people thought about it, what it *does in the world*.⁸

I greatly admire the humility Dolan presents while still asserting her credibility. Criticism as conversation is immensely important, as reviews will never reach their potential or function as the helpful aid they can be if they are not discussed. Being a critic is much more than providing feedback and opinions and then walking away. Critics want to see how the criticism functions, and hopefully see the benefits from it. Similar to what we ask of the people and productions we review, it is also crucial for critics to be open to criticism about our reviews in order to learn the most useful elements to include, and how they best help to aid and build up the theatre. Dolan also states, "We rely on reviewers and their idiosyncratic reports of what they see not only to reconstruct the content and form of a given performance, but also to gain at least a glimmer of how it might have made the audience feel."⁹ Without the critic, this valuable insight may be lost. Missing out on the critical discussions surrounding the theatre, which are perpetuated by criticism, is reprehensible.

8. Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. 2nd Ed. (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2012).

9. Dolan. *Utopia in Performance*, 9.

Some scholars and writers claim that criticism is an act of love, or a service to the theatre and those creating it. While I argue that criticism is more than a service and that it is indispensable, these viewpoints certainly support the value and importance of criticism. Dwight Garner of *The New York Times Magazine* said that “Criticism doesn’t mean delivering petty, ill-tempered Simon Cowell-like put-downs. It doesn’t necessarily mean heaping scorn. It means making fine distinctions. It means talking about ideas, aesthetics and morality as if these things matter (and they do). It’s at base an act of love. Our critical faculties are what make us human.”¹⁰ Garner’s sentiment is on point, leading to the conclusion that criticism can help us feel more alive as humans as individuals and communities think and discuss said criticism. Performance theorist and critic Ann Daly describes dance criticism, in which we can easily replace ‘dance’ with ‘theatre.’ She states,

Criticism is a gesture that carries the dance beyond its curtain time, extending it to readers near and far, present and future. Criticism transfigures dance into a much larger, discursive existence...criticism...is about sorting out the morass of perception into something orderly and interesting. It’s about discerning relationships and making meaning...[C]riticism takes a deferential position.¹¹

Criticism indeed expresses esteem and respect for the theatre in its desire to improve the wellbeing and strength of the art. Both Garner and Daly discuss criticism as being much more than a superficial review that simply tells those involved in the production what they did well and what was flawed. Criticism moves beyond that, sparking modes of thought and action that could be infinite.

10. Dwight Garner, “A Critic’s Case for Critics Who Are Actually Critical.,” *The New York Times Magazine*, August 15, 2012.

11. Dolan. *Utopia in Performance*, 9.

Theatre criticism holds numerous possibilities. Above all of these is the creation and support that it provides to the health of the theatre and the theatre community. Journalistic criticism is the most beneficial way to ensure the profusion of present and future healthy theatre. A healthy theatre community is one where citizens are excited about the theatre, desiring to participate and engage with it often. It is a place where artists and spectators listen, respect, and trust one another, being open to opinions and suggestions that may enhance and improve the theatre community. A healthy theatre community strives to provide theatre that may be multi-faceted in purpose, but allows for opportunities to challenge, uncover, teach, or simply entertain to become magnified, creating transformative experiences within the viewers. In the most utopic state, healthy theatre causes epiphanies that provide glimpses of a better world, one where individuals and societies may know peace. These interactions, with the magic that theatre can bring, may benefit communities on a level ultimately akin to changing the world.

In healthy theatre communities, there is always room for growth and improvement, and critics can be a great asset in increasing the vitality and strength of the theatre. Because theatre criticism holds such a high potential, it is vital to raise awareness of its value and importance. Critics and theatre artists must understand the purpose, usefulness, and significance of criticism so that a positive discourse surrounding theatre criticism can be promoted. Journalistic criticism must be embraced as a helpful and necessary tool in the theatre to ensure its vigor. As theatre practitioners desire to share their art and the messages it carries, the value of criticism lies in the increased capacity to do just that.

In this introduction, I will examine what I believe are the three most fundamental and vital functions of a review and the role of a critic, why critics and theatre artists should care about these aspects, and how these elements accomplish the larger goal of theatre criticism

leading to a healthy and improved theatre community. The first chapter, “The Critic as an Archivist: A Model for Increased Promotion,” discusses how theatre criticism aids in the promotion of a theatrical piece, as well as supports the theatre community in general. This chapter also explores the critic as an archivist, using theatrical reviews to record theatre history. The second chapter, “The Critic as a Sounding Board: Interpreting Honest and Specific Feedback,” addresses the importance and purpose of honest and specific feedback within reviews, and why theatre artists should be receptive to criticism. Finally, the third chapter, “The Critic as an Advocate: Placing Emphasis on Social Justice,” will inform how and why reviews should emphasize social justice by analyzing themes, morals, and values presented within a production. I will end with a project description where I will outline my critical approach for my entire thesis.

THE CRITIC AS AN ARCHIVIST: A MODEL FOR INCREASED PROMOTION

The first and foremost way a critic promotes a specific show is simply writing a review. The old adage that “all press is good press” can be debated; however, it is true that even a negative review increases awareness and publicity. With the advent of the Internet and social media, reviews are posted online and can be circulated widely and quickly. This has the ability to reach many people who otherwise may have had no idea about the run of a show. Critics are helping to get the word out, making people aware of local productions in their area. Even the most basic “armchair” reviewers who may post as little as a few words on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook can help to accomplish this and have an impact on journalistic criticism. These types of short, often amateur, reviews do help to inspire people to attend the theatre, and also allows them to join in a conversation about it, supporting and popularizing the theatre all the

while. I have recently had experiences of people approaching me, saying they attended a film or became interested in a play because of a review or even simple comments I have posted on Facebook. Subsequently, we were able to discuss the value in these works, and why we felt they were important. As an advocate for the theatre, I think it is always beneficial for people to more frequently engage with the theatre and evaluate what they are viewing, and professional and amateur critics alike are helping to aid in this process on a much more broad scale than before.

Beyond informing, the next key step in which a critic supports the theatre is actually encouraging people to attend the local productions. This is done primarily through a recommendation within the review. While good reviews should reflect a critic's opinion throughout, a definitive recommendation statement, such as "must see!" could be incredible for the publicity of the show, promoting increased viewership and ticket sales. In addition to making general recommendations, critics can also make a recommendation to a more specific audience. Critics often recommend a show to particular group of people who they believe will most enjoy the show, or warn others to stay away. This generates a more specific target audience to attend, creating a better experience for all involved and aiding in the overall success of the production. By doing this, a production will attract the people who can gain the most from it. Additionally, potentially upset or angry patrons who may not be pleased with the subject material, for example, can be avoided. Ultimately, these recommendations communicate to readers which shows they would most enjoy.

These recommendations within reviews are important not only for a particular production, but for the theatre as a whole. Due to the abundance of professional and non-professional theatre, it would be impossible for a person to attend everything, even if they wanted to. Going to the theatre (in relation to this thesis, this means attending plays and musicals

or other theatrical pieces) can also be an expensive hobby. Potential patrons need voices they can trust so that they can pick and choose what shows they will attend as to not waste their time or money. The possibility of a patron refusing to attend the theatre because they have become upset with the productions they have chosen to see would be detrimental to the theatre financially, as well as from a social and moral standpoint. I assume most critics and directors want people to think positively about the theatre and attend as much as possible. More important than using criticism to bring in money for a theatre company is using it to increase people's excitement in the theatre, and getting people more involved in their community.

A critic can accomplish this objective by providing readers with all that they need to know to be able to make an informed decision about attending a show. Critics are needed to advocate for the theatre more than the casual spectators in part because of the acquired skills discussed earlier. Theatre professor and director Richard Palmer argues:

A successful critic embodies the tastes of the audience but also challenges the reader by being slightly more perceptive and demanding than the typical playgoer. To the extent that a critic is an experienced theatregoer with a developed set of standards, who has taken the time to acquire background on a specific production or the theatre in general, the review serves an important educational function for the less practiced or less informed audience.¹²

Concerning the critic as an employed professional, it is their job to ensure they have gained the knowledge necessary to write informed and accurate pieces that will best serve the reader, more so than the casual audience member that the reader may come in contact with.

12. Palmer. *The Critics' Canon*, 11.

Due to the immediacy of the theatre, criticism is important as a form of documentation. Unlike other forms of media that live on essentially forever, such as films or musical recordings, the theatre is fleeting. Written plays may last, but performances and the magic that happens on the stage is lost after a production closes. If an individual does not see a production during its run, he or she will never be able to see it the same way again, with the same cast, director, and designers. Bertolt Brecht, indisputably one of the theatre's most influential theorists, playwrights, and critics, said of his work, "what they say about my plays doesn't matter, my plays will survive the critics, but what they say about my productions matters very much because what they write is all that posterity will know of the subject."¹³ Brecht, who made this statement while at the Berliner ensemble after establishing his post-war career, makes a robust claim for the critic's work, and the significance of reviews being a method of recording history and productions, becoming archives. Some of what is lost after a production's run may be saved and protected by a review. While a review cannot preserve a performance, it can provide insight into what took place, letting readers in the present or future know of an actor's portrayal or a director's concept. I know that the actor Bradley Cooper, for example, provided a memorable performance in the recently-closed *The Elephant Man* on Broadway, not because I saw it but because of what critics wrote about it. One example written in the *New York Times* by Ben Brantley states, "Even if you can't identify the man onstage [Cooper] as the one who starred in the blockbuster "Hangover" film franchise, you're always aware of the sheer, looming presence of him. He is, as he should be, the elephant in the room."¹⁴ In this way, critics and reviews are

13. Wardle. *Theatre Criticism*, 13.

14. Ben Brantley, "A Chance to Stare. So Go Ahead. Bradley Cooper in The Elephant Man on Broadway," *The New York Times*, December 7, 2014.

constructing theatre history. Recorded moments, thoughts, and feelings of the critic that provide insight into a particular theatre piece may someday become invaluable.

Because theatre criticism so heavily influences the promotion of the theatre, it is directly supporting the art form. Palmer declares that, “Over time, an influential critic can improve theatrical standards by educating an audience to a level of taste more receptive to ambitious theatre and less tolerant of mediocrity.”¹⁵ By helping encourage more people to attend the theatre and discuss it, criticism allows a healthy theatre community to develop and flourish.

Communities are then able to develop their own standard of mediocrity and rise above it, strengthening the community in the process. By embracing their role as ones who help support, promote, and record the theatre, critics will cause nourishing theatre to thrive and prosper, allowing theatregoers to experience the art forms deepest potential.

THE CRITIC AS A SOUNDING BOARD: INTERPRETING HONEST AND SPECIFIC FEEDBACK

While the previous section focused on how the theatre and its artists benefit from reviews that promote theatrical work by informing and serving the audience, this section explores how reviews serve artists, productions and theatre companies directly. Feedback in reviews is crucial, and is provided largely for the purpose of aiding current and potential future productions. If a production is given immense positive feedback, then support and promotion is of course increased. When feedback is negative, unhelpful, or insincere, problems may occur, such as a director shaming the critic or review, or not being able to use the information provided. These problems are obviously undesirable, and a critic must work to provide the most helpful feedback

15. Palmer. *The Critics' Canon*, 11.

as possible. When critics offer valid, kindly phrased negative feedback, its importance is equal to positive feedback.

Despite the boost that may come from positive feedback, zealous and overindulgent compliments or criticisms do not serve much purpose within reviews. Reviews are meant for audiences as well as theatre companies, and both deserve honest evaluations. A critic's role is not to simply carp or praise, but to provide honest and specific feedback that can hopefully be used to aid and improve a production. In order to improve the health of the theatre, a critic must address the weaknesses and strengths within the production so that the cast and crew know what is working and what can be improved upon. As long as a critic appears credible, backing up claims and providing specific examples, as well as remaining kind and professional, negative or undesirable feedback should be appreciated and considered.

Unfortunately, feedback often goes unappreciated, and worse than that is the contempt that a person may feel for the critic who offered the feedback. It is natural to experience feelings of sadness, anger, or even hatred when someone responds negatively to something you have put countless hours, energy, and soul into. However, critics do not write what may cause pain for the sake of doing so. In the process of creating enriched theatre, it is a critic's responsibility to provide honest feedback, useful enough that it may actually be applied. Personally, whenever I write a negative review I feel a pang of sadness, because I can empathize with what it may feel like on the other end. However, I understand that this is the necessity of the business and it is essential if my goal is to promote healthy theatre. Every time I arrive at a theatre to review a production, I wish for the show's success so that I can write a glowing review. Unfortunately, not every production earns an outstanding notice. I would hope that those working in the theatre might acknowledge that not all productions are great, regardless of how much hard work was

spent. By being receptive to criticism, one can learn from it and ultimately create productions that better support a vibrant theatre community.

After a critic has provided polite and helpful feedback in the form of a review, it is the duty of the cast and production team to decide for themselves their feelings about it, and whether or not they choose to utilize or dismiss the feedback. Palmer takes the position that “only foolish directors would alter a production to respond to offhanded criticism with which they disagree, but a perceptive and well-defended review deserves attention and may motivate important changes.”¹⁶ Palmer recognizes that there may be elements within the production that are too concrete or complicated to alter, even if rightly criticized, but “potentially articulate, informed, and disinterested criticism” allows for reassessment where applicable.¹⁷ A director may discern the credibility of the critic and depending on whether or not she feels the critic’s feedback would aid this production or future works, she may decide to heed the critic’s comments.

Ultimately, a review deserves attention and should be carefully considered. When working closely on a show, it can be easy to become too attached and potentially blind to issues that may occur. It is then helpful to have a new, fresh, and unconnected set of eyes assess what may not be working or ideals that are not shining through. An educated or experienced critic may see things that others might miss and that could potentially enhance the production, so being accepting of their insights can be exceedingly rewarding. Concerning theatre companies, Palmer states, “While it may not modify a specific production in response to a review, a resident theatre

16. Palmer. *The Critics' Canon*, 14.

17. *Ibid.*, 14.

company has a high potential for responding over time to constructive criticism.”¹⁸ A critic’s role can be to improve theatrical standards by educating and informing.

Fundamentally theatre is a hard business, and anyone involved should be open to, and even expect, negative criticism and rejection. It is simply the nature of the occupation that not everyone will always like what you as a theatre artist are doing, and that you will not be hugely successful in all of your endeavors. However, stifling the critics’ voices also prevents the knowledge and growth that contributes to a healthy theatre community. To disregard negative criticism is just as foolish and dangerous as blocking out the positive. Just like positivity is needed to gain confidence and purpose, the constructive criticism is needed to grow, further succeed, and reach full potentiality. Even “Brecht still relied on the hit-or-miss response of reviewers to transmit his work to the future.”¹⁹ A critic can help their work become more accepted by offering indispensable and insightful feedback while being kind, respectful, and open themselves to criticism of their evaluations or writing. A respectful working relationship between the critic and the director is crucial for journalistic criticism to fulfill its potential and benefit the theatre.

Building respect and mutually accepting criticism is key to ensuring the success and future of robust theatre. Criticism holds value in allowing an outlet for critics, spectators, and theatre makers alike to discuss their feelings and opinions that are evoked by a theatrical production. New York Times theatre critic Charles Isherwood has declared, “although artists and critics are hardly natural allies, a vigorous public discourse about theater — and that necessarily means an assessment of its quality — is vital to the health of the art form that

18. Ibid.,15.

19. Wardle. *Theatre Criticism*, 13.

supports them both.”²⁰ Recognizing that critics are attempting to uphold and maintain a healthy theatre community is the first step in realizing that we are all working together to elevate the theatre. Critics must strive to reinforce this image, proving their worth to the theatre by cultivating a healthier and improved theatre community.

THE CRITIC AS AN ADVOCATE: PLACING EMPHASIS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE

I recently had a conversation with one of my professors about her experience seeing a production of *Catch Me If You Can* at a popular local theater. While the production aspects were of a high quality, with impressive directing and design elements, she disliked the show because of the way it portrayed women and gender roles. She revealed her opinion that this show is fundamentally bad for society because it encourages harmful messages. This conversation caused me to reflect on if I had written a review for this production if I would have reveled in the design elements and acting, or if I would have pointed out the potential negative effect the production might have on the viewer. I came to the realization that my review probably would have been the former, focusing on judging how well the production came together. Although I often think about theatre as a platform in which social issues become exposed, I had never quite thought about this implication situated within criticism before that moment.

Since then, I have grappled with the idea of using theatrical reviews to further expose social injustices that the theatre may bring to light. As someone who wants to promote healthy theatre that strengthens communities, these are the very issues I should be concerned with. In thinking about how altering my reviews and view of criticism would be beneficial to the theatre, I have come to a conclusion that journalistic criticism may not only benefit the theatre, but can

20. Charles Isherwood, “Theatre Talkback: A Hot Ticket on Broadway and a Cold Shoulder to Reviewers,” *The New York Times*, December 3, 2012.

better society as a whole by exposing themes that are insalubrious, having the potential to infect a healthy community. Therefore, critics' need to address issues of social offenses, such as prejudices and bigotries, within a review, pointing out shows or moments within them that could be harmful to the viewer or the society of which they are apart. Considering the example of *Catch Me if You Can*, only filling the review with praise would increase its popularity and endorse ideas that could adversely shape society.

Looking at the aspects involved in a play or performance beyond the production value, I have considered the question of how criticism can focus on the themes, morals, and values presented in the play. Because reviews can expose what ideological beliefs structure a production, and how those beliefs could cause harm, it is important that they do so. Therefore, looking solely at production value may be detrimental. If journalistic criticism is truly about bettering society through healthier communities, it is important that the principles and messages depicted within the plays, and how they are represented, are evaluated.

Exposing theatre that is potentially harmful to a society is deeply important because of the power that the art form actually holds to reflect and mold society. Throughout history, people have looked at theatre as a way to shape their understandings of society and the world they live in. Playwright and historian Friedrich Schiller argued that, "the stage acts more powerfully than morality or law."²¹ If this is true, theatre has the power not only to shape society, but to also reconstruct it, potentially creating a better world. If negative issues, such as gender inequality, are perpetuated within the theatre, the future outlook is not good. We must be providing theatre that is socially conscious to alter common notions and perceptions that may be damaging. Philosopher Herbert Marcuse wrote, "Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to

21. Friedrich Schiller, "The Stage as a Moral Institution," 1784.

changing the conscienceness [*sic*] and drives of the men and women who could change the world.”²² When people view art that supports the social constructs they are familiar with, these constructs are reaffirmed, whether they be good or bad. Theatre is most successful, however, when people instead have the sort of epiphanies Marvin Carlson discusses. These are the moments in which an individual can assess how society is functioning, their place therein, and if changes need to occur. These contemplations are the first step in actually effecting social change by motivating people to action. Thought of in this way, a critic’s role to continue and extend conversation after a production becomes an integral duty.

Criticism maintains more value when it addresses issues that go beyond the common production elements that are so often analyzed. Literary critic Terry Eagleton sums up the history of literary criticism in a way that aligns similarly to that of theatre criticism. He poses,

In the early eighteenth century, to risk an excessive generalization, criticism concerned cultural politics; in the nineteenth century its preoccupation was public morality; in our own century [1900s] it is a matter of ‘literature’...it is arguable that criticism was only ever significant when it engaged with more than literary issues – when, for whatever historical reason, the ‘literary’ was suddenly foregrounded as the medium of vital concerns deeply rooted in the general intellectual, cultural and political life of an epoch.²³

If criticism is most significant when it engages with more than a production, then a critic has a responsibility to explore a more social and global realm. They must call attention to the types of shows a company is producing that are helpful or hurtful for the theatre and its audiences. In this way criticism becomes more of a political function, increasing its importance not only for the sake of the art but for a much larger purpose. Jill Dolan supports this, saying, “I see and write

22. Dolan. *Utopia in Performance*, 20.

23. Terry Eagleton, *The Function of Criticism* (Great Britain: The Thetford Press Ltd., 1984), 107.

about performance with hope for what it can mean politically, but also affectively, through my faith that emotions might move us to social action. That is, I believe that being passionately and profoundly stirred in performance can be a transformative experience useful in other realms of social life.”²⁴ Dolan’s conviction that the transformative experiences caused by the theatre can be transferred outside of the theatre is a reflection of how the art form has the ability to impact social change. If this is true, and I believe it is, writing about these experiences becomes vastly important in encouraging positive changes within society.

Critics need to write about social justice and use their work to actually make a difference. Regardless of the size of the impact, if a critic can influence social change on any level, even if this means touching one person that may then have the ability to affect society, he or she will have succeeded as a critic. Using criticism to further expose what the theatre is trying to do, what it isn’t doing, or what it is doing harmfully, increases its validity as a needed companion to the theatre.

ANALYZING THE FUNCTIONS OF CRITICISM: A CRITICAL APPROACH

As opposed to a traditional research based thesis, this thesis will be using qualitative research and action research in which I will consider and evaluate the work that I have been doing throughout the Theatre and Media Arts MA program at Brigham Young University. Specifically, I will be analyzing the reviews that I have written over the last two years in order to assess how my personal work in the field illustrates and exemplifies the three respective functions of criticism that I have laid out. Grouping the reviews into three representative sections, “Promotion,” “Honest and Specific Feedback,” and “Social Justice,” I will identify how

24. Dolan. *Utopia in Performance*, 15.

I have contributed to the field of theatre criticism, in these three realms in particular. I will also be able to recognize how I can improve as I progress as a critic in order to fully incorporate my goals as I see them. Each section will look at six reviews of productions from various companies in Utah, as well as a few out of state.

After careful consideration, I have placed each review into the specific section in which it best fits. I chose this placement through close readings of each review, while trying to remove myself from them as the author. Using Roland Barthes' theory from his 1976 essay "The Death of The Author," I have attempted to separate myself from the literary work in order to measure them more intuitively. Barthes' essay argues that examining the intentions of the author conflict the actual work itself, thus literary works should be interpreted as separate entities, as to not be given unneeded meaning or become limited in meaning. For the purpose of honest evaluation and understanding my reviews as they are, not as I may have meant them, I have tried to avoid becoming bogged down by my personal authorial intent, biases, experiences, or writing style. I say I attempted this because it is profoundly difficult to separate oneself from one's own work. I am sure that in critiquing my reviews, I was not able to be as fully objective as I would have been if the author was unknown, though I did succeed in being able to recognize the material I was looking for and determining its importance. To be sure I was accomplishing this as accurately as possible, I also had another person perform close readings of each review, pointing out the specific examples that would fall into the specific categories. Because this person was someone other than myself, he was able to more fully form a disconnect from me as the author, allowing him to honestly assess the work as it is on the page and provide new insights, much like the journalistic criticism I am discussing.

While finding that most reviews do in fact depict examples in all three categories, I have considered at what amount this occurs, as well as the weight of the statements in each category. Because of the consistent structure my reviews follow, it seems they all inherently contain more instances of feedback than those of the other categories. This causes the placement of these reviews to be not solely based on the volume of the occurrences that depict each section, but also on the importance and significance of the statements. This means that if a review contains a lot of feedback, for example, but functions more effectively as a promotion for the production, it will be placed into section one, "Increasing Promotion." In each review, I will provide specific examples that demonstrate how it fits into the assigned section, validating the decision.

From this study, I will not only see where I have succeeded in these three distinct functions of criticism, but also where improvement is needed. Further, I will then be able to consider what the reviews say about my practice comprehensively, or possibly what is lacking in it. Also significant in my evaluation will be discovering a probable natural progression of how my reviews have changed as my focuses and schools of thought have shifted.

To provide a brief background for my reviews before we begin examining them, I began writing for the Utah Theatre Bloggers Association (UTBA) nearly a month or two after I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Theatre Arts from Utah Valley University in 2013. Soon after, I began the Master's program in August of the same year at Brigham Young University. Since then, I have written reviews consistently, one every month or two. Most of these have been published with UTBA, though there are a few I have written purely for school purposes and also for the critics institute at the Regional Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (ACTF), which I have attended twice. After discovering that my most fitting and valuable contribution to the theatre would be as a journalistic critic, I have found a dedication and passion

for the profession. As such, I have been able to construct my enthusiastic manifesto that ‘theatre criticism promotes healthy theatre and allows it to flourish.’ At its core, the purpose of this thesis is to evaluate my progress as a theatre critic in relation to my self-proclaimed manifesto. Also important is to share this belief with theatre artists and other critics who will hopefully support and embrace the value of theatre criticism.

CHAPTER 2

INCREASING PROMOTION

Promoting a show is one of the most effective ways to increase ticket sales and viewership. Critics help to do this by informing the public about the local shows in their area through writing reviews. These reviews ought to communicate enough information that a potential patron can decide if a show is worth their time and money. Critics encourage people to see the productions that would be best suited for them by targeting specific groups of people that would enjoy a particular piece (such groups may include families, conservatives, casual theatregoers, those that love political satire, for example), as well as providing specific recommendations and information about a production. Critics can also promote shows that are especially well suited for the community of which they are part, supporting the theatre and strengthening communities by bringing people together with the arts.

Some of the particular ways that a critic informs, communicates, and encourages in reviews is in the way he or she writes. Catchy and descriptive titles and compelling word choice throughout have the ability to easily alter one's prospective interest in the show at hand. A critic that also makes clear and explicit recommendations in a review will help readers gauge if the show is one they will enjoy. This is more than simply letting the reader know the production is well done, but informs the reader of certain styles or themes that might interest them. While reviews are usually written broadly, recommendations are specific. By including recommendations that identify target audiences that would most appreciate a production, and potentially warning others to stay away, a review may help a reader judge if they fall into the subset of people to whom the recommendation is directed. A review can also include things that

may draw a reader to it such as awards and nominations, and any famous or notable people involved. These are the elements I will be examining in this group of reviews, pulling specific examples of each.

LANGUAGE AND TITLES

If promotion is to be most beneficial, critics must hone their skills to write well-structured reviews with the use of carefully chosen and descriptive language. Along with writing technique, how a critic chooses to talk about or describe something in a show matters, and is certainly a reflection of a critic's credibility. This has been demonstrated to me while reading some of the older reviews I have written. I have found some to be almost painful, and have been tempted to edit each one before compiling them together to make them sound better and more mature. However, I know that this would not be beneficial, and would even be contradictory to what I am trying to accomplish. Through this process, I have re-examined the importance that reviews must be well written and respectful, to allow theatre criticism to be most helpful and to allow the critic to become more fully trusted and validated.

It is incredible how one or two words can change an entire phrase, altering the meaning or intent. In my review of *Vincent in Brixton*, I refer to Vincent Van Gogh as having "mental issues." Looking back, I cannot believe I ever said that. I wrote this particular review for a competition at ACTF, and I remember being heavily influenced by the competition and the judges. I was trying to find my voice and infuse humor into my writing, even where it may not have been appropriate. I have since learned that is not my particular writing style and that this type of description is disrespectful and unprofessional. Luckily, that review was written very early in my writing career and was never published.

Examples of where I better promote a show through word choice are usually because of descriptive words about the production. I describe *Vincent in Brixton* as “well crafted,” “a magnificent story,” “extremely gripping,” and “truly a breathtaking production.” In *The Plain Princess* review, I label it as an endearing production. The *Barefoot in the Park* review reveals that “I laughed out loud”, explaining how humorous the production was. My review of *Much Ado About Zombies* argues, “visually, the show is spectacular.” All of these descriptions compliment the performances, greatly upholding those involved and the companies that produced the shows.

Titles such as “A Sweet and Loveable PLAIN PRINCESS;” “Utah Valley University masterfully achieves VINCENT IN BRIXTON;” and “A Surefire Country Hit at the Grand with ALWAYS...PATSY CLINE,” all indicate positive reviews immediately from the beginning, catching a reader’s attention and hopefully encouraging them to want to read more. Such definitive titles capture the quality of the production instantly, and establish the first step in encouraging the public to attend.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND TARGET AUDIENCES

Most of the reviews that fall into this group are fairly positive. Some are more mixed than others, such as *Much Ado About Zombies*, and *Grant and Twain*; however, they all receive positive recommendations. The most highly recommended is *Barefoot in the Park*, in which the review provides readers with the statements, “a pleasant experience for those looking for a humorous and relaxing night at the theatre,” and “with a strong cast and excellent direction, this fun, feel-good production is worth the night out.” Although there is not a strong recommendation

for a specific target audience here, the statements imply what type of theatregoers would most enjoy this show.

Stronger examples of reviews that identify specific target audiences are in *The Plain Princess*, *Always...Patsy Cline*, and *Grant and Twain*. Respectively, they are recommended to families, concert and country music lovers, and “mature audiences...interested in...American History.” Much like the *Barefoot in the Park* review implies the audience to be the casual or comedy-loving conservative, these reviews imply to the reader that if they do not fall into one of these groups, this show may not be something of interest. My review of *Always...Patsy Cline* does this well by directly stating “This show is perfect for anyone who likes concerts and country music. However, if country music is not your thing, or you prefer more traditionally structured musicals, this may be the show you decide to skip.”

Much Ado About Zombies and *Vincent in Brixton* could have included stronger or more specific recommendations. While *Much Ado About Zombies* says, “If you enjoy Shakespeare, zombies, and/or steampunk, this innovative play is the perfect show for you...this show is a great date night or friendly activity for the Halloween season that is upon us,” I should have been more clear in the distinctions between Shakespeare and zombies, for example. If a reader likes both they would potentially enjoy the show; however, a more seasoned theatregoer that may only enjoy Shakespeare on that list would most likely not enjoy this production. Hopefully, the remainder of the review would be enough of an indication as to whether or not a specific reader would enjoy the production. In the review for *Vincent in Brixton*, on the other hand, I never actually provide a straightforward recommendation. Although the review contains many compliments and highly positive statements such as, “how pleasant it is to experience a performance that can captivate and audience in such a way as this did...This is a show that will

not be easily forgotten,” a definitive recommendation is missing. This is another disservice to this review, as I still recall this production as being one my favorite plays I’ve seen.

AWARDS AND PEOPLE

The only review that references an award is *Grant and Twain*, which received the “prestigious Edgerton Foundation New Plays award.” This is given weight in the review, hopefully increasing the play’s appeal. Though not an award, the “chart topping hits” of Patsy Cline are referenced in that specific review, causing them to stand out to anyone who recognizes them. My review of *Much Ado About Zombies* makes overt references to director Eric Samuelson and playwright Becky Baker. As these writers are both from the area, readers who know them or are already familiar with their work may now have increased interest in attending. This is similar to the reference to Phyllis McGinley in *The Plain Princess* review, as she is the author of the children’s book upon which the play is based. People who are familiar with this book or any other of McGinley’s works are sure to become automatically more invested.

Including all three of these categories in a production review, where applicable, is essential in promoting a particular production or theatre company. By keeping people engaged and coming to the theatre, communities are strengthened and theatre becomes a more central part of it. Reviews that encourage readers what specific productions to attend are significant in establishing more vigorous and contemplated theatrical standards within a community. In this way, communities may become more aware and strive for a healthier theatre community, allowing the theatre to be an increasingly stronger and more influential art form.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEWS:

A Sweet and Loveable PLAIN PRINCESS

February 13, 2014 – By Tara Nicole Haas

LOS ANGELES – Weber State University's endearing production of *The Plain Princess* is bound to entertain the children in your life, and exudes a message of the importance of inner beauty, a nice reminder for children and adults alike.

The Plain Princess, a musical adaptation of Phyllis McGinley's children's book of the same name, tells the story of the young princess Esmeralda (Lindsay K. Blackman) who is perceived as plain in her kingdom, as well as bossy and demanding. Princess Esmeralda has seemingly everything she could ever wish for, but has been made snooty and churlish because of it. Through the use of a Mary Poppins type character, the Princess learns that what is inside is reflected on one's exterior. If inner beauty exists, it is bound to show through.

Blackman's delightful performance holds an audience's attention from beginning until end, providing many moments of humor and amusement. Watching Blackman transform on a powerful journey throughout the piece is the most wonderful aspect of the production. As a great family friendly show, I recommend taking your little ones to see Weber State's charming and fun production.

Utah Valley University Masterfully Achieves VINCENT IN BRIXTON

February 14, 2013- By Tara Haas

Nicholas Wright's *Vincent in Brixton*, the beautiful story of Vincent Van Gogh before he became an artist and his relationship with a woman battling depression, is at its core, simply a love story. An endearing love story with a lot of depth.

When I think of Vincent Van Gogh, I naturally think of his Impressionist paintings and view him as a pretty artsy guy, with possibly (okay, let's be honest,) definitely some mental issues. It's hard not to remember the story of the man who cut off his own ear, which he afterwards gave to a prostitute. It's also hard to deny this same man the incredible talent he possessed. It was so interesting to view an interpretation of Van Gogh in another light, and see how he might have been before he ever began his career.

Set during the three year span from 1873-1875, Van Gogh would have been in his early twenties. The play chronicles his time in Brixton, England, and is based on real people and accumulated from found letters that Vincent wrote to various people during that time, of course with the playwright's creative understanding to shape the piece. The new play itself tells a magnificent story and is well crafted, though it is very simple, in context and in language. This could potentially be a setup for disaster, but actors at UVU ensure that this is not the case.

The acting in this production did not fall short. James Mckinney's portrayal of Vincent was astounding. This is an actor that you can watch and know he was meant for the stage. He was able to transform his simple lines into little bits of entertainment. His depiction of Vincent was innocent and charming, and I could instantly make an emotional connection with the character.

This was also true for his counterpart, Ursula, played by Elizabeth Golden. She was raw and

honest to the role, leaving herself completely vulnerable. I revered seeing the dynamic in her character, going from complete extremes of giddy happiness to the darkest pits of depression. I willingly went on this roller coaster ride with her and yearned for us both to get off safely. Applause must be given to these two leads, as their performances were real and extremely gripping.

Unfortunately, Mckinney and Golden completely overshadowed the rest of the cast. Although the other acting was still quite good and provided nice contrast and buffer characters for the two leads to play off of, I found myself not caring about them or their part in the story. It was also these characters that brought me out of the story at times, either because of a faulty accent or the exposing of a very fake looking baby prop. This was especially difficult to stomach because all of the other props in the show were very authentic. I must say too, despite how good the acting was, even between the lead characters, there was a definite problem with the volume of the lines at times. Some of this was projection issues, but mostly the actors did not know how to account for audience laughter and their lines were buried in the sound because they did not pause.

Overall, *Vincent in Brixton* is truly a breathtaking production. All of the design elements worked together to enhance the show and the glimpse of *Starry Night* at the end brings a sense of homecoming. How pleasant it is to experience a performance that can captivate an audience in such a powerful way as this did. This piece accomplished a huge feat in theatre, in that the audience member's thought process does not end when they leave the lobby. This is a show that will not be easily forgotten.

A Surefire Country Hit at the Grand with ALWAYS... PATSY CLINE

May 8, 2015 - By Tara Nicole Haas

Salt Lake City – Ted Swindley’s *Always... Patsy Cline* has swept the nation since its debut in 1988, much like Patsy Cline herself in the 1950’s and 60’s. Directed by Richard Scott, the Grand Theatre’s production is top notch, providing a fun experience that honors a legacy.

Always... Patsy Cline pays tribute to, of course, the famous “Queen of Country Music,” Patsy Cline (Erica Hansen). The musical is made up of songs that are almost entirely those of Patsy Cline, including chart topping hits such as “I Fall to Pieces” and “Crazy.” The musical not only recalls Cline’s music, but offers an inside look into a special friendship with one devoted fan, Louise Seger (Toni Byrd), before Cline’s untimely death in 1963.

Reprising the role of Patsy Cline, Erica Hansen is fabulous. She has an incredibly fun energy about her that is enticing. It is clear she is gifted in the art of performance and is a natural on stage. Even though I am not a huge country music fan, Hansen’s performance made me want to listen and engage with her. As a professional vocalist, Hansen’s smooth voice is perfect for the role of Patsy Cline, reflecting the old country genre very nicely. Hansen is limited within her character, however, in that she does not have much opportunity to act beyond the singer persona she is portraying. This is largely due to the structure of the musical being set up more like a concert than a traditional musical. Although I see the value in this, I wished for a little bit more connection with the character.

Toni Byrd as Louise, on the other hand, was able to create a very distinguished character. As the story is told primarily through Louise’s memories, Byrd was excellent at painting a picture for

the audience through her acting. Her strong body language and facial expressions truly depicted the descriptive text, and I could always vividly imagine what she was describing. It was also impressive to feel the extreme excitement Byrd portrayed as an impassioned fan. As the show's protagonist and seemingly true central character, Byrd provided most of the comedy in the show with her sassy and humorous personality. She was equally as fun and energetic as Hansen, and the pair made a great team. My favorite moments were when both characters were onstage, engaging with each other where you could see their friendship bloom, such as when they were dancing around Louise's kitchen. Both actors skillfully embodied the characters they created. Whether or not Hansen, for example, truly personified Patsy Cline, I cannot say, though it was refreshing to see such notable talent.

Both Hansen and Byrd were great at getting the audience involved and building an exciting rapport. With some audience participation and the frequent absence of a fourth wall, the two actors were able to interact with the audience and generate a very lively environment. With the accompaniment of the impressive live band on stage, The Bodacious Bobcats Band, I consistently found myself tapping my foot and feeling the urge to dance and sing, both of which were permitted at times. The band also emitted a brimming energy that matched Cline's vocals perfectly. There seemed to be a good balance between fast and slow songs throughout the show, providing plenty of active moments and then those that were relaxing and thoughtful.

From pictures that I have seen of Patsy Cline, Hansen certainly looked the part thanks to hair and make-up design by Yancey J. Quick and costume design by Thad Hansen and Amanda Raiser. I enjoyed how Louise's costume remained the same throughout the show as she recounted the story, while Patsy's changed frequently to transport the audience to a different moment in time.

Recommendations for *Always...Patsy Cline* are easier than most. If you're a fan of Patsy Cline, this is definitely a show you do not want to miss. This show is also perfect for anyone who likes concerts and country music. However, if country music is not your thing, or if you prefer more traditionally structured musicals, this may be the show you decide to skip. Although it is very well done, it may not be for everyone. I did already state that I am not a huge country fan myself though, and I was able to have a fun and enjoyable time at the Grand Theatre's polished and professional production. It was also enlightening to see a glimpse into the life of the famous musician whose music has inspired many, and whose career was undoubtedly cut too short.

Always... Patsy Cline runs May 7-28, Thursday-Saturday, at 7:30 p.m., with Saturday matinees at 2:00 p.m. The show plays at the Grand Theater at Salt Lake Community College (1575 S. State Street, Salt Lake City). Tickets are \$14-20. For more information, visit the-grand.org.

GRANT & TWAIN

February 9, 2013 - By Tara Nicole Haas

SALT LAKE CITY – Salt Lake Acting Company’s world premiere of *Grant & Twain*, directed by Keven Myhre, is a dramatically charged look into the latter half of the 19th century, with focus on two of America’s great men in history, Ulysses S Grant and Mark Twain.

Grant & Twain begins late in Ulysses S. Grant’s (Marshall Bell) life, after his role of union general in the Civil War and 18th President of the United States has passed. After being swindled out of all of his money in a Ponzi scheme, Grant is beginning to lose his admiration in the public eye, adding to his hardships. He is then solicited to write his personal memoirs, which he believes can help bring him out of his financial slum. He becomes invested in his memoirs and receives immense help from his unlikely and loyal friend Mark Twain (Morgan Lund), the famous American novelist. The story focuses on their lives and friendship in the late 19th century, while including flashbacks to the Civil War and Grant’s time as General.

Grant & Twain, a new play written by Elizabeth Diggs, received the prestigious Edgerton Foundation New American Plays award. We are now privileged to see this play in our very own Salt Lake City, making its world premiere with Salt Lake Acting Company. Diggs’ script proved to be well written with strong characters and a sensible structure, although there was one moment in particular that was strange and pulled me out of the world being created. This was when Grant was baptized, and we hear a voice-over of the priest. As Mrs. Julia Dent Grant (Kathryn Atwood) stood at the front of the stage interacting with this voice, I felt confused as to why this style choice was occurring because it does not fit with the rest of what has been created in this play. On the other hand, a very strong tactic that Diggs employed was the use of flashbacks in

the story. This broadened the understanding of the audience, helping them to see why Grant is the way he is, and where he is pulling his material from for his memoirs.

The acting in the show was quite impressive overall, though I will come right out and say that it was apparent that the two lead actors were stumbling over their lines throughout the entire show. This was especially a problem with Bell, who had many instances where he struggled with his lines. I have to say I was disappointed to see this from a professional company, as I would have expected the actors to be completely memorized and prepared. Overlooking that, I did appreciate the strong acting from both Bell and Lund. From what the playwright included in the program, as well as my personal knowledge of these two characters, the actors seemed to portray the men quite accurately, mirroring their true personalities. They established these personalities very well creating strong, honest characters. I very much enjoyed seeing the contrast between the two, as they played very different characters. Grant was very reserved and always kept his morals a high priority. Twain was the opposite, so it was always fun to see Lund jump into the scene, energizing it with his active and humorous personality. Lund also had great stage business, making his character intriguing and exciting to watch. I felt Bell's strong points were how seamlessly he was able to transition from his very sick character to his earlier self in the flashbacks of the war.

Grant & Twain is built on relationships. Along with Grant and Twain, there are also strong connections between Grant and his wife, and Grant and his servant, Harrison Terrell (Brien K. Jones.) Grant and Twain obviously share a strong bond, with the actors having a nice chemistry between them, depicting their true friendship. Unfortunately, I wished for more chemistry with Bell and Atwood. It was clear that the couple was in love and cared for each other deeply, but I felt there was something missing from their portrayal. Even though I could see that the two were

in love, I could not fully believe it. Atwood did a marvelous job unaccompanied though, and particularly represented the character's sadness superbly. There were moments when you could literally see her face fall and melt into despair. Her apparent naivety is also heartbreaking. Bell and Jones, on the other hand, did have a nice chemistry and I was genuinely aware of their friendship, and how they cared for each other. Both Bell and Atwood depicted their characters as immensely loyal to Grant, emphasizing love as a theme in the play.

All of the design elements come together skillfully in this production. Set design by Keven Myhre is fairly simple, but of high quality with period set pieces that provide an accurate depiction of what Ulysses S. Grant's house would actually look like. This is also true of the costume design by K.L Alberts, giving the entire production a realistic touch. The lighting (design by James M Craig) was pleasantly subtle, and did a very nice job aiding with the scene changes and helping the audience know the time of day. This was needed in understanding the quick scene changes. The projections were also very nice in this production in establishing the setting and year we are experiencing during the flashbacks. The sound design by Josh Martin also aided the show in a similar way the lighting did, helping the audience know when a flashback or the present time was taking place.

Grant & Twain is largely a high quality production, providing a valuable look at American history. The play recalls the hardships of war and the life of a military leader. It also teaches us the value of meaningful, deep relationships. I find it inspiring that because Ulysses S. Grant wrote his memoirs, we now have this history, and I commend the playwright for capturing this on stage. I would certainly recommend this production to mature audiences interested in this topic of American history. *Grant & Twain* is an intellectual drama, and the casual theatre goer may not be incredibly intrigued with the content of the piece.

Grant and Twain plays Wednesday through Saturday at 7:30 p.m. and Sundays at 1 and 6 p.m. through March 2nd, in the Upstairs Theatre at Salt Lake Acting Company (168 West 500 North, Salt Lake City.) Tickets are \$24. For more information visit <http://saltlakeactingcompany.org/>.

A Matchless MUCH ADO ABOUT ZOMBIES at the Covey Center

October 25, 2014 – By Tara Nicole Haas

PROVO – Directed by Utah’s renowned playwright, Eric Samuelsen, Shakespeare’s classic comedy receives a dramatic retelling at the Covey Center for the Arts, just in time for Halloween.

Much Ado About Zombies, based on Shakespeare’s famous *Much Ado About Nothing*, is a new play written by Provo’s own Becky Baker. This adaptation melds Shakespeare’s language and well-known characters with zombies and steampunk, making it quite the transformation. Set in an imagined past in Italy, the play is not bounded by history or reality, but is moved into the realm of the fictional. Zombies become characters and the science fiction of a steampunk world is all encompassing.

Much Ado About Zombies does in fact stay true to the original story, even with all the additions. The focus is still on the four lovers, Beatrice and Benedict, and Hero and Claudio. Hero and Claudio easily make the decision to be wed, while Beatrice and Benedict struggle to reveal their feelings to each other. Because of circumstance and much trickery, conflict ensues between the couples, but in the end, everyone is joyous and celebrate by dancing. Baker’s new script demonstrated this plot naturally and understandably. While most of the language is pulled from Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing*, other lines and verses are used from some of Shakespeare’s’ other works. There is also some modern vernacular interspersed throughout. I felt this mixture worked well and came together quite seamlessly to create a modern and creative retelling. The way in which the zombies were worked into the script was also well done. Being familiar with *Much Ado About Nothing*, it was clear that in the beginning, the citizens of the

town arrive home from the war as Zombies. At this point, most are killed, but some survive and end up living and interacting with the townspeople. This is very confusing at first, but as the play progresses, we see a capacity for the zombies to become humanized again, and therefore accept them as members of the society.

The most impressive aspect of this production was certainly the design elements. Visually, the show is spectacular. Set designer, Daniel James, was able to bring the steampunk world to life with his metallic gear filled set. The Proscenium arch was covered with a collection of metal pipes and pieces, which included spinning gears. Along with this, there was also a great deal of fog produced on stage. Both of these elements emphasized the notion of a world powered by steam, before the advent of modern technology. The costumes, designed by Lisa Kuhni, were equally impressive, with all of the actors looking the part. Makeup designer, Laryne Lawson, created fantastic makeup to match the costumes. The zombies appeared realistic, while not having utilized too much gore. This was a great choice, in that the focus of the play could still remain on the original storyline. The eccentric and imposing sound design (uncredited) played an integral part in bringing the world to life, along with the set design. The techno/electronic mixes seemed to fit perfectly into the specific world being created. Lastly, Pam Davis's lighting design brought mood to the production and created an atmosphere in which steampunk and zombies could easily exist. Rarely do all design elements come together so perfectly in a community theatre production. All of these elements helped to pull the audience into the fantasy, making it that much more believable.

While the acting in the production was somewhat mediocre, the definite standout of the piece was Barrett Ogden, playing Benedict. Ogden seemed to have a wonderful grasp on classical acting technique, enticing the audience with his crisp speech and broad gestures. His acting was

able to clearly emphasize his feelings and motivations, causing me to form the biggest connection to him. I was also pleased to see his very clever switch to a Commedia Dell' Arte style while wearing a mask of the like during the ball scene. Ogden and Ashley Lammi (Beatrice) emanated a great chemistry together as they tried to confess their love to each other. The scene where Beatrice asks Benedict to kill Claudio (Carter Peterson) is particularly powerful. Because of their great chemistry and skilled acting, you can see each character truly struggle, causing an emotional reaction from the viewer. Peterson's performance was also well done, particularly his tremendous portrayal of transformation his character experiences throughout the play. Another actor I thought was especially talented was Kristen Perkins as Conrad. There is a certain skill that is required when performing classical works such as Shakespeare, and much like Ogden, Perkins exemplified this skill very well, and I greatly enjoyed her character.

Most of this production came together well, though there were a few shortcomings. While director Eric Samuelson succeeded in many ways, there were moments in the production that did not reflect the rest of the show. The two biggest of these that stand out to me are when Benedict asks the audience to borrow a cell phone, and the zombie rock band. Both of these moments were humorous, though they were nonsensical and too out of place. Suddenly Benedict breaks character to address the audience, asking for a cell phone to take a picture, out of context of Shakespeare's or the steampunk world. While this ultimately could work, it is never explained. Ogden skips off stage with the cell phone, never to bring it up again. A similar issue occurs with the zombie rock song. The rest of the play did not set up this scene enough in order for it to make sense within the world. Along with these aspects, there seemed to be an over-the-top amount of

sexual innuendo that was too overtly expressed. Some quips and gestures provided humor, but in expressing the same joke quite blatantly over and over again, it becomes flat and repetitious.

Despite the few imperfections I have mentioned, this production is over-all a success worth seeing. If you enjoy Shakespeare, zombies, and/or steampunk, this innovative play is the perfect show for you. Given the spookiness zombies provide, this show is a great date night or friendly activity for the Halloween season that is upon us.

Much Ado About Zombies plays Monday through Saturday, October 24- November 1 at 7:30 p.m. at the Covey Center for the Arts (425 W. Center St, Provo.) Tickets are \$14-16. For more information visit coveycenter.org.

A Charming and Hilarious BAREFOOT IN THE PARK at the Hale

January 8, 2015- By Tara Nicole Haas

Orem – Neil Simon’s classic romantic comedy receives a charming telling at the Hale Center Theater Orem. A pleasant experience for those looking for a humorous and relaxing night at the theatre.

Barefoot in the Park looks in on the lives of a young, newlywed couple just returning from their honeymoon and learning how to live together as husband and wife. While at first infatuated, they soon learn that marriage is perhaps not all that it is cracked up to be. The couple struggles to find things in common due to their opposite personalities. The husband, Paul Bratter (Jason Sullivan), is a “stuffed shirt” type, who prefers order and logic in all things, while his wife Corie (Kelly Coombs), is adventurous and eccentric, preferring to live in the moment. When Corie’s mother, Ethol Banks (Karen Baird), comes to visit, Corie all too eagerly decides to play matchmaker and set her up with the very friendly and spontaneous upstairs neighbor, Victor Velasco (Mark Pulham). Hilarity and conflict soon ensues, all leading toward a touching happy ending.

As Corie Bratter, Coombs, reminiscent of a young Kristen Chenoweth, plays her role in a delightfully bubbly and giddy manner, never missing a beat. Her energy is infectious and carries the first act of the show. As the show progresses, her character becomes quite mean and bitter, though Coombs is still able to easily fit these different personalities into the guise of one multi-dimensional character. Sullivan opposes Coombs’s character nicely with his down to earth nature and wit. He did seem to stumble over his lines quite a bit in the first act however. Because I saw this show a week into the run (an unusual occurrence), this does leave me to be concerned with his preparation. Luckily, this issue did seem to resolve itself the longer the show continued.

Where the two leads really shone was in their chemistry together. Beginning with a solid romantic and sexual chemistry as a true newlywed couple, the audience might be convinced of their relationship as being a real one off-stage, which of course is not the case. This chemistry only became stronger in the later acts, creating the most honest moments while the two are fighting and arguing, and then as the show is resolved at the end. Because of the small cast and premise of the play, this chemistry is conceivably the most important and commendable thing for these actors to accomplish. Similarly, Coombs and Pulham's infectious chemistry was strong and realistic, and a humorous joy to watch. Pulham was also a standout in the production, having created a solid and incredibly amusing French character. It was a delight every time he was on stage.

While the show did contain its slow moments, it did succeed in being very comical. There were moments I laughed out loud, a feat that is fairly rare during live theatre. Simon's script is packed full of funny lines and little anecdotes, and director Dave Tinney seems to have a talent for bringing them to life. Each cast member was able to emphasize these moments of humor by implementing their unique character personalities. Also notable was the great blocking and placement of the characters at all times during the show. Every seat seemed like it could have been the best in the house, something often tricky with thrust staging.

The scenic design by Bobby Swenson was very effective in helping the audience visually sense the apartment, although the actual set was fairly simple. This provided plenty of room for the actors on the small stage, without taking away any needed elements of the setting. Most impressive was the New York City skyline that appeared outside the couples' apartment, constantly reminding the audience of the height and location of the apartment. Cody Hale's sound design was also simple, though a nice and needed touch. In a show like this with long

transitions between acts and scenes, the sound design can be very important. In this particular case, the sound helped to lift the mood during these transitions, keeping the audience entertained and engaged with the show. I often found myself tapping my foot at these times, instead of getting bored.

Overall, *Barefoot in the Park* was delightful, with very little to improve upon. A commonly told and modest story, *Barefoot in the Park* is your classic romantic comedy that is satisfyingly heavy on the comedy. With a strong cast and excellent direction, this fun, feel-good production is worth the night out.

Barefoot in the Park plays Monday through Saturday, February 7, at 7:30 p.m. at the Hale Center Theater Orem (225 W. 400 N., Orem). Tickets are \$16-22. For more information, visit haletheater.org.

CHAPTER 3

HONEST AND SPECIFIC FEEDBACK

While reviews are written for potential spectators, they are also intended to help the producing theatre companies better understand their final product. Providing a company, director, or cast and crewmembers with honest and specific feedback is one of the most important things that a review can do. Theatre companies deserve honest feedback, and it is a critic's responsibility to provide them with such, along with specific examples detailing when or where certain strengths or weaknesses occurred within the production. This way the feedback can be interpreted and hopefully used to aid and enhance the production or productions in the future.

Critics that contribute to a healthy theatre community will provide honest and specific feedback by being true to the theatrical standards that they hold, meaning that they maintain their beliefs of what makes a strong or weak production. They evaluate each production fairly and in accordance to those beliefs. Critics should then communicate those opinions honestly, while always referencing the claims they make with particular examples from the production. They will also provide feedback in many different aspects of a performance, so that the review is balanced and the director, actors, and designers all benefit. From evaluating all of my reviews in this thesis, this trait is what embodies them the most. The reviews in this section all contain a good deal of examples of helpful feedback, so I will try to point out the most helpful and specific ones which will best aid the theatre company or director.

I credit my early review of *Aida* as a major source of inspiration for my desire to write reviews of productions. The community production was nice, though nothing of much acclaim.

My review was fairly mixed, pointing out many strengths and weaknesses as I saw them. One example comprises:

“Nelson was fierce and strong as Aida, as well as thoughtful and wistful. You could see her struggle with her responsibilities as a princess and a lover and feel sympathy for her...My only complaint with Nelson is that her volume and diction could have been better, She became too quiet at times throughout the show, (especially in the number “A Step Too Far”...) as well as made some words/phrases hard to understand.”

This example contains specific moments or scenes where I saw problems or strengths arise. I also include compliments either before or after stating the things that did not work as well. This allows the company to be more receptive and understanding of the criticism, while the specificity permits them to pinpoint and recognize problems themselves, addressing those areas of the show. In this particular example of *Aida*, that is precisely what happened, and the show improved. My editor and the founding member of UTBA, Russell Warne posted this quote about the situation online:

This summer I attended opening night of a play that I didn't review...The show was nice, although nothing special. The review was mostly positive, but the reviewer pointed out a number of weaknesses in the performance. When I returned on closing night the show was *much* better, and the director told me that he used the review to show the cast what they needed to work on and improve for the rest of the run. This sort of story is not uncommon; multiple times per year I get emails from directors and others who tell me that a UTBA review helped them improve their production.

While I hope that my reviews do this often, being able to hear about or see firsthand the impact of criticism is inspiring. Creating a stronger production of *Aida* benefitted all involved— the

cast, crew, and community alike, making the theatre community stronger. This is the magic that can occur when directors are receptive to criticism, and as Warne pointed out, there are many directors who recognize a critic's value and see the benefits of theatre criticism.

Other notable examples of feedback within my reviews include, from *The Pirates of Penzance*: “Overall, the show moved slowly, without enough action to hold the audience's attention. A notable example of this is the musical number, “Oh! Is there not one maiden breast?” where the daughters...simply stand in a line facing the audience while Frederic sings.” While this is a specific assessment, I should not have made the assumption of how the audience was feeling. It would have been more honest to say “without enough action to hold my attention.” From *The Woman in Black* review, I discuss the lighting as “help[ing] provide the mood, although I felt toward the beginning the lighting changes were too harsh and abrupt, being quite noticeable, rather than subtle as the best lighting designs are.” Of *A Christmas Carol*, “Brower depicted this journey wonderfully...I found myself feeling true empathy for this character, due to his realistic and honest acting style that was filled with grief and regret.” In the *Elephant's Graveyard* review, I say,

While I believe the collaboration was probably a good experience for all involved, these pre-show like performances did not benefit the show in any way. The artists were impressive, but aside from the circus aspects, I did not see a connection or point to this addition...there was also an actual pre-show, which likewise did not seem to connect with the mood or message of the play itself. By the time the legitimate production began, I was fairly confused and quite frankly, bored.

These examples explain why I made the claims I did, or why I felt a certain way. Examples such as these are more helpful to the producing company, as well as help to establish myself as more knowledgeable and well-informed, making the artists more apt to trust me.

A theatre company is inherently more likely to care about what the review says if the critic is kind and professional. Unfortunately, these aspects are lacking in my review of *Charm*. Like *Vincent in Brixton*, this review was written at the ACTF Critic's Workshop, and a lot of the same issues apply. In trying too hard to write for specific judges, I lost track of what the review was actually meant to do. While most of the feedback is still honest and contains specific examples, some statements are incredibly harsh, such as, "the show has nothing going for it;" "awfully written script;" "nothing about the production is worthwhile;" and "the constant harsh lighting that was giving me a headache and the choking fog that was invading the house." It is reviews like this that could explain why critics are sometimes disliked. As a critic, I am ashamed of this review, as it does not accomplish what I think theatre criticism should. While I still believe most of what I said still needed to be addressed, I could have done this in a much more professional way, as per my other examples. I would hate for this company or any other to turn against theatre criticism because of my scathing review.

The example of my review of *Charm* proves why it is important to have good critics who can help build up the theatre, rather than tear it down. If theatre criticism can become more accepted as a positive and necessary practice in our society, we can better educate aspiring critics and create a better working environment. It is worth noting that the judges directing the workshop for which I wrote this review, were esteemed Los Angeles theatre critics. While I am certainly not blaming them for my writing, my review of *Charm* was triggered by their influence and desire for a distinct, honest voice that did not hold back one's feelings. I can admit that there

are critics in the field who may contradict the purpose the way I have outlined it. This is why directors completely have the right to disregard any criticism they see fit. However, the distinction needs to be that they actually make an informed decision for themselves and only, after openly engaging with the criticism. A bad critic or review should not spark a discourse of negativity. When theatre criticism is done well, as it often is, it can improve theatrical standards and provides hope for the future. This immensely supports a healthy theatre community, making journalistic criticism a crucial asset to the theatre.

CHAPTER 3 REVIEWS:

AIDA's Strong Suits Outweigh its Flaws

August 9, 2013- by Tara Nicole Haas

AMERICAN FORK- Based on the popular Italian opera by Giuseppe Verdi of the same name, the musical *Aida* (with music by Elton John and lyrics by Tim Rice) is presented by American Fork and Highland Arts Council in a touching, yet imperfect manner.

The story is something of a classic love triangle. Aida (Mary Nelson) is a princess from Nubia (a region along the Nile river, which is located in northern Sudan and southern Egypt.) who is captured by an Egyptian captain, Radames (Christian Jones.) Radames soon falls in love with Aida and saves her from a life of hard labor by instead offering her as a handmaiden to the Egyptian princess Amneris (Allison Books), his betrothed fiancé of nine years. The story unfolds with forbidden love, betrayal, and loyalty, while the characters are forced to make difficult choices concerning their country, their people, and the desires of their hearts.

First, let me just say that all outdoor venues (as this one is) can be difficult to work with. I was surprised though that here the company was able to keep those difficulties and problems to a minimum. The biggest problem encountered was of course issues with the microphones, but overall they had a decent sound system, as well as a sufficient lighting system. I felt they used the space that they had to an advantage. The ambiance of this particular amphitheater was actually a quite nice backdrop for the show and added a pleasant element that would not have been there otherwise. Set designer, David DeLong was able to accentuate this by creating a

simple set design, complemented with high quality set pieces. The subtle lighting design by Mathew Jensen contributed to the shifting mood of the piece from scene to scene, and kept the actors well lit in the dark. Costume designer Cindy Holindrake also did a good job incorporating the costumes into the world of the play and elevating the story by adding authenticity to the characters. All in all, the design elements worked well with each other and the story to make the action believable.

The acting, however, was somewhat hit and miss. The three leads; Nelson, Jones, and Books, truly carried the show and all were quite talented in their roles. All three have strong and capable voices and were able to make their respective musical numbers enjoyable. Admittedly, I was surprised that Nelson, playing Aida, appeared to be Asian and fair skinned, as the character is Egyptian and of African descent. Nelson pulls the role off exceptionally well though, as well as has the voice for it, so it was easily overlooked. (This is also the case because the other Nubian ensemble members were of different races.) Nelson was fierce and strong as Aida, as well as thoughtful and wistful. You see her struggle with her responsibilities as a princess and a lover and feel sympathy for her, as is true with all three of these characters. My only complaint with Nelson is that her volume and diction could have been better. She became too quiet at times throughout the show (especially in the number “A Step Too Far” as I could barely hear her compared to the other two characters,) as well as made some words/phrases difficult to understand.

Nelson’s counterpart, Jones, kept up with her the entire time. Jones’ performance was very well done. He is believable as a barbaric captain in the beginning, and then we see him take a journey where he softens and becomes caring. It was very easy to see his feelings for Aida. The two actors complement each other very well and have good chemistry. This becomes especially

apparent in “Enchantment Passing Through,” and then it is a joy to see the sweet moment when they embrace in “Elaborate Lives.”

Books, as Amneris, had a particularly strong voice and knew how to use it. She was a delight to listen to, as well as put on a great performance. Amneris is such a multi-dimensional character, and it was refreshing to see that be played well and translate to an audience. It is clear that she is hiding under a mask, behind her cavernous feelings. The best moments of the show are when these three leads are on stage together such as in “Not Me,” and “A Step Too Far.”

Unfortunately, the big ensemble numbers were not as good. Although there were some strong ensemble members, I never felt that they were a cohesive whole, this being a major flaw to the production. There were also many times the choreography was quite sloppy, and a little cheesy for my taste. This was most noticeable in “Fortune Favors the Brave,” “Another Pyramid,” and “Like Father, Like Son.” In these songs, the movements were not in sync with each other and appeared to be not well rehearsed. In “Another Pyramid,” it seemed like the ensemble had moments of aimless, unmotivated wandering and it was confusing. The title character in both these numbers is Radames father, Zoser, played by Jonathan Baker. Baker’s performance was better during the non-musical numbers. In both these songs I felt he was too concentrated on the music and lacked energy and emotion. I also felt the vocal licks in “Another Pyramid” were excessive and required more meaning behind them. Baker does deserve applause though for his vocal ability and skill in hitting the difficult high notes those songs demand.

Also unfortunate were the weak ensemble vocals. It seemed like many cast members were timid and afraid to come in when they were supposed to. As a general rule, the entrances to the songs throughout the show were not on time and dropped. Some numbers, such as “Like Father, Like

Son” did not seem polished vocally. The cast was not together and some parts were lost. This was also true in “My Strongest Suit.” This ensemble of girls was also much too quiet and hard to hear.

Director Andrew Lloyd Hunsaker, aside from some odd casting choices (one of which being that actor Jones looks much older than his father character,) was able to create beautiful images on stage with his actors. Most prominent of these moments were when the cast formed a semi-circle at the front of the stage in “The Gods Love Nubia” and when the cast was huddled together in groups during “Radames’ Letter,” as well as “Not Me,” where the lead characters formed a strong triangle. The transitions from scene to scene were also handled smoothly and efficiently, helping the show not to drag and keeping people invested.

Although there were some elements in the production that seemed a bit amateur, as I stated above, it was still very touching, and I was able to have an enjoyable experience. I would recommend this production to the average audience as there is plenty to appreciate in American Fork and Highland Arts Council’s portrayal of this bittersweet love story.

Aida plays August 9, 10, 12, 15, 16, & 17 at 8:00 PM at the American Fork Amphitheater (851 E 700 N, American Fork.) Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$8 for students with any ID and seniors, or \$35 for a family ticket.

A Disappointing Re-imagining of THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

February 14, 2014 – By Tara Nicole Haas

LOS ANGELES – Westmont Festival Theatre presents a re-envisioned take on Gilbert and Sullivan's famous comic opera, *The Pirates of Penzance*.

On the shores of Cornwall in the late 19th century, Frederic, (Ben Offringa) a man of 21 years having been accidentally apprenticed to a group of pirates at a young age, announces that he is soon to be released from his duty. After Frederic leaves the pirate gang, he meets Mabel, (Megan Silberstein) the daughter of Major-General Stanley (Connor James Bush.) Mabel and Frederic begin an instant love affair, though they are soon torn apart after Frederic learns that he was born on the 29th of February during a leap year, making him technically only five years old. Because of Frederic's strong sense of duty, he returns to the pirates to finish his apprenticeship until he is 21 years old, 63 years from then.

Although it is nice to see a company giving the audience something new and eliminating the typical "yo-yoing pirates, ditzy daughters, and dorky police" as director John Blondell puts it, the good idea is not enough to create a strong production. Overall, the show moved slowly, without enough action to hold the audience's attention. A notable example of this is the musical number "Oh! is there not one maiden breast?," where the daughters of Major-General Stanley simply stand in a line facing the audience for several minutes while Frederic sings. I was also confused by the actors playing multiple characters, and particularly felt that the scene in which the daughters changed back and forth from daughters to pirates was more distracting than it was effective. However, Blondell made great use of imagery, and he was able to capture many

striking pictures on stage. Most prominent of these was when the bright, attention-grabbing tableware and balloons were incorporated.

The music in the show was somewhat hit and miss. The live music on stage was a wonderful choice, and for the most part, the ensemble sounded nice together. Conversely, there were a few songs ("Pour, oh pour the pirate sherry" and "How beautifully blue the sky") where the words were hard to understand as the actors were not together or clear enough in their diction.

Silberstein as Mabel was also hard to understand throughout. Although she effectively hit the high notes, (being the most operatic character) I could barely tell what she was saying due to her struggle with diction, as well as projection. The highlight number of the musical, "I am the very model of a modern Major-General" was quite delightful and funny as modern references were made that were specifically directed towards the known audience.

Bush, as the Major-General, was the standout actor in this production. His physicality and facial expressions perfected the role and elicited laughter from the audience. I wished for more emotion from the lead, Offringa. His acting was a little stiff, and would have benefitted from stronger reactions and motivations. This is also true of the majority of the cast.

In the end, *The Pirates of Penzance* reeked of an amateur production. There were moments of great success, but not enough to overshadow what did not work. I commend the company for what they were trying to achieve, but unfortunately, the production would need to be reworked to accomplish that.

The Pirates of Penzance plays Friday, February 14, 2014 at 2:00 pm and 7:30 pm at the Los Angeles Theatre Centre (514 S Spring St, Los Angeles.) Tickets are free. For more information visit <http://thelatc.org/>.

THE WOMAN IN BLACK Leaves Audience Spooked

October 3, 2013 - By Tara Nicole Haas

PROVO- After making a transition from a less than perfect theater space, the Echo re-opened last night in their new and improved building with a respectable premiere of *The Women in Black*.

The Woman in Black is a successful horror play adapted by Stephen Mallatrat from a book of the same name by Susan Hill. It is to date the second longest running play in London's West End, and has recently been adapted into a film version for the second time. The play explores the past of Arthur Kipps, (Jason Purdie) who is trying to tell his story to exorcise a ghost (the woman in black) from his life. Mr. Kipps invests in an actor (Joseph Skousen) to help him put on this performance. The play becomes meta-theatrical as the rehearsal begins and the actor plays the young Arthur Kipps, with the actual Mr. Kipps playing all the other characters, as well as narrating the story.

The play within the play begins as young Arthur, a junior solicitor, is called upon to investigate the estate of a Mrs. Drablow, an old woman who recently passed away. Upon arriving in the town for Mrs. Drablow's funeral, Arthur becomes aware of the town's eerie atmosphere. Things become more frightening as he travels to Mrs. Drablow's house in the middle of a swamp and tries to uncover the mysteries of the past. This leads him to the discovery of a haunting secret that he wishes he had never encountered.

Overall, I was pleased with the direction of the show. Director Ben Hopkin was able to make very good use of the stage and created nice pictures on stage with the actors. One downside was

that the play had a slow start and the entire first act was fairly lacking in energy. Luckily this picked up after intermission as the play became much more suspenseful. I also felt the woman in black could have been more ghost-like. Maybe it was due to the hard soled shoes she was wearing, but she could always be heard coming, making the effect not as scary as if she had just appeared, the way ghosts seem to do. She could have had a stronger effect if she had been made more secretive and mysterious. The show was still thoroughly creepy though, eliciting many squeals and gasps from the audience throughout.

The acting was quite strong. Purdie did a magnificent job of switching though so many various characters throughout the show. They were all distinct and different from one another because of the use of strong facial expressions and movements. This is an impressive task, and I was surprised that he was able to achieve this so well. Skousen's performance was also fairly strong, with highlights being many moments where he displayed immense vulnerability and fear. The terror that Skousen was able to exhibit seemed real and genuine, which increased the fear felt by the audience. My favorite moments were his frustrations with the locked door. The problem that I had with his performance was that he consistently kept tripping over his words. This may have been nerves, but it was so frequent that it made him seem somewhat unprepared. I also felt the chemistry between these two actors was considerably lacking. This did get better into the second act, but I felt myself wanting a stronger connection between them. I am hoping that this (along with Skousen's stumbling) may have had something to do with opening night jitters and will get better over the course of the run.

Matthew Boulter's set design was nice and simple, matching the dynamic of the play. The use of sheets over the furniture and the mismatched chairs and such helped to establish the spooky mood of the play. The see through back drop was the highpoint of the set and it was a delight to

see the action on the other side of it. The lighting design by Samantha Layco also helped provide the mood, although I felt that towards the beginning the lighting changes were too harsh and abrupt, being quite noticeable, rather than subtle as the best lighting designs are. The lighting progressed well throughout the show though, and by the second act the constant dim lighting was very evocative of a ghostly and unnerving atmosphere. The lighting also allowed for shadows to play in many areas of the stage, including on the back drop, which was a very nice touch.

Finally, the sound design by Spencer Carter did a great job of initially setting up the ambiance of the performance. Throughout most of the play the sound did this very well, although there were elements that detracted from it. I did not understand the point of the random voice overs. They seemed very unsystematic and did not make sense in relation with the rest of the play, as some moments were narrated and some used the voice over. There was also a mix up with one of the sound cues playing early. This was confusing to the audience as it was one of the voice over type, and did not mesh with the action at all.

Despite some of the imperfections that occurred in the production, the show does achieve an intriguing and fear-provoking production, making it fun for the entire audience. Having never seen the recent movie adaption and being unfamiliar with the plot, I found myself pleasantly surprised and startled by the daunting plot twists and uneasy feelings of fear felt in the audience. Beforehand I was afraid the scary elements would appear cheesy, but was very glad to find that this was not the case. The scare factor was handled very well, and all of the cast and crew added their contribution to accomplishing this. This show is perfect for the Halloween holiday coming up, and I believe that it would provide a fun night out for all, including being a great date night for couples and even families. Of course with the chilling and spooky content, it may not be appropriate for young children.

The Woman in Black plays every night through November 2, excluding Sundays, at the Echo Theater (15 North 100 East, Provo.) Tickets are \$10 in advance and \$12 at the door. For more information visit TheEchoTheater.com.

A Delightful CHRISTMAS CAROL at HCTO

December 1, 2013 - By Tara Nicole Haas

OREM- Hale Center Theater Orem's annual Christmas tradition, *A Christmas Carol*, has been a long time favorite for many. I was happy to see that this year did not disappoint.

A Christmas Carol is the well-known, heart-warming tale written by Charles Dickens, chronicling the life and transformation of Ebenezer Scrooge. Dickens' short novella was adapted into a musical version in the early 90's with music by Alan Menken, lyrics by Lynn Ahrens, and book by Mike Ockrent and Lynn Ahrens. Now, the musical is one of the most produced holiday classics there is for its wonderful message and Christmas spirit.

The definite strong point in this production is the character Ebenezer Scrooge, played by Chris H. Brower. Brower, reprising the role, has played the character many times before, and each year still enchants his audience. He is delightfully ornery in the beginning, scarring the neighborhood children and treating his clerk, Bob Cratchit (Eric Glissmeyer), with less than generosity. This makes his character a very unlikable one, though the unique component of Brower's Scrooge is the element of humor he infuses. Brower gives us many funny moments, making his performance more enjoyable to watch, and showing the audience that he is actually a quite charming old man. His performance also included many dramatic and powerful moments, one prominent one being his song, "Am I That Man?"

Throughout the course of the show, the character of Scrooge goes through one of the greatest and most dramatic mental and emotional journeys in the theatre. Brower depicted this journey wonderfully. He was able to share his feelings with the audience every step of the way so that the

audience could really see this taking place. I found myself feeling true empathy for this character, due to his realistic and honest acting style that was filled with grief and regret. Brower was able to come full circle on his journey, and by the end of the show had gone through a complete transformation. This was an amazing change that truly embodies the spirit of Christmas.

The other strongest actors in the production were Glissmeyer and Patrick Brannelly as the Ghost of Christmas Present. Glissmeyer portrayed Bob Cratchit well, especially in the first half of the show. His childlike excitement because of the Christmas holiday was endearing. His strongest moment in the show was his song, "What Child is This?" which was filled with emotion and sang beautifully. Brannelly was able to effectively depict an enthusiastic yet mighty ghost with a robust voice to compliment the part. The choir was also quite good. They were able to create a very unified and blended sound that was lovely to listen to. I enjoyed listening to the choir sing traditional Christmas songs throughout the show, and was especially pleased with the beautiful sound they produced.

Although there was a decent amount of strong acting in the performance, there were weak links as well. Most of the acting did not feel honest or truthful, but more "fake." It seemed exaggerated and overacted. Unfortunately, this made it so I did not form connections with any characters that I have not previously mentioned. I felt I missed out on a lot because of this, particularly in relation to the Cratchit family. During the sad events in the show, I was not nearly as moved or upset as I felt I should have been. There was definitely something missing, and I believe it was because, unlike Scrooge, the acting style did not make me fully believe what was happening onstage, and, the characters did not cause me to connect and/or sympathize with them.

The costume design by Maryann Hill worked very well in this production. All of the costumes complimented the characters and emphasized their status within the world of the play. The costumes also helped to establish the time period well. The women's fancy party dresses, as well as the costumes for the spirits were gorgeous. The Scenic design by Bobby Swenson was also nice, as it was simple but incorporated all it needed to without being a distraction for the small stage. The lamps were a very nice touch, and I was impressed with the snow effect towards the end of the play. It is often hard to make snow look real, but this was a success in this production. I also noticed the walls of the theatre as being reminiscent of an old cathedral, which aided to encapsulate the mood of the musical before it even began, as well as added an even deeper layer of meaning into the story.

Overall, *A Christmas Carol*, is a delightful family show. There are a few spooky moments, but just hold your little ones tight and this is a show that everyone can enjoy, no matter how old. The production is sure to get even the biggest "scrooges" into the Christmas Spirit. The show sends a wonderful message that is nice for everyone to be reminded of, especially around the holidays. *A Christmas Carol* is a joyful and uplifting experience.

A Christmas Carol plays every night through December 23, excluding Sundays, at the Hale Center Theater Orem (225 West 400 North, Orem.) Tickets are \$17-21. For more information visit <http://www.haletheater.org/>.

A Powerful ELEPHANT'S GRAVEYARD at Westminster College

October 12, 2014 - By Tara Nicole Haas

SALT LAKE CITY – A stunning retelling of a horrific true story, *Elephant's Graveyard*, is the current production on the stage at Westminster College. The Westminster Players provide this beautiful play with a rightfully beautiful production.

In only about an hour's time, *Elephant's Graveyard* tragically portrays the story of a town, a circus, a railroad, a man with red hair, and an elephant. Written by George Brant, the play fictionalizes the real account of the only known lynching of an elephant in the early 20th century. Back in 1916, during the height of the American circus after the establishment of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, the Sparks circus was gaining its own reputation with having the largest performing elephant. With the advent of the railroad, Sparks travels to a muddy town in Tennessee, where “the greatest show on earth” soon becomes complicated and tragic for the circus and the townspeople. After watching the majestic elephant kill her new rider, the townspeople are out for blood and demand retribution for the purity of their town. What happens next becomes a part of history.

To bring such a powerful story to life, a production needs strong actors to portray strong emotions. Most of the actors in this production fit into this category, particularly the townspeople. They were able to create a strong sense of community, further identifying the spirit and unity of the town. While all the actors playing townspeople brought depth into their conflicted characters, the couple that really stood out to me were the Hungry Townsperson (Trayven Call) and the Young Townsperson (Tyler Palo.) Both gave very moving and

memorable performances. As a child, Palo balanced his giddy excitement with just enough innocence to make his role believable. As far as the circus members, the clown (Amanda Corbett) was the definite standout. She was able to portray true and deep emotions throughout while never losing the “clown” persona she had established. Tage Gould as the Ringmaster was also impressive with his money-driven, “the show must go on” attitude.

Elephant’s Graveyard is very much an ensemble based show, although I still felt as though the audience is meant to feel the biggest connection with the (elephant) Trainer, played by Chloe Kaye. Unfortunately, I felt Kaye’s performance was lacking, and kept me from having the deep connection with her that I wanted to feel. Her performance seemed to be driven completely by anger. Within the context of the show this is understandable, though I wanted to see the desperate sadness the character must have been feeling come through in her performance. When I never did, my acceptance of the character as reality was never fully achieved. I believe this lack of empathy decreased my capacity to feel a more intense cathartic emotion from the production.

The strongest design element in this production was certainly the excellent sound design. Above all, the sound in this production was key to establishing and building the mood. The live music created a palpable tension at times, contributing to the agitated and uneasy atmosphere within the theatre. This powerful element likely played a vital role in eliciting a stronger emotional reaction from the audience.

Although *Elephant’s Graveyard* was ultimately successful, that does not mean it was without flaw. Disappointingly, the production got off to a rocky start. Before the play even began, there were separate performances from various members of the Aerial Arts of Utah Performers, who collaborated with the Westminster Players for this piece. While I believe the collaboration was

probably a good experience for all involved, these pre-show like performances did not benefit the show in any way. The artists were impressive, but aside from the circus aspects, I did not see a connection or point in this addition. They were also quite long, with four different acts in total; it was almost a relief when this aspect was over. At that point, there was an actual pre-show, which likewise did not seem to connect to the mood or message of the play itself. By the time the legitimate production began, I was fairly confused and quite frankly, bored.

This feeling of boredom continued into the beginning of the play, where there seemed to be exhaustingly long transitions between scenes. Fortunately, director Michael Vought, was able to pick up the energy greatly into the second half of the show. From then on, the production was extremely engaging and was able to build to an intense climax. I also particularly enjoyed the way Vought staged the production with the position of his actors. He was able to create interesting and powerful images on stage, one of the best of these moments being the tableau created with the circus members.

Westminster College's production of *Elephant's Graveyard*, though not a completely solid production, is definitely worth seeing. Exploring themes of spectacle, violence, revenge, and love, Brant's script is heavy and extremely thought provoking. Despite some weaker aspects, The Westminster Players do succeed in effectively telling this incredible story so that the audience members are sure to be affected and moved, thus creating a beautiful production indeed. Please be aware there is some strong language, and themes that may not be appropriate for children.

Elephant's Graveyard plays October 9-11 and 23-25 at 7:30 p.m. in the Dumke Student Theatre at Westminster College (1840 South 1300 East, Salt Lake City.) Tickets are \$10. For more information visit https://www.westminstercollege.edu/theatre_arts/.

Weber State's CHARM Turns Out To Be Rather Un-charming

February 15, 2013 - By Tara Nicole Haas

Charm, written by Kathleen Cahill, is about, well...I'm not really sure. Something about the life of nineteenth century author Margaret Fuller, interspersed with sexually charged segments and interactions with her literate contemporaries of the time, is all I could keep track of. I left the theater knowing about the same amount of information as when I went in, just more confused. Not to mention, upset that I had to endure two hours of this theatre piece. This is clearly not a good sign.

Charm, reminiscent of a poor high school production, was set up for failure at the beginning because of the awfully written script. Add that with bad directing and bad acting, and the show has nothing going for it. The text did not feel solid to me, and acted as though it was setting up the ending multiple times, only to keep on continuing. Once intermission occurred, I was certain that the play was over. Unfortunately, I wasn't that lucky. Ironically, I was unsure that the actual ending of the show was in fact the end because it was abrupt and did not conclude the scene. It was also as if the play itself did not know what it was doing. It played as a comedy the entire production, until the end when the lead character dies in a tragic way, an obvious characteristic of a tragedy. So much for genre and sensible text structure I guess.

My biggest problem with the directing is that I could not discern what the concept of the show was or what it was trying to achieve. There was obviously a strange mystical feel to it, along with the use of exaggerated props and an overall style, but it was never tied together with anything that explained it. I never understood the role of the character holding up the signs with super titles on them and why that was included. I also felt she just muddled the focus. This is

much the same as when the lead's dress expanded to cover almost the entire stage. Although this was a remarkable effect, what was the purpose of it? Nothing seemed to work for me and I just found myself lost and uninterested.

I also had a major problem with the transitions between the immense amount of different scenes. They were choppy and did not flow nicely into the next. If I had been invested in the story, this would have pulled me out every time. There was also some odd staging that occurred at times, when an actor would address the audience for seemingly no reason. This is always a bold choice, especially when you have nothing to back it up with. This goes hand in hand with the stylized, not honest or engaging acting performances. Because of this, a lot of the humor in the piece falls short. It was much too on the surface and physical for my taste.

The one redeeming quality of the show was the costumes, thanks to the designer (uncredited.) They all looked quite nice and fit together perfectly; making this the only cohesive element that added stability to the show. The character playing the statue was visually stunning and quite possibly the highlight of the entire production.

It is clear that this show is unquestionably not worth your time. Aside from some great one liners and a few nice stage effects, nothing about this production is worthwhile. I became increasingly bored and yearned for the time to finally come when I could escape and reclaim my sanity. Not to mention get away from the constant harsh lighting that was giving me a headache and the choking fog that was invading the house. All plays should be good to their audience, and this one was certainly not.

CHAPTER 4

EMPHASIZING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Because theatre has the power to provide people with engaging, stirring, and emotional experiences, it also has the potential to have a great impact on society, whether or not it is intended to do so. Productions inherently have a social impact, in either assertive or passive ways. Even if a play does not have a specific social or political agenda, there are still messages that are always being transmitted, even if the viewer doesn't realize it. This is why one of the roles of the critic should be to evaluate the principles and messages within a play or production, and address them if needed. A critic should be continually looking for social messages that could possibly be harmful or beneficial to society, evaluating more than the production aspects such as acting, directing, and design.

A critic can help encourage socially conscious theatre as well as challenge theatre which maintains socially harmful ideals simply by pointing these things out in reviews. Discussing a production's themes and morals within a review, or lack thereof, makes people increasingly more aware of them, hopefully causing them to assess their feelings and form opinions. Productions that support negative themes such as gender and racial inequality need to be addressed, especially if a company is consistently producing such work. Productions which depict prejudices as a normal function in society can be potentially harmful when engaged with on an intellectual or emotional level. These practices may become ingrained in our minds, particularly younger generations, as what is normal and appropriate human behavior. Negative stereotypes and outdated ideologies need to be reversed, not perpetuated by media and art. Likewise, the productions that actively point out social messages for this purpose should be

given equal attention. The reviews in this section mostly address aspects of productions that are already socially conscious, rather than productions with negative impacts. I have learned that identifying and pinpointing these social messages is where I can most focus my efforts as a critic in the future.

In my review of *In The Next Room...*, I describe the show as “inspirational,” that it “explores themes of feminism, sexuality, and marriage,” and is “more than an inappropriate comedy. The play is a wonderful commentary on feminism, female sexuality, and gender roles among other themes, making the show a thoughtful and profound experience.” *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* is a “political and social commentary of the past and present;” and “examines issues of gender equality and homosexuality with a keen relevance to our society today.” *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* is a particularly socially conscious play because audience members are forced to interact with the potentially controversial topics mentioned above, as the said audience members are made active participants in the play. The play depicts homophobia, for example, as a problem within the community, and then embraces homosexuality in a positive light. My review states, “upon entering the theatre, each audience member is welcomed and given a nametag, henceforth being considered a female participating in the meeting of the Susan B. Anthony Society for the Sisters of Gertrude Stein.” While these statements are not expanded upon a great deal, they say a lot about the social attitudes presented in the play. I go on to say,

The play is thought provoking and directly forces the viewer, or rather the participant, to engage in the important issues that are presented and discussed. It may seem easy to think of the 1950s in America as a different time, however a lot of the concerns that may seem outdated and unprecedented today to many are still very present. Equality is always

something to be considered, and *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* accomplishes this in relatable and entertaining ways.

This quote is a prime example of how criticism can address the social aspects presented in the show, as well as why these issues are important to consider.

Pool '63 is constructed as a political platform, purposely addressing issues of race and civil rights for a social purpose. This made it especially easy to discuss “America’s dark past in the 1960’s concerning racial segregation.” The show concerns “two young girls of different races...who wish to be friends and change society.” The production includes “many individuals speaking out about the importance and need for civil rights. The story is interspersed with many scenes, incorporating different styles used to expose the horrific racist ideologies of the time and hone in on the issues of segregation.” This is a nice example because it illustrates not only that this show is effectively exposing these issues with “a tone of social activism,” but also *how* it is accomplishing this. *The Box* is similar to *Pool '63* in that it “had the goal of creating a play that would raise important questions of the soul and encourage audience members to think outside of their own boxes.” The play delves into “existentialism” and has “heavy influences of Asperger’s Syndrome and Autism.” Although I address these things, I feel they could have had more weight in the review as the production was an especially socially conscious piece of theatre.

Another way a critic can place emphasis on social justice is by looking at the ethics of a production, not necessarily within the play, but in dealing with the rights that protect it. In supporting the theatre, when a critic notices productions that have been altered illegally, this is something that should be brought to attention. Two reviews that do this, though not well, are *The Mikado* and *The Crucible*, both of which were luckily some of my first reviews and were never published.

In *The Mikado* review, I chastise director James Arrington, saying he, “might want to think harder next time about mutilating a show into something untrue to the author’s work.” I also state “The show was altered so much from the way it was intended that I feel Utah Valley University was not on the right course with this one.” On top of the former statement being more of a personal attack than I would like to admit to, I also had no place to condemn him. A critic must be educated and understand the conventions surrounding the show they are reviewing. I now know that the works of Gilbert and Sullivan are in the public domain, and, as such, are no longer protected under copyright law and can be altered essentially anyway a director wishes. After learning more about Gilbert and Sullivan, I still believe they would be upset with the production, however, it is the director’s prerogative and not what, I as a critic, should judge.

On the other hand, *The Crucible*, also at Utah Valley University, was altered in ways that I can’t seem to justify as legal, although the review makes it sound like I am. The review states that there is an “addition of a new character, a Native American type spirit guide. The text of the spirit guide comes not from the play script, but from a series of short essays that are embedded in the text of the play. It was an interesting choice for the director to make, and I believe it worked well.” The essays were also written by Arthur Miller, though the only reason that I know this is because I knew the director personally. On top of the many amateur issues with this review, I don’t know if it was appropriate to praise this decision to add to the text of the script. It would be more honest to address the additional text in another way. Because I knew the director and discussed his process with him, I believe I was likely biased and let that affect the way I saw the production, and, in turn, how I wrote the review. I am now more aware of such conflicts of interest and would likely not review a production if they were significant. Although the director believed he was being honest in the creation of his new script, I think it was still disrespectful to

modify Miller's original work that, unlike *The Mikado*, is not in public domain. This is what should have been stated in the review.

Looking for ways to implement and expose social justice or injustice in reviews is increasingly important in our world today, where people are heavily influenced by the media and other art forms. By allowing criticism to address such issues depicted within the theatre, artists and spectators can become increasingly aware of the messages being projected. This knowledge may not only benefit individuals, but also provide them with the desire to ultimately enhance and improve the health of the theatre and respective communities.

CHAPTER 4 REVIEWS:

IN THE NEXT ROOM OR THE VIBRATOR PLAY Leaves You Begging for More

April 19, 2014 - By Tara Nicole Haas

SALT LAKE CITY – *IN THE NEXT ROOM or the vibrator play* presented by The University of Utah’s Department of Theatre is a hilariously gratifying and inspirational polished production.

IN THE NEXT ROOM or the vibrator play examines a time in the late nineteenth century at the dawn of the age of electricity, shortly after Thomas Edison invented the light bulb. By this time, electrical vibrators had been invented for the purpose of treating hysteria. Dr. Givings (Matthew Windham) is a doctor who administers this massage treatment to patients, with the help of his assistant, Annie (Jasmin Peterson). Meanwhile, Dr. Givings struggles in his marriage with his wife, Catherine (Haeleigh Royall), who has recently given birth, but is unable to provide the baby with nourishment from her breast milk. To remedy this issue, the couple allows Elizabeth (Kathryn Mungin), a mid-wife, into their home to nurse the baby. With the accompaniment of Dr. Givings patients, Sabrina Daldry (Stewart Fullerton), and Leo (Mike T. Brown), the play explores themes of feminism, sexuality, and marriage.

Most of the aspects in this production came together seamlessly. Overall, the acting was quite impressive, with the standouts being the two leads, Royall and Windham. Royall was especially skilled in her comedic timing, as the character relentlessly talks too much and ends up with her foot in her mouth. Royall is also quite expressive in her acting and facial expressions, allowing her to nicely contrast humor with the intense pain she feels because of her inadequate marriage

and feelings of failure as a mother. It is wonderful watching the journey Royall's character takes as she searches for who she is and what she wants as the play progresses.

Royall and Windham share excellent chemistry and are very believable as husband and wife, even if their relationship may seem fairly dysfunctional in our modern views. This chemistry is exemplified not by how much the characters connect, but by how little they seem to understand each other in their communication. Dr. Givings in particular is quite dense, and although he medically treats many women, he fails to understand them. He treats Catherine as a doll, and is blind to her depression and loneliness. Windham expresses this personality brilliantly, causing a genuinely realistic relationship that the audience can become truly invested in. He is also able to find great depth as he too begins to experience jealousy and unhappiness in his marriage.

Windham's other great moments include when he shares comedic stories as he is administering treatment, adding much amusement.

My only complaint with the acting was with Fullerton as Mrs. Daldry. Although I was able to enjoy her performance, I was not nearly as invested in her character as I was with the others because she was not fully convincing. I often wondered what Fullerton's motivations were, and if she was actually affected by Dr. Giving's treatment. Some of these scenes in particular seemed overacted and unauthentic. She also seemed to rush through her lines, speaking quite quickly. I believe this may have been a character choice to exemplify the hysteria, although it still proved to be a distraction.

The intricate scenic design by Thomas George was impressive, appearing more professional than most University productions. The many details within all of the rooms of the house easily captured the setting of the story, providing interesting background and visuals for the audience.

Mariah Colbert's lighting design was effective in complimenting the scenes and providing a distinct mood within each. I enjoyed the contrast in the harshness of the light between the living room of the house and the operating theatre, where Dr. Givings treats his patients. Sound design (Adam Harris) and costume design (Costume Design 1) were both beautifully designed as well to complement and enhance the production.

My biggest complaint with this production was the transitions between scenes. There were at least two painfully long scene changes that felt like the audience was sitting in the dark for minutes. This allowed time to wonder what was going on, and took me out of the action and world of the play. Although it was fairly easy to become yet again involved a few minutes into the new scene, I was disappointed that I was distracted and briefly lost interest in such an enjoyable story. Other than this setback, the thought-provoking direction by Hanna Cheek was well-done.

IN THE NEXT ROOM or the vibrator play was quite an impressive production, and the U Department of Theatre deserves much praise. Though very comical, this production is much more than an inappropriate comedy. The play is a wonderful commentary on feminism, female sexuality, and gender roles among other themes, making the show a thoughtful and profound experience. In light of the adult themes, *IN THE NEXT ROOM or the vibrator play* is for mature audiences only.

IN THE NEXT ROOM or the vibrator play runs every night through April 27 at 7:30 pm, with matinee performances on the 26th and 27th at 2:00 pm, in the Babcock Theatre at the University of Utah (1400 E. 300 S. Salt Lake City.) For more information visit <http://www.theatre.utah.edu/>.

5 LESBIANS EATING A QUICHE is Simply Delicious

April 26, 2015 – By Tara Nicole Haas

Salt Lake City – Silver Summit Theatre Company, in conjunction with A-Muses, fabulously presents the regional premiere of *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche*, a hysterical political and social commentary of the past and present written by Andrew Hobgood and Evan Linder.

5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche observes a particular exciting day for the lives of five women in 1956. It is the Susan B. Anthony Society for the Sisters of Gertrude Stein quiche breakfast. The annual event brings women of the society together to meet, mingle, and await for the anticipated award winning quiche. Soon after the meeting begins, communists drop an Atomic bomb on the small town in Middle America, and the women learn they must remain in the specially prepared community center for four years. When the women realize they now only have one quiche left, with no prospects of making more, hilarity ensues and the truth comes out. The smart and silly comedy, chalk full of humor and sexual innuendo, examines issues of gender equality and homosexuality with a keen relevance to our society today.

Upon entering the theatre, each audience member is welcomed and given a nametag, henceforth being considered a female participating in the meeting of the Susan B. Anthony Society for the Sisters of Gertrude Stein. Directed by Dave Hanson with Amy Allred, the most impressive aspect of the show was the atmosphere that was created by the cast and crew. With very little set, sound, and lighting design elements, the realistic environment and hospitable actors who directly talk to and address the audience, ensure that the audience member are actually ‘guests’ rather, sitting in on and even participating in the meeting. Also helpful in establishing this was the preshow, where the actors casually conversed with the audience, encouraging the audience to

take on their own new characters they have been given. The spirit of comradery that was felt was indeed apparent by the middle of the show, and I felt the need to fit in with this group of lesbians.

All of the actors were superb in their respective and equal roles. Julie Silvestro as Lulie Stanwyck, however, was the standout of the group. Her talent certainly showed through in her facial expressions and body language, which conveyed her character's emotions and straightforward, leadership personality perfectly. Jouianna Boulter Blake as Vern Shultz; Michelle Hall as Wren Robin; Karli Rose Lowry as Dale Prist; and Mandi Titcomb as Ginny Cadbury were all excellent as well, each having moments where they displayed immense talent as comedic and honest actors. Also impressive was the solid chemistry between the five actors. This chemistry was strong enough to in turn build chemistry with the audience, making this 'meeting' quite a believable experience. Rarely have I seen such an outstanding and well-cast ensemble.

Along with the outstanding acting, directors Hanson and Allred managed to keep the energy up and the pacing of the show moving throughout. Every moment seems to be engaging, laced with meaning, and the delightful silliness is careful not to be overdone. Amongst the funny absurdity of the show, it is notable that the directors were still able to create such a compelling piece that ended up surprisingly touching at times. The quiet moment when the five women stand wondering "what do we do now?" is a beautiful one that balances all the joviality nicely.

As I truly have nothing negative to say about *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche*, it is a definite success. I cannot remember the last time I have laughed so freely during a stage production. There is an abundance of moments of overt, as well as subtle and clever humor making it absolutely laugh out loud funny and enjoyable. More importantly, the play is thought provoking and directly

forces the viewer, or rather the participant, to engage in the important issues that are presented and discussed. It may seem easy to think of the 1950's in America as a different time, however a lot of the concerns that may seem outdated and unprecedented today to many are still very present. Equality is always something to be considered, and *5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche* accomplishes this in relatable and entertaining ways, creating an enriching and well spent 80 minutes.

5 Lesbians Eating a Quiche ran April 10-26 at The Sugar Space in Salt Lake City. For more information, visit www.silversummittheatre.org or www.a-muses.com.

POOL '63 is Commanding and Strikingly Powerful

February 13, 2014 – By Tara Nicole Haas

LOS ANGELES – Cuesta College presents an intriguing and experimental theatre piece, *Pool '63*, a fictionalized story of America's dark past in the 1960's concerning racial segregation.

Pool '63, directed by Bree Valle, is a new play which premiered at Cuesta College this past year.

The play began as a devised piece created by the students and faculty, and the Playwright in Residence Philip Valle, was later brought into the creation process. *Pool '63* tells the story of two young girls of different races, Caroline Woods and Rosa Jackson, living in Birmingham in 1962. They are caught up in the devastating results of history, yet wish to be friends and change society. As their families become involved, we begin to see history in the making, with many individuals speaking out about the importance and need for civil rights. This story is interspersed with many scenes, incorporating different styles used to expose the horrific racist ideologies of the time and hone in on the issues of segregation.

Pool '63 contains many strong elements, though I was most surprised by the exceedingly impressive acting. There were many standouts, though the most notable was Rainey Forzetting as Rosa Jackson. Forzetting played a quirky and spritely character that emphasized her youth in a realistic and charming way. I also significantly appreciated Preacher Jones, played by Deonte Smith. Smith was able to infuse his role with honesty and authority. One of the most powerful moments in the play was when Smith preached his sermon to the audience, detailing how things need to change in our world. The breaking of the fourth wall was very effective, and a great

tactic to get the audience involved and directly thinking about what they are being presented with.

Director Bree Valle effectively and seamlessly mastered the many and various successions of scene changes in the production. There was also an effective use of various events happening on stage at once. While helping to lighten the mood, this pairing of events also helped to drive the points home to move the audience, as well as to invoke a tone of social activism.

Pool '63 is a high quality production that I would highly recommend and encourage everyone to attend. This is the type of meaningful theatre and profound experience that citizens should take advantage of.

Warboy Theatre Projects Has Intriguing Play with THE BOX

July 12, 2013 - by Tara Nicole Haas

PROVO — What is the box? Who am I? Do I exist? What lies outside the box? These are all questions posed in *The Box*, a new play written by Christian Swenson and directed by Chase Ramsey.

The Box, a thoughtful and extremely short comedy, is a philosophical look at two men who explore communication and existence within the same realm. Man One (Daniel Anderson), and Man Two (Andrew Robertson), find themselves confined to a small box and have difficulty both co-habiting and understanding what is outside of the box. With a little help from the audience, the characters begin to see outside of the box and find fulfillment within themselves.

The Box contains a complex plot and deep symbolism. “The box” that is referenced is a metaphor for the mind, or limitations of the subconscious. For Man One and Man Two, the play is about escaping the box, or learning how to deal with the restraint of the human mind in seeing the world, thinking about things, or communicating with others. The characters banter over existentialism throughout the show, slightly resembling absurdist theatre, and search the answers for typical existentialist questions such as, “Who am I?” and “What is real?”

Additionally, there are heavy influences of Asperger’s Syndrome and Autism. Swenson himself is diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome, and he explained that Man 1 is based off of tendencies and symptoms of the syndrome. It is clear to see some of the common symptoms through Man One’s actions and language, such as having a hard time understanding others’ perspectives, empathizing with others, and that one “can only talk about the abstract.” These issues are

especially exposed as the other characters challenge Man One, and the audience is shown the complexities of the syndrome, as well as the box that the two characters are restrained in.

Anderson and Robertson were both wonderfully cast and showed great strength in portraying these complex and untraditional characters. Anderson in particular gave a very honest performance as someone suffering with Asperger's Syndrome and struggling with profound and philosophical questions about his life and the world. The two actors had apparent chemistry, causing the action to carry smoothly and their relationship to be truthful and not forced. Swenson himself also stood up and addressed the audience during the end of the play as a part of the piece. This was a very good choice, as it provided more clarity and premise to the issues presented in the play.

Dan Whiting's simple set design aided in the production immensely as it gave a physical representation of the box. It also added an element of confinement, as the box was small and close to the audience, leaving a vast amount of empty space on the stage. I enjoyed the multiple light bulbs hanging from the ceiling, as they provided a more intimate feel to the space while at the same time gave off a perception that "the box" feels different than a normal room.

Although *The Box* is very thought provoking, it also has many moments of humor and even a surprising plot twist, contrasting the otherwise heavy material. The play shares a strong message with a lot of depth that I believe can touch every adult. I would encourage people to attend this production, and would also highly encourage staying for the talkback after every performance with the cast, Ramsey, and Swenson. The talkback I attended was a very insightful and informative experience and enriched the experience of the performance. As mentioned the show is very short, only 20 minutes long, and due to its content is most likely only suitable for adults.

The Box is a piece about barriers, but also it is a piece about understanding one's self and others. Swenson and Ramsey had the goal of creating a play that would raise important questions of the soul and encourage audience members to think outside of their own boxes. I would like to congratulate Ramsey and Warboy Theatre Projects on successfully accomplishing this.

The Box plays nightly at 7:30 PM through July 13 at the Echo Theater (145 N. University Avenue, Provo). Tickets are \$6-8. For more information, visit warboytheatreprojects.com.

A Charming Disservice with Utah Valley University's THE MIKADO

April 16, 2013- By Tara Nicole Haas

Gilbert and Sullivan's highly popular comic opera is presented in a very untraditional way by director James Arrington at Utah Valley University.

The Mikado, William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's most popular and adored savoy opera, or comic opera, was written as a satire set in Japan. William Gilbert's inspiration for *The Mikado* actually came from his many visits to Japan, and his admiration for the culture. The opera uses fairly traditional elements of Japanese theater and style to emphasize the culture, though it was actually written to expose or mock the politics taking place in England during the mid-late nineteenth century, the time the operetta was written.

The story follows a cheap tailor, Ko-Ko (Kyle Oram) who is appointed to the position of Lord High Executioner. He is in love with his ward, Yum-Yum (Amanda Maxwell) and has arranged to marry her. This is a conflict for her because she is in love with Nanki-Poo (James Bounous), a musician. It turns out that Nanki-Poo is actually the son of the Mikado, (the Emperor) and has run away to escape the affections of a strong and commanding woman, Katisha (Julie Suazo).

When the Mikado announces he will be visiting the town, Ko-Ko knows he must execute someone in order to make it appear he is doing his job. Ko-Ko is too timid to actually go through with this though, and conceives a plan to trick the Mikado, which of course fails in a humorous manner.

Director James Arrington's concept for the production was that the actors in the production were actually the covers (understudies) for the original cast. It is announced at the beginning of the

show that the “cast” has left and not returned, and so the covers are all going to step up and take over the production, letting the show go on. It becomes clear that these covers are in fact the actual actors and the arrangement is planned. Naturally, chaos arises as the actors play the part of understudies and pretend like they are not sure of what they are doing. Some actors whisper lines to others, a piece of the stage breaks, costumes fall apart, characters trip, drop lines, and miss their cues, and even need to be replaced. Everything that could go possibly wrong in a show happens in this production, and in a delightful way.

The execution of this “controlled chaos” was handled wonderfully by great comedic actors. Kyle Oram as Ko-Ko was exceptionally impressive, and never failed to get a laugh from the crowd. His eccentric character required a great deal of focus on comedic timing, which he was able to achieve nicely while providing depth to his character. Another actor that must be mentioned is Chase Grant as Shogun. He showed great talent as an actor and was spot on with comedic timing, as his antics always provided a good deal of the humor in the first act of the show. Unfortunately, the vocals of all of the actors, though decent, were not up to par with how they should be for such a music-heavy operetta such as this one. The actors also played many parts, with all of them playing a character role as well as being a part of the chorus. In the case of Chase Grant, he played two character roles as well as the chorus. This merging and cutting of the cast size was messy and caused for confusion.

Steven Purdy’s set design was superb. From the moment you walk into the theater, you are exposed to Japanese culture. Such close attention to detail is evident in many aspects of the set, such as the painted faces and traditional Japanese trees. The paper screen used was beautiful and a nice touch in adding to the Japanese feel. The lighting design by Zach Lambson added effect with a nice color pallet and emphasized the mood and ambiance created by the set. This was

also nicely achieved from the pre-show music and the lobby display by production dramaturg, Karen Rodriguez. An overall tone was well established before the show began, wonderfully preparing the audience for what they were about to see.

The Mikado was certainly an entertaining night at the theatre, and I'd be lying if I said I did not laugh or enjoy myself. My mixed feelings about the production are unsettling though. If someone were to ask me if I had ever seen *The Mikado*, basing my answer off of this production, I'd have to say I wasn't entirely sure. Though amusing and humorous in a *Noises Off* fashion, this production completely distracted from the story and I was rarely entirely sure of what was going on. The plot of the story is already complex, and with such a concept added on top of that made it even harder to follow. I also simply detached myself from the story because I became fixated on looking for the next funny moment about to happen, not the action within the story. The show was altered so much from the way it was intended that I feel Utah Valley University was not on the right course with this one.

If you don't care about the actual play itself, then you'd probably have an enjoyable night out seeing *The Mikado*. However, if you are looking for the real thing, I encourage you not to attend as you might be highly disappointed. James Arrington might want to think harder next time about mutilating a show into something untrue to the author's work. I think Gilbert and Sullivan would be disappointed. This is a disservice to these men, the operetta, and the theater community.

Utah Valley University Provides a New Look at THE CRUCIBLE

February 10, 2013- By Tara Nicole Haas

Arthur Miller's classic, *The Crucible*, is given a whole new perspective as UVU's most recent production. Director Dr. Terry Petrie takes risks with innovative and untraditional elements for such a traditional play.

The Crucible is the story of a town of Puritans in Salem Massachusetts in the late seventeenth century. After a young woman, Abigail (Bethany Woodruff,) is rejected by her former lover, the married John Procter (Patrick Kintz), she plummets into a frantic rage and accuses Elizabeth Proctor (Brooke Grant) of witchcraft. With the town already in an upheaval over the threat of witchcraft, Abigail and her fellow contemporaries' accusation's become extremely powerful, and we watch the community fall apart.

Originally written as an allegory for McCarthyism, Petrie decided not to emphasize that history in order to bring the story closer to the viewer, so that they could experience it personally and view how the circumstances apply to them. He chose instead to simply accentuate the fear of the story. One way he achieved this was by the addition of a new character, a Native American type spirit guide. The text of the Spirit Guide comes not from the play script, but from a series of short essays that are imbedded in the text of the play. It was a very interesting choice for the director to make, and I believe it worked well. The mysterious character helped instill fear into the audience member, as well as helped to better inform them of the context of the play. There was information given that you would not gain from another production of *The Crucible*. This made the play more interesting for those familiar with the common play, and especially helpful for those either unfamiliar with the play or the history.

The cast brilliantly captured the beauty and the sadness of the story. The depth of the relationships that the lead character's shared was profound and poignant. John Proctor established the air between himself and Abigail, as well as with Elizabeth in such a strong way that the audience could undeniably feel the tension between them. He was commanding and tough, yet vulnerable and tender at needed. The moment when John and Elizabeth see each other for the first time in months is truly touching. Elizabeth was portrayed as a much stronger woman and wife than is typical, and I found this to be successful and gripping. Further mention must be given to Melissa Brinkerhoff for her heartbreaking and powerful performance of Rebecca Nurse.

Scenic Designer, Stephen Purdy, was able to create an atmosphere of fear and intrigue that was present from the second you stepped into the theater. With the arena staging and the surrounding trees the audience was immersed into the forest, the very place the Puritans find the most dangerous. Lighting and sound design (not credited) both were subtle and natural, enhancing the show by underscoring the story and providing the mood of bleakness, danger, and solemnity.

Overall, *The Crucible* was a success. The tragic story is guaranteed to pull at the heartstrings and force you to think about what is presented. Be prepared for a heavy and thought provoking show. Even if you have seen *The Crucible* multiple times, this production offers a fresh and interesting take on Arthur Miller's classic.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

When we say that criticism is in crisis, what we really mean is that criticism as we've always known it is on its last legs...Newspapers might survive without critics. The question is can critics survive without newspapers? ... We need to start living in the future, even though we're stuck in the present. We have to stop surviving and start serving. We have to stop talking about what criticism once was and ask what it could become. Anything else is just nostalgia.²⁵

— Matt Trueman, “Stop Surviving, Start Serving – The Future of Criticism”

I continually talk about the theatre as having immense power and potential to change the world, as if it is a magical door that only need be unlocked, through which we can walk and escape into utopia. I know this may sound naïve, but I would be lying if I said I didn't feel truth in this idea. Though it may not be quantifiable, I do believe that the theatre can provide people with experiences so profound that they are changed. I've often thought that truly healthy theatre is that which inspires, helping people exit the theatre more enlightened than when they entered, better prepared to take on life's challenges and more equipped to understand and address societal matters, whatever they may be. While this is difficult to gauge, I am optimistic in thinking that if everyone on earth could engage in such an enlightened theatrical experience at the same time, awakening to a cathartic understanding, world peace would become ignited. Of course, I also know this is an incredibly zealous and unreachable ideal. But we, as theatre artists, lovers, and critics, *can* keep producing the type of theatre that will change people, one at a time. Theatre

25. Matt Trueman, “Stop Surviving, Start Serving...” *Matt Trueman: Theatre Critic and Journalist*, October 6, 2013.

produces epiphanies of what it means to be kind, loving, open, honest, accepting, understanding, brave, happy, sad, and fully aware of the human experience, if only for a moment. If we are lucky, a fraction of these moments will live on inside a person forever, continually increasing the wellbeing not only of theatre, but also of society.

When I think about the future of theatre criticism, I feel hopeful. I know that others share my sentiment and are dedicated to advancing the field of theatre criticism. The more we can increase the discussion of journalistic criticism in the theatre, the more accepted it will become. The Internet has brought great changes to theatre criticism, increasing these conversations more and more every day. With countless aspiring critics, bloggers, “tweeters,” and writers of all kinds expressing their opinions widely and publically, news of the arts is spread like never before. People who have never had a voice in such a manner now have a platform from which they can be heard, amateur and professional alike. I do see impending problems with this “new-wave” criticism, such as increasing amounts of criticism that is unhealthy, unkind, and unhelpful due to the fact that virtually anyone can make claims, justified or not, and with any motivation. Criticism may also become more complicated because so many people are doing the same type of work, some better than others, which could potentially increase negative feeling towards critics and the profession. Ultimately, despite these misgivings, I feel this shift in criticism is positive and online forms of criticism can aid in the healthiness of theatre the same way traditional forms can.

With the countless reviews, reflections, and opinions showing up in blogs, Twitter and Facebook feeds, theatre is discussed much more frequently. The conversation of productions and theatre news has exponentially increased. These discussions are precisely what cause people to become and remain interested in the theatre. It is clear that no matter the position of online

critics, they are certainly supporting and promoting theatre all over the world. Online sites can also be effective platforms for discussing themes of social justice, allowing anyone to participate in the conversation. Bloggers may reach people that the newspaper critics do not, and they are able to involve people more easily and directly. These two forms of criticism may attract people of different tastes, and each holds their varying strengths and interests for the reader.

While theatre artists must recognize the value of theatre criticism, critics and artists alike must also realize that the field is shifting. Online criticism is becoming more predominant and widespread, and will continue to do so. If this is where the future of theatre criticism lies, we must learn to embrace and accept it, as the work of professional critics should be respected and accepted. While all forms of internet criticism may not be appreciated or applied the same way, online forms of criticism hold value, and there are undoubtedly helpful critics, professional or not, who are providing insightful feedback. Being employed for a newspaper does not necessarily imply credibility, and vice versa. In the same way that journalistic criticism helps the theatre generally, online or amateur criticism can be strengthened and improved by reviewing the online platforms themselves. This promotes a positive discourse and online community, creating criticism that is more effective and beneficial. Ultimately, bloggers and similar critics are still providing criticism that is increasing the discussion of theatre, allowing more and more people to engage with it, and is also potentially promoting a healthy theatre community.

This thesis has come to have great meaning to me. Although it has been hard (and sometimes embarrassing) surveying my own work, it has been incredibly beneficial. Nothing could have better prepared me to progress as a critic. I now have a much better grasp of what I need to improve upon by learning from past mistakes, and I can look toward the future with newfound awareness, as well as a stronger philosophy and purpose than I had before.

While I think all three of the goals of theatre criticism that I have outlined are equally important, my personal favorite aspect is promoting a production and supporting the theatre as a whole. Because I have such a deep love for the theatre and cherish the transformative moments and epiphanies I have experienced, I am passionate about sharing these experiences with others. It is my utmost goal as a critic is to share the magic of theatre with others. I can improve upon this aspect by simply better promoting my own work, sharing my reviews with others and on social media. I can also focus on making stronger recommendations to target audiences that more stalwartly encourage people to attend.

The words “honest” and “specific” are absolutely key when providing feedback. Feedback within reviews is especially significant because it is what sets a theatrical review apart from a feature article or general play analysis. The feedback is most helpful to the theatre company that produced the play, and of course the cast and crew. Because I always want to see increased salubrious theatre that affects its viewer, it is important to me to share with the company elements I loved about their production, as well as to inform them of moments that could be improved upon. I can always learn to be more honest while writing, being true to my original thoughts and impressions I had while watching the production. More often than the alternative, I feel that I fall into the trap of being a little too kind, providing compliments and praise that may not be entirely how I felt. While this is always something to work toward, I must remember to write politely and professionally so that my reviews do not create negative feeling towards further reviews or the field of journalistic criticism.

I have always been compelled by the idea of using the theatre as a tool to effect social change. Using theatre criticism to do so, even on a small scale is exciting to me. It is important that I pay closer attention to themes of social justice within the theatre, and then communicate

my realizations in reviews. More important than picking out the messages of social justice in a production, I want to endeavor to find the moments where injustice is depicted. These are the examples that, when exposed, may have the biggest impact on a theatre community, helping it to reach an even healthier state.

I am happy to see that my writing has improved over the course of two years, however, from the close reading of all of the reviews, I have noticed small ways I can continue to progress so that my reviews are more enjoyable to read. I have also learned how specific reviews are to the particular production being critiqued. All performances call for feedback in different areas, some more than others, and because all shows are different, the reviews are too. A review does not necessarily warrant attention in all three of the categories I've addressed. While I can strive to incorporate all when I can, it is all right if a review doesn't discuss social justice, for example, as long as I am always aware of it and bringing it up elsewhere. As a critic, I must continue to evaluate my writing so that I may improve, providing theatre criticism that is of utmost significance for that of the profession and the theatre in general.

I recognize the limitations of this thesis, and have pondered over who will read this work. Most likely, it will not be directors or established theatre makers or critics. The people who may stumble upon this thesis will be students and possibly aspiring critics, those who are interested in journalistic criticism in the theatre. This work is not groundbreaking, though I hope that my musings and evaluation spark truth and insights in others. The largest potential value that this thesis holds, however, is not in what is actually presented in the content, but in how I have profited from engaging in this project. I am confident that I am now a stronger critic than when I started, and will continue to become so because of what I have learned. It is my sincere hope that because of this thesis, I will be able to benefit readers, theatre makers, and the theatre as a whole

for years to come with my writing, and as a critic, I will prominently contribute to journalistic criticism in the theatre.

I aspire to be a critic that audiences and theatres alike can trust, providing all the insight and information I can to fully support a healthy theatre community. I know what it feels like to experience moments of magic while engaging with the theatre, and to have glimpses of utopia. My purpose as a critic is to help others experience the same feeling. Producing journalistic criticism that archives and promotes, provides honest and specific feedback, and places emphasis on social justice will allow healthy theatre to flourish, strengthening communities, society, and providing hope for our world. I truly hope that this message is spread, allowing all those working in the theatre to come together to improve and move forward the work of theatre criticism, recognizing the unparalleled value in it.

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