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**Allegedly in Love: A Theatrical Production**

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Honors Studies in  
Theatre

By

Leah Christenson

Advisor: Helene Siebrits

Spring 2023  
Theatre  
Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences  
**The University of Arkansas**

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## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	ii
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	iii
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>The <i>Allegedly in Love</i> Process</b> .....	2
<b>The Production Team</b> .....	3
<b>The Costume Design Process</b> .....	4
<b>Producer Responsibilities</b> .....	7
<b>Tech Rehearsals</b> .....	8
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	8
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	10

## Introduction

*Allegedly in Love* was a fully realized theatrical production with four performances spanning October 21-23, 2022. For this show, I took on the roles of producer and costume designer. I led our team on the design and administrative fronts while the playwright and director of the *Allegedly in Love*, Madelyn Marks, guided the text and performance of the piece.

At the very beginning of this process, when searching for a piece to produce and design, I had to take our potential resources and our projected timeline into consideration. It was crucial that I picked a piece that provided an adequate challenge for myself and my artistic team, yet one that was still achievable within the limits of our resources. Putting up an entirely student-led and student-produced show meant it was our job to be creative with our budget, our performance space, and our “man-hours” for building set pieces or altering costumes. It was vitally important that my production process valued the voices of the artistic team while still respecting the personal health of the individuals. The last thing we wanted was a burnt-out group of artists caused by an inability to properly estimate what was feasible within our seven month process.

I was first introduced to the *Allegedly in Love* script during a meeting of The Playground, a playwriting and workshopping club on campus. The script had four actors, minimal set changes, a realistic style, and most importantly, had a story I felt needed to be heard. There were plenty of lovely character moments for the actors to explore, and challenges for the designers like how one might indicate rain on garments or how to light actors during a power outage. Soon after hearing it read aloud, I requested to meet with Madelyn about her piece. By the end of our meeting, we had officially agreed to be partners in bringing *Allegedly in Love* to the stage.

*Allegedly in Love* is a play completely unique to the University of Arkansas from its creation as a script to its debut performance. The script itself is of Northwest Arkansas. It was

written in Fayetteville, the location of the piece is set in Northwest Arkansas, and its first debut as a full production was at the University of Arkansas in Studio 404. This piece has given the emerging artists of Fayetteville opportunities to perform, produce, and design a show that is intertwined with our experiences here as developing young professionals. *Allegedly in Love* is a new play that follows four young adults freshly out of college as they explore newfound independence, self-discovery, and the trials of relationships from the perspective of a young woman living in Fayetteville. After they move in together, we witness tensions between our main couple, Blair and Sydney. Alongside their respective best friends, Morgan and Travis, they navigate conversational grenades that will fundamentally alter the dynamics between them (Marks). It is a story of new beginnings that applies a critical lens to the modern romantic relationship and the experiences of young working professionals. *Allegedly in Love* speaks to the lives of a Gen Z audience, providing perspective on contemporary struggles similar to those young adults may face during the transition period from college to the working world. In that sense, the performance of this piece amplified the modern college graduate's experience as they gain their footing in adult life.

### ***The Allegedly in Love Process***

Once Madelyn and I made it our mission to produce *Allegedly in Love*, we knew there would be a few hurdles to jump before auditioning actors. We applied to be considered part of the UARK Theatre Department's "Student Spotlight" series, a newer addition to the department's season. In applying for this title, we were granted the black box theater Studio 404 in Kimpel Hall for our production as well as permission to attend the department's season auditions as casting directors. After the MainStage season was cast by the department, we were given priority for any actors that were not. This smoothed our casting process considerably,

allowing us to focus our energies on hosting our own separate callbacks for the show. The group dynamics in this piece are central to the story, so we paid particular attention to which combination of actors had the best chemistry. After the callbacks, we had a few intense hours of deliberation. We ultimately chose our cast of actors for the performance, who all had exhibited acting talent and a friendly, hard working attitude. I then created a rehearsal schedule and we cemented our exact timeline for the show, including a design presentation for the entire *Allegedly in Love* team, tech rehearsals, dress rehearsals, and performances.

### **The Production Team**

Amidst auditions and season applications, I needed to secure a team of designers and a budget with which I could support our production. I applied for the Honors College Research Grant, and was honored to receive it for the summer 2022, fall 2022, and spring 2023 semesters. With this grant, I was able to turn our design and marketing dreams into a reality. Each designer received a portion of the budget corresponding to their needs and projected expenses. For recruiting the designers themselves, I approached trusted former collaborators and promising new prospects from the U of A theater cohort. If I hadn't seen direct examples of their work, I requested their portfolio so I could determine their compatibility with our project. I quickly amassed a team of experienced undergraduate designers and stage managers who were buzzing with excitement at the prospect of our production. Our design meetings began in April 2022 after the show was cast, and we began to share our preliminary interpretations of the script and initial design ideas. We strove to create a healthy conversation in design meetings while still adhering to our agenda and time limits for our meetings. Before each design meeting, I would create an agenda and talking points for us to explore. Once I conferred with Madelyn and made any necessary changes, I would bring the agenda to the meeting and go around the room for designer

check-ins. We wanted to be sure that everyone was able to voice their questions, comments, and concerns in each meeting with time for group discussion at the end. As the producer, I led the meetings and imparted information about the budgets or other relevant administrative matters. As the costume designer, I brought in my own designs and took part in the artistic process as we moved closer to the show date.

### **The Costume Design Process**

My process for designing the costumes in *Allegedly in Love* followed a collaborative, time-sensitive plan based upon the methods of my mentor, Helene Siebrits. My process began with multiple read-throughs of the script and an in-depth analysis of the text. Over the course of our production timeline, I discussed the characters at length with the playwright and explored each character's perceptions of themselves, which greatly impacts their dress. As a costume designer, it is my responsibility to define the characters of a show, providing the audience with key information about their circumstances and characteristics. This includes the age, status, personality, health (both physical and mental), gender expression, and other major identifiers of each character (Cunningham 2-7). The costumes provide details on the time period, location, and environmental conditions of the world in the script, as well as the overall target style of the show (Siebrits.) The costume designer must also fit their designs within the overall vision of the director to create a cohesive show that coordinates between scenic, lighting, sound and costume design (Cunningham 8). The root of the designs are extracted from the script, acting as the primary basis for creating all elements of production. With that in mind, an in-depth script analysis is crucial to the early process of costume design.

*Allegedly in Love* is conversational in nature and its contemporary setting suggested current styles in my research (Marks). As I began to explore, I pulled photos into mood boards



and started gathering pictures of potential costume pieces to share in design meetings. My color inspirations were pulled from the four seasons. Blair was spring, exploring new beginnings and new growth for her character. Her best friend Morgan was summer, full of loud colors, a big personality, and a desire to chill. Sydney, Blair's boyfriend, was winter, his capacity for fun and lightheartedness cut by an underlying chill. Sydney's best friend Travis was our fall, mild, comforting, and contemplative. I picked the colors of the character's costumes accordingly, striving to align their personalities and inner lives with their sense of personal style. Because of the rapid transitions between scenes, each character had a "base look" that was embellished with changeable accessories and outerwear to indicate a different day. Blair wore a floral dress with a cardigan and sneakers, highlighting her femininity while keeping her style very current. Her colors were soft pink, cream, light gray, and tan to highlight her "spring" nature and peacekeeping tendencies. Morgan wore a tank top with a "thrifed" Hawaiian shirt tied over it, black corduroy pants in a "mom jean" cut, white sneakers covered in purple doodles, and bright yellow sunglasses. The bright purple, bright yellow, and pops of orange in her Hawaiian shirt complimented her outspoken nature and highlighted her "summer" spirit. Sydney wore khaki pants with leather sneakers and a navy blue polo buttoned all the way up to his chin. The khaki color he wore mirrored Blair's shoes during their date night, one of the moments they came together as a couple after tensions had been rising between them. Sydney's cooler-toned colors and neutral palette conveyed his serious nature, subtly evoking winter. Travis wore gray skinny jeans, a cream shirt, a wool-lined jean jacket, hiking boots, and a fidget ring. His warmer color palette complimented Morgan's, hinting at the budding connection between them as well as his warmer "fall" nature.

As a costume designer, I had multiple rounds of research and paperwork that were imperative to supporting the design process. After gathering my initial inspiration, piecing together vision boards, and creating design drafts, I made piece lists for each look and determined their approximate costs within the confines of my budget. Everything we wanted to purchase was achievable within our costume and hair/makeup budgets. This included haircuts for the actors playing Sydney and Travis and a highlight correction for the actor playing Morgan, who had two-tone split hair at the beginning of rehearsals. I then broke down the script into scenes to create a costume plot determining the exact moments each actor would wear each piece. Along the way, I created actor-friendly and costume-crew friendly versions of the costume plot so each character would have a document detailing their costume tracking throughout the show. For the costume crew, I wrote a document detailing the quick changes and assisted changes, which we distributed during our tech week. I also created a costume “check-out/check-in” sheet so we could guarantee that all costume pieces were present at the beginning and end of each night once they were purchased.

*Allegedly in Love* is set in the early spring of 2023, so I explored modern clothing and makeup trends in my research. Floral dresses, slouchy cardigans, “mom cut” or “80s cut” pants, thrifted button ups, corduroy, and white leather sneakers were all popular for women in 2022. For men, leather sneakers, denim aviator jackets, dark jewelry, and “guyliner” have been very popular during 2022. I gave Morgan and Travis more trendy garments and distinct senses of personal style to reflect their stronger understandings of themselves and their values. I purchased garments from Amazon, Kohls, and Walmart, ordering a few different sizes for each garment to ensure we’d find a good fit. We held measurement sessions very early on, especially for Sydney (who needed a khaki suit jacket for date night) so we could scout out the perfect garments and

have enough purchasing lead time. After a “first looks” fitting session, we returned what garments didn’t fit the actors or our vision and made a second round of purchases. We had another fitting session for each of the actors and did “final looks” for our last dress rehearsal, having made little tweaks like painting Sydney’s bright white shirt buttons navy to match his polo and finishing the doodles decorating Morgan’s sneakers. We moved into performances having made all of our adjustments and given our instructions to the costume crew, ready for the show.

### **Producer Responsibilities**

As a producer, it was my responsibility to support the show financially and provide my team with anything they might need not directly related to their responsibilities. I also set the timeline for the production, managed our process, and coordinated meetings in a timely manner. As a leader in this process, it was my responsibility to keep an open communication with the UARK theater faculty. I also ensured we went through the necessary channels to get our production approved, our space reserved, and our show advertised. Our marketing plan, led by Assistant Costume Designer and Head of Publicity Mercy Embree, was a multi-faceted approach that maximized our public engagement. Beyond word-of-mouth, Mercy designed posters, flyers, and social media posts on multiple platforms to spread the word about our production. She submitted her drafts to me, and after a round of edits, we took them to the printer and spread posters around Fayetteville. As we neared closer to our performance, Mercy drafted a rough program for the show including a note from me as the producer. We also created a digital ticketing system, indicated by QR codes on our posters/flyers, that audience members could use to reserve their seats. Our strategy was incredibly effective. We sold out all performances within 48 hours, and opted to add a fourth performance in order to guarantee seats for the friends and

family of the *Allegedly in Love* team. Unbeknownst to the actors, I had been in contact with TheatreSquared about their show, *Detroit '67*. As a thank-you for all of their hard work and their willingness to meet over fall break, we started tech with a surprise pizza party and tickets for the entire team to see *Detroit '67*.

### **Tech Rehearsals**

Once we began tech, I switched between my producer/costume designer roles to keep the tech rehearsals on track while making necessary costume adjustments. I oversaw the recruitment of our crew and board operators, ensuring they received show communications as we moved into the final days before performance. We attended classes and advertised our show to the student body, recruiting crew members along the way. Once we entered tech, the crew assisted in setting-up the dressing rooms. Supported by the UARK costume shop, we brought over hangers, garment bags, and makeup mirrors. We also built a full private changing station out of rehearsal blocks and solid wooden dividers with a lockable door. As we entered dress rehearsals, I walked the costume crew through the quick changes and assisted changes, providing them with the documents detailing their track. I also had a hair and makeup lesson with the actors, breaking down each of their looks and instructions on how to achieve them.

### **Conclusion**

The performances of *Allegedly in Love* went very smoothly, and I delighted in them all. Madelyn and I gave a closing speech each night after curtain call, praising our team for their incredible efforts and recognizing the support we received from the Fayetteville theater community. With *Allegedly in Love*, we intended to collectively tell a story that frames love as a daily choice that should be mutually fulfilling. In watching the breakdown of the relationships

between these characters, we desired to move the audience to consider their own relationships and the role those play in their happiness.

I valued this experience immensely in my development as an artist, and I'm grateful for everyone who worked to make it happen. I gained comprehensive, hands-on experience as a producer and costume designer that I will carry with me into my career. *Allegedly in Love* has expanded my creative and administrative horizons, preparing me for professional theatrical work. This process has tested my skills as a team leader, designer, and theatrical coordinator following the model of a professional production. This show expanded both my skills and my portfolio, which is crucial for my ongoing future employment as a collaborative, well-rounded theater artist (Smith 65). In the theater industry, the ability to produce your own work is imperative to expanding your personal brand in a competitive industry. I'm honored to have taken what started as a script and a conversation between two artists into a fully-realized show and completed creative thesis project.

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