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Directing Final Paper

Thoroughly analyzing each one of the screenings was a key part of learning and absorbing what each one of them had to offer. It was very interesting to see each director and how their different backgrounds affect each one of them, but how at the same time they have similar essences, and are passionate about what they do for a living. One specific thing that almost all of the directors agreed upon when asked is that you cannot learn how to direct until you direct something. You can be a great assistant, and you can learn a few things from other directors, however, you will only learn how to do it when you start doing it. This is something that was explored in this class (even though we could not finish it) so I thought it was a good idea to pay attention to what these people were saying and contrast to what we learned in the class, and how I was starting to direct my play.

I am a fan of theatre, but I do not geek out on it very much. Especially about the directors, however, I observed that the panel of directors in each program was very special, so these people are the best that are in the business and they were bringing a good amount of knowledge to us. Something that I thought was interesting is that, just like in many other professions, most of them went to Ivy League, or famous colleges for their undergraduate, or graduate degree. This was the case of Doug Hugues, who was studying biology in Harvard, and then realized that he had this passion, and calling for the arts, since both of his parents were actors. Also how, when he realized he was pursuing the wrong thing, he basically created a small theatre club in Harvard where writers would submit their ideas and how he would direct them later, and how most of these writers who were submitting stories are also very famous names

right now. I also thought it was very interesting when Leigh said that she had worked with him before as his assistant and she only had great things to speak about him, with admiration.

Leigh Silverman was another great director sitting in the first panel, and I thought that how she became a director was very interesting. She said that she was interested about being an actor, and she was working towards that, but then one of her camp teachers said that she was not a good actor, but would maybe be an excellent director. This drew my attention the most because she could have complained or gotten mad over that comment, or even tried even harder to pursue acting; but she went and tried what the teacher suggested, and fell in love with it. She was one of my favorite directors because she is very humble and she acknowledges the circumstances that build her directing life to the point where it is today. As mentioned above, she has worked under Doug Hugues, and she only had good comments about him, even after being put on the spot asked if under him she had had the opportunity to direct and her answer was very wise and considerate saying that, at that moment, it was not what she was looking for, and she was just happy to be there as an assistant. Leigh was definitely the director that I most learned from, I just loved her take on what she does and how passionate and thankful she is about every opportunity that was given to her, and what she is doing right now.

Scott Elliot is another great director who also started as an actor, and went to a top tier school. He was majoring in psychology at NYU, when he realized it was not for him, so he called some old friends so they could start a theatre company. I like the originality of this director, and the passion that he speaks about what he likes and dislikes. I thought it was very interesting when he brought up that some directors try to please others, especially the audience, but they should be egocentric and try to please themselves and the artists that are working with them because it is hard to please people. This was also said by Anne Borgart, who we will talk

about soon. With Elliot I could really see that being passionate and dedicated about what you do is very important and a director needs that because then he can relay this to his team.

Anne Borgart was someone that I was very intrigued by. She liked to speak a lot, and we can also see that she is passionate about what she does. She is very opinionated, and seems like to be a person that likes to push herself to her limit as a director, and I like that! With her, I learned that directors need enthusiasm and ability to articulate what they want to their artists. She is also one that likes to think that the director should please himself with the work that he/she is doing because if they do otherwise it will not work since it is hard to please everyone. She gives nice tips about her directing style, which is more laid back, and she likes to give voice to her team. She tells a nice example of how in an opera she lets the musicians opine even though they are not accustomed with the director doing that just because they know more about music since they have been studying and working with that. I like her approach to directing because it is important to make the people who are working with you feel important, heard, and respected.

John Rando was also an actor in school, and he had a drama teacher that saw potential in him to direct and let him direct his first play during his senior year of high school. He brought some interesting ideas of how a person giving an opportunity to the other is important, but also how important it is to know the right people and have the right connections, because having the right connections was actually what got him his first professional job. This is not only important in this market, but also all the other ones. If you have good connections, you can go very far very fast. I also thought that it was nice of him to say that being an actor did not help him to be a director, and most of them say that it is not correlated, but it did help him to understand actors better, so when he is directing, working with actors, he knows how to speak their language and

how to be considerate of them. I believe that this is an important characteristic that directors should have to fully connect with the people that they are working with.

Another great director I could learn from was Joe Mantello, who also started as an actor. He got into directing just because he wanted to try something different then fell in love it with, just like most of the other directors. Something that I thought was really interesting about him is the way that he recognizes that the work that he does is not his merit, but he has to appreciate and recognize that it is the director's work, the actor's work, and the crew's work altogether so it is hard to take a lot of credit for what he does, and this is the nature of the job. I thought this was a very wise thing to say and to learn as a novice director because sometimes we look for recognition, and even though it comes, it might come as a whole, with other people so it is important to recognize that.

Sheryl Kahler also had some interesting points to make. She said that what makes a good director is to show up on time and do the best job you can each day. I think this is a very important lesson to apply for life, to do the best you can with all your heart. One of the most interesting things that she said was how blocking can affect the humour of a play depending on the size of the stage. This is something that we saw while doing blocking, that we have to consider the space that we have so our audience can hear and see the play properly. I like her laid-back approach to directing and how she likes to pay attention to the suggestions that her artists give her.

Pam Maccinon was another great director with useful tips to beginners, and veterans. She said it is very important to communicate with the actors, visual artists, designers, everyone. And that what makes a good director is to show up on time, prepared, and willing to hear what the collaborators bring to the table and perhaps make changes based on that. I really like how she

brought up the technicality of the stage, and how the placement of actors is hard sometimes if you are changing houses, for example. Because, like Sheryl also said, each stage is different and you have to consider the audience who is viewing it. I also thought it was interesting that she gets inspiration by doing ordinary things such as traveling and seeing and enjoying other people's work.

Stephen Wadsworth is also another director that has an impressive background. He directs opera and theatre, and he is also a teacher, and works at Julliard. He believes that some key elements of being a good director is to have good communication, persuasion, and to unify the voices. I enjoyed that he said that he is a visual person so he likes to see the space, the colors, and everything so he can develop his work. I also thought it was very interesting how he said that he likes the complicated bits of personal interaction. I believe it is very important for a director to analyze and understand how the personal interactions work so he, or she, can accurately relay what they want to their collaborators, and also for them to understand what the director wants from them.

Stafford Arima also brought his own ideas and shared his secrets with us. He said that instead of sitting and waiting for a directing opportunity, he went and created his own. He directed his first play out of an opportunity that he created, and because he would not have the means to hire a director, and it was successful. He brought up some interesting points about writers being a part of the play, that it should flow naturally and when they impose or interrupt too much it becomes an issue, and I believe this is something important to me mindful of. He said that he needs to feel the actors to hire them instead of looking at their resumes and I agree with that. Sometimes, regardless of how many productions the person has done, you just want the one who can connect to the character the most.

Henry Wishcamper started as an assistant director, just like many other directors. I thought it was interesting the fact that he did not go to graduate school, so what he learned, and the bulk of his training was during the phase where he was being an assistant. One very cool thing that I was able to learn from him is that once you recognize your mistakes, and what is not working for you as a director you have to go ahead and change them. Sometimes it is very hard to recognize where we mess up, so I think that what he said there was a very helpful tip.

Anne Kaufman and Rebecca Taichman also brought some very interesting points as female directors in this panel. Rebecca is one of the ones that had Ivy League education as she went to Yale, and Anne was a housing manager before she tried directing. Both of them agreed that being a woman you have a lot to prove as directors so they started out very serious and became more laid back as they learned their craft, and I believe this is something very important. To recognize your weaknesses.

Jo Bonney, Sheldon Epps, Michael Halberstan, and Gregory Mosher also had great tips to give. However, I grouped them together because this conversation flowed very organically with them and they were complimenting what the others were saying so I learned with them as a whole. Jo and Sheldon, for example, said that the actors that they work with have to have the essence of the character, and that them, as directors, have to feel that they (the actors) are the right ones for the characters that they are going to portray. I also thought that Sheldon brought interesting views because he was the only African American in the screenings we saw, and he even brought up the fact that of his skin color and the correlation with him wanting to be a director. Michael brought up an excellent point that I discussed in the beginning of the paper, and many other directors said that it is the reason why you can't learn directing until you direct: does not matter how much a director thinks that he/she is prepared, they will not know until they are

in a room with everyone and start rehearsing. And Gregory Mosher also gave great advice in the fact that sometimes a director really wants to work with a certain actor, and he does a play based on wanting to work with that actor, and then someone enters the room and they are completely thrown by that because now the idea of what they wanted shifts, so always be open to new ideas, including in the casting that you had already imagined.

The director Daniel Sullivan gave some advice saying that it is very easy to look at things more analytically after you become a director and kind of losing the thrill that you have when you are just starting. However, it is how you grow and how you make strong connections, which is very good. Another tip that I really appreciated is to make good relationships, which is also something that almost all the other directors said, because you learn how to relate to the actors and the rest of the crew. I also loved how dedicated he still is because he said that he reads about 10 different plays a week.

Scott Ellis also brought some good points about the producers, who are the people who fund the play. He said that there are some who are indeed hard to work with, but good producers will listen to you. He says that it is the director's job to create a welcoming environment for everyone that he is working with. He also started as an actor and said that the training that he got as an actor definitely helped him to become more sensitive to the actors. I liked how he said that he likes to push himself out of his comfort zone when directing, even when he thinks that something is not right. I also learned a lot from him.

One of the things that were common to all directors is the fact that almost all of them either assisted other directors, or were actors. They did not just jump into directing without any prior knowledge about theatre, and what I could sense in all of them is that they are deeply passionate about what they do. As many of them pointed out, being a director is not easy, it is

very stressing and some days it just feels like you are not going anywhere. I believe that jobs where you have to work with people closely are the hardest ones because people are complicated to work with. However, directors have to direct people, and make sure that their vision is relayed to them correctly so the play is executed as they envisioned. Even though none of them talked about passion, it was what I learned the most while viewing these screenings because I could sense that from each one of them. I also enjoyed their sensibility and how they know that they are not in this alone, and the credits will not be given to them alone, but to the production as a whole. So even though, like some directors said, you have to be egocentric to please yourself with your production, you also have to be the opposite to recognize that you win gratification as a team.