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Sic Semper Tyrannis Thus, Always to Tyrants

Joseph Gay

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Sic Semper Tyrannis

Thus, Always to Tyrants

By Joseph Gay

Thesis submitted
to the School of Theatre & Dance
at West Virginia University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in
Acting

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Abstract

Sic Semper Tyrannis

Joseph Gay

Through the course of this thesis, I will examine the historical context of John Wilkes Booth and his assassination of President Abraham Lincoln as it is related to my performance of the character of Booth in the musical *Assassins* by Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman. Additionally, how the development of this character changed me as a performer, and created substantial growth as a professional. This historical examination of Booth, as well as the examination of text and music, will shed light on how this role came at a crucial point in my training at WVU. Included will be a comprehensive review of the use of training in voice, body, and acting that I received during my time at WVU, and how this training will remain invaluable throughout my career.

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Chapter 1: A Vocal Backdrop

“Finishing a hat. Starting on a hat. Finishing a hat. Look I made a hat . . . where there never was a hat!” are lyrics from Stephen Sondheim’s musical *Sunday in the Park with George*. A musical that is about the artistry of creating, what it means to live as an artist, and how creating art translates directly to creating self. *Sunday in the Park with George* is specifically about a painter, but as an actor, creating a character in service of a story translates to creating a self-identity in service of a greater story – life. On very special occasions these characters help the actors learn something about their self-identity, and while one creates a character, the character in turn creates the actor. Ultimately, that is the appeal of performance. Many performers look to gain something from the roles they play. They also give something. There is a duality of leaving a piece of yourself in that role, and at the same time taking something with you. It’s like a relationship. You give something, and you take something. When you leave that relationship, you are more whole in certain ways, but also empty. This is also the relationship that you have with the audience

Every role you begin allows you to start all over again – create something new. “White. A blank page or canvas. His favorite. So many possibilities.” is the last line in *Sunday in the Park with George*. There are, in fact, so many possibilities at the beginning of a performance. Sondheim writes a lot about these themes, and not just in the context of being an artist. He makes many parallels between life and art, but he oftentimes approaches these themes in terms of relationships, leaving a legacy, and making a mark with the life we’ve been given. A sort of existential, self-determination kind of writer. His way of building his music and lyrics, tying them into life, and his use of metaphor is reminiscent of Shakespearean text. Every word and every phrase feeds the actor’s emotional and physical choices. Every note, word, tempo, and

dissonant change is an imaginative smorgasbord for the soul. These are the shows and characters that truly communicate with the actor and change who they are as people.

Performing John Wilkes Booth from Sondheim's musical *Assassins* was one of those special occasions when building a character fed my development as a person and actor. The process reminded me how to start with a blank canvas, the possibilities that arise, and the growth that comes out of giving over to another person or character. People create themselves into characters to interact with their surroundings every day. Actors tend to forget the fact that crafting a character is no different than the way we craft ourselves, thus creating for the stage can become disconnected from real human behavior, which is why acting teachers throughout time have said they do not want to see the actor "act," rather to simply be. Working on Booth allowed me to take what Sondheim and Weidman had put on the page, commit myself to necessary research, and then give myself over to that character. In this way Booth came to life and left me with something new. A piece of Booth stayed with me, as though the text, the collaborators involved in WVU's production of *Assassins*, and who I was as a person came together to conjure him back to life. In that way, I experienced a sort of transcendent learning experience that changed me as an actor and person. Before Booth, I was not a bad person, nor was I a "bad" performer. Booth was not the first character that I felt change or stay with me, nor will it be the last. But developing Booth instilled a confidence in me that I didn't have before. This process healed many of the insecurities I had about my voice, speaking **and** singing, thus crucial to my growth as a clear and grounded actor.

The insecurities about my voice started at a young age. The vocal part of puberty hit a couple of years later than most, and I remained a squeaky soprano late into my teenage years. This was probably the first blow to the confidence in my voice and perception of how my sound

defined me, thus causing the development of poor vocal habits. Even when my voice started changing, and I became a low bass, the insecurities convinced me my speaking voice was too high. Any time I heard a recording of myself I still heard that high, squeaky soprano voice. This way of thinking caused tension by actively working to make the voice lower and more monotone instead of being naturally free – causing a disconnection with the breath. Throughout the course of my undergraduate program, I put in a lot of hard work into not only my singing voice, but also my speaking voice. Fitzmaurice voicework with Shakespeare text taught me how to release many of the vocal tensions built up. Alexander Technique taught about finding the natural state of being and release in the voice instead of muscular control and pushing. Being incorporated and accepted by faculty in the Music Department, joining a choir, and taking lessons from vocal professor Dr. Ann Schoenecker allowed me confidence and passion for singing to return. However, the insecurities I had about my voice still existed.¹ Many of my peers and teachers led me to believe that I would never be good enough, and I tried to work on my voice by comparing mine to the voice of others. Singing was especially a point of insecurity, and I carried that insecurity into the MFA program at WVU. For the first year in the program my voice continued to get in the way of my development as an actor. It was a mental block and hurdle that seemed impossible to surpass. In the second year of grad school we dug into Shakespeare, which reminded me to use the voice in tandem with imagination. It was a semester that reminded me what it was like to let the text and the character change and affect me. This time around, our voice instructor, Professor Laura Hitt, opened my understanding of pitch variation through Fitzmaurice and Linklater techniques such as tremoring and the house of resonance.

¹ Personal Journal in Appendix A: Insecurities going into the process

The training throughout second year gave me back the confidence I needed to move forward as an actor, as well as helped me re-discover my identity as a person. The technical training gave me greater use of pitch variety and a new found understanding of resonance. Being able to connect these technical aspects to imagination and acting technique allowed me to take charge of my speaking voice. It also set me up to have the confidence needed to approach the role of Booth and rediscover my singing voice.² Learning how to take breath, resonance, and pitch variance in my speaking voice and connect those techniques to acting, set me up to make the same discoveries with my singing voice. By researching Booth as a person and developing him as a character in tandem with the application of vocal techniques, he became a role that transformed those insecurities into points of confidence. Instead of fearing my voice I grew to own it, and accept the challenges as opportunities to learn. Developing Booth was a necessary step in my acting career.

² Personal Journals in Appendix A: Auditions and Callbacks

Chapter 2 Perceptions and Reality of John Wilkes Booth

John Wilkes Booth is an interesting character to play because of the perceptions that surround him. Since the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, many sources painted him as a villain of the United States. The man who believed in the right to own slaves killed the man who led a war that ended slavery. From newspaper articles released the day after the assassination, to modern day psychological analyses, Booth emerges as a myth, madman, maniac, and short-tempered brute. History does not generally remember John Wilkes Booth as the famous actor, son, and countryman, born in the countryside of Maryland to a family of famous actors. His father, Junius Booth, contributed to the development of the acting style in the United States. His brother, Edwin Booth, made innovations in staging as a director later in life. The famous theatrical family made lasting contributions to American theatre as we know it (Brockett 327-328). However, most historic accounts remember John Wilkes Booth as a traitor and southern sympathizer with anger, hatred, a resentment towards the northern states and President Lincoln.

Lincoln, in contrast, is a man remembered as a hero who ended slavery with his famous Emancipation Proclamation. The memory of Lincoln and Booth is dealt with in “The Ballad of Booth” from *Assassins*: “But traitors just get jeers and boos, not visits to their graves. While Lincoln who got mixed reviews, because of you John, now gets only raves” (Sondheim and Weidman 10-11). That lyric rings true. Up until the assassination, Lincoln’s peers and contemporaries held criticism for him as well as praise, but after Booth shot him he became solely a hero. A hero for whom monuments have been erected. “Upon his death, Lincoln assumed the status of the dying god in northern culture, the tragic hero whose blood was shed to preserve the nation and who henceforth watched over the people from a mythic abode.

According to the classic formula, Booth assumed the status of his nemesis-twin, the demon god with whom Lincoln wrestled in endless combat” (Evans 9). How does an actor play such an iconic figure in US history? Was Booth truly a madman? The work ahead was to pull back the layers of perception throughout history and find the human within the perceived brute.

The main body of work in finding Booth as an actor is not to attempt to perfect an accurate representation of who Booth was in 1865. An actor's job is to find the humanity so that the representation of the character is not based on generalization, but personalization and compassion. You must give yourself the perspective of John Wilkes Booth as the human rather than the iconic, historical idea of him. Furthermore, every discovery or decision made about his humanity must be in service of the script. The struggle of doing so became most apparent as the cast of WVU's *Assassins* went through the first week of music rehearsal and first read through. Booth, as a character, needed to illicit likeability, but likeability through intelligence and manipulation. Not likeable in a “Oh, he’s nice, we like him” kind of way, but the audience needed to side with him, even if they knew his acts were far from admirable. The audience should want the same things he wants through the course of the play and go on that journey with him. Unfortunately, Booth in real life as well as in the musical had horrific and negative opinions about the African slaves in the United States. The line that made it apparent how difficult it would be to reconcile Booth’s humanity is a lyric in “The Ballad of Booth” where Booth – at the height of his emotional turmoil – calls Abraham Lincoln a “Nigger lover” (Sondheim and Weidman 15). It was a struggle for a while to decide if it should be said or not. I thought about approaching the Director, Professor Lee Blair, to ask if it could be cut since it is such a vile word. After struggling to find an actual written account from Booth using that word, it appeared perhaps Sondheim was using it for shock value or to make a statement about the ideals that

Booth represented. Maybe it was my desire for Booth to come from a place of pure intentions and not wanting to have to reconcile that part of him. Finally, it showed up in the research. Booth wrote:

The study of our early history will not let me forget it, and may it never. I do not want to forget the heroic patriotism of our fathers, who rebelled against the oppression of the mother country. This country was formed for the white, not for the black man. And, looking upon African slavery from the same standpoint as the noble framers of our constitution, I, for one, have ever considered it one of the greatest blessings, both for themselves and us, that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation. Witness, heretofore, our wealth and power; witness their elevation and enlightenment above their race elsewhere. I have lived among it most of my life, and have seen less harsh treatment from master to man than I have beheld in the North from father to son. Yet, Heaven knows no one would be willing to do more for the negro race than I, could I but see a way to still better their condition (Rhodehamel and Taper 147).

An actor cannot perform this role and ignore this part of Booth. The good and the bad parts of Booth must be recognized, or else the character will not be fully embodied.

Booth wrote those words for a reason, and Sondheim also wrote those lyrics for a reason. The racist, gross, and pure evil existed within Booth, but at the same time the noble, strong, and patriotic parts could exist. Every human carries the potential for great evil and the potential for exponential good. Trying to eliminate the evil part of a character does not help the actor. An actor must be able to let go of their own grievances and give over to other perspectives. The words of Booth and Sondheim could not be changed. They are written into the fabric of the play

as well as into the fabric of our country. Booth's actions influenced our nation for years, as did his words. I found a balance when coming across the things I perceived as the evil parts of Booth – especially when using the “n” word. An actor should not use it lightly. However, Booth is a character comfortable with racist language. The actor's perceptions cannot get in the way of the text and truth of the story. I concluded to use it while working on Booth's perspective, but never while warming up or practicing vocal technique apart from intention. In the end, it was something that just came out of Booth. There wasn't even a hiccup in my mind when the time came. That word must be used in service of our history as a country, and in service of the truth of the script. The audience had to grapple with it in the way Sondheim intended.

To personally grapple with the unsavory traits of Booth's character it was helpful to first connect with his noble and decent traits. Finding those traits that I could connect to and empathize with would help me achieve truthfulness when representing Booth's motivations within the action of *Assassins*. James W. Clarke write about Booth's perspective in *American Assassins*,

Few persons loved the south and hated Abraham Lincoln more than John Wilkes Booth. From the beginning of the war, Booth had made his southern Sympathies clear in the most outspoken and unequivocal manner. His hatred for the President was both personal and political, and it grew more intense as the conflict dragged on. He held Lincoln responsible for a bloody and unnecessary war and, as a man of some refinement, he was contemptuous of what he saw as Lincoln's personal coarseness of style and manner. In Booth's eyes, Lincoln was not qualified by birth or training to be president” (28).

The easiest place to begin was in Booth's opinion of Lincoln. Therefore, my research took me to Lincoln's critics.

Having attended a tribal college for my Associates degree, my approach and opinion was already different than what the grade school version of Lincoln as one of the United States' "greatest" Presidents would have been. From the Native American perspective, Lincoln is not represented as a hero in the way he is in typical American history. The professors at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College taught that he freed African-American slaves only to win the war for the North; that Lincoln's Civil War was more about economy rather than the freedom of all men. Lincoln was not anti-racist but rather an opportunist and not only did he own slaves, but was partly responsible for the continued expansion westward which resulted in the cheating, murder, and rape of entire Native American cultures. My History of the United States Professor Jonah Braxton-Brown pointed out that even in the Emancipation Proclamation, the emancipation of slavery may not have been humanitarian push for equality but rather a punishment to the southern states for their succession. The Emancipation Proclamation transcript from the National Archives Websites states "... and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion . . ." as Lincoln's reason for revoking slavery from states in opposition of the union. Additionally, Lincoln held the position that the war was not about the emancipation of slaves but the joining of states under the Federal Union.. It was only when it became apparent that emancipation would be necessary for victory that Lincoln presented his plan to his cabinet and advisors. On the advice of his cabinet, Lincoln waited for a Union victory at the Battle of Antietam to announce the end of slavery. His announcement on September 22nd of 1862 stated that all slavery would be abolished in all states still opposing the Union on January 1st of 1863, which is the day of the famous Emancipation Proclamation. Again, this proclamation was only

issued to those states still in opposition, and a war tactic that was meant to weaken the confederacy and recruit freed slaves for the Union. It must be clear that the loyal border and northern states were still allowed to hold slaves (Burns Ep. 2-4).

An actor can easily get caught up in the inner workings of the politics and social idealism behind both sides of The Civil War. It was a war that shaped the United States as a nation, and continues to do so. An actor's job is to glean information that drives the character actions on stage, instead of getting bogged down in historical information that is never dealt with in the text. This perspective of Lincoln is merely one side of a complex man leading a country during a complex time. To gain Booth's perspective, I needed to look at criticism of Lincoln and find his downfalls as a leader. To do so, it was helpful to view the African-American slaves and abolitionist leaders who fought for their own freedom as the true heroes of this war. For example, in 1862 before Lincoln made the move to emancipate slaves, Frederick Douglass wrote, "We care nothing for the Union. We have been slaves to it for nearly a hundred years" (Burns Ep. 3). Perspectives from leaders such as Douglass, and those who fought for freedom and equality became the link I needed to connect to Booth's intensely dark beliefs. By redirecting credit away from Lincoln, I could see his actions more from the eyes of a critic, rather than through the retrospective lens of the good he achieved historically for the United States.

This perspective became a jumping off point to dig further into stories about Booth as well as his own letters and journal entries. Having a less than ideal perspective of Lincoln made seeing the Civil War through Booth's eyes a bit simpler. Especially because my feelings about the current sitting President's tyrannical and arrogant behavior allowed me to connect to how Booth may have felt about his President's actions – even if our reasoning comes from vastly

differing beliefs. This was the beginning of the journey to connect Booth as a human to Booth as a motivated character who could elicit a sympathetic response from an audience.

After finding ways to connect to Booth from an idealistic worldview, my research revealed ways to connect to his personal reasoning in his own words (i.e. journal entries, letters, editorials). Booth's first scene in *Assassins*, apart from the opening number, is the scene between him and the character of David Edgar Herold – the man who aided Booth's escape after Lincoln's assassination. In this scene, they are finally cornered in a barn after being chased down for weeks. Booth is scrambling to write his purpose for shooting Lincoln before he is caught and inevitably murdered. He is angry because the papers are proclaiming him as a madman instead of being remembered as a hero. Herold urges Booth to escape, but Booth forces him to take down charges against Lincoln at gunpoint. In the end, Herold gives himself up, the barn is set on fire, and Booth shoots himself in the head (Sondheim and Weidman 11-16). The scene is a perfect example of what is needed in terms of historical accuracy versus what is needed to accomplish what Sondheim wrote. All the historical research done was motivation for these first moments. The rest of his actions in the play are a combination and result of this catalyst or inciting incident. For example, there is no real evidence that Booth was scrambling to write down his charges against Abraham Lincoln. Apart from a few pages found missing from his diary, that conversation is something of Sondheim's imagination.

To figure out how these historical imaginings help tell the story, and find motivation for these actions, it is helpful to look at the things that Booth actually wrote. By doing so, you can find the factual places that Sondheim and Weidman pulled from to create their fantasy. Another example of the historical liberties taken is Booth shooting himself in the head. He was actually shot while he was still in the barn, and then bled out on the farmer's porch steps (Evans 3-4).

What was the purpose of changing these details? Sondheim must have had a very specific reason for making these intentional changes from fact to fiction, as he hopefully knew the historically accurate version of the story. Whether that choice was to make a more climactic moment for the scene, or drive Booth's action throughout the rest of the play, Booth's historical motivations can help feed his fictional actions on stage. During the scene with the Herold, Booth declares his motivations for what he does in his indictment against Lincoln. "One: That you did ruthlessly provoke a war between the States, which cost some six hundred thousand of my countrymen their lives" and "Two: That you did silence your critics in the North, by hurling them into prison without benefit of charge or trial" (Sondheim and Weidman 13). How much did those things truly mean to Booth and what was Weidman's inspiration for that dialogue? One of the first of his letters I came across was to his mother, where he personally expresses many of his beliefs in detail. In one passage he explains his patriotism that also comes across in the *Assassins* dialogue.

But dearest Mother, though, I owe you all, there is another duty. A noble duty for the sake of liberty and humanity due to my Country—For, four years I have lived (I may say) A slave in the north (A favored slave its [sic] true, but no less hateful to me on that account.) Not daring to express my thoughts or sentiments, even in my own home Constantly hearing every principle, dear to my heart, denounced as treasonable, And knowing the vile and savage acts committed on my countrymen their wives & helpless children, that I have cursed my wilful idleness, And begun to deem myself a coward and to despise my own existence (Rhodehamel and Taper 130-131).

Here Booth has written something that correlates directly to the text in the musical. It gives the actor concrete material to use when working on personalization of the character. He continues later to say

You can answer for me dearest Mother (although none of you think with me) that I have not a single selfish motive to spur me on to this, nothing save the sacred duty, I feel I owe the cause I love. [sic] the cause of the South. The cause of liberty & justice. So should I meet the worst, dear Mother, in struggling for such holy rights. I can say “Gods’ will be done” And bless him in my heart for not permitting me, to outlive, our dear bought freedom (Rhodehamel and Taper 130-131).³

These words further the ideas of patriotism and commitment to his cause. He not only believes his cause is good and moral, but a direct charge from God. To him, it was God’s will that he murders the tyrant who crushed the liberty of the South. These words drive the dialogue in the musical. Furthermore, they drive the actor to invest themselves in every word. I could not read these words without feeling my own passionate commitment to patriotism, the United States, and the freedom of my countrymen. Nor could I read them without feeling the pang of despair in potentially tearing my family apart by going a different direction from how I was raised. Later, in the letter he asks forgiveness from his mother, and the conflict between his devotion to his family and his own convictions are clear. Booth’s words motivated the performance of such text in the musical such as “I did it so they’d suffer in the North the way we’d suffered in the South.” Many of us can relate to differing political views from our families and those we care about or

³ Full letter in Appendix B: John Wilkes Booth to Mary Ann Booth

love. Based on his letters and diary, Booth felt the same in the northern states. He felt as though he was oppressed for his beliefs and needed to stand up for what he believed was right. The letter to his mother also shows the patriotism that Booth carried. He stood for liberty, justice, and freedom, and he perceived the southern states as downtrodden, having their inalienable rights stripped away. How accurate he was in his perception of who was downtrodden is not necessarily the actor's job to decide while preparing to perform the role.

The next personal writing of Booth's I looked at was a submission to the editors of the *National Intelligencer* April 1865, explaining his stance to the country. This was a logical next step in the progression of personalization. The first was his emotional relationship with his family and that connection, this next one ties into his political relationship with his country.

Washington, D.C., April 14, 1865. To My Countrymen: For years I have devoted my time, my energies, and every dollar I possessed to the furtherance of an object. I have been baffled and disappointed. The hour has come when I must change my plan. Many, I know—the vulgar herd—will blame me for what I am about to do, but posterity, I am sure, will justify me. Right or wrong, God judge me, not man. Be my motive good or bad, of one thing I am sure, the lasting condemnation of the North. I love peace more than life. Have loved the Union beyond expression. For four years have I waited, hoped and prayed for the dark clouds to break and for a restoration of our former sunshine. To wait longer is a crime. My prayers have proved as idle as my hopes. Gods [sic] will be done. I go to see and share the bitter end. This war is a war with the constitution and the reserve rights of the state. It is a war upon Southern rights and institutions. The nomination of Abraham Lincoln four years ago bespoke war. His election forced

it. I have ever held the South were right. In a foreign war I too could say “country, right or wrong.” But in a struggle such as ours (where the brother tries to pierce the brother’s heart) for God’s sake chose the right. When a country like this spurns justice from her side she forfeits the allegiance of every honest freeman, and should leave him untrammelled by any fealty soever to act as his conscience may approve. People of the North, to hate tyranny to love liberty and justice, to strike at wrong and oppression, was the teaching of our fathers (Rhodehamel and Taper 147).

This section of the letter shows Booth’s commitment to his cause, his country, and his people. It also shows his feelings about Lincoln which are expressed in the text of *Assassins* when Booth indicts, “That you did ruthlessly provoke a war between the States which cost some six hundred thousand of my countrymen their lives.” By going beyond what Sondheim wrote to learn what Booth felt, a greater meaning can be found. Booth goes further to explain his cause and hatred for Lincoln,

But Lincoln’s policy is only preparing the way for their total annihilation. The South are not, nor have they been, fighting for the continuation of slavery. The first battle of Bull Run did away with that idea. Their causes for the war have been as noble and greater far than those that urged our fathers on. Even should we allow that they were wrong at the beginning of this contest, cruelty and injustice have made the wrong become the right, and they stand now before the wonder and admiration of the world as a noble band of patriot heroes. I know my choice, and hasten to accept it [. . .] I have studied hard to discover upon what grounds the right of a State to secede has been denied, whether our very name, United States,

and the Declaration of Independence both provide for secession[,] but there is now no time for words (Rhodehamel and Taper 147-148).

Booth was justified in his reasoning. One of his bits of dialogue in *Assassins* is “We did get away with it! He was a bloody tyrant and we brought him down! And I will not have history think I did it for a bag of gold or in some kind of rabid fit!” It would be easy to play Booth as a rabid maniac with a broken leg, but that is contrary to the text itself.

Sondheim writes in that Booth believes reasoning was greater than fame or a rabid fit. Once again, these personal writings and understanding of why he did it give the performance more depth. The last moment in the scene we reach the fictionalization of Booth shooting himself in the head. The actor must earn that poignant moment. The final lyrics of “The Ballad of Booth” are “Let them cry dirty traitor! They will understand me later. The country is not what it was.” Then he shoots himself. This final moment, even though it is fictionalized, is directly motivated by Booth’s feelings about his loss of country which he expresses in his letter to the editor.

Alas, I have no longer a country. She is fast approaching her threatened doom. Four years ago, I would have given a thousand lives to see her remain (as I had always known her) powerful and unbroken. And even now I would hold my life as naught, to see her what she was. Oh! my friends, if the fearful scenes of the past four years had never been enacted, or if what has been had been but a frightful dream, from which we could now awake, with what overflowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for his continued favor. How I have loved the old flag can never now be known. A few years since and the entire world could boast of [none] [ed.’s brackets] so pure and spotless. But I have of late been

seeing and hearing of the bloody deeds of which she has been made the emblem. And would shudder to think how changed she had grown. Oh! how I have longed to see her break from the mist of blood and death so circled around her folds, spoiling her beauty and tarnishing her honor. But no; day by day has she been dragged deeper and deeper into cruelty and oppression, till now (in my eyes) her once bright red stripes look like bloody gashes on the face of heaven. I look now upon my early admiration of her glories as a dream. My love (as things stand today) is for the South alone, and to her side I go penniless. Her success has been near my heart, and I have labored faithfully to further an object which would more than have proved my unselfish devotion. Heartsick and disappointed I turn from the path which I have been following into a bolder and more perilous one. Without malice I make the change. I have nothing in my heart except a sense of duty to my choice (Rhodehamel and Taper 148-149). ⁴

Booth's decision to shoot himself in the musical was not a choice of weakness or a choice that an actor should take lightly. It is driven by Booth's deep ingrained sense of duty found in his writings. An actor must approach this from an incredibly truthful and honest place or it can become satire. These moments in the show are difficult because the Balladeer is singing along a satirical mockery of Booth while he is experiencing his turmoil, but the job of the actor is to portray Booth honestly. It is the writer and director's job to deal with the other elements of the story.

⁴ Read full letter in Appendix B: John Wilkes Booth to the Editors of the National Intelligencer

A final connection to Booth's perspective was to look at Brutus from Julius Caesar. Both Booth the person and the character refers to himself as Brutus. His fascination with Brutus, and the play Julius Caesar, is clear (though oddly enough misquoted) at the end of his letter to the National Intelligencer.

If the South is to be aided it must be done quickly. It may already be too late.

When Caesar had conquered the enemies of Rome and the power that was his menaced the liberties of the people, Brutus arose and slew him. The stroke of his dagger was guided by his love of Rome. It was the spirit and ambition of Caesar that Brutus struck at. "Oh that we could come by Caesar's spirit, And not dismember Caesar! But, alas! Caesar must bleed for it." [iii] I answer with Brutus: He who loves his country better than gold or life (Rhodehamel and Taper 149-150).

Sondheim and Weidman also included this element into the text when Booth is convincing Oswald to assassinate President Kennedy. "Lee, when you kill a President, it isn't murder. Murder is a tawdry little crime born of greed, or lust, or liquor. Adulterers and shopkeepers get murdered. But when a president is killed, when Julius Caesar got killed . . . he was assassinated. And the man who did it . . ." Oswald responds, "Brutus." And Booth makes note that even after all these years Oswald still knows who he is (Sondheim and Weidman 86). Booth's fascination with Brutus in the play as well as in real life is very revealing of his character. Especially being a famous Shakespearean actor, and since he quotes the play he was sure to know Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Relating himself to that figure in history shows how much he truly believed his cause. In Brutus' famous speech in Act III Scene ii of Shakespeare's

Julius Caesar he, in the same way as Booth, preaches no less love towards Caesar but a stronger love for his country.

Be patient till the last.

Romans, countrymen, and lovers, hear me for my cause,
and be silent, that you may hear. believe me for mine
honor, and have respect to mine honor, that you may
believe. Censure me in your wisdom, and awake your
senses, that you may the better judge. If there be any in
this assembly, any dear friend of Caesar's, to him I say
that Brutus' love to Caesar was no less than his. If then
that friend demand why Brutus rose against Caesar, this
is my answer: Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I
loved Rome more. Had you rather Caesar were living,
and die all slaves, than that Caesar were dead, to live all
freemen? As Caesar loved me, I weep for him; as he was
fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was valiant, I honor him;
but – as he was ambitious, I slew him. There is tears for
his love; joy for his fortune; honor for his valor; and
death for his ambition. Who is here so base that would
be a bondman? If any, speak; for him have I offended.
Who is here so rude that would not be a Roman? If any,
speak; for him have I offended. Who is here so vile that
will not love his country? If any, speak; for him have I

offended. I pause for a reply (Harbage 916).

Booth's similarities to Brutus, his reasoning, hubris, and ultimate downfall are uncanny. By examining Booth's own correlation and the correlation within the text, these similarities give great impetus to the actor to motivate his actions beyond the suicide in the beginning of the play. Sondheim has Booth, and the rest of the assassins, as this eternal figure. What set Booth apart from the other Assassins is that Booth is lasting throughout ages of United States history to try to get the others to complete their task – or their purpose? He wants his legacy to live on in the same way that Brutus lived on.

These letters as well as his connection with Brutus helped me personalize my connection to the character and reach a place of truth I needed emotional impetus for the inciting incident. However, the key elements of imagery that drove him to reach this point of assassination and shooting himself were still not fully bloomed. Thus, I began my journey into "Ken Burns: The Civil War," a PBS produced documentary that covers the war from 1861-65. Produced in 1990, Ken Burns presents a lot of the information from a straightforward, well researched factual point of view that, according to reviews as well as my own perspective, took an unbiased stance on the Civil War. It was important to understand the political and social climate of the United States coming out of the Union win that ultimately led up to the assassination of Lincoln. To fully invest in the moments during the scene with Herold and through 'The Ballad of Booth Part 1 & 2,' the imagination must be active on every word and phrase. The documentary presented the information as a story from those who were there during the war. Obviously, there are no recordings of the people who were there, or the recordings that we do have are done later from people who were young during that period. However, the PBS documentary presents the journal entries of soldiers, wives, Generals, and leaders through active readings and narrations –

allowing the audience to experience those voices and their stories. The information presented was very helpful in gaining a visceral experience of losing friends and countrymen to war. It was also helpful to gain a perspective on Lincoln that was thoroughly researched and factually based instead of sensationalized. Lincoln was not well-liked by all during his time as President, and in fact his second term election was highly controversial. The southern states wanted to secede as a matter of freedom from a centralized government and economy. Southerners did not believe in the large centralized government, and did not want to pay taxes to the Union. It was viewed as the same power structure that was left behind during the Revolutionary War. Many of the founding fathers, and leadership throughout the history of this country, were strong advocates for a centralized Federal Government because it kept the powerful in positions of power. The southerners, and southern sympathizer like Booth, were strong advocates for freedom, liberty, and the idealism behind the creation of the Constitution. In their minds, it was a Constitutional right to secede from the Union and Lincoln was behaving as a dictator rather than a democratic leader. Ultimately the economy of the south was directly linked to African American slaves, and The Civil War became about much more than the independence of states. However, ending slavery was not part of the initial conflict.

Something that was surprising to learn was that Lincoln's own generals, his cabinet, and advisors were critical of his behavior and war tactics. General McClellan described him as, "A well-meaning buffoon," and a "gorilla." Like Sondheim wrote into the show, Lincoln did throw his critics into prison without benefit of trial. Nobody could foresee the extent of this gruesome war. With a few rifts and uprisings in Richmond, and the Confederacy firing upon Fort Sumpter, war became inevitable, and President Lincoln fed the machine of it. The First Battle of Bull Run was intended as a glamorous, easy win for the Union, and an expected surrender of the South.

People rode out on carriages to picnic on the hillside as they watched the battle unfold.

Thousands of young recruits from the south banded together to fight for their freedom from a centralized government. What happened that day was described as a terrifying hellscape. This is where the rebel yell was first heard and the sound was described as a corkscrew being run up your spine. Rebel reinforcements pushed back the Union, and after thousands died the Union retreated into Washington. Each battle to follow in this war became worse and worse. Battles fields were covered in bodies and swamped in blood. Disease killed two men for every one that died in battle. However, the pride of Lincoln was stung. He paid out of his own pocket for the development of weapons that were far more advanced than the war tactics of the time. He did not do it in the name of freedom for slaves, for equality of all men. He was just as prideful, privileged, and vengeful as John Wilkes Booth. After the Battle of Bull Run, McClellan refused to go to war again. Many of the union soldiers sat in the trenches drinking champagne and eating oysters. When Lincoln heard Jefferson Davis was elected president of the confederacy he pushed and threatened his generals to attack with few resources and inexperience with the new battle tactics. Booth saw these decisions kill an uncountable amount of his countrymen and friends (Burns Ep. 1 – 7).

The historical backdrop of the Civil War and Lincoln, help me view Booth not as the maniacal racist, but as a misguided idealist that felt pushed to the extent of his deeds. The actor must find the reason, find the fight, passion, and motivation when playing this role in *Assassins*. Watching this documentary helped me find that pain and anger towards the president and government who pressed this war, who could have saved hundreds of thousands of lives, and who let his pride cloud his leadership. Later this would help me connect to and personalize the sentiments of John Wilkes Booth by taking Booth's critical perspective of the political system of

his time and tying them with my perspective of the political system today. These were my starting points, my connections to the first scene to Booth's motivations, and to the performance of this role.

Chapter 3: Finding Booth's Voice & Body

Even though I was finding connections to Booth's intentions through historical research throughout this process, it did not mean the intellectual knowledge just transformed me into Booth on stage. There was extensive vocal and physical work to put into the character with voice and movement coaches. The vocal aspect of this process was probably the most difficult. Not only just singing, but finding the voice of John Wilkes Booth. Since there are not recorded samples of Booth's voice, it takes a lot more research, but also gives greater freedom in vocal expression. It was a journey and process to find the voice, and much of the vocal work happened alongside the physical work, at the same time tying into the song work being done with the Music Director.

The first contact with the speaking voice was through a workshop done by vocal coach, Professor Laura Hitt, on the second week of rehearsal. It was an initial meeting to get us thinking about how we make sound, change sound, and create a sound for our characters. We were instructed to find a sound that seemed close to what we thought and to begin playing with it. My first impulse was for Booth to have a Southern dialect. This was the dialect that was used in the professional cast recordings, and it seemed to make sense since Booth was a "Southern sympathizer." That is the sound I began to play with during rehearsal. During a short meeting with Laura I mentioned that I was playing with a southern sound, and she was skeptical. She said that it wouldn't make sense for Booth to have a southern sound because he was from Maryland and had British parents. His sound would be closer to Received Pronunciation with Scottish sounds mixed in. The idea of doing RP and Scottish was not appealing. There was something about it that didn't feel right, so I had a moment of rebellion. A justification for the Southern sound was that the audience wouldn't understand why Booth sounded British and that the

general population correlates him with the South, so that is why the professional Broadway cast recordings all chose Southern. Therefore, my choice was the Southern sound. Laura said okay, but to keep an open mind about it, if the choices could be justified.

After playing with the southern sound through the first working of the scenes, it didn't feel right. It felt awkward and clunky and didn't really match the physicality I was finding. In the way that Booth's physicality felt natural in my body and natural with the text, the Southern dialect felt disconnected from the character. It didn't fit the intentions or motivations I was finding, and ultimately it just didn't feel right. Since there was no possible way to listen to how Booth might have sounded, the only way to determine what his voice may have sounded like was to look at pictures of him and try to match that physicality with what his voice may have sounded like. In that way developing his voice became a little bit like mask work, by putting on the mask and finding the physicality, and the Southern sound just did not fit the mask. Unfortunately, I had already habitually built a Southern drawl into his voice. Furthermore, it was not a specific Southern drawl but just a generalized Southern sound. I had to re-evaluate what I believed was true about the correlation with his ideals to the South and his sound.

Conflicted, and needing clarification, I wanted to meet with Laura again, but needed to do some personal digging. YouTube is now a expansive database for sounds and information, which can be incredibly useful when trying to find examples. It takes digging and rigorous checking of the information to make sure it is researched and factually based, but a good resource to begin searching for sound samples. Another good place to start was by listening to "The Civil War" documentary because much of the voice work was done by trained actors and researched by Ken Burns and there was some sense of what the sound of that time would have been. Both the sound samples I found and those sent to me by Laura were very helpful in getting

closer to a rhythm and “heightened” sound that may have existed in that period. Which also fed my ear as to what Laura meant by an RP/Scottish sort of mix. Still, feeling like the perspective from other actors would be helpful, I began research of actors who may have also played this part. I came across an interview by vocal coach Joel Asher who has a studio out in LA. In this interview Asher explains, “I recently coached an actor in the role of John Wilkes Booth. Booth was born on a farm in Maryland 1838. What did that sound like? But wait. Booth’s father was from England and they were both trained actors. As an adult, Booth wouldn’t have sounded like a country boy; he would have learned other ways of speaking” (“Dialect Coaching”). Interested in an additional perspective such as Asher’s, I went to his website and emailed him about some potential feedback about how to approach Booth’s sound, since he had already coached someone in doing it before. He responded with pretty much the same conclusion that he stated in the interview – that Booth would no longer (if ever) have much of a Maryland, country boy dialect. However, he added some further provocative thoughts about approaching the character. “He was the son and brother of great American actors and they all did lots of Shakespeare. At that time, English accents were considered ‘the way’ to do Shakespeare. He would have studied that and used it professionally.” Asher continued, “However, he was also very involved in the Confederate cause and would have spoken in some sort of Southern accent to fit in with those people. It was, after all, his “native speech. So, we don’t know which accent dominated.” He then offered advice in terms of approaching the dialect in context of the show, “My suggestion to you for the show is to use British-tinged accent when he’s trying to impress society, and to temper that with Southern drawl (closer to Virginia than Maryland) when he’s with his fellow conspirators. While this may be historically accurate, it might not be the best way for your production. Talk to your director and ask if he wants you to be accurate at the possible expense

of theatrical truth.”⁵ The phrase “British-tinged” is one that was particularly interesting about his response. Since the idea of straight RP wasn’t feeling comfortable and straight Southern drawl also wasn’t feeling comfortable, this mixture of both based on Booth’s intentions and surroundings was appealing.

That week I scheduled an appointment with the vocal coach, Laura Hitt, to discuss the things I had been trying in rehearsal and the things I was discovering in research. Since Hitt was the one to initially suggest RP with a tinge of Scottish, I wanted to express my concern with the straight British and how that would affect the audience, but also if they would even be able to decipher why a Scottish dialect was coming into the mix. The main purpose of his sound was to help tell the story and not to distract from it. After explaining the appeal of the British-tinged sound, we discussed the use of General American or Mid-Atlantic dialect, but still neither of them felt correct for who Booth was, and neither fit the time period of the 1860s either. His theatrical involvement and upbringing needed to play a role in what he sounded like. Which then brought up a lot of good discussion about what his sound’s purpose was in telling the story. In terms of the script that Sondheim and Weidman wrote, it is not necessarily important to highlight Booth’s struggle between his upbringing and his relationship to the South. While knowing those things can be helpful for the actor in character development, the script does not tell the story of Booth’s struggle between identities. Therefore, his need to switch sounds is never dealt with in the script. There is no need to include the things that are excluded by the script.

What was included in the script is Booth’s switch between his performance nature and his reactive, fearful nature. At the beginning of the musical, Booth is in fight or flight mode. He is in

⁵ See Appendix C for full email exchange

a state of panic and his need is to justify his act to the country. Within this context, his vocal quality can fall away from that trained performer's voice, but it is still not necessary to connect fully to that "Southern" sound. This contradicts directly with his final scene with Lee Harvey Oswald. This scene is a calculated performance that is formulated to manipulate Lee. This final scene is the height of Booth's performance style, it is his last performance. Without convincing Oswald to assassinate President Kennedy, everything that has happened with the assassins throughout all of history has been for nothing.

Through this examination of the journey of tactics that Booth experiences throughout the show, the next step in vocal quality became clear. Professor Laura Hitt guided my research to Shakespearean actors close to Booth's time. She recommended John Gielgud to become the point of reference to listen to when trying to get into Booth's sound. Every rehearsal, I would put on my headphones and listen to Gielgud perform Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech. This ended up being the best example of the sound because Gielgud would have been trained in the same way that Booth was, with the exception that Gielgud was trained in London. Therefore, I was able to adapt the sound slightly to a more "Americanized" sound. This was done by keeping the vocal space and height of the RP vowels sounds while clearly articulating consonants, but letting some of the sound changes fall away. Gielgud's speech pattern matched this sound perfectly, and when first listening to his speech and walking around in Booth's physicality, I finally felt as though the sound matched.⁶ The patter and quickness of Received Pronunciation was dropped for purposes of the stage, and each vowel was long and drawn out with the consonants standing out in between the luxurious openness of the vowels. In addition to the Gielgud sound samples, Professor Hitt included a sample of an interview with an eyewitness to

⁶ Link to Youtube video with Gielgud's full speech in Appendix C

Booth escaping Ford Theatre. Although recorded years later, this sound sample was also crucial in developing Booth's sound⁷. It was especially helpful during the more frantic moments in the barn when the character was not putting on a performance sound. With the help of these samples and discussion about sound tied to intention, I dropped my apprehension for the RP, and worked out a sound with Professor Hitt that we continued to develop throughout the process. Another helpful listening exercise was listening to Stephen Foster music.⁸ Even though the songs were recorded in the 1990s, the music brought a sound out of the singers that matched Gielgud, the voices from "The Civil War," and the sound that Music Director, Professor James Mitchell was encouraging me to use during music rehearsals.

In addition to developing the proper sound with Professor Laura Hitt, Movement Coach Professor Jessica Morgan Bishop came in and helped the cast develop physicality through movement workshops. These workshops were incredibly useful because Professor Bishop used Viewpoint techniques to allow us to begin exploring our characters. Viewpoints is a movement technique that was originally developed by choreographer Mary Overlie to compose dances, but was later adapted by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau for the stage. It is a form of staging based in the nine viewpoints: spatial relationship, kinesthetic response, shape, gesture, repetition, architecture, tempo, duration, and topography. It is a way to organically find bold acting choices by bringing the actor's awareness to spatial relationship, architecture of the body within the space, rhythms and tempo of the body, as well as awareness to each other (Bogart and Landau).

Professor Bishop used these techniques to bring our awareness to the physical life of our characters and how they exist within the space around them, as well as the other characters. This

⁷ Link to YouTube video with full interview in Appendix C

⁸ Links to the music listened to throughout process in Appendix C

opened my imagination and freed my body from personal physical habits, to begin to inhabit Booth's body. With that famous image of Booth and the Viewpoint exercises, I found his stature as well as his physical rhythm. In the photograph, it looked as though he held himself high with his energetic center around his chest. He held himself tall and proud, even though his recorded height was only 5'8". This fact was fascinating, because I am only an inch taller, and realized that I could hold myself a certain way with a center of energy that gave the perception of being more imposing. Professor Bishop brought us through exercises in which we started at neutral stance and then closed our eyes imagining how our characters would stand, how they would hold themselves, and where their tensions would be. I kept that photograph of Booth and the information I had gathered about him in my mind.⁹ Once we were instructed to open our eyes and begin to exist in our environment, the imagination opened to how Booth would hold himself. It became a layering on top of the initial imagination. From that point on I could structure where Booth held his head, his chest, his hands, how he stood – all from that initial exercise of imagination.

In that exploration of Booth's physicality, there were many differences between how the character Booth held himself and how I naturally hold myself. I tend to carry my center of energy in my gut and slouch my shoulders slightly, my eyes tend to fall to the floor more than anywhere else. Booth's center felt higher in the mid chest and shoulders. His head held high and eyes up. It also took some time to find the groundedness that the character had. I had to do many exercises of feeling my feet connected to the earth and releasing my pelvic bowl. Squatting,

⁹ Photos of Booth in Appendix C

especially while singing, became a common thing for me to do to feel the connection to the earth through my feet.

Once I found the proper sound, the voice and body came together in a way that allowed me to fully embody Booth. It no longer felt like a contradiction between sound and body in the way that the Southern sound felt. The body also had to be used specifically to express intention in the same way that voice did. They were both influenced by the examination of when Booth was in panic/emotional mode, and when he was in performance/manipulation mode. Especially because during the panicked, pleading moments in the shows he was using a crutch and had a broken foot. The broken foot was another layer of struggle. Professor Bishop explained that instead of playing at a generalized sense of pain, it is better to really examine how a broken foot would hurt, where would the pain originate, and how would that live in the rest of the body. Once again, finding that pain and that physicality of the broken foot helped the vocal quality during those moments under duress.

This is also where the vocal workshops that Professor Hitt did came in to play. We spent a lot of time as a cast learning how to shout, scream, and use other forms of vocal intensity so that we could keep our voices safe throughout the run of the show. Almost all of Booth's dialogue dealt with vocal intensity because of the intensity of his purpose. Alongside this work with voice and body, I was able to bring in my training in the Michael Chekhov technique into the process. Chekhov is an acting method that approaches acting from a physical standpoint using psychological gestures. These gestures allow you to physically embody your action or objective until it manifests itself through intention and the physical action can drop away. This technique also uses imagery, like floating, carving, flying, ect. to find rhythms, tempos, and stature (Chekhov). While finding Booth's physicality, I used Chekhov's techniques to find my

center, my rhythm, and my patterns in relation to my intentions. Carving through the space and through other characters was a helpful way to view my physical and vocal intentions. Ultimately, and most difficult for me, I had to tie all of this in to the singing portion of the show and find my voice as not only an actor but a singer.

Chapter 4: Music Rehearsal – Finding Confidence in my Sound

One of the most exciting, but also daunting parts of tackling a Sondheim musical is actually tackling the music. Sondheim builds his scores and lyrics in a way that is similar to how Shakespeare built his text. The acting choices are found in the text itself, and if you are to break down each beat, rhythm, tempo change, and volume change, then the character just grows out of the music. At first, I was not particularly drawn to the music in *Assassins*. In fact, it didn't feel as though it was something that fit into Sondheim's body of work. When thinking about his body of work, it was the iconic musicals *Company*, *Into the Woods*, and *Sweeney Todd* that carry his most familiar themes and motifs. A Motif is a short musical phrase or "idea" and a composer generally have their specific phrases that are unique and recognizable.¹⁰ The things that I think of most when reviewing his work are the repetitive and driving themes and the contrast between languid and choppy rhythms. Sondheim builds his music to tell a story, and then he turns it on its head to surprise the audience. At first, I did not find what I thought were "Sondheim-isms" – or recognizable musical phrasing – in the *Assassins* score. Rather, it seemed that the music was more a series of vignettes in a variety of styles of music, which lacked those special Sondheim qualities. The more we worked on the music, the more I realized that all of those Sondheim themes were cleverly hidden within. For example the song "Another National Anthem" carried themes from *Into the Woods* and *Sweeney Todd*.¹¹ Another expectation going into this music was that it would be speak-singing and less legit singing. Legit singing is a style or training technique that is closer to classical music where the sound is more open and operatic. I struggled

¹⁰ See "Last Midnight" example in Appendix C

¹¹ See "Another National Anthem" and "The Gun Song" Appendix C

with a more legit sound because I believed it had to sound more beautiful, therefore requiring more singing skill. Speak singing was a way for me to escape the pressure of sounding “good.”

In a way, the final product was produced by getting closer to the speaking voice, but there were a lot of pre-determined expectations and mental blocks to get past before those realizations and breakthroughs came about. One of my mental hurdles came from the first music rehearsal with Music Director, Professor James Mitchell. After listening to multiple cast recordings, my expectation was to go into music rehearsal simply to learn the music and that it would mostly be “using my natural voice” to speak-shout-sing. That Booth would sound like me, therefore singing it would be closer to a brighter, forward, wider sound that I naturally carry with the resonance focused in the nasal cavities and forward area of the oral tract.

The first misperception that I held about singing was that I could produce a sound that wasn't **my** sound. Thinking that there was my sound versus something else that I could produce that wasn't my sound was an error in thinking I had to soon correct. After singing through the first song, James stopped and explained that Booth should sound “rounder” and “taller.” So, he led me through some exercises on an /u/ vowel to feel that taller heightened space. These /u/ exercises became very important in finding the vocal posture of the singing and speaking voice. At first, it was surprising to find out that this was the kind of sound that James was looking for, especially while I was still in the Southern stages of developing Booth's speaking voice. In trying to dig deeper into understanding the sound that James wanted, he said, “Booth sings the most beautifully out of all the other characters. That beautiful sound is then contrasted with the ugliest words.” That phrase stuck, and it stuck for a long time. That was the second, and biggest, hurdle to overcome. The word “beautifully” became an obsession. It got to the point that I began to listen to other members of the cast and I remember thinking, “I need to sound more beautiful

than them.” After weeks of working on an /u/ vowel and trying to keep that tall space with and operatic sound with Sinatra smoothness, we came to our first run through for the designers. After this run we got notes. James went through each number and gave everyone specific notes. When it came time give notes for *The Ballad of Booth*, James looked at me and said, “We need to set a time aside next week for you and me to meet.” These words caused a spiral of self-doubt, and suddenly all the insecurity that had been repressed about my voice came spilling out. James could not meet until the next week, which was good because the full weekend was necessary to recognize and process those insecurities, which only helped strengthen the final product.¹²

After the weekend of processing, I sat in my voice lesson with voice instructor RJ Nestor, and we had just worked through “The Ballad of Booth.” Not going as well as it could have, I explained my insecurities about having to sound the most beautiful. RJ reminded me that it wasn’t about sounding beautiful, being the “best,” or sounding perfect. It was about reconnecting to the acting technique, to the character, and to the intentions. It was that the doubts, the attempt to make a certain sound, and trying to sound beautiful was blocking the potential he saw. He implored me to let go of the idea that the sound Professor Mitchell was looking for was not my sound. It was just a different part of the sound that I already had. That night with James took fifteen minutes. It wasn’t dramatic. My career wasn’t over. He guided me through an exercise in which I squatted when I came up to my high sustained notes in “Ballad of Booth.” This exercise helped take the production of the sound out of my head and allowed the breath to connect to the pelvis, thus lifting the breath to the soft palate and carrying it with clarity. This moment in the process was crucial. Even though none of the daunting issues I imagined were there, that moment of fear and growth beyond the fear was necessary. From this point on I could switch my

¹² Personal Journal in Appendix A: 9/29/17 Rehearsal

focus from the production of the sound and making it sound beautiful, to the use of sound in relation to character and intention.

Chapter 5: In Rehearsal – Finding the Character

Voice and body work was not complete, growth in all areas of performance doesn't end until the show closes. However, the foundation of technique and character had been laid, and it was time to move on to melding the technical work with the acting technique. Additionally, it was time to bring it from the brain into the body and heart and tie it with the relationships on stage. With the techniques being laid during the first few weeks of rehearsal, you can let go of all the technical aspects flying around in your brain and fully invest in each moment. This was the next goal, to truthfully and honestly invest in each moment that builds the play. One way to do this was to look at how Booth fit into the story of *Assassins*. What is his role in the play and relationship to other characters? On multiple occasions director Professor Blair described Booth as "Honey Badger don't give a fuck," meaning Booth was someone who just doesn't care and doesn't care who knows he doesn't care. He is a cocky peacock who does what he wants. Ultimately this image gave a good initial idea of the attitude of Booth. However, Booth did care a lot about what he was pursuing. This is where the historical research of Booth was incredibly important to understanding his motivations. Once again, his historical motivations must be separated from his theatrical motivations.

In the musical, Booth is the mastermind behind bringing the "crew" of assassins together. The beginning scene shows him in the context of Lincoln's assassination, but they also see the madness and frantic behavior behind the act, the incredibly ugly motivations that drove Booth to shock a nation. After shooting himself in the head, he appears in the very next scene and immediately begins guiding the other Assassins. As he walks in, he says to the character of Giuseppe Zangara, "Have you considered shooting President Roosevelt?" With those simple words, Booth's purpose begins. Now, the character has different motivations that go beyond

historical research. In addition to the research, I used the text and Meisner technique to make Booth's intentions personal to me. Meisner is an acting technique developed by Sanford Meisner that teaches the actor to use elements of their life to connect to the circumstances of the character. An actor takes their own circumstance and then imaginatively explores the "what if" of the circumstances of the character. This process is called emotionally prepping. The actor attaches himself emotionally to the character's point of view to fully invest in the text. In this way the actor does not need to live everything the character has lived, nor do they need to relive trauma of their past (Meisner). For example, I do not know what it is like to shoot a president. However, I can take how I feel, or have felt, about presidents of the United States and know what it is like to hate a leader or feel as though a leader is being tyrannical. I can know what it feels like to have strong opposing opinions, and to see my countrymen treated unfairly. Then, I attach those circumstances to how Booth felt and start to imagine from there. With the clear image of why Booth hated Lincoln so much, and the images documentaries on the Civil War gave, that same anger that Booth may have felt rose up inside me. Taking this imaginative journey into Booth's world and then journaling about what is most important to him, I felt closer and closer to Booth as the rehearsal period developed. What was difficult to understand was why Booth, during the rest of the musical, was so hell bent on getting others to continue his legacy. Why did Booth need Oswald to kill President Kennedy so badly?

As I did with the words "the most beautiful voice" I grasped tightly onto the words "Honey Badger don't give a fuck," and just got caught in the attitude. There was a feeling of being stuck and not progressing. Not only not progressing but not connecting with Casey Johnson who was playing Lee Harvey Oswald. Frustration began to build again, and I expressed that frustration in rehearsal one night. Lee Blair responded passionately that Booth may have an

attitude of not caring but he does care an incredible amount. This is life or death for him.

Professor Blair explained that if Booth does not get Oswald and the other assassins to do this then everything he did for his country and for his people – for his friends – would be for nothing. The world would not remember him, the world would forget about everything he stood for. If his legacy of assassination lives on, he would live on. Professor Blair's description of this need and drive brought tears to my eyes. Suddenly everything connected. All that research and personalization did not only motivate Booth's action in the first scene in his environment, but it carries throughout the entire play even in the places of limbo and in Oswald's environment. Blair's speech that night changed everything.¹³ The Booth that Sondheim and Weidman wrote cared deeply and passionately about his mission, family, friends, country, and most importantly his legacy. Booth was acting like he didn't care to put on a performance for the other characters. It was part of a manipulation tactic, but it was also part of a drive and absolute need. This discovery made me realize the emotional build that Booth was going through during the Oswald scene. He started out with a meticulous plan he had to carry out, and his desires built up to the point where it is no longer about carrying out a plan, but executing something that is incredibly important to him. The importance of his goal is apparent, not only for him but all the assassins, at the end of the scene between Booth and Oswald. All of the Assassins come on stage to convince Oswald to shoot President Kennedy. In Oswald's doubt Booth calls upon all of the assassins throughout time to help him. They implore with Oswald. Booth says, "We need you, Lee" Sarah Jane Moore explains, "Without you, we're just footnotes in a history book." The rest of the assassins explain how important Oswald's act is to them (Sondheim and Weidman 92-96). Booth

¹³ Personal Journal in appendix A: 10/6/17 Rehearsal

was not passive about any of it, his need drove him to this final climax with all the other assassins by his side.

This specificity of understanding and care for Booth and his intentions forced me to let Booth take over and let go of my need to perform, which resulted in greater specificity of body and voice. For example, Booth paints a picture for Oswald about the legacy he would lead. He describe all people would talk about it, all the conspiracy theories, and how those specific images, “the grassy knoll. The Mafia. Some Cuban crouched behind a fence” would live on forever. Booth then goes on to say, “This, right here, right now. This is the real conspiracy, and you are part of it” (Sondheim and Weidman 89). Not only was each moment, but each word was necessary and incredibly important for Booth.

Professor Hitt came in to give notes towards the end of the process, and the insecurities I held about my voice came up again.¹⁴ Instead of putting up walls, I chose to let go of my preconceived notions and open myself to what she had to say. She said that it had grown so much since the last time she saw it, but I was still letting some of the words and images be nonspecific and the energy behind thoughts would trail off at the end of phrases. The stubborn part of me wanted to ignore it, but this was the perfect opportunity to go back to the technique and refine what had been going so well. It also began to make sense what Professor Mitchell was telling me about sounding beautiful, that Booth uses his sound to tell a story, and uses it to manipulate the other characters as well as the audience. That way when he said the ugly things he says, he had the audience in his clutches. Taking Hitt’s notes, I began to use every single word for a specific purpose. This specificity only continued into tech week, and every night there

¹⁴ Personal Thoughts in Appendix A: 10/12/17 Rehearsal

were more specific choices to find, new discoveries to make. Going through the struggle of insecurity, building technique, and then connecting to Booth at such a personal level allowed me to let go in a way that changed me and set me up for tech week and performances.

Chapter 6: Two MFAs at a Sitzprobe – Coming up on Tech

The week of, and the week leading up to, tech week was the time to bring the hard work together and really develop a process, a way to get into the character. After a few weeks of testing, using what worked, and throwing out what didn't, the process to create Booth became a daily routine. That routine entailed, tea, vitamin D, apple cider vinegar, and a breakfast of eggs/veggies every morning. Throughout the day were marking points for drinking water to stay properly hydrated, and any time at the gym was spent in the pool to keep released muscles and work on breath. Arrival at the theatre was one hour before call time to take out the pin curls from the night before and hair styling. By the time other performers had arrived, hair had been styled, and it was time to warm up the body/voice. These exercises included tremoring in a wall sit position, pushups, leg/hip stretches, and releasing the body through touch/massage. Vocal warm up included scales on an /u/, going through the house of resonance, and singing on vowels through Booth's songs.¹⁵ Any other vocal warmups from voice class were thrown in depending on what was needed on a day to day basis. Emotional preparation included lying on the floor and imaginatively connecting to Booth's circumstance. Sometimes journaling from the character's point of view would happen if that impulse came out of the imaginative work. Listening to Stephen Foster music in seclusion became a regular practice, as well as watching a clip from *The Civil War* documentary. The clip was of a reading from soldier Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain's diary who explained the horrors of the battlefield.

Night brought quiet, but out of that silence rose new sounds more appalling still. A strange ventriloquism of which you could not locate the source. A smothered moan,

¹⁵ Find Linklater's House of Resonance exercise in Appendix C

as if a thousand discords were flowing together into a keynote. Weird, unearthly, terrible to hear, and bare yet startling with its nearness. The writhing concord broken by cries for help – some begging for a drop of water, some calling on God for pity, and some unfriendly hands to finish what the enemy had so horribly begun. Some with delirious dreamy voices murmuring loved names as if the dearest were bending over them. And underneath, all the time, the deep bass notes from close lips – too hopeless or too heroic to articulate their agony. At last, out wearied and depressed, I moved two dead men a little and lay down between them, making a pillow of the breast of a third. Drew the flap of his overcoat over my face and tried to sleep (Burns Ep. 6).

Every day listening to this speech put me in Booth's mindset of the horror he believed Lincoln alone caused. Every night I would listen to this and then listen to the music of Stephen Foster as I put on my clothes, makeup, and feel my transformation into Booth.

Sitzprobe was the day that I truly began to appreciate those I was collaborating with. My Graduate Classmate, Madeline, and I were doing our thesis roles together, and she had been my best friend in the grad class from day one. Her support and encouragement, as well as the support and encouragement from fellow cast members, the Director, the Choreographer, the coaches, and the Music Director was invaluable. It was a surreal moment, together with my collaborators, unjudged, working together to bring our story together with the musicians. It was difficult finding the orchestra at times. There were sound and balance difficulties, but Sound Designer Ricky Moats worked incredibly hard to get the cast exactly what we needed. Our Music Director, Professor James Mitchell was also not in the pit but a level above us on stage. Therefore, they placed a monitor in the pit so we could see. Unfortunately, my eyes are not great, and the screen

was difficult to see at times, but the Music Director worked tirelessly to make sure we knew where we were and he managed the marriage of cast and orchestra like a true professional. Everything was coming together in a way that took my breath every night. The process made me feel light, electrified, and supported. I looked forward to showing up to the theatre every night. Of course, with every example of support and collaboration, there is a counter example of someone who did not match in effort or hard work. This did not lessen or cheapen the work of those who put in one hundred percent. However, it taught me to simply be an actor and let the director or stage manager guide the rest.

There were times that collaboration didn't always happen from every member of the team, and those moments can teach just as much as the good moment. It was difficult, at times, to work with the Assistant Stage Managers backstage. There was a point in which racial slurs were made towards one of our cast members, and a specific time when I remember hearing the exact words, "all these actors are fucking liberals." It felt inappropriate especially in the context of the material we were working on, but it allowed the opportunity to learn to work alongside people with differing opinions as well as differing reasons for working on a theatrical piece. In contrast, the crew and cast worked very well together backstage, and the comradery built over the two weeks that we had together made me the best I could be on stage. Other struggles arose related to props, and some elements of the props seemed more thrown together than carefully researched and crafted. Again, the Director, Technical Director, Production Manager, Stage Manager, cast, and crew all came together to support each other and meet each other's needs. The Costume Designer Katy Ellenich especially made sure that I had everything I needed, and worked with the dresser and myself to get my quick change down to a science. The moments of struggle in collaboration taught me humility, patience, and focus on my own work. There is a

great amount of value in working to support every single member of the team. No matter what position, no matter what production, a good collaborator is dedicated to the whole and bringing people up rather than tearing them down. Thank you and a smile goes a long way, and when one member of the team is adding negatively to the process, that attitude can spread like wildfire.

Final dress rehearsal was a disaster. Not for the show, but personally a disaster. I left my gun off stage, ran off to get it, and arrived back on stage just in time. This left me flustered, and I lost the orchestra and flew through the key change in “The Ballad of Booth.” As a testament to the support that the cast had, James allowed me to come to his office the next day, and he worked the song to solidify the sounds I would be hearing with the tempo. We discussed where I needed to slow down, speed up, and went through the differences between what I had been hearing in the studio versus what the orchestra was playing. Ricky Moats took the time to figure out what levels I needed to monitors at to hear these sounds. Opening night was upon us, and I was shaken from the night before but I stuck to my process, told myself “bad dress, good opening,” and leaned on the confidence instilled in me by Professor Mitchell.

Chapter 7: Booth in Performance

The buzz of performance was in the air all day. The whole day of opening night was a ten-hour preparation, and butterflies fluttered in my stomach. I arrived particularly early to the theatre that day, and walked around the space, making sure everything would be in place. It felt as though I was Booth preparing for the arrival of Lincoln. After spending some time in the house and on stage, I went downstairs to go through the process I had developed over the week, and then five minutes to curtain was called, then places were called. The butterflies moved from my stomach to my throat as I walked upstairs and navigated through the maze that was built underneath the set. As my feet planted in the place where I waited to go on, the buzz of the crowd filled the space, and the electricity of the theatre sent shivers around the room. I closed my eyes and took off my coat, throwing it over my shoulder I paced to find Booth's physicality. I stretched my hips, shook out my hands, tremored on the wall, and pressed against the two by fours holding up the set. The opening number began and I sat waiting for my cue.

At my cue, I stepped out onto the top platform and looked down across the audience. My eyes moved to the other assassins standing around the proprietor, looking up at me. My heart rate was pulsing through my body, and sending energy from head to toe. As the first note came out, I felt my body begin to tense, but focused on Booth's intention and I began to descend the stairs, and suddenly everything lit up inside of me and my breath matched my body, matched my voice, matched my intention and the energy of a lightning bolt struck through me. The relationship to my fellow cast mates was no longer Joe in relation to cast, but Booth in relation to Assassins. After the last note, I, as Booth, looked up into the boxes, seeing Lincoln there and said, "Excuse me!" ran offstage, fired, and yelled "Sic Semper Tyrannis" – thus, always to tyrants. With those words my understanding of the culmination of work throughout the process came together.

Booth's motives were deeply personal to me, and his intentions were clear ahead. I ran off and did a quick change, coming back on with my crutch and diary. The scene with Herold in the barn, and the Balladeer commenting on the action felt brand new. The pain in Booth's foot was real and specific like Jessica had guided. The voice was large and powerful like Laura had instructed. The singing was beautiful and full like James had crafted. All the weeks of collaboration with everyone brought Booth out on stage that night. That moment was one I will never forget. I forgot myself and Booth emerged. It felt as though I was there and everywhere in that theatre all at once. Something woke up inside, and the rest of the musical was part of something indescribable. By the time the scene came up between Booth and Oswald, I forgot that I was on stage, forgot that it was a performance. I truly felt alive in the moment with Casey Johnson, and I saw in his eyes that he had changed too. We fed each other, and forgot ourselves for a moment. It would be easy to allow the opening performance peak, and let the rest of the performances fall short with low energy. However, with the encouragement of cast, director, choreographer, and music director, it only was filled with further discoveries, more energy, and greater life. This was a performance that I never wanted to end, and a musical I could do for years. This was a defining moment.¹⁶

¹⁶ See show photographs in Appendix D

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This defining moment of performance taught me about dedication, passion, and working on a character that I was passionate about. Moments like these teach that struggle is necessary for success, that living in the difficult moment, and working through your insecurities will shape you to come out stronger on the other end. The character of Booth that Sondheim and Weidman wrote inhabited me as an actor, and Booth as a historical figure connected my psyche to a historical figure that is a villain and has been painted in a negative light. *Assassins* has so much to teach about American history and how everything ties together, how everything repeats, and how the struggles that we face today are a compilation of events that have happened since the beginning of the United States. Stephen Sondheim says about *Assassins* “Otherwise, as far as I’m concerned, the show is perfect. Immodest as it may sound, but I’m ready to argue it with anybody.” This is the same thing I would say about my experience with the role and my process with the character. Immodest as it may sound, I am willing to defend it against anybody. The process of this perfect show brought me to life as an actor and reinvigorated my passion to act. It showed me what true support meant, and what it means to get better every single rehearsal and performance. An actor should never settle for good enough or a decent performance. They should push themselves every time they get on stage, constantly achieving for their best. Many people came to me and said to me, “That was the best we have ever seen you.” This was not a compliment or a point of pride for me, it simply is what must be done. If this had been the same as my previous performances, or if it had been the same as my first performance at WVU, I would have no reason to continue performing.

That compliment is also not a testament to my talent or even hard work, but a testament to the people who supported and worked with me, who pushed me, and believed that I would get there when I doubted. After the process, my curiosity about Booth continued, which led to more books and articles written about him. I realized that Booth really did come to life through me. It was not because I was emulating or behaving exactly as he did or did so much extensive research that I perfectly executed who Booth was. It is because the director knew how to tell the story and bring to life the characters that were written. I was a vessel for a voice, and it was an opportunity of a lifetime. I truly believe that this character inhabited me, I did not portray this character. All I did was to let go of my hold ups and allowed myself to simply be. Alexander technique teaches that to access your full, intentional self you cannot DO anything, instead you must let go of doing and simply allow/be. This was a process of eliminating the doing aspect of performing, which is something that will stay with me through all future performances. There is no longer a need to “perform” or “act.” The habitual tendencies to try to create something or make something happen will always be there and will always be something that needs work. But from now on this marking point will stay as a reminder to trust the process, trust the struggle, and allow the letting go to happen.

This show completed the transformation that needed to happen during my time at WVU. We are all on a very specific path in life, and this role was my biggest realization that this was the path that was made for me. Singing confidently on stage in a role that inspires you may seem like a small thing, but I did not believe I could ever do that. The release of many of my demons and insecurities through this process has made me a better person as well as a more confident actor. It is beautiful that a role can have that much effect on an actor, and I hope it affected an audience member in the same way. The training at WVU gave me the tools necessary to take

on this role and grow in the way I needed. Thus, this was a nearly perfect thesis role. It encompassed everything I have experienced here. This production of *Assassins* taught me the value of collaboration, unification, and support. I hope one day to step out of the role of an actor and lead a team with same generosity that I experienced in this production.

Appendix A

Journal Entry One: Insecurities Going Into the Process

My voice, being largely attached to my sense of self, has always been the main element of acting that has caused me to doubt my ability. Therefore, when the season was originally announced during the spring semester of 2017, a knot immediately pitted up in the bottom of my stomach. When *Assassins* by Stephen Sondheim was announced a spark of excitement came up even though I knew very little about it. I had heard about the musical from friends who saw it in London, but what excited me is that I have been absolutely in love with everything I've heard from Sondheim. Even his lesser known work like *A Little Night Music* connected to me in very powerful ways.

For the longest time, it had been a dream of mine to perform in a Sondheim musical and work on his beautifully detailed scores. The only memory I had of *Assassins* was working on Sam Byck's monologue in my very first acting class, but out of everything announced for the fall 2017 season, that was the most exciting. However, that knot was the memory of all the people who said that I should not and could not be a singer. My anxieties about singing told that excited part of me to not even try, not even think about it. Of course, there was always *Exit Pursued by a Bear* and *Three Sisters* to look forward too. However, neither of those titles excited me as much as *Assassins* did. *Exit Pursued by a Bear* is a contemporary drama that held some interesting acting challenges, and *Three Sisters* presented opportunity to work with mentor and Professor of Acting Jerry McGonigle, but my respect and passion for Sondheim and his work held my sights

on *Assassins*. The fears and insecurities I held told me that being cast in a musical would not be possible. I stifled my desires and resigned myself to focus on auditioning for the other two shows.

When applying for undergraduate programs, that passion for singing still existed, yet I had very little knowledge of musical theatre and still believed I was not good enough to continue as a professional singer. Not knowing about how to go about applying for acting and musical theatre programs, stumbling my way through it, and trying to incorporate “back up” degrees, I was accepted in a couple of programs but came up short financially. Last minute I auditioned for Viterbo University, and they asked for two monologues and song – after which they would decide which degree would be the best fit. Viterbo accepted me into the acting program as opposed to the Musical Theatre program. This was a second blow to my confidence in my singing voice especially, but I became immediately enamored with acting as well as all other elements of the creative process of theatre. I spent my days acting and my nights in the shops, wanting to take part in the whole process. Unfortunately, there was a void without music and dance. I began to pursue voice lesson and dance classes, but was immediately turned down and told that those skills were reserved for musical theatre students. Not being one to take no for an answer, I began to develop my own major by picking up a dance minor as well as eliciting the faculty to allow acting students to have access to a voice teacher in the music faculty. After working hard to develop those skills, I was cast as ensemble in multiple musicals as well as land singing roles in plays. Yet, peers continued to jeer and explain that I should not be taking those classes or pursuing those shows because those who are merely actors were not good enough to do anything but act, and to leave the triple threat to the musical theatre students. This divide in

between Musical Theatre and “just Acting” students, as we were so condescendingly titled, was the third blow to my confidence in singing

However, during the final month of class, the school provided us with an audition class to prepare us for “the real world.” During the final mock audition, guest faculty came in to give us feedback. When it came time for my feedback, the same faculty who had cast me in their musicals, as well as taught me Musical Theatre Dance and Musical Theatre Scene Study, explained that I was not a good enough singer, and never would be cast professionally in a musical. This was the greatest blow to my confidence as a singer, and there were so many feelings of anger and regret over all the work I had put in to being a singer. After that, my nerves fell apart, and every time I traveled to cattle call unified auditions I would try to sing, shake uncontrollably through the audition, and then receive zero callbacks.

I made the choice to stop trying to sing and dance. That decision came at a convenient time as WVU had called to offer a position in their MFA Acting class. It became something I was okay with. I believed I didn’t need to use that part of my voice and that I could ignore it. Of course, the first audition at WVU was for a musical *Kiss Me Kate*. I felt as though I needed to prove to these new people and faculty within the first week of being here that I could sing, and that if I didn’t do well I would be uncastable for the remainder of the time. Fortunately, my roommate and graduate colleague Madeline Hintz was incredibly encouraging and listened to my audition, gave me feedback, and helped me technically with my voice. Still, the audition came and the legs shook like an earthquake. Callbacks came and went and it felt as though my singing voice was being pinched by the chokehold of the words “We would never cast you in a musical.” *The Beaux Stratagem* was also in that season, and I felt as though the heightened text as well as the playfulness of the characters allowed me to give an exciting and energetic callback. Being

cast in that show gave me confidence in my acting ability as well as my vocal ability. Until, of course, the end of the rehearsal process. Everything felt flawless with that process. There were no blocking notes, few vocal notes, and very little acting notes. When I asked the director if there was anything I could work on he said, “Just keep doing what you are doing.” Then came the Tuesday before opening night (two nights before), and the cast gathered in the lobby for notes. That night, it felt like the full forty-five minutes of vocal notes were dedicated to my vocal quality – which I perceived as intense at angry at the time. I was told that because the grads didn’t have WVU’s training yet our vocal habits had not been resolved, and that we had to work out those habits of being punchy or monotone before opening. I had no idea what to do, but knew that wallowing was not an option. I did my best to take the notes and trust the rehearsal process to move into performance. Looking back, I know now what growth has happened. Throughout my time at WVU, through voice class and continued voice lessons, I have been shown the importance of using resonance, rhythm, tempo, etc, and now realize what that first performance was lacking. At the time, it was still a downgrade of confidence.

First semester evaluations came up and all the feedback about my acting development was positive, except for one element: my voice. Once again, my voice was a problem, and everyone agreed that if I didn’t fix my voice, “there will be problems.” I was flabbergasted that my bad vocal habits had returned. Most of the semester was spent being in the moment, emotionally prepping, and being present with my partner. At no point, up until the end did I think that my vocal and physical habits were a problem. Jerry McGonigle, head of Graduate studies, assured me that we would work on it the next semester and that I would be pushed in the next semester’s shows to eliminate those habits. Well, that next semester I was given the opportunity to have the semester off and not be cast. The reason, I was initially told by McGonigle, was

because I carried too many bad habits in my voice. After that point, it became a downward spiral of a semester. My voice along with my identity, was shaken, and studio scene after studio scene I was told I had to fix it or I would have major problems with Shakespeare. I became fixated on “fixing” this vocal problem, it consumed my thoughts in every scene, and I began to question if I even knew what I was doing as an actor. Giving up was the easiest choice. Instead, I listened intently to other people, recorded myself, and heard the same vocal patterns. Yet, no one else was getting these doom impending notes. Time and time again actors would perform with their smoking induced vocal fry, and yet my voice continued to get singled out. I was forced to examine every element of my vocal production and the vocal production of others. Even still at the end of the second semester evaluations, the acting faculty said the voice had not improved and that I would not make it through Shakespeare. My stubborn self tried to convince them that my vocal training had been through Shakespeare and that I would be fine. That explanation was greeted with doubtful glances and an eye roll or two. This emotional spiral of a semester ended with the loss of an important relationship, thus the confidence in myself, my ability to act, sing, and just be.

That summer was a time of a lot of personal reflection and growth. It was the reevaluation of what was important as a human and as an actor. At no point in his life should a human, but especially an actor, feel as though they need to prove something to anyone. I didn’t owe anything to anyone except for myself. Nobody else needed to think I was good enough, I needed to know it. I also needed to remember that I am not in theatre so people can feel as though I am in the right place for them, I do it because I love to do it.

Journal Entry Two: Auditions and Callbacks

Back at school in the fall, the audition requirements were sent out a week before auditions and required that we sing thirty-two bars of something that wasn't Sondheim. Fear and panic came back, and I began to try to find the perfect song and scrambled to learn something unfamiliar. On the first day of Graduate Musical Theatre Studies, the week of the audition, Lee said something that really struck me. He said, "This class isn't about being the best singer. It is about how you sound. Your sound is your sound and no one else's." That simple phrase had an incredibly profound impact. For years teachers, classmates, etc. had been saying that you had to have a certain sound. Musical theatre was supposed to sound brighter, more vibrato, darker, or more of a "powerhouse sound." Lee simply said it is our sound and we get to own it as our own. That day the class brought in a song that they wanted to sing for open mic. I brought in "It's hard to Speak my Heart" from the musical *Parade*, which has always been one of my favorite songs from my favorite musical. Singing a full song in front of someone was something I hadn't done for a long time, and my nerves were flying even though it was in front of my grad class in a very low-pressure environment. Since this was a song that had been worked on many times in voice lessons, and I was able to connect to it both emotionally and physically, I felt the nerves fall away as I made my way through the song, and it felt like a positive, encouraging atmosphere in the room. After the song was finished, Lee looked very impressed and the rest of the class had many encouraging words. Excitement came across me, but not because of the nice comments,

but because I began to believe that there was a chance that the upcoming audition would go well. If anything, that day gave me the confidence I needed to take ownership of my voice and ownership of the audition. It also caused me to realize that it wasn't about preparing the perfect song that would match *Assassins*, but about going in there with something that I felt connected to and confident with.

When audition day came around, I did my best to keep myself level-headed. However, attempting to work myself down actually just psyches myself back up, and I tend to over prepare. I tried to just know that whatever happened in that room is what I had to offer in that moment. Whenever I come out of an audition and I do not remember anything that happened except my racing panic about how they felt about me, then I know I lost myself in that room and I did not give a quality audition. After the *Assassins* audition, that feeling was mixed, there were times I lost myself in my panicked thoughts, but for the most part, I felt as though my connection to my material carried through, and it was the most confident I have felt about a singing audition to date. No recollection exists as to which monologue was used, but I went home feeling confident (still nervous) about the callback lists going up. The next day, the callback list was up for *Three Sisters* and *Assassins* and my name was on both. Normally, I feel very confident going into the callbacks. They are where I can thrive because there is plenty of opportunity to show ability to work, take direction, and play off one another. Usually, if the director doesn't give you direction, you just make a strong choice with your partner and roll with it. This time around was a little bit different. Recollections of the semester I wasn't cast kept entering my brain. I remember Lee telling me that I wasn't as imaginative as I could have been after I wasn't cast in either of the shows second semester of first year, and Jerry telling me that I hadn't adapted as well as he wanted me to after giving me the direction, "Be more open." With these two being the same

directors this semester, I felt as though I might inadvertently not be imaginative or open enough, and began to psych myself out yet again. While I was sitting outside the callback room I recall thinking “I should never have said I didn’t want the faculty to consider me for *Exit, Pursued by a Bear*, I should have just kept my mouth shut and maybe I could have been cast in that.” Well, it was too late for that. My body started to get hot and shaky. I was dizzy, disoriented, and foggy. It was obvious after a few minutes that I was psyching myself into a panic attack to the point of nearly passing out. It was strange though because this nearly exclusively occurs on the initial audition and never the callback. There was no reason to not be confident. I was surrounded by those who supported me, and mentally I got to a place of confidence and security. However, my body was still going through a panic attack and my heart would not stop racing. I went into the Three Sisters callback, and felt myself acting my heart out. Not acting in a good way, but acting in the projecting, showing, and “shmacting” sense of the word. It did not feel good. Jerry told me it was “lovely” and told me I could go, asking Jordan to stay and read with Senior BFA Acting major Mack Kale. Now in my somewhat limited experience directors always say letting an actor go first doesn’t mean anything, and that just because you are asked to leave first doesn’t mean you will not be cast. This is rarely true, and most often the cast list reflects their cuts of who can go and who can stay in the callbacks. I knew I had not been open or receptive enough to my scene partner Jordan. It was alright though, I just accepted it for what I presented in that moment and moved on. Moving into the *Assassins* callback, the anxiety attack started to get worse. My chest was seizing up, and breathing became difficult. The sensation still felt strange as my body was having this experience, but my mind felt clear and prepared. The fact that it didn’t feel like a standard panic attack was just making everything worse because then I started to panic about how I was feeling. After thinking about it for a bit, I remembered I had started feeling this way

earlier after finishing a swim. Two weeks earlier I had started a vegetarian diet suddenly without research as to how to get the proper protein intake while being a vegetarian and was having a reaction to the absolute zero intake of protein I had. After realizing that it was a protein deficiency, I ran to the vending machine quickly before the callback and got a protein bar, but at this point a two-week protein deficiency wasn't solved by a single protein bar, so I pushed through. While I was up learning the music we were singing for the callback, I could feel my entire body shaking and felt as though I might pass out. I did everything I could to push that energy into the performance, but my voice kept crapping out at a much lower range than I knew I was able to sing, which was making me angry. Lee had us take the song and do an improv exercise with the song. I remembered this exercise from "Arabian Nights" callback, and immediately thought, "Here it goes. I'm not going to have enough imagination to do this improv exercise correctly." I do not know if it was trying to focus on not passing out, or if I just let go of that thought, or if it was the mixture of singing and improv that took my mind off performing, but when I went up with my partner I felt as though I kind of just let go and had fun. Then we went to do a range test, and at first the music director James Mitchell called my name to stay behind, but then he said, "Nevermind Joe, I don't need to hear you." My heart sank. I felt good enough about the callback or at least what I could reassemble in my foggy mind about the callback, but I left that night defeated, thinking that I had been asked to leave from both callbacks thus would find myself not cast once again. Immediately I went to my place of work, Iron Horse Tavern, to eat a huge basket of chicken and drink beer. That is when the vegetarianism ended.

The rest of the week was very nerve racking. My classmates Rick Mugrage and Joe Bussey came into the office the next day angry because Jerry told them that they were not cast in

Assassins even though that's what they wanted. Madeline Hintz came in angry because Jerry told her that he was not going to put her in *Three Sisters* because she had already been cast in *Assassins*. Classmates Emana Rachelle, Andra Ward, and Lonnie Simmons were already cast that semester and didn't audition for these shows, so Cassie Hackbart and I were the only ones not specifically approached and told what our thesis roles would be. Although Cassie thought she knew she would be cast in *Three Sisters*. I figured since I hadn't been approached, and I felt as though I had blown my entire callback night with a protein deficiency, that I would not be cast in my thesis semester. Fast forward through a week of pins and needles masked by my standard, "I don't care about casting" attitude, and the cast lists were up. I thought maybe I would be cast as an ensemble member in *Assassins*, but seeing my name next to John Wilkes Booth was a shock that I wasn't prepared for. Every emotion flew through my body including a deathly fear that I might not be able to live up to that role. I had been listening to the soundtrack all week, and the more I listened to it, the more I became enamored with the part, the music, and the libretto. Being given the opportunity to perform this role was a dream come true. I was ready, excited, and afraid.

Journal Entry Three: 9/29/17 Rehearsal

Tonight's rehearsal was probably the first time that self-doubt truly took hold. Up to this point I've been feeling fairly confident in the work I have been doing, especially with the singing, thinking that I had been taking James' and making the correct adjustments. After going through acting notes, James started to give out notes, and while going through the Ballad of Booth notes, he didn't give me anything to work on. I thought this was good news until he said, "Joe, I need you to come to my office and I need to work with you one on one, do you have free time on Monday?" Immediately I felt embarrassed. I cannot believe that I am the only one in the cast who needs this individual work. It makes me feel as though I am doing terribly and have zero awareness of how I sound. Within moments every insecurity I ever had come flooding back in, and all the voices who told me I should never sing filled my head. I honestly believe that Lee made a mistake in casting me. I stopped Madeline outside of the CAC after rehearsal and broke down. She assured me that it didn't mean I was doing terribly that James just wanted to meet with me to help me reach the sound he wants, but everything she said just sounded like further criticism in my head. I don't know how I will make it through the weekend worrying about this. It feels as though I have failed and they will all regret putting me in this role. I can almost see the disappointment on Lee's face.

-JG 9/29/17

Journal Entry Four: 10/06/17 Rehearsal

Tonight's rehearsal changed something for me. I've been so caught up in my head and the performance of the role. Trying to keep everything perfect vocally and physically has been holding me back just slightly. There has been so much focus on the technique, text, and historical analyses that I haven't gotten to the point of letting go – finally giving in to the emotional life of Booth. Instead of the regular rehearsal in the Falbo tonight, we went through the show in the VDM, and since we didn't have James, we just ran through the show without music. It was almost like an Italian run, but instead of speeding through the show, Lee shouted different stimulus at us to keep us on our toes and out of our heads. That included doing the text faster, slower, in different accents, with different intentions, speaking to different types of people, etc. This exercise seemed silly at first, and I was having a lot of fun. It gave a completely different perspective of the musical. I don't know if it was because I was more emotionally available or perhaps out of my head, I heard new things tonight. I heard new and moving things in Sam Byck's speech recorded to Nixon. I heard about the trees burning and the disaster around the world. I saw them happening in our new headlines today. My imagination opened and the world of the play became our world. Then immediately following was "Another National Anthem." I saw the struggle that we were all going through, and I tied my personal life to Booth's words of why he shot Lincoln. "I did it so they'd suffer in the North the way we'd suffered in the South." Everything built from there. The lyrics, "where's my prize? They promised me a prize!" tied

with Sondheim's music (which was only playing in our heads) built in a way that I had never experienced before, and suddenly the meaning of the play revealed itself. After "Another National Anthem," Casey and I had our scene between Booth and Oswald and Lee told us to do it as fast as we could, which just made that scene drive. The meaning that came out the previous song as well as the drive of the scene, made the words the most alive they have ever been for me, and the relationship with Casey was present, tangible. By the time the scene was over and the chorus was singing "Something Just Broke" I felt something move inside of me, and nearly broke down in tears. I realized what the story meant for us now, and gained a greater understanding of what Booth saw in his surroundings. I feel closer to understanding what drove him to the assassination. After running in the VDM, we moved back to the Falbo and worked those last moments of the show again, going through the scene between Oswald and Booth. While working, I lost the intensity that I felt in the VD, and I expressed to Lee that I didn't know how to keep that intensity while still being "Honey badger who don't give a fuck." Lee explained, passionately, that Booth does give a fuck. That this moment, this one moment in time is the moment that defines all the Assassins. This is life or death for each Assassin, and when they join me on stage to convince Oswald to shoot Kennedy, that is the moment that keeps us alive, keeps us remembered, and holds everything that we lived for in the balance. Lee explained that not giving a fuck is an attitude that Booth puts on, but everything he does and everything he says is specific, intentional, and purposeful. For example, when he is explaining the conspiracy theories to Lee such as the grassy knoll and the Cuban behind the fence, Booth is using specific images that have to do with being remembered. When he talks about Caesar and Brutus, he is talking about a legacy being carried throughout history. Oswald is the assassin who keeps the

other assassins alive. This moment tonight changed how I look at approaching Booth need throughout the play, how Oswald fits into that need, and how that need is executed.

-JG 10/06/17

Journal Entry Five: 10/12/17 Rehearsal - Crew Watch

Tonight's rehearsal was almost like the rehearsal when James said he needed to meet with me, and I had an emotional spiral. I felt as though I had been growing since last week, and the rehearsal where so much of Booth's intentions opened to me. Laura was coming in for crew watch today, which meant there would be an audience, but also someone who was listening specifically for vocal notes. I felt confident that she would be impressed with the work I had been doing. We went through the show, and it went well. When it came time for Laura to give notes, I started to feel incredibly nervous in my gut. I'm not sure why I got so nervous. She gave a bunch of general notes about us not being specific or clear enough or supported enough and I of course took all of the general note to be personally against me – even though I'm sure they weren't. Then when it came time for my specific notes, I began to have flashbacks to *The Beaux Stratagem* days when a few days before opening I felt as though everything I was doing was completely wrong, and I had failed my first show. I thought all of the work and confidence I had built from this show was false perception and tonight was the night I was going to find that out. After good notes and compliments about my growth from James and Lee, Laura started in. It was not as bad as my gut reaction told me. She told me that there were moments I was not being specific and I was gliding over images as well as falling off the ends of my sentences. Initially

and internally I had a bad reaction because these were the issues I was told were a huge problem first semester, so I immediately started beating myself up for being a terrible actor and wasting my time getting my MFA in Acting. After that initial, and irrational reaction, I decided to listen and absorb and then process the information. Afterwards I went to talk to Laura more specifically about what I could work on, and it ultimately comes down to time and intention. Her notes tie into everything I have been discovering. Everything Lee said about the importance of what Booth is saying to Oswald and his need to say it right now was exactly what Laura was telling me. She was just telling me to go about it in a vocal and imaginative way, to take my time with the vowels and consonants and not rush over images. To have a purpose for every phrase so that the ends were not just thrown away. I was able to not take her feedback personally tonight, and believe I can grow a lot from here.

-JG 10/12/17

Appendix B

John Wilkes Booth, letters and diary entries

Source: *"Right or Wrong, God Judge Me": The Writings of John Wilkes Booth*, ed. John Rhodehamel and Louise Taper (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

John Wilkes Booth to Mary Ann Holmes Booth

Editorial note: "Autograph letter signed, National Archives."
[Philadelphia, November] 1864

Dearest beloved Mother

Heaven knows how dearly I love you. And may our kind Father in Heaven (if only for the sake of my love) watch over, *comfort* & protect you, in my absence. May he soften the blow of my departure, granting you peace and happiness for many, many years to come. God ever bless you.

I have always endeavored to be a good and dutiful son, And even now would wish to die sooner than give you pain. But dearest Mother, though, I owe you all, *there* is another duty. A noble duty for the sake of liberty and humanity due to my Country—For, four years I have lived (I may say) *A slave* in the north (A favored slave its [sic] true, but no less hateful to me on that account.) Not daring to express my thoughts or sentiments, even in my own home Constantly hearing every principle, dear to my heart, denounced as treasonable, And knowing the vile and savage acts committed on my countrymen their wives & helpless children, that I have cursed my wilful idleness, And begun to deem myself a coward and to despise my own existence. For four years I have borne it mostly for your dear sake, And for you alone, have I also struggled to fight off this desire to begone, but it seems that uncontrollable fate, moving me for its ends, takes me from you, dear Mother, to do what work I can for a poor oppressed downtrodden people. May that same fate cause me to do that work well. I care not for the censure of the north, so I have your forgiveness, And I feel I may hope it, even though you differ with me in opinion. I may by the grace of God, live through this war dear Mother, if so, the rest of my life shall be more devoted to you, than has been my former. For I know it will take a long lifetime of tenderness and care, to atone for the pang this parting will give you. But I cannot longer resist the inclination, to go and share the sufferings of my brave countrymen, holding an unequal strife (for every right human & divine) against the most ruthless enemy, the world has ever known. You can answer for me dearest Mother (although none of you think with me) that I have not a *single selfish motive* to spur me on to this, nothing save the sacred duty, I feel I *owe the cause I love*. [sic] the cause of the South. The cause of liberty & justice. So should I meet the *worst*, dear Mother, in struggling for such holy rights. I can say "Gods' will be done" And bless him in my heart for not permitting me, to outlive, our dear bought freedom. And for keeping me from being longer a hidden lie among my country's foes. Darling Mother I can not write you, you will understand the deep regret, the forsaking your dear side, will make me suffer, for you have been the best, the noblest, an example for all mothers. God, God bless you. As I shall ever pray him to do. And should the last bolt strike your son, dear Mother, bear it patiently And think at the best life is but short, and *not at all times happy*. My Brothers & Sisters (Heaven protect them) will add my love and duty to their own, and watch you with care and kindness, till we meet again. And if *that happiness* does not come to us on earth, then may, O May it be with God. So then dearest, *dearest* Mother,

forgive and pray for me. I feel that I am right in the justness of my cause, And that we shall, *ere long*, meet again. Heaven grant it. Bless you, bless you. Your loving son will never cease to hope and pray for such a joy.

Come weal or woe, with never ending love and devotion you will find me ever your affectionate son
John.

John Wilkes Booth to the Editors of the *National Intelligencer*

Editorial note: "Text of letter written and destroyed on 14 April 1865, reconstructed from memory by John Matthews with the help of Philadelphia journalist Frank A. Burr, and published in the *Washington Evening Star* on 7 December 1881." This letter generally follows Booth's less readable April 14 "To Whom It May Concern" letter, which was left with his sister Asia Booth Clarke and published in the 19 April 1865 edition of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*.

Washington, D.C., April 14, 1865.

To My Countrymen: For years I have devoted my time, my energies, and every dollar I possessed to the furtherance of an object. I have been baffled and disappointed. The hour has come when I must change my plan. Many, I know—the vulgar herd—will blame me for what I am about to do, but posterity, I am sure, will justify me. Right or wrong, God judge me, not man. Be my motive good or bad, of one thing I am sure, the lasting condemnation of the North. I love peace more than life. Have loved the Union beyond expression. For four years have I waited, hoped and prayed for the dark clouds to break and for a restoration of our former sunshine. To wait longer is a crime. My prayers have proved as idle as my hopes. Gods [sic] will be done. I go to see and share the bitter end. This war is a war with the constitution and the reserve rights of the state. It is a war upon Southern rights and institutions. The nomination of Abraham Lincoln four years ago bespoke war. His election forced it. I have ever held the South were right. In a foreign war I too could say "country, right or wrong." But in a struggle such as ours (where the brother tries to pierce the brother's heart) for God's sake chose the right. When a country like this spurns justice from her side she forfeits the allegiance of every honest freeman, and should leave him untrammelled by any fealty soever to act as his conscience may approve.

People of the North, to hate tyranny to love liberty and justice, to strike at wrong and oppression, was the teaching of our fathers. The study of our early history will not let me forget it, and may it never.

I do not want to forget the heroic patriotism of our fathers, who rebelled against the oppression of the mother country.

This country was formed for the white, not for the black man. And, looking upon African slavery from the same standpoint as the noble framers of our constitution, I, for one, have ever considered it one of the greatest blessings, both for themselves and us, that God ever bestowed upon a favored nation. Witness, heretofore, our wealth and power; witness their elevation and enlightenment above their race elsewhere. I have lived among it most of my life, and have seen less harsh treatment from master to man than I have beheld in the North from father to son. Yet, Heaven knows no one would be willing to do more for the negro race than I, could I but see a

way to still better their condition. But Lincoln's policy is only preparing the way for their total annihilation. The South are not, nor have they been, fighting for the continuation of slavery. The first battle of Bull Run did away with that idea.

Their causes for the war have been as noble and greater far than those that urged our fathers on. Even should we allow that they were wrong at the beginning of this contest, cruelty and injustice have made the wrong become the right, and they stand now before the wonder and admiration of the world as a noble band of patriot heroes. Hereafter reading of their deeds Thermopylae^[i] would be forgotten.

When I aided in the capture and execution of John Brown (who was a murderer on our western border, and who was fairly tried and convicted before an impartial judge and jury of treason, and who, by the way, has since been made a God.) I was proud of my little share in the transaction, for I deemed it my duty[,] and that I was helping our common country to perform an act of justice, but what was a crime in poor John Brown is now considered (by themselves) as the greatest and only virtue of the whole Republican party.^[ii]

Strange transmigration! Vice to become a virtue, simply because more indulge in it. I thought then, as now, that the Abolitionists were the only traitors in the land, and that the entire party deserved the same fate as poor old Brown. Not because they wished to abolish slavery[,] but on account of the means they have ever endeavored to use to effect that abolition. If Brown were living I doubt whether he himself would set slavery against the Union. Most, or nearly all the North, do openly curse the Union if the South are to return and retain a single right guaranteed to them by every tie which we once revered as sacred. The South can make no choice. It is either extermination or slavery for themselves (worse than death) to draw from. I know my choice, and hasten to accept it. I have studied hard to discover upon what grounds the right of a State to secede has been denied, whether our very name, United States, and the Declaration of Independence both provide for secession[,] but there is now no time for words. I know how foolish I shall be deemed for undertaking such a step as this, where on the one side I have many friends and every thing to make me happy, where my profession alone has gained me an income of more than twenty thousand dollars a year, and where my great personal ambition in my profession has been a great field for labor. On the other hand, the South have never bestowed upon me one kind word; a place now where I have no friends, except beneath the sod; a place where I must either become a private soldier or a beggar. To give up all of the former for the latter, besides my mother and sisters whom I love so dearly (although they so widely differ with me in opinion), seems insane; but God is my judge. I love justice more than I do a country that disowns it; more than fame and wealth; more (heaven pardon me if wrong) more than a happy home. I have never been upon a battlefield, but oh! my countrymen, could you all but see the reality or effects of this horrid war. As I have seen them in every state save Virginia, I know you would think like me, and would pray the Almighty to create in the Northern mind a sense of right and justice (even should it possess no seasoning of mercy) and that he would dry up the sea of blood between us which is daily growing wider. Alas, I have no longer a country. She is fast approaching her threatened doom. Four years ago, I would have given a thousand lives to see her remain (as I had always known her) powerful and unbroken. And even now I would hold my life as naught, to see her what she was. Oh! my friends, if the fearful scenes of the past four years had never been enacted, or if what has been had been but a frightful dream, from which we could

now awake, with what overflowing hearts could we bless our God and pray for his continued favor.

How I have loved the old flag can never now be known. A few years since and the entire world could boast of [none] [ed.'s brackets] so pure and spotless. But I have of late been seeing and hearing of the bloody deeds of which she has been made the emblem. And would shudder to think how changed she had grown. Oh! how I have longed to see her break from the mist of blood and death so circled around her folds, spoiling her beauty and tarnishing her honor. But no; day by day has she been dragged deeper and deeper into cruelty and oppression, till now (in my eyes) her once bright red stripes look like bloody gashes on the face of heaven. I look now upon my early admiration of her glories as a dream. My love (as things stand today) is for the South alone, and to her side I go penniless.

Her success has been near my heart, and I have labored faithfully to further an object which would more than have proved my unselfish devotion. Heartsick and disappointed I turn from the path which I have been following into a bolder and more perilous one. Without malice I make the change. I have nothing in my heart except a sense of duty to my choice. If the South is to be aided it must be done quickly. It may already be too late. When Caesar had conquered the enemies of Rome and the power that was his menaced the liberties of the people, Brutus arose and slew him. The stroke of his dagger was guided by his love of Rome. It was the spirit and ambition of Caesar that Brutus struck at.

“Oh that we could come by Caesar’s spirit,
And not dismember Caesar!
But, alas!
Caesar must bleed for it.”^[iii]

I answer with Brutus:

He who loves his country better than gold or life.
John W. Booth

From John Wilkes Booth’s Diary

Editorial note: “Autograph manuscript, National Park Service, Lincoln Museum at Ford’s Theatre, Washington, D.C.; transcription from William Hanchett, ‘Booth’s Diary,’ *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 72 (Feb. 1979): 39–56.” Italics have been removed.

Zekiah Swamp and Nanjemoy Creek,
Charles County, Maryland,
17 and 22 April 1865

April 13th
14 Friday the Ides

Until to day [sic] nothing was ever thought of sacrificing to our country’s wrongs. For six months we had worked to capture. But our cause being almost lost, something decisive & great must be done. But its failure is owing to others, who did not strike for their country with a heart.

I struck boldly and not as the papers say. I walked with a firm step through a thousand of his friends, was stopped, but pushed on. A Col- was at his side. I shouted *Sic semper before* I fired. In jumping broke my leg.^[iv] I passed all his pickets, rode sixty miles that night, with the bones of my leg tearing the flesh at every jump. I can never repent it, though we hated to kill: Our country owed all her troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of his punishment. The country is not what it was. This forced union is not what I have loved. I care not what becomes of me. I have no desire to out-live my country. This night (before the deed), I wrote a long article and left it for one of the Editors of the National Intelligencer, [sic] in which I fully set forth our reasons for our proceedings. He or the Govmt

Friday 21—

After being hunted like a dog through swamps, woods, and last night being chased by gun boats till I was forced to return wet cold and starving, with every mans hand against me, I am here in despair.^[v] And why; For doing what Brutus was honored for, what made Tell a Hero.^[vi] And yet I for striking down a greater tyrant than they ever knew am looked upon as a common cutthroat. My action was purer than either of theirs. One, hoped to be great himself. The other had not only his countrys but his own wrongs to avenge. I hoped for no gain. I knew no private wrong. I struck for my country and that alone. A country groaned beneath this tyranny and prayed for this end. Yet now behold the cold hand they extend to me. God *cannot* pardon me if I have done wrong. Yet I cannot see any wrong except in serving a degenerate people. The little, the very little I left behind to clear my name, the Govmt will not allow to be printed. So ends all. For my country I have given up all that makes life sweet and Holy, brought misery on my family, and am sure there is no pardon in Heaven for me since man condemns me so. I have only *heard* what has been done (except what I did myself) and it fills me with horror. God try and forgive me and bless my mother. To night I will once more try the river with the intent to cross, though I have a greater desire to return to Washington and in a measure clear my name which I feel I can do. I do not repent the blow I struck. I may before God but not to man.

I think I have done well, though I am abandoned, with the curse of Cain upon me. When if the world knew my heart, that one blow would have made me great, though I did desire no greatness.

To night I try to escape these blood hounds once more. Who can read his fate. God's will be done.

I have too great a soul to die like a criminal. Oh may he, may he spare me that and let me die bravely.

I bless the entire world. Have never hated or wronged anyone. This last was not a wrong, unless God deems it so. And its with him, to damn or bless me. And for this brave boy with me^[vii] who often prays (yes before and since) with a true and sincere heart, was it a crime in him, if so why can he pray the same I do not wish to shed a drop of blood, but "I must fight the course." Tis all that's left me.

Notes

i At the Battle of Thermopylae, in the fifth century B.C., the greatly outnumbered Spartans, though finally killed to the last man, managed to hold off the Persian army long enough to allow the rest of the Greek army to withdraw, setting the stage for the Greek naval victory at the Battle of Salamis.

Appendix C

This theme builds throughout and feeds the actors internal life / rhythm

Piano-Conductor —333— #61—Last Midnight

(WITCH) 25 26 27 28 *poco cresc.*

vow, did you? Had to get your

(+Clarinet, Bassoon, Horns)

(Piano) *poco cresc.*

(Cello, Bass pizz.)

29 30 31 32

Prince, had to get your cow, have to get your

(Violin harmonics—8va)

(+Viola)

(+Cello—arco) *mp* (+Clarinet, Bassoon)

33 34 35 36 *dim.* *mp*

wish, does-n't mat-ter how—An-y-way, it does-n't mat-ter now. It's the

(+Horns) (+Clarinet, Bassoon)

Piano Vocal

#4—Ginn Song

76 (Click!) You can change the world. What ev - er else is true, you

77

78

79 ✓

(Click!) You can change the world. What - ev - er else is true, you

(Click!) You can change the world. What - ev - er else is true, you

80 Trust your lit - tle fin - ger. Just a sin - gle lit - tle fin - ger can

81

82

83

Trust your lit - tle fin - ger. Just a sin - gle lit - tle fin - ger can

Trust your lit - tle fin - ger. Just a sin - gle lit - tle fin - ger can

Using key change to build
tension to be "released"

Piano Vocal

Using a "Barbershop" style of music, but breaking it with his standard use of choppy rhythms - usually started by a ~~single~~ character

Tempo secundo (♩ = 60) (Moore enters) To → 92 MOORE: #1 - Gun Song

Change the world. Change the world. Change the world.

mp leggiero

new rhythm
new character

93 94 (fishes in purse) 95 96 97 (pulls out lipstick)

real-ly great gun - Shit, where is it? No, it's real-ly great - wait! - Shit, where is it?

sempre stacc. *mf*

new key

98 (drops it back in) 99 100 (pulls out hair brush) 101 102

An - y - way, it's just a thir - ty - eight. But it's a gun, you can make a state -

mp *cresc.*

Piano Vocal

#3—Another National Anthem

(GUITEAU:)

(...)and promote the sale of my book...

MOORE: I did it so my hippie friends would know where I was coming from...

CZOLGOSZ:

I did it because no one cared about(...).

Più mosso (♩ = 88)

15 16 17 BYCK: *p* 18

Where's my prize?

ahh, _____ ahh, _____ ahh, _____

fp *p*

(CZOLGOSZ:)

(...)the poor man's pain...

MOORE:

I did it so I'd know where I was coming from...

ZANGARA:

I did it 'cause the bosses
made my belly burn...

HINCKLEY:

I did it so she'd pay
attention...

19 20 21 (BYCK): *mp* 22 23

I want my prize.

mp

MOORE:

So I'd have some place to come from and some place to go...

GUITEAU:

I did it 'cause they said I'd be Ambassador to France...

BOOTH:

I did it so they'd suffer(...)

24 25 (BYCK): *mf* 26 27 28

Don't I get a prize? _____

mf

Build of musical motif that
is also found in "Last Midnight"

Piano Vocal

#8—Another National Anthem

(BOOTH:)

(...) in the North the way we'd suffered in the South...

FROMME:

I did it so there'd be a trial and Charlie would get to be a witness,
and he'd be on TV, and he'd save the world...

(BYCK:)

29

I de-serve a fuck-ing prize!

30

31

To → 34

GUITEAU:

35

mf

Where's my

BYCK:

I did it to make people listen...

CZOLGOSZ, FROMME:

36

37

38

39

prize?

They prom-ised me a prize.

HINCKLEY:

Because she wouldn't take my phone calls—

+ OTHERS:

What a-bout my

ZANGARA:

Because nothing stopped the fire— I

BYCK:

Nobody would *listen!*

(Balladeer enters)

BALLADEER:

prize?

I want my prize!

And it

Photos of Booth

"The handsomest man in America": An elegant John Wilkes Booth leans against a studio prop in this photograph taken by the Boston firm of Silsbee, Case and Company, probably in 1862. (Taper Collection)

Cased photograph of Booth with strands of hair cut from his head by a Virginia girl a few moments after his death. (Taper Collection)

Booth gave this copy of his portrait to Taper 2 months in Boston in the spring of 1864. (Taper Collection)

John Gielgud's Hamlet Soliloquies:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_ZorcIPcyE&index=22&list=PLqqrW11Af8958LdtMRWbF-YJaD9zBp1Is

An Eyewitness Account of Booth's Escape:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3SvKPACbx_U&list=PLqqrW11Af8958LdtMRWbF-YJaD9zBp1Is&index=27

Stephen Foster music used for vocal quality and emotional preparation:

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=robert+shaw+chorale+stephen+foster

Email From Joel Asher:

"Hi Joseph,

Unfortunately we have no recordings of Booth. Where was Thomas Edison when we needed him?

My conclusion that he didn't have much of a Maryland accent is something I still believe. He was the son and brother of great American actors and they all did lots of Shakespeare. At that time, English accents were considered "the way" to do Shakespeare. He would have studied that and used it professionally. However, he was also very involved in the Confederate cause and would have spoken in some sort of Southern accent to fit in with those people. It was, after all, his "native" speech. So we don't really know which accent dominated.

My suggestion to you for the show is to use a British-tinged accent when he's trying to impress Society, and to temper that with some Southern drawl (closer to Virginia than Maryland) when he's with his fellow conspirators. While this may be historically accurate, it might not be the best way for your production. Talk with your director and ask if he wants you to be accurate at the possible expense of theatrical truth.

I hope this helps. If you have more questions, contact me again. In the mean time, break a leg.

Joel Asher"

Appendix D

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