The Passionate Actor

Britney Nichole Walker-Merritte

University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

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The Passionate Actor

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Drama

by

Britney Walker-Merritte
Oral Roberts University
Bachelors of Science in Drama/TV/Film, 2009

May 2016
University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

________________________________________
Amy Herzberg, M.F.A
Thesis Director

______________________________  __________________________
Jennifer McKnight, M.F.A          Michael Landman, M.F.A
Committee Member                  Committee Member
ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of materials documenting my thesis performances as well as a statement of artistry, a copy of my current headshot, and resume and a link to my website.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Special thanks to:

The honeymooners: Bill Rogers, Damian Dena, Stephanie Faatz Murry, Lupe Campos, and Chris Hecke.

My professors at the University of Arkansas.

My bestfriend Ashley S. Price, who has always been my rock.

My family that instilled in me to always to pursue my passion.
DEDICATION

This is dedicated to those who passionately pursue their dreams with no limits.
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STATEMENT OF ARTISTRY

“To whom much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48). I believe I have been given a gift to be a creator: An Actor. I hold myself at a high standard when it comes to showing the complete rawest truth of each character that I portray. I have been given the opportunity to change the people around me. I don’t take lightly the potential to change their ideas and perceptions, or to allow them to reflect on their past, present, or future. It is my job, my passion, and I plan on doing it until I breathe my last breath.
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Frank and Sara Sharp, Les Wade and Robin Roberts

Every gift, no matter the size, is instrumental in helping us provide an
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latest technology, opportunities to work with guest artists, and
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University of Arkansas
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE
Proudly Presents
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
Twelfth Night

Directed by:
JENNY MCKNIGHT

Scenic & Projection Design: KIAH KAYSER
Costume Design: PATRICIA J. MARTIN

Lighting Design: JACQUELYN R. COX
Sound Design: JACOB HOFER

Dear Theatre Friends

Welcome to the second production of our 2015-16 Mainstage Season. I am sure you will enjoy seeing faculty director Jenny McKnight's rendition of William Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" set not in Illyria, but in New Orleans during March, the beginning of the 20th Century. I know they've all had a wonderful time with this classic piece and are eager to share it with you.

I am often asked, "How do you pick your season of shows for the University Theatre?" The short answer is this: it's not easy! When the faculty begins the process of selecting a season for the University Theatre stage, many, many factors must be considered. However, as an exercise in brevity, I will only discuss two. First and foremost, students who make up the Department of Theatre are our primary concern. As educators, we work to identify just the right pieces that will challenge and inspire students to become the best theatre artists they can as they develop their skill as designers, actors, technicians, directors, and playwrights. The student's best interest is always at the forefront and center as we make our way through hundreds of scripts each year, searching for the "right" plays and musicals. It's not an easy task, but one the faculty takes seriously.

Second, and equally important and you, the audience. We understand there are live theatre options in the Northwest Arkansas community, and we work very hard to stand out amongst a very exciting crowd. I'm sure we can all agree that by this and foremost, the show should be entertaining. Attending live theatre is a wonderful way to escape the rigors of daily life, which tends to be filled with business meetings, bills, chores, paying bills, and soccer practices. These activities monopolize our daily routine, so it's nice to break away for a couple of hours in a darkened theatre (with a couple hundred closest friends!) watching live entertainment is an excellent respite from all of these stresses.

However, we also believe that it is our obligation to provide an opportunity for audiences to be challenged, to be provoked, to be inspired, and ultimately to be changed. We hope that by seeing our productions -- created by the next generation of stage masters and world leaders in the arts and beyond -- you are moved to engage in a dialogue with the world in which we live, and perhaps, even more importantly, the world we will those who come after us. Some of our productions this year will push that even further, what I believe to be a very healthy and appropriate way.

This year's season is an exciting collection of works written by such artists as Coward, William Shakespeare, Sarah Ruhl and Billie Joe Armstrong & Michael is safe to say that most of our audience members will be one or perhaps two or three not all of these authors. What is also safe to say is that each show this season will entertain, challenge, and delight audience members of all ages, interests, and backgrounds. There is truly something for everyone.

Thank you for your patronage and hope to see you at the theatre!

Michael J. Riha
Chair of Theatre
Staff for the Production

Stage Manager: Colleen Draper
Assistant Stage Manager: Samantha Burrow
Costume/Props: Valerie Lane
First Hands: Ruby Kemp
Hair Stylist: Robin Okamoto

MEET THE CAST

DIRECTOR’S NOTES

When producing a play by William Shakespeare, many directors choose to set the play in a more contemporary time and place than the playwright intended, to illuminate the themes, relationships and spirit of the play to a modern audience. I’ve chosen New Orleans: a vibrant waterfront city, prone to storms, with a rich cultural heritage and adventurous, fun-loving, passionate and resilient people.

During the early years of the 20th century, folks of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds lived together in what jazz musician and New Orleans historian Winton Marsalis calls not a “melting pot,” but a “gumbo.” At that time, Jazz was beginning to emerge as a musical form in its own right, improvised from origins in blues and ragtime. And the social structure of those in power and those who served them was extremely important. Not to mention New Orleans carnivals, the history of legal prostitution in Storyville, gambling, jazz funerals, the French Quarter, The Garden District, mariners, pirates... As we rehearsed the play and honed our design ideas, we uncovered even more parallels between 1900s New Orleans and Shakespeare’s Illyria.

Thanks for joining us – we hope you’ll enjoy the trip as much as we have!

- Jenny McKnight

GETTING TO KNOW...

Kiah Kayser, Scenic & Projection Designer

Who is Kiah Kayser?
I am a second year MFA scenic design candidate from a tiny town in Minn that my friends enjoy calling “south Canada.” I love hanging out with the gre family here in Arkansas and shamelessly watching How to Get Away with M.
Also I would like to extend the biggest shout out and gratitude towards the grad/SHOP family. They are truly some of the most supportive people I know.

How did you get interested in design?
I grew up doing community theatre with my family and building sets with m. That’s where that theatre bug first really bit. What really got me interested in design was taking a theatre practicum class in my undergrad at Iowa State University. I got to paint every so often and I showed interest in it, so they h me to work in the scene shop the next year. I kept painting and then people wanted me to design. I fell in love with the idea of having to create an exciting world for the actors to work in while still supporting the story.

What do you wish people knew/understood about scenic design?
I wish people knew that putting on a show takes an insane amount of people working together. There are so many people that work on each show, that I stave in it. They all have to make decisions while keeping in mind the other people they are working with and also trying to stay true to how they want the story. It’s insane, but very wonderful and rewarding at the same time be there is such a sense of achievement when it is all put together.

If you could design any show, what would it be and why?
If I could design any show, I would love to do Macbeth. I am a big fan of Shakespeare and being able to deal with the magic of that. I would also really love to do Guys and Dolls because I have ne done a musical before and that show is so fun and has this more classic sense

What do you plan to do after you receive your MFA?
After I graduate I plan on working as a freelance painter/designer for a while then hopefully teaching.

If you were not in theatre, what would you want to do?
If I were not in theatre, I would love to at least be teaching. Seeing others discover things and really let those thing “click” is a fascinating process. See the Lab students work and learn in the theatre has brought me such joy. The energy and passion reminds me constantly of why I wanted to do theatre in first place.
WHO'S WHO IN THE PRODUCTION

Jessica Lee Cox (Lighting Designer) is from Chattanooga, TN. She is a graduate of the Lighting Design Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Cox has worked on productions at the Tennessee Repertory Theatre, The Virginia Repertory Theatre, The University of Vermont, and The University of Cincinnati. She has received several awards for her lighting designs, including a regional award for her work on "Twelfth Night." Cox is currently based in New York City and is available for freelance and full-time work.

CAST

Oberon, Duke of Navia .................................................. James Smith
Valentine, a gentleman attending on the Duke ............................................. John Adams
Coozie, a gentleman attending on the Duke ............................................ Kevin Kelly
Olestra, a rich Cretan .......................................................... Stephanie Evans
Toby Belcher, a rich Cretan .................................................. Bill Johnson
Bessie Belcher, a rich Cretan .................................................. Brenda Walker
Alice Belcher, a rich Cretan .................................................. Lisa White
Dante Belcher, a rich Cretan .................................................. John Collins
Kauffman, a rich Cretan ..................................................... Maggie Smith
2nd Gentleman, attendant to Coozie .................................................. Jeff Taylor
Viola Cesario, a shrewed young woman ................................................. Kate McNeill
Sebastian, a young man .............................................................. Josh Johnson
Eliot, a young man ................................................................. Mike Adams

SETTING

New Orleans, Louisiana. Turn of the 20th Century.

Twelfth Night will be performed in two acts, with one 10-minute intermission.

The video tapes or other video or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited. As a courtesy to other patrons, PLEASE TURN OFF CELPHONES AND OTHER DEVICES during the performance.

GETTING TO KNOW...

Jenny McKnight, Director

Who is Jenny McKnight?
Jenny McKnight is a director, actor, teacher, wife, daughter, sister, sports fan, cat lover, and reader, seeker of balance in all things. Not necessarily in that order.

What made you decide to join the faculty here at the University of Arkansas?
Jenny McKnight decided to join the faculty here at the University of Arkansas because she was drawn to the emphasis on collaboration, teamwork, and respect for each individual's contributions in the approach to classes and productions here at UA. It isn't always part of every educational environment, but it fuels her Theatre Department.

What is your favorite thing about this production?
Collaborating with the amazing students who are involved and watching them create a show that is dedicated to honest, clear, and innovative storytelling. It's been a joy.

Do you prefer acting or directing? Why?
That's like asking a parent to choose their favorite child! Those roles are both so valuable and necessary, in different ways. I'm grateful for this opportunity to develop my directing skills and further explore the ways in which my acting experiences inform my directing approach. And the reverse...

If you could play any role in the world, what would it be?
I'd love to play the roles of: Oedipus, The Birthday Party, The Trojan War...

If you could direct any show, what would it be and why?
A Harold Pinter play. Old Times, The Birthday Party, Betrayal...

If you could tell the audience one thing before they see this show, what would it be?
I'd thank each of them for investing the next few hours in a real-time, spherical, shared experience. I'd invite them to leave the outside world for a while and try to immerse themselves in the world of Shakespeare's (and their own imagination).

WHO'S WHO IN THE PRODUCTION

Bill recently appeared in Todd Taylor's The Jefferson Estates with the Black St. Theatre Co. University of Arkansas credits include: The Fennyman, King Lear, Timon Stands Still, Translations and She Stoops to Conquer. His Northwest Arkansas credits include: The Maids in Off Broadway Productions, Alley. All (The Artist's Laboratory Theatre). His Wir in a Variety of Productions, including Oedipus Rex and Oedipus Tyrannus. Bill is a member of the Actors' Equity Association.

Bunny is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas. She was a member of the University of Arkansas Opera Theatre and a member of the University of Arkansas Women's Chorus. Bunny is a member of the Actors' Equity Association.

Rosie Wagner is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas. She was a member of the University of Arkansas Opera Theatre and a member of the University of Arkansas Women's Chorus. Rosie is a member of Actors' Equity Association.

Bettye Walker-Amery is a senior in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Arkansas. She was a member of the University of Arkansas Opera Theatre and a member of the University of Arkansas Women's Chorus. Bettye is a member of Actors' Equity Association.
WHO'S WHO IN THE PRODUCTION

Maggie Harris ("Cordelia and Desdemona") is a senior Theatre major from Fayetteville, Arkansas. She was previously seen in "All About Loving" with the Ark Center of the Ozarks, This is her first University of Arkansas show.

Chris Brecit (Malvolio) is from San Pedro, Bolivia. He was a part of a Theatre from North Greenville University. Recently, he was seen as Malcolm in "Macbeth" with the University Theatre and as a lead singer in a local band. He is a member of the Media Club, a local radio station, and he plans to move to Los Angeles.

Jordan Martin ("Othello") is a senior Theatre major from the University of Arkansas. He has been involved in theatre throughout high school and college. He will be playing Iago in Twelfth Night. He recently played Iago in "Hamlet" at the University Theatre and plans to study acting at the University of Arkansas. He is a member of the University Theatre and will be playing Iago in "Othello" later this year.

THE STORY OF TWELFTH NIGHT, OR WHAT YOU WILL

Orlando, the Duke of Illyria, is in love with the Countess Olivia. She is mourning the death of her brother, so she rejects Orlando's suit. Another young woman, Viola, has just survived a shipwreck and washes up on Illyria's shore, fearing that her twin brother has died in the storm at sea. Viola decides to dress as a boy to get work as an attendant to Duke Orsino.

Orsino sends his new servant Cesario (Viola in disguise) as a boy to woo Olivia on his behalf. Viola seems unwillingly, as she has already fallen in love with Orsino. Olivia is attracted to "Cesario," and she sends her Eunice to the Duke's, after "Nemo," with the gift of a ring.

Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby Belch, his servant Maria, and Sir Toby's wealthy but gullible friend, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, who is also hoping to woo Olivia, all plot to expose the self-righteous, sanctimonious Malvolio. Malvolio forges a letter that tricked Malvolio into thinking that his mistress Olivia loves him. Malvolio appeared dressed ridiculously and mildly, behaving strangely as he was told to do in the letter. Meanwhile Viola's twin brotherbastian, having survived the shipwreck, comes to Illyria accompanied by his rescuer Antonio, who is a wanted man in Illyria. Sir Andrew challenges Sebastian to a duel (thinking he is "Cesario") and Olivia avenges him by challenging Sebastian (thinking he is "Cesario")

Finally, the twins encounter each other, astounding everyone in town. "Cesario" reveals that he is actually Viola, and she and Sebastian celebrate their reunion. The play ends as Orsino welcomes Olivia and Sebastian. Then, acknowledging his own attraction to Cesario, he promises that once she is dressed as a woman again, they too, will be married. "Twelfth Night" invites the audience to celebrate the restoration of balance to the world of the play.

WHO'S WHO IN THE PRODUCTION

Jenny McNulty (Director) is an instructor in the Department of Theatre, teaching Acting II, Acting for the Camera, and Theatre Appreciation. As a professional actor, Jenny spent nearly 20 years based in Chicago, and performed off-off Broadway around the country, including the Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, Knowsight Theatre, Victory Gardens Theatre, Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, Indiana Repertory Theatre, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arizona Theatre Company, Kansas City Repertory, and many others. Last spring, Jenny made her Tennessee Williams Debut in Superior Donuts. Jenny has also taught classes at Indiana University, Oklahoma City University, the University of Alabama, and Wabash College. She is very grateful to have landed in Fayetteville among such courageous and enthusiastic students!

Grant Addisson (Virginia) is from New Zealand, and is a senior, and was previously seen in Into the Woods at Cabot High School, and Anne and High School Musical at the Cabot Community Theatre. He plans to work in Washington D.C. and then he will go to law school.

Maryvale Allen (Sparrow) is a Junior theatre major. She is a transfer student and this is her debut at the University Theatre. Her favorite credits include Katniss Everdeen in The Hunger Games, Malevolent in The Hobbit, and于 Van Truyen in Aladdin. Her future plans include an acting career.

Guadalupe Campos (Vivian/Emma) is a 3rd year MFA Acting candidate at the University of Arkansas. Recent credits include ensemble member in Antigone, Hamlet (TheatreSquared), The Quest for Don Quixote and Just Like Us (Wak How Play Fest). University of Arkansas credits include The Cherry Orchard, A Kiss, Time Stands Still, and The Clean House (University of Arkansas School of Fine Arts). She is a member of "A Month's Progress," a local Buffet Improv group and has studied at the UCB Training Center in NYC. Guadalupe is a recent graduate of Ohio State University with a BFA in Theatre from the University of Texas at El Paso. She has appeared in the University of Arkansas spring production of The Mother! with The Hoth.

Matthew Travis Cloehr (Lex Capra) is a junior from Little Rock, Arkansas. He is a Theatre major with a Business minor. He was previously seen in the Cherry Orchard, and The Foreigner, and in the City Hall Improv Group.

Damien Davis (Davison) is a 2nd year MFA Performance Major and has been in previous university of Arkansas productions including Friday, Time Stands Still, Peter and the Wolf, and The Cherry Orchard.

Elizabeth DeWolf (Beatrice) is a native Arkansan and a senior in the Theatre Department. Previous University of Arkansas credits include ensemble cast for The Cherry Orchard, and The Foreigner. Lighting Coordinator for the Glee Club and the Glee Club Choir. Also has a degree in Theatre and Film.

Stephanie Fassbender (Olivia) is a native of Rochester, NY and a 3rd year MFA Acting candidate. She has a BFA in Musical Theatre from SUNY Fredonia and has worked professionally with companies such as Playhouse on the Square, Charleston Stage, Black Halo Playhouse, Nebraska Theatre Company, Hennepin Stage Company, and Terasawa in South Korea. Previous University of Arkansas credits include Alice in Wonderland and The Importance of Being Earnest.

Tina Gibson (Gigi) is a sophomore in the Department of Theatre and a member of the Theatre Department. Her latest project was Almost, Maine where she played Gayle, Walters, and Suzanne. She will graduate next spring. Her plans after graduation are to move to Los Angeles to pursue her acting career.

**Twelfth Night** Program published by University Theatre. Page 8 and 9.
As Maria in “Twelfth Night” (with Trey Smith and Bill Rogers). Photo by University Theatre.
As Maria in “Twelfth Night”. Photo by University Theatre.
As Maria in “Twelfth Night” (with Bill Roger, Chris Hecke, and Trey Smith). Photo by University Theatre.
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ANGELS................................................................Michael and Terry Johnson

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FRIENDS.........................................................Wayne and Sherri Brooks, Ben Hill, Brandon Keener and Elizabeth Barnes Keener, Brandt Leeds, Johnnie Leavelady, Nadine Purvis Schmidt and Karl Schmidt, Frank and Sara Sharp, Les Wade and Robin Roberts, Brent Winborn

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“The Motherfucker with the Hat” Program, publish by University Theatre. Page 1 and 8.
MEET THE CAST

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Welcome to Stephen Adly Guirgis’s prize-winning play, The Motherfucker with the Hat, now on tour with the University Theatre. The play’s title is a reference to a character in the story, and it is a title that seems appropriate for the story that unfolds in the play. The play is about addiction, and it is a story that is relevant to everyone, as we are all struggling with our own issues.

The play is set in a drug rehabilitation center, and it is about the struggle of a man trying to overcome his addiction. The play is written by Stephen Adly Guirgis, who is a well-known playwright in the United States. The play has been produced by the University Theatre, and it is a great opportunity for students and faculty to see a play that is relevant to our lives.

The Motherfucker with the Hat is a play that is relevant to everyone, and it is a story that is worth seeing. I hope that everyone who attends the play enjoys it and takes something away from it.
**Staff for the Production**

Stage Manager: Ana Diaz  
Assistant Stage Manager: Melissa Ferguson  
Lighting Design: Adam Rose  
Remote Lighting: Levi Rosario  
Sound Board Operator: Patrice Spann  
Stage Crew: Colleen M. Pancake, McClain Wood  
Wardrobe Crew: Mckenna Auth, Colby Downs  
Poster Design: Emily Closson

**Special Thanks To...**

Alcoholics Anonymous, Debbie Bafios, Flex Coreas,  
Jane Landman, Sean Liddell, McClain Wood,  
Dr. Javier Reyes and the Global Campus staff

**Staff for the Department of Theatre**

Chair of Theatre: Michael J. Rha  
Vice Chair of Theatre: Patrick J. Martin  
Theatre Office Manager: Barbara J. Spangler  
Production Manager: Joseph Millet  
Technical Director: Weston Wilkerson  
Scene Shop Manager: Brendan Hileman  
Costume Shop Manager: Valerie Lane  
Theatre Business Manager: Ashley Cohvis  
Box Office/Prompt of House: Michele Conway,  
Meghan McGinn, Paul McNichols, James Mekinen

**CAST**

Jackie........................................Chris Heckle  
Ralph D......................................Damien Dena  
Veronica................................Guadalupe Campos  
Victoria......................................Britney Walker-Merritte  
Cousin Julio.................................Charlie Rodriguez

**Place**  
New York City

**Time**  
Present

**The Motherfucker with the Hat**  
will be performed without an intermission.

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The videotaping or other video or audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited. As a courtesy to other patrons, PLEASE TURN OFF CELLPHONES AND OTHER DEVICES during the performance.

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**Coming Soon to the University of Arkansas...**

**Eurydice**  
By Sarah Ruhl  
February 19-28 at University Theatre

**Hedda Gabler**  
By Henrik Ibsen, Adapted by Christopher Shinn  
March 10-13 at Vol Walker Hall

**Green Day's American Idiot**  
Featuring special guest director Gary John LaRosa  
April 15-24 at University Theatre

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"The Motherfucker with the Hat" Program, publish by University Theatre. Page 3 and 6
WHO'S WHO IN THE PRODUCTION

Michael L嘴唇man (Director) is an Associate Professor of Theatre and Head of the M.F.A. Directing Department at the University of Illinois and a graduate of the School of Drama, University of Chicago. He has directed and produced extensively in Chicago, as well as at the Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre, and The Royal Shakespeare Company. His latest production, "The Motherfucker with the Hat," will be presented at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago this spring.

As Victoria in “Motherfucker with the Hat” (with Chris Hecke). Photo by University Theatre.
As Victoria in “Motherfucker with the Hat” (with Damian Dena). Photo by University Theatre.
As Victoria in “Motherfucker with the Hat” (with Chris Hecke). Photo by University Theatre.
WEBSITE LINK

http://britneywalkermerritte.com
Britney Walker-Merritte

B.A Drama/TV/Film—Certificate Los Angeles Film Studies—MFA Acting Candidate 2016*

**Height:** 5’5 **Weight:** 130 **Hair Color:** Brown **Eye Color:** Brown

**Voice Type:** Mezzo Soprano

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**Theatre**

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<td>Oral Roberts University</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macbeth</td>
<td>Killer</td>
<td>Tulsa Playhouse Theatre</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Film**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parker’s Anchor</td>
<td>Jeune-Fille</td>
<td>Purpose Pictures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FM Radio</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>LAFSC Short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Office Party</td>
<td>Girl date</td>
<td>LAFSC Short Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulina</td>
<td>Paulina</td>
<td>UCLA Student Short Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graces Ocean</td>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Slakes Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christmas Snow</td>
<td>Extra</td>
<td>Trost Film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elf</td>
<td>Owl lady</td>
<td>ORU Student Short Film</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Training**

Vocal: Pat Gidion, Jason Burrow

Acting: * Alexander Technique (Kate Frank)
  * Long Form Improve (Kris Stoker)
  * Meisner Technique (Courtney Sanders, Amy Herzberg, Bob Ford)
  * Viewpoints (Chris Crawford, Micheal Landman)
  * On Camera Acting (Nate White, Jenny McKnight)

**Special skills:**

Spoken word Poet, Hip Hop Dancer, Southern Dialect
Work Cited


"To Whom Much Is Given..." To Whom Much Is Given... Word of Truth Radio.com, 2003. Web. 05


To: Graduate School and International Studies, University of Arkansas
From: Ashley Cohea, Business Manager for Department of Theatre
Date: January 20, 2016
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(479) 575-6067
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