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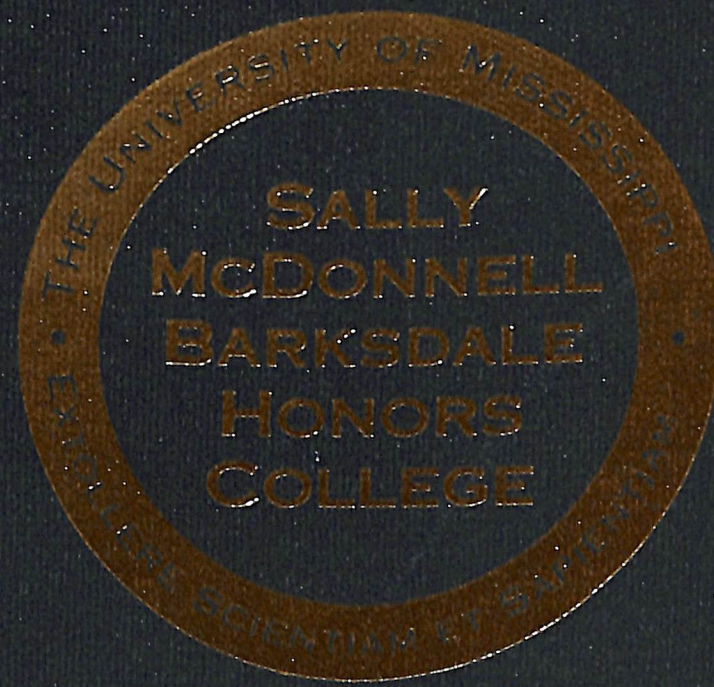
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SALLY MCDONNELL BARKSDALE HONORS COLLEGE
SENIOR THESIS 2008



FREETIME!?!? THEATRE:
THE CREATION OF A SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTION COMPANY

By
Brian Martin Tichnell

A thesis submitted to the faculty of The University of Mississippi in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

Oxford
May 2008

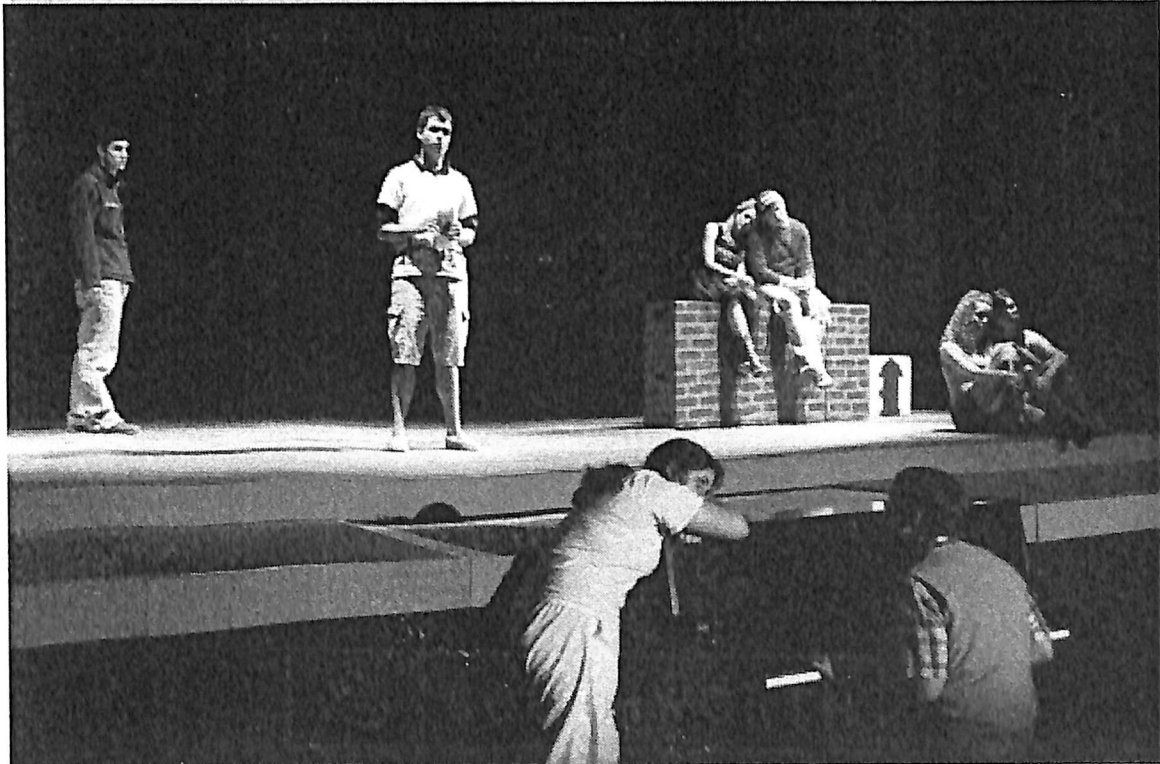
Approved by

Advisor: Professor Joe Turner Cantu

Reader: Professor Valerie Wilson

Reader: Professor Deborah Chessin

Dedicated to all those involved in FreeTime!?!? Theatre.



ABSTRACT
FREETIME!?!? THEATRE:
CREATING A SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTION COMPANY

The following is a description of a theatre production company created by Brian Tichnell and Derek Van Barham. The production company produced five successful plays over the course of two years. Included is the story of how the company was created, problems faced and lessons learned. Photographs are also included. No argument is made nor any research completed. This document's purpose is to make known the work, dedication, and love that went into the creation of FreeTime!?!? Theatre.

PREFACE

Seeing as how this is a thesis of a somewhat unconventional nature, and considering no model exists for theatre majors to emulate, I felt it necessary to include an introduction explaining not only the nature of my thesis project, but also the style I plan to employ while writing this thesis. The important thing to remember is that my actual thesis is not research and writing. My thesis is the creation of a production company, FreeTime!?!? Theatre, and the production of five different shows over the course of two years. This monster of a paper, which has been haunting my holidays for the past two years is a mere response to the wonderful experiences I had creating my production company, some of the problems I faced, and lessons I learned from mounting five different shows. While discussing my thesis with Dr. Young, because there are no models for theatre students to emulate, she informed that I could take “artistic liberties”, and I intend on using those liberties to my fullest ability. And while that might not be the most scholarly approach to a thesis, I feel that a fun approach is, as Katurian puts it in *The Pillowman*, “more in keeping with the spirit of the thing.” Anything else would be false. I did not start this production company to have a thesis project, I started this production company because it was awesome. It was one of the greatest, most memorable things I have ever had the pleasure of working on in my life, and I believe that it is the legacy that I have left to Ole Miss. If you do not appreciate the unconventional, conversational, somewhat satirical tone that this thesis might at times take on, please, by all means, do not give me a diploma...it’s okay. I must admit, I’d rather you give me a diploma, seeing as how I did so much typing this year, but in the grand scheme of things, it’s okay. That’s one of the things I learned from working on independent theatre projects...it’s okay, things will work out. But all in all, I think those of you who read this will appreciate a bit of convention-breaking thesis-reading. That is where I’m coming from with this journal of sorts. The plays are my thesis, this is just something to turn in. I feel like one of those eighteenth century writers who would write a preface to their work so as not to be beheaded by an absolutist king with no sense of humor. I do not view anyone in the SMBHC as such. I promise.

(Note: I have added pictures of the productions we have already completed, excluding *The Pillowman* pictures. Unfortunately, no pictures exist of *The Pillowman*, but I do have a filmed version of the first act, which I will add to this thesis, as well as a dvd of the first act of *Dog Sees God*)

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CHAPTER I: THE BEGINNING

For my thesis project, I chose to create a production company which would produce shows completely and solely put together by undergrad students. I wanted my shows to be of high quality and have full tech support, advertisement and a usable space. Most of all, I wanted my shows to reach college age students, and not only entertain them, but give them a strong appreciation for theatre. (We actually have a class here at Ole Miss titled Theatre Appreciation for non-majors. I feel that my production company has been more effective.) I was able to achieve this with the help of my production partner, Derek Van Barham. What brought about this production company, which would be named FreeTime?!?! Theatre (because of the complete and total lack of free time that anyone who worked on our shows actually had), was a late night conversation that took place around 2:30am in Derek's and my apartment. We had ordered a script titled *Dog Sees God*, written by Bert V. Royal, with the intention of using it as a Duo Interpretation event for forensics competitions. So, now that the scene is laid out, I would like to present what actually occurred between Derek and me, in play script format:

Brian: We should do this whole play; here.

Derek: That's what I was thinking.

Brian: It could be really awesome.

Derek: Would we hold auditions?

Brian: No, we already know everybody, let's just cast who we want.

Derek: Alright then, let's do it.

Brian: I really think we can do it...like...really well.

Derek: So do I.

Brian: 'Night.

Derek: *(In a pseudo-British accent)* Good night, kind sir.

And thus the creation of the first FreeTime!?!? project. Now, this interaction, while a bit silly, is very important to the success of our production company. It was a production company conceived and put together by friends, who just wanted to do some theatre with each other. This "friend" element, above anything, was the key to FreeTime!?!?'s success. There is a lot of "stuff" written in a lot of overdue library books on my bedroom floor, explaining how to make a successful production company, none of which I used while producing these plays, and most of which is common sense to anyone who has done theatre for at least two years. I did not use any of that grade school methodology and therefore I will not be citing any of it.

CHAPTER II: THE FIRST PLAY

Dog Sees God was FreeTime!?!?'s first play, but when we were first getting started, our production company had no real name. All that existed for a while was a delirious, late night chat, and a notion to do some theatre on our own. Conversations about doing plays are easy, but actually putting one together is a bit daunting. Even though I was someone who was around theatre as early as 4th grade, it took a lot of forethought and planning to make sure everything went off without a hitch.

First we decided to cast the play, which was no easy thing to do. It was decided that we would cast it based on the knowledge we already possessed about each of our peers. In other words, no auditions. Instead Derek and I partook in a series of late night conversations, each having varying levels of pseudo-British accents. Through these conversations, we picked our cast based on talent and work ethic. We did not pick anyone who we thought would not be entirely focused on making the best show possible.

Not holding auditions presented us with one problem. Because no auditions were held, it gave off the impression to our peers that we were showing favoritism and only casting "friends." This, of course, was not true, but one of the important things to remember about the actor, is that he/she is sensitive and often cries himself/herself to sleep. The truth is that auditions would have been a waste of time. I mention the upsetting nature of not holding auditions because it was a very legitimate concern Derek

and I had. Our main audience support would be coming from our fellow theatre majors. If the show were to have a stigma of “favoritism” hovering over it, then it might hurt the overall turnout of the show. We wanted people to see our show.

Derek and I knew that we wanted to act in the play, so that meant that neither of us could direct. Our concern was that if we brought in someone else, they might direct the show in a direction that we did not want. This part of the thesis could be called “Derek and Brian Learn to Let Go and Trust Others to Have Good Ideas As Well”, because looking back on it, we had issues with letting go. *Dog Sees God* is a play that contains very broad pathos and very broad comedy. There is a very fine line that one cannot cross for fear of going too far to one side or the other. The play can be really sappy or really immature, so the director had to be able to steer the play away from these traps. With fear that no one outside the cast would be able to take the play in the direction we wanted, we turned to our own cast and we asked Paige Mattox, who was playing the Lucy character, to also direct the show. In the play, she is only in two scenes, so we figured it would not be hard for her to stage the rest of the show. Derek and I felt more comfortable having a cast member direct, because we felt that our influence would still be heard, and we felt that an actor in the show could be more sensitive towards the tone required for success.

We were wrong. Paige took a crack at directing, and she did a great job staging some of the scenes, but the truth was that Paige was not comfortable giving direction at all. Half way through rehearsals she spoke up and said something about not wanting to direct anymore. So there we were with no director, and only two weeks until we opened the show. Derek and I agreed we had to bring in someone outside the cast. We asked one

of our class mates Dana Colagiovanni to come in and give some direction. Dana was great, she had great instincts and she saved our show. Derek and I came to the realization that others can have great taste, too. Revelation.

Because the cast was so extremely busy, we had very little time to rehearse, so we just worked individual scenes in little times during the day. We were able to get a lot done, but some things fell by the wayside. One particular scene that required the entire cast to be present, was not blocked until the night before we opened the show. Certain sections of the play were not completely memorized by some of the cast until the morning before we opened. Also, because Derek and I had only ever been on the acting side of theatrical productions, many technical things were forgotten until the last minute (much of which I will describe in greater detail in other sections of the thesis). Needless to say, the night before opening was extremely stressful, and Derek and I were not sure whether our show would even be worth performing the next day. On opening night, our show began, and it was flawless. It was performed effortlessly by our cast and the audience loved it. *Dog Sees God* was the first show I have been in where I could actually hear audible sobbing from the audience.



Figure 1: The Cast of *Dog Sees God*

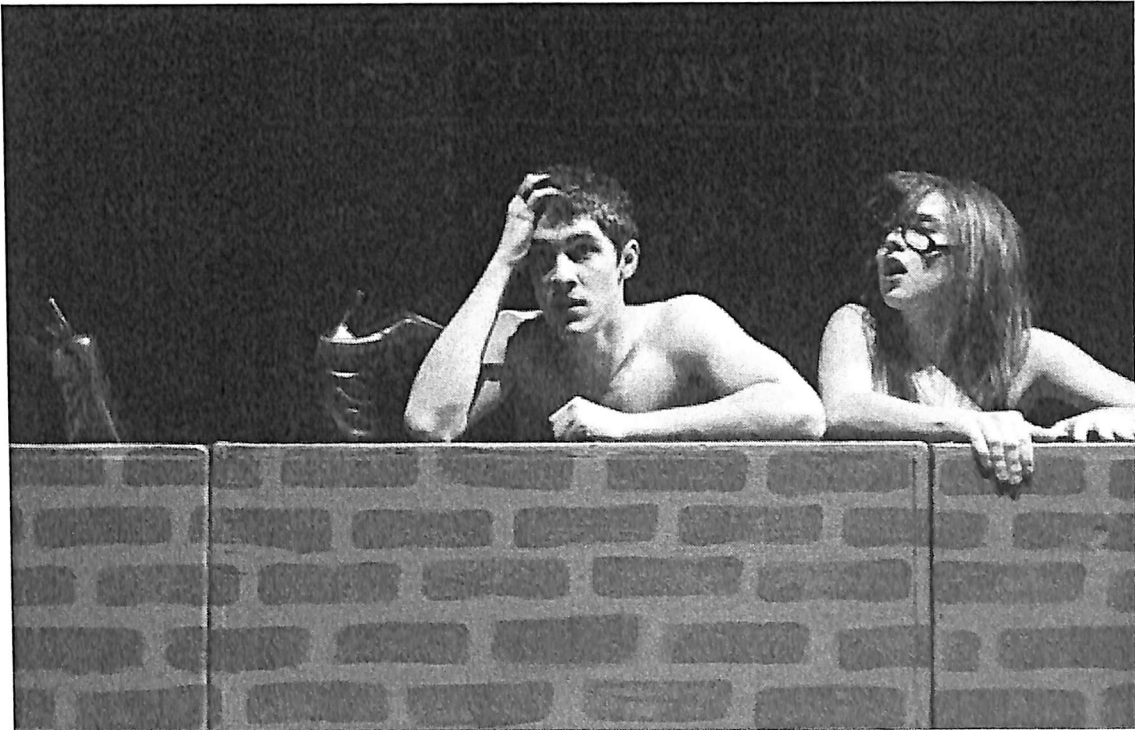


Figure 2: Me Playing Matt (or the Stress of Producing a Play)

CHAPTER III: OUR MISSION

Due to the great success of *Dog Sees God*, Derek and I decided that we should continue producing shows, shows that we were certain would be of high quality and would be just as well produced as Ole Miss main stage shows (and sometimes better). As we continued, Derek and I produced contemporary shows, aimed at moving students to appreciate the power of theatre. Currently we live in a society dominated by film as the only widely-appreciated performance art form. Derek and I knew that because cinematic performance was so widely accepted, we must choose shows with contemporary subject matter and language in order to really reach Ole Miss students. The average Ole Miss student has rarely, if ever, been to the theatre, and most have negative preconceived notions about the art form. Derek and I were determined to show plays that were not only contemporary, but powerful, entertaining, and (well) perfect. Settling for mediocrity is something Derek and I would refuse to do.

The one thing Derek and I realized, was that things can go off without a hitch with very little preparation and rehearsal, as long as you cast the right people. As a producer you must make sure that you trust your cast completely. The more trustworthy your cast, the less preparation is needed to put on not just a good show, but an amazing show. FreeTime!?!? Theatre became a theatre company based on little preparation. While this may seem opposite in every way from what one should do to produce a good show, I

came to learn little preparation can keep a show very fresh and alive for the performers, as long as those performers are professional enough to handle the pressure. Our most successful show by far, *The Pillowman*, had the least amount of preparation: only two weeks of rehearsal for a three act, two and a half hour show. I posit that with professional actors, little rehearsal but extreme focus lead to the most truthful performances.

Personally as an actor, I find that too much rehearsal stifles my process. The addition of new things, such as costumes and lights the night before, keeps the actor in the moment, as long as that actor has the capacity to not let lack of preparation throw them. For this reason, casting was one of the most important elements of our productions.

Derek and I were also determined to not charge admission to our shows. We felt that FreeTime!?!? should be free. We did not want students to have any reason to not come experience what we had to offer. The main reason we did not charge was because we honestly could not think of any reason to make people pay. While I understand art cost money, Derek and I decided that while we were in college and were allowed to do things with little financial concern, we should make some free theatre. It just felt right.

So FreeTime!?!? began to produce free, contemporary shows, all done with little preparation and time. We did *SubUrbia* by Eric Bogosian, *Shakespeare's R&J* adapted by Joe Calarco, *The Pillowman* by Martin MacDonaugh, and we are currently in rehearsals for *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* by Stephen Adly Guirgis. Many times our formula was very successful. Other times it was not as successful as we had hoped. But we were always proud of our shows; because quite frankly, for a group of undergraduates to produce shows for no personal gain, and for those shows to be so well received in a place that does not generally receive theatre well, is unique. FreeTime!?!? is by far the

most fulfilling thing that I have ever been a part of in my entire life. It is my seminal work. I feel that it is something that has allowed me to give to the university the most I could give, utilizing my talents and my theatre training. Also, FreeTime!?!? taught me more about the world of theatre than any class could have ever begun to teach me.

CHAPTER IV: ACTING WITH NO TIME

As I've said, FreeTime!?!? Theatre is all about very little production preparation, because: A) None of us actually have the free time to work on something on the side what with all the classes and main stage shows and B) it is our belief that fresh, motivated art and performance is born out of high concentration and little preparation. When in the rehearsal process personally, I have found that I move very quickly and I find that if rehearsal goes on for too long, my performance becomes stale and I am bored. I always feel that my best performances usually occur within the first two or three weeks of rehearsal. Once a show starts rehearsing for four to five weeks, I feel that a show has reached decreased marginal productivity. Of course, there are exceptions to this rule, such as shows that require highly stylized choreography or slapstick comedy.

I am certain that the reason so many of FreeTime!?!? Shows have been so personal to both the actors and the audience is because the finished product is so fresh. To perform a show that still had unfamiliar elements can bring shivers down an actor's spine. It is truly a beautiful experience.

There is, of course, a flipside to this concept, and that is the fact that not everyone can handle little preparation and quick memorization. To be able to mentally handle performing a FreeTime!?!? show one must be a quick study, comfortable on stage, and able to handle mistakes, dropped lines, and technical disasters without being thrown in the least. For this reason, Derek and I were very picky with who we cast in our shows. . As a producer I have definitely learned that the top consideration to make when casting

someone is not talent, but *trustworthiness*.

CHAPTER V: DESIGN

Section 1: Costumes

Through starting a production company, Derek and I were in charge of all aspects of the theatre. Before this, acting was the only side of theatre that either of us really knew. Being thrown into everything at once forced us to learn as much about the design world as we possibly could. Because costuming was the most foreign to us, we probably put the least amount of time into working on costume plots. For *Dog Sees God*, we assigned each character a color and had each actor assemble his or her own costume employing their specific color. With *SubUrbia*, we just had the actors wear what they wanted for the character. We did the same thing for *The Pillowman*, but we had to make sure we had fake blood, which we ended up making with corn syrup and red food coloring. *Shakespeare's R&J* was set in a catholic school, so school uniforms were an obvious choice, and we had, once again, the actors bring in their own costumes. For the first time we are employing a costume designer for *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*. I chose to use Martha Mallory, a theatre major with an emphasis in costume design. I felt that due to the nature of the play, costuming is going to be very important to telling the story. The play is based on several different characters from several different time periods. Also I have double cast this particular show, so different costuming is going to be very important in helping the audience distinguish the different characters from the actors that are playing them, especially when one actor is playing three different roles.

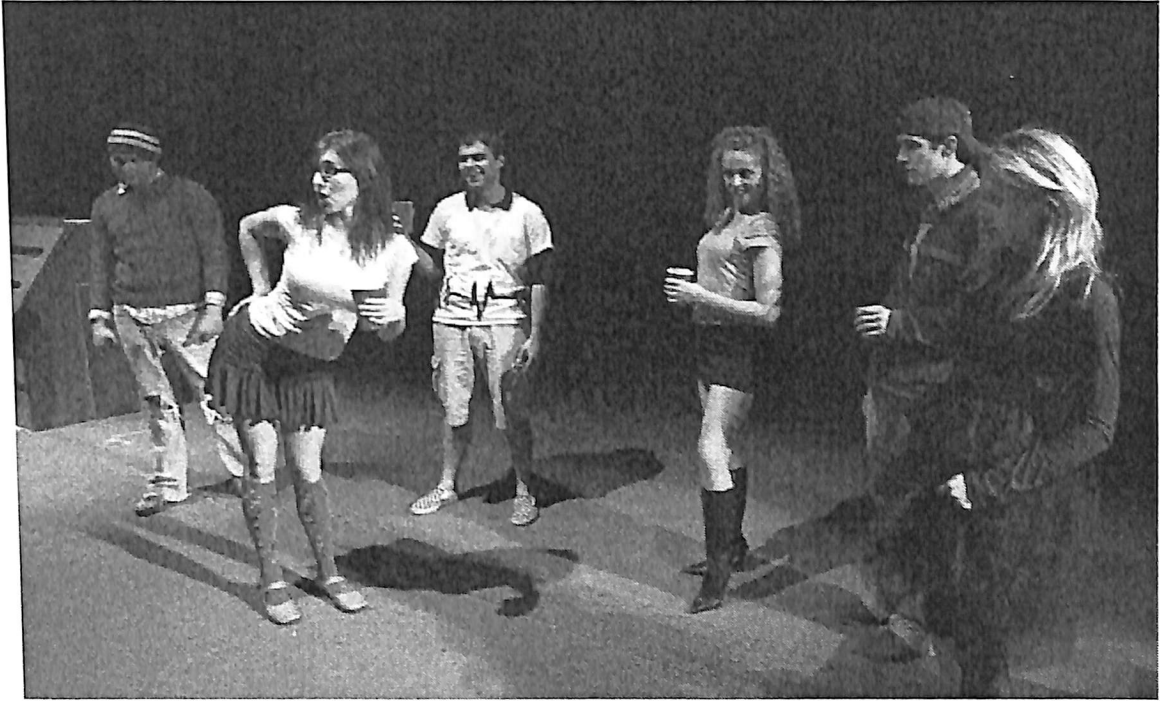


Figure 3: Color Assignments in *Dog Sees God*

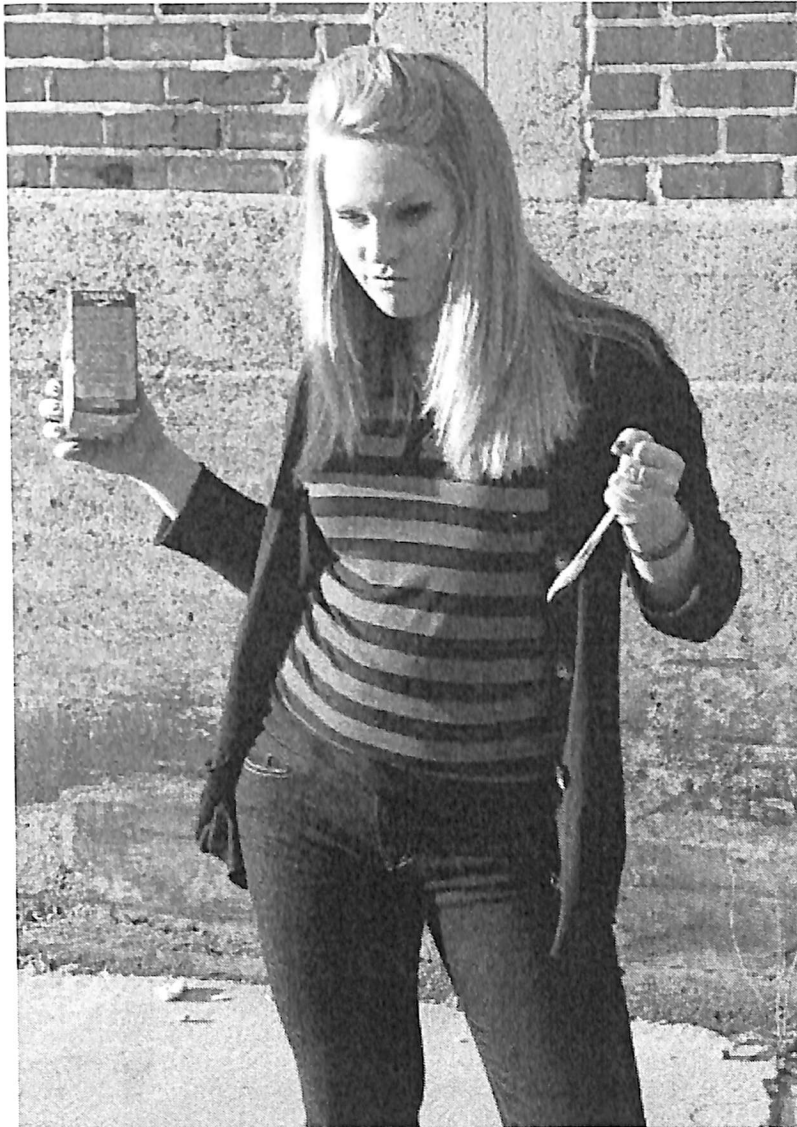


Figure 4: Sooze's Costume in *SubUrbia*



Figure 5: Costumes in *SubUrbia*



Figure 6: Costumes in *Shakespeare's R&J*

Section 2: Experimental Spaces

Derek and I are very proud to have never used a performance space twice in the production of our five shows. We have always striven to find innovative places to perform plays. What many people, within the theatre community and without, do not

realize is that theatre can be performed literally anywhere, not just in a theater. In fact, performing theatre in an experimental, “found” space can be very useful in not just creating an environment, but involving the audience more personally. It is my position that large theaters, such as Fulton Chapel, can actually distance an audience from the action, because it is so big and so typical. When a play looks like a play then it is seen as a play. But if a show can be done somewhere that makes it not look like a play, then the fact that it is a play can be lost. Then all that is seen is a story, a story that is not hindered by the fact that it looks like a play.

Our first show, *Dog Sees God*, was still very conventional. We were excited just to be putting on a play. We asked if we could use Fulton Chapel, and Jared Spears the Ole Miss Theatre Technical Director was very accommodating. Fulton Chapel is a very distancing space as I have said before, literally and emotionally, because it is so big and the stage is so far away from the first row. In order to remedy this problem we chose to stage a good portion of the action on the ground floor right in front of the audience. Luckily, a set had already been built for another production which extended the stage from the proscenium wall. This stage extension made it very easy to move from the stage to the ground floor.

Our use of an essentially traditional acting space ended up going smoothly. Because we had gone down a traditional road the first time around, we decided that we should break new ground in terms of acting spaces. Our second project, Eric Bogosian’s *SubUrbia*, is set outside of a convenient store, so Derek and I were determined to actually perform the show outside. We reserved the Powerhouse and told the Oxford Arts Council that we wanted to dress the front of the Powerhouse building as a convenience

store. The Arts Council was very supportive and helped us achieve what we wanted. Once we secured the space, our director Valerie Wilson, one of our theatre professors, began to direct around the elements that were already set in place in front of the building. There were these amazing lime green structures right in the middle of our playing area, and instead of allowing these things to hinder us, we used them to the fullest.

The show was set at night, so we set up lighting instruments around the area, and built some lights into the area right above the door, so as to look like florescent lights. We set up chairs out in the parking lot, and then had the cast park their vehicles around chairs to create a barrier, and we ended up letting many of audience members sit on the vehicles because our audience attendance was so large. We also set up a large white screen behind the audience to shut out all street noises that were coming from University Avenue. Unfortunately, the noise was not completely shut out, especially when men with trucks and something to prove drove by with absurdly loud engines. Instead of letting this hinder us, we used these noises in our acting, reacting to the stupidity of having a vehicle that made such annoying, loud noises. Generally the cast would flip off these imbeciles who drove by while staying in character. This was, consequently, humorous to audience, but more importantly, it added a level of naturalism that enhanced the show, and allowed the audience to feel engulfed in the action. The actor's environment and the audience's environment was one in the same.

Unfortunately, because we used the great outdoors, we ran into some problems, one being that there were simply not enough chairs to seat all of our audience, even after allowing them to sit on our vehicles. So, there was a group of audience members who were forced to stand during the performance, which was a two act play. Also, while

opening night had beautiful weather, in the second performance it rained right in the middle of the show. But we had a plan. Once it started to sprinkle, our stage manager allowed the scene to finish, and then he interjected into the performance and directed everyone to go to the stage inside the Powerhouse, where we actors had quickly created a make shift set, and we continued the show with no problem. Our closing night had rather cool weather, so we had to make sure the audience had blankets and things to keep them warm. But despite the rain, the standing, the cold, and the interrupted performance along with a locale change, the audience stayed with us for the entirety of the show. An entire group of college students, half of whom that thought plays were stupid and “gay”, stayed with us, and were great audiences.

For our third show, *Shakespeare's R&J*, we utilized the newly renovated Meek Auditorium. While it was a traditional space, we chose to use a completely bare stage, and predominately use lights to denote changes in place, mood, and convention. The play is set in a Catholic school, and portrays a group of students performing *Romeo & Juliet* together for fun, so we created a stark white sterile color palate for the lights when the students were in school, and a more warm, yellow, romantic feel for when the students were immersed in the world of Shakespeare. Using lights in this more advanced way, was a huge learning experience for those of us who were a part of FreeTime!?!? Theatre. Lights were a bit foreign to all of us working on FreeTime!?!?. Generally we just used lights to make the action visible, but with *Shakespeare's R&J*, we used lights as an artistic device in order to help tell the emotional story.

Our fourth performance, arguably our most successful show, *The Pillowman*, was performed in the basement of the ROTC building on campus. This area was dingy, dusty,

dreary, wet and perfect for the show. The show is set in an alternate reality governed by a totalitarian establishment, and the action takes place in an interrogation room. We had the audience enter through the 'backstage' area, which we dressed and lit as a frightening, haunted house type world, to set the mood for the subject material of the play. After walking through the backstage, they entered through the playing area, where the lead actor was sitting behind a desk blindfolded with blood running down his face. The audience then took their seats on a series of raised platforms that we had built for the performance. Because the audience area was small, we had several audience members standing and sitting on the floor. Despite the fact that this show was three acts, nearly the entire audience stayed for the entirety of the show, most of whom were extremely moved by the performance. *The Pillowman* was probably the ultimate example of our using a found space, and utilizing all of its elements to enhance the performance and allow the environment to pull the audience into the action.

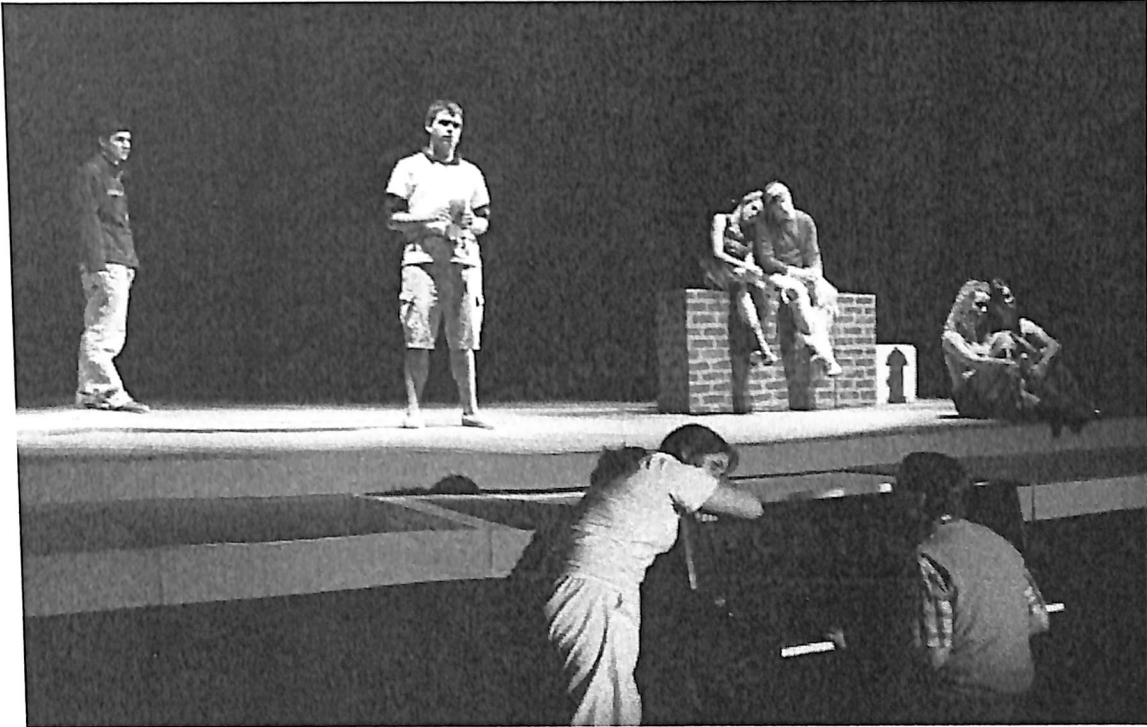


Figure 7: Using Fulton Chapel



Figure 8: In Front of the Powerhouse



Figure 9: *SubUrbia's* Audience

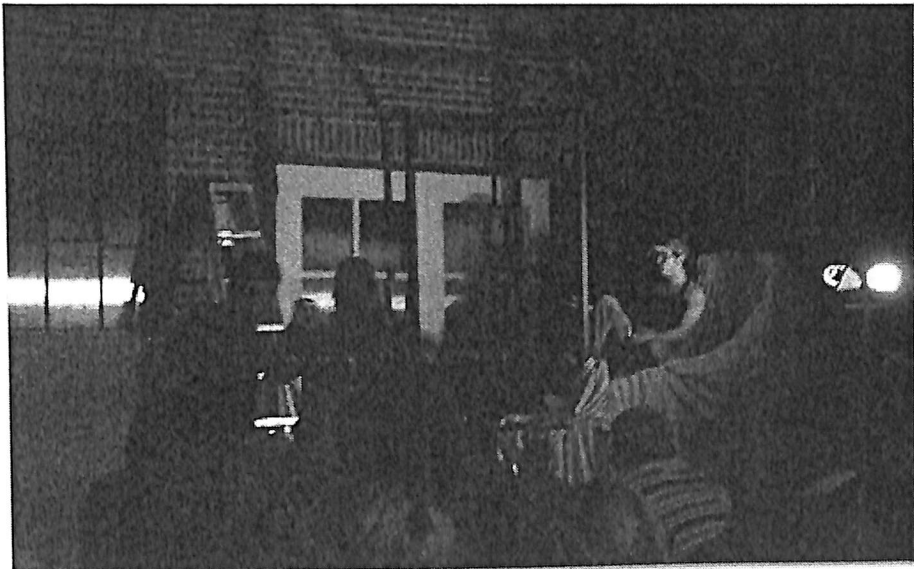


Figure 10: Performing Outside

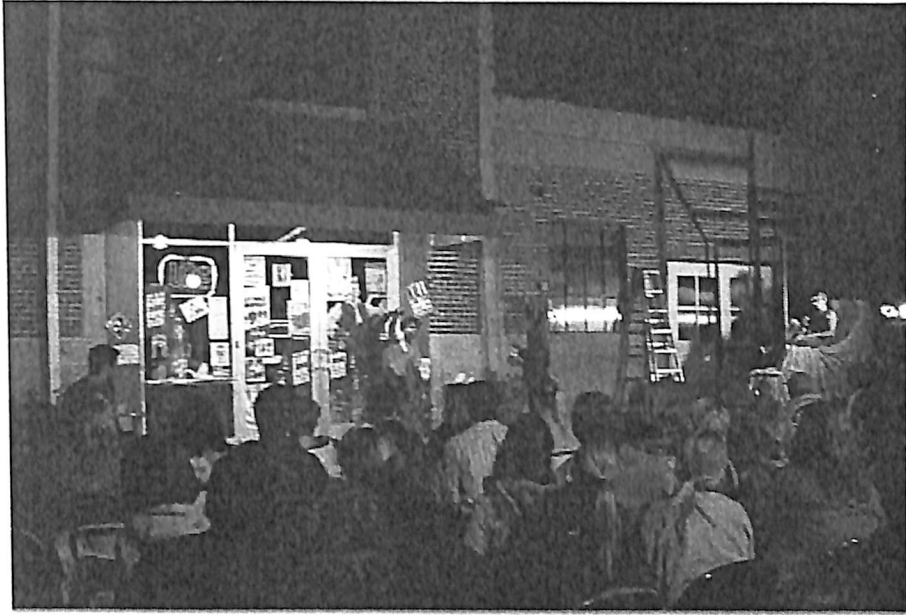


Figure 11: Creating a Convenience Store



Figure 12: Sitting on Vehicles

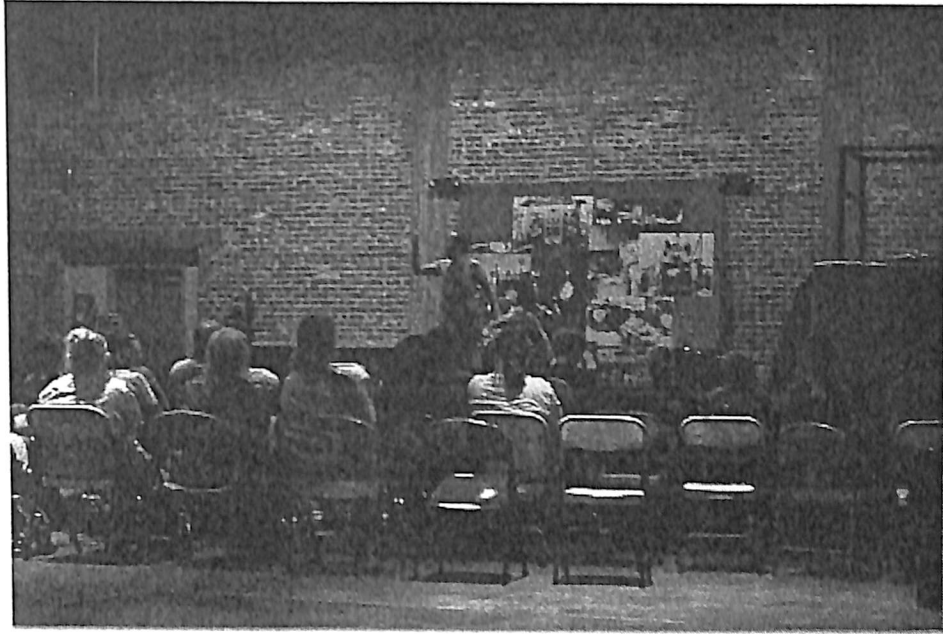


Figure 13: Performing Inside Because It's Raining

Secion 3: Sound Design

Throughout the course of my two years producing shows with FreeTime!?!? I have acted as the company's sound designer. This soon became a hobby of mine, as I am very interested in the art of sound design. As my interest in designing sound grew, it became more than a hobby; it became a money maker. I have been hired twice by the Oxford Shakespeare Festival as the festival sound designer, and I have designed two Ole Miss mainstage productions. The reason I mention this is to make it clear how much FreeTime!?!? has affected my life both personally and professionally. Had I never been forced to oversee all of the technical aspects of theatre, I would have never come to appreciate the true beauty of all the technical aspects of theatre. More importantly, I would have never even thought of sound design as a career choice, because I would have never learned that I am actually quite good at it.

It all happened by accident really. It got down to the wire while we were putting

together *Dog Sees God*. We all ended up dividing the final production jobs that each member of the cast needed to do to get the show performance ready. I was to make a CD of all the sound effects, school bells and so forth, and I was asked to find some music to play during the scene transitions. I ended up loving the process. I found some amazing music to underscore two different scenes, and I feel that those additions enhanced the performance more than I could have imagined. The pride I felt in my simple sound design was exhilarating.

Another memorable show that I designed sound for was our production of *The Pillowman*. My design for this show was far more extensive, as I had already had experience designing shows professionally. I am very proud of this design. I utilized the sound of a small child's piano and xylophones, as there is something both childish and frightening about these instruments. I feel that it was important that the show have a mood of innocence and disturbance at the same time.

CHAPTER VI: FAILURE

Of the four productions that I have already produced with FreeTime!?!? I feel that there is only one show that did not meet the expectations of excellence that FT Theatre is determined to produce. *Shakespeare's R&J* was our attempt to connect the contemporary to the classical, because the show itself does so beautifully. The show uses nearly all of Shakespeare's language throughout the action of the play. Also, there are undertones of issues dealing with homosexuality and we wanted to perform a show for "Coming Out Week." We cast two different shows, one with all men (as the play suggests) and one with all women. We had two different directors for each show, both students. We alternated each performance, with one cast performing one night and another cast performing the next, and so on. This was, I think, a good idea, but I think the shows were executed poorly. They were not terrible, but not terrific either, and terrific is what we strive to create.

The problem was not in the direction, nor the concept, but I feel in casting of the show. As I said before, FreeTime!?!? operates on very little time and demands quick memorization. I think that we forgot this fact when casting the show. We cast some very talented actors, but many of them were actors that we were not entirely familiar with in terms of work ethic. Not that they were lazy, but many were not used to going above and beyond what is typically demanded in the theatre world. Also, the fact that we were performing a play that involved heightened language did not help the memorization process. Typically, FreeTime!?!? actors need to be invigorated by the challenge of very little rehearsal. Some of the actors in *Shakespeare's R&J* had a antithetical experience,

being nervous and thrown by the lack of rehearsal.

Also, I had very little to do with this show as compared to my involvement in the other shows, because I was busy with a mainstage production. I feel that while Derek has a lot of artistic skill, I feel that my contribution to the production process is my managerial skills. I feel that because I was only minimally involved, I was not able to add as much structure to the rehearsal process as might have been needed.

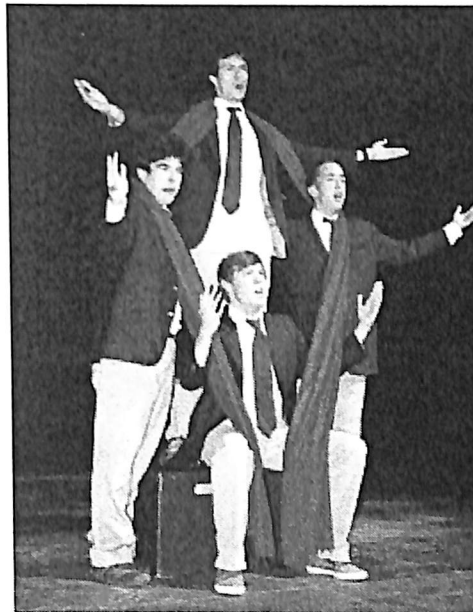


Figure 14: *Shakespeare's R&J*

CHAPTER VII: BUSINESS

Section 1: Promotion and Advertisement

While Derek and I had several talents in the world of theatre, being business savvy was not necessarily one of them when we first started out. But through FreeTime!?!? we have become very knowledgeable on how to promote a show, and how to build a reputation. Derek and I learned that for our production company to really grow, we needed to make sure that our name means something special to audience members. This, of course, drove us to produce the most professional, high quality shows possible, even though they were free to the public. So Derek and I, from the beginning, worked on building a name.

The first method that we used to build our reputation was to make sure our shows were advertised well. We new that the best way to get our shows' information to the public were posters, internet, and the newspaper. We had a very good friend named Allison "Sauce" Mott who was an art design major. She has designed all of our posters, starting with *Dog Sees God* and she is currently designing a poster for *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*. Her designs were extraordinarily professional and appealing. We knew that our main target audience was college students. I feel that Sauce's poster design was very successful in appealing to young adults. This was proven through our large young-audience turnout.

Also, internet was an important medium to reach students. With email and internet websites, such as Facebook being so ridiculously popular in our culture, no tool could be better employed in gathering an audience. Derek would always create terrific

Facebook event pages to be sent to anyone he could, and I would make sure to send mass emails over the Ole Miss web mail network. Also, we learned that we could add events to the Ole Miss website's calendar, which we did before every show.

Lastly, we made sure that we always had an article in the Daily Mississippian, usually interviewing the cast, including pictures and performance information. We have a good relationship with the 2006-2007 Arts&Life editor Zachary Wilson, who always reviews Ole Miss Mainstage Theatre productions. He has always been more than accommodating towards FreeTime!?!? and he wrote great articles for us, which were usually accompanied by color pictures on the back page of the newspaper. Also, we were able to get a News Watch news story on *The Pillowman* to air on the Ole Miss television station a few days before we opened our show.

Because Derek and I made sure to advertise our company in whatever way we could, we were always able to generate terrific, enthusiastic audiences. (I imagine the fact that we did not charge admission also had a bit to do with that.)

Section 2: Daily Mississippian Articles

'This is not your typical Peanuts.'

Zachary Wilson

Issue date: 11/2/06 **Section:** Arts & Entertainment

Beautiful. Poignant. Inspiring. Contemporary cartoon. Revealing. Hilarious. Sad. Entertaining. Exciting, in every sense of the word. Thought-provoking. Real. These are the words and phrases the cast of "Dog Sees God" used to describe the play they're performing this weekend.

The play shows where the gang from Charles Schulz's "Peanuts" are now that they're in high school. Some of the characters are the same, and some have gone through drastic changes.

Beau Cole, a senior, plays C.B., the Charlie Brown character. Cole said C.B. hasn't changed much, but begins a little soul searching at the start of the show.

"Charlie Brown has ditched his blase' name of Charlie Brown to go by his initials, C.B.,"

said Cole. "He's still sort of like the everyman, the downtrodden average guy who gets picked on. And, like everyone else in the play, he's trying to find himself."

Pigpen, now known as Matt and played by junior Brian Tichnell, and Peppermint Patty, now known as Trisha and played by senior Jessica Rosa, are two of the original characters who have made the biggest changes.

Tichnell said the dirt cloud that used to surround Pigpen has stopped traveling around him and has relocated itself into his soul.

"He's a dirty, sexual pervert and he's really mean," said Tichnell of the now-cleaned-up Matt.

Rosa said Trisha went from being a stereotypical tomboy to a stereotypical mean girl.

"Peppermint Patty was a tomboy growing up, then she makes a complete 180 and now she's the leader in this bitchy clique," said Rosa. "She's girly girl, dressed in pink, polar opposite of what she used to be, but the core of her is still hiding something."

Trisha's best friend Marci has also changed into a girly-girl, says Winslow Rumph, a junior.

"I was the little brainy dork in elementary school, and now I still have a little bit of that, but I've turned into this kind of bitch that follows Trisha around, just like she did when she was younger," said Rumph.

Sam Jacobs, who plays the Linus character who now goes by Van, said there are only a few differences in his character.

"My character Van has gone from the little boy who sucks his thumb and carries his blanket around to sucking on bongos and pipes," said Jacobs. "But on the other side, he's still the philosopher he was when he was young. He still has this advice-giving quality."

The Sally character, played by Haley Strode and named simply C.B.'s Sister, also hasn't changed too much but is trying to find herself through various outfits and persona changes. Strode said she can relate to Sally being the youngest and always trying to fit in.

"I have two older brothers, and I can kind of relate to this type of situation - being the younger person, trying to get someone's attention."

Strode also said she thinks C.B.'s Sister's costumes change the way she looks on the outside, but on the inside she's still Sally.

The character that remains the most true to the original "Peanuts" is Schroeder, who is now called Beethoven and is played by junior Derek Barham. Not changing, though, has actually caused Beethoven to be excluded from the group.

"He's pretty much the only one who hasn't changed, and I think that's why the others don't like him so much," Barham said. "He still plays the piano, and he still has stuck to who he was, and in not changing, he has become the outsider."

The tight-knit group of actors decided to perform "Dog Sees God" after Rumph and Dana Colagiovanni, the director, saw it in New York City and suggested it as a scene to Tichnell and Barham for an acting class. They didn't have financial backing from the theatre department and all of the cast members are involved in other shows, but they decided to perform the play anyway.

"This production isn't a money-making thing at all - obviously, since we're doing it for free - it's just about delivering a message and performing for people and entertaining people," Cole said.

"Hopefully [the audience will] get the overall message," said Colagiovanni. "Hopefully we'll teach people something, or make them think, at least."

Colagiovanni also added that she hopes people will be able to understand and relate to the new version of the "Peanuts."

"It's interesting to me that the playwright took these characters that are cartoons that people know and love and associate with childhood and put them in these awkward and sometimes horrifying and violent, but ultimately real, situations," she said.

"Dog Sees God" opens Friday at 8 p.m. in Fulton Chapel and runs again Sunday at 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. The run time of the show is about an hour-and-a-half long, and admission is free and open to the public.

Viewers should be warned that though the play involves the "Peanuts" gang, it is not meant for children as it contains harsh language, drugs and sexual situations and discussion. The cast recommends high school aged audience members and up.

"There is some language and there is some crude innuendo going on," Rumph said.

"This is not your typical 'Peanuts,'" added Colagiovanni.

5 questions for the cast of 'SubUrbia'

Zachary Wilson

Issue date: 4/2/07 **Section:** Arts & Entertainment

The following is a transcript of an interview with the cast of "SubUrbia," a dark comedy about aimless 20-somethings produced by Free Time Productions. In it, the cast discusses the show, the rehearsal process and how different it is to work outside.

On "SubUrbia":

Hurlburt: "SubUrbia" is about a group of young 20-year-olds that want to figure out their place in life and want to know what their meaning is."

Fine: "It's just real. It's about several kids on a street corner not knowing what to do with our lives, and we spend all of our time on the corner in front of this 7-11 gas station. It's about being lost, and we're all trying to find ourselves and don't know how to do that."

Tichnell: "I think the main point of "SubUrbia" is that it explores the effect of living in a society where you can have whatever you want, living in a society of wealth and opportunity and how that affects the youth. And how having so much opportunity actually leads these kids to sit around and squander their opportunity and live in boredom and confusion."

On working outside:

Barham: "It's a completely different atmosphere, working outside, because you have to deal with the elements. We were actually rehearsing the other night and it was raining, so we had to duck under the shed. And we have to deal with a lot of noises outside - sound is a bit of an issue, that's why we're having the audience really close to the actual performance, because, since we are outside, it is a bit more difficult to hear and we want to make sure that they can."

Jacobs: *"Working outside was a challenge. There was the issue from the road with the cars passing by, and I think how we dealt with it, by pulling the audience closer, has helped us. It's a real intimate show and it's real, and that helps us."*

Bartlett: *"I think doing the entire show outside enhances the show, because it's set at a 7-11 and it really just adds to the reality and it helps the audience connect more with exactly what life is like for these kids in suburbia."*

On audience response:

Barham: *"SubUrbia" tackles a lot of different issues that I think are very relevant to people our age: racism, politics, sexual politics, the disillusionment as far as the American dream goes, the boredom that youth face and the lengths they'll go to to fill their time, drugs, sex, relationships, abuse, commercialism, stereotypes. And a few of the characters represent that whole 'what is the point of being here' attitude, and because of that I think a lot of us deal with those issues. I hope, if nothing else, we make people think. And we certainly present some characters and some situations that our audience can relate to.*

Tompkins: *"I also think with "SubUrbia" you get a show that kids our age can relate to. And I feel like a lot of people, especially kids in their 20s, aren't really interested in theater, but we need to do shows that help them realize that theater can be fun, it can be interesting, it can be thought-provoking and can show a really different sides of what theater can be. And I think "SubUrbia" really brings it home."*

On free admissions:

Barham: *"Free Time Productions prides itself on not charging admissions, so that college students have no excuse for not being able to come as far as financial constraints go. But we do have to pay royalties for the show, so we ask that our audience in the end if they enjoyed the show, if they have anything that they could donate, we would appreciate it. It goes to help us pay royalties and any excess over royalties goes to assure that we can do more shows like this without having to charge admission."*

Fine: *"It's all been us doing our own props and doing our own costumes out of our closets and scrounging up props and whatever we could do. All of us are getting pretty attached to it now, because we've just put everything into it, it's not just acting, we're doing everything, which I think shows in our performance as far as the appreciation we have for it. So hopefully that will leak onto the audience so they can appreciate it as much."*

On the relevance:

Barham: *"The reason we liked it so much and decided to do it now is because it's still such a relevant show. Even though it's almost 15 years since he first wrote it, we still have the exact same conversations, we still have the exact same concerns. The conversations the characters have in the play are the same conversations you have sitting*

around in the dorm room or sitting at the bar. I think why we liked it and why we decide to do it is because it's still so relevant, and it sort of spoke to us."

Tichnell: "Practically, we knew we wanted to do a show with four guys and a certain amount of girls, because me, Derek, Sam and Beau had all done "Dog Sees God" and we wanted to work together again. Whenever we read "SubUrbia," each character is so well defined and so interesting. I think we picked out the perfect play for actors to tackle very, very good, very funny, very out-of-the-norm roles that we would all want to play. Great roles for the actors we wanted to work with."

Fine: "The thing with these [side] productions that we've been doing that pretty much got on a roll with "Dog Sees God" is that the shows we do with the [theatre] department are wonderful and fun to do, but these are the shows that we get the opportunity to take risks, to make definite choices on our own, without a professor pushing us or casting us - it's something that we take into our own hands and really take responsibility for, and that helps us mature in all sorts of ways as actors, as grown-ups, just taking hold of something and really making it our own."

Shakespeare with a twist

Student troupe presents new take on classic for Coming Out Week

Erin Parsons

Issue date: 10/10/07 **Section:** News

Shakespeare's classic "Romeo and Juliet" is considered one of the greatest tragic love stories ever written - but what if the title roles were both played by men?

Free Time?!?! Productions, a student theater organization, will begin performing "Shakespeare's R&J" at 8 p.m. today in Meek Hall Auditorium in conjunction with Ole Miss' Coming Out Week, an event sponsored by the Ole Miss Gay-Straight Alliance. The show is an adaptation by Joe Calarco on William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet." It tells the story of a group of students in a Catholic school who stumble upon a copy of the tragic tale of star-crossed lovers. The students read the play aloud and discover the true emotion in the work.

There are two variations of the show; one with a female cast and one with a male cast. The opening show will feature the female cast, while the male cast will perform its first show Thursday at 8 p.m. in Meek Hall Auditorium.

"I don't want it to get pigeon-holed as a 'gay play' because it's not," said Derek Barham, director of the female cast. "Obviously, if you have an all male cast doing Romeo & Juliet, there are gay elements, but it's so much more than that. It's a huge challenge to the actors.

"In fact, it's a huge challenge in every sense of the word."

The different casts each exhibit a different side of the characters in the play, Barham said. The male cast shows the strength of the female characters, and the female cast shows the sensitivity of the male characters.

"It's about passion, it's about sexuality, it's about being young and your first love or your first lust," he said.

Another interesting aspect of the play is the lack of props and scenery, said Beau Cole, director of the male cast.

A single red scarf is used to symbolize everything that isn't an actor, the stage has no set and there is very little music, Cole said.

The play showcases "how universal Shakespeare is," he said.

Barham said the two casts have been working on this play for about a month.

"I understand Romeo's plight in loving people all over," Pamela Bullock, who plays Romeo, said.

"Shakespeare's R&J" is the third production Free Time?!?! Productions has put together. Free Time?!?! Productions features a group of students interested in performing "free theater," Barham said. The organization tries to put together a show every semester.

"Shakespeare's R&J" will continue to be performed throughout the week. The male cast will perform on Friday at 9 p.m. and on Sunday at 2 p.m.

The female cast will perform on Friday at 6 p.m. and on Sunday at 5 p.m.

Admission is free for all performances, but Free Time?!?! Productions will gladly accept donations to help continue their productions, Barham said.

'Pillowman' offers social, political thrills

Mia Camurati

Issue date: 11/9/07 Section: Arts & Life

Free Time?!?!? Productions' fourth show, "The Pillowman" is now showing again in the basement of Somerville.

Because of limited space allowing for only about 25 audience members, the group decided to put the show on for a second weekend.

Free Time?!?!? is starting its second season after such controversial shows as "Dog Sees God" and "R&J."

The difference between Free Time and most other productions around Oxford is that Free Time is, as the name states, free. They do gladly accept donations, as it does take money to produce a show, no matter how obscure.

In "Pillowman," Katurian, a writer living in an unknown totalitarian state, has been called in for questioning regarding the close resemblance of his stories to a number of recent gruesome child murders that have been occurring around the community.

Katurian, played by Beau Cole, becomes the man you love when you leave, despite his mildly disturbing stories.

The two detectives, Ariel and Tupolski, played by Brian Tichnell and Derek Barham, play off each other with the stereotypical good cop/bad cop difference between their personalities. Barham keeps a steady hold on his strict abide-by-the-rules character, and Tichnell is wonderfully creepy, as seen in "Mr. Marmalade" earlier this year.

Katurian's mentally retarded brother Michal, played by Alex Mauney, is the standout character of the show. His mannerisms and voice keep you convinced of his childlike brain capacity throughout the show.

The lighting and sound design, while barely visible due to their simplicity, work

amazingly with the show. The barely-there lights and gentle background music give the show a new dimension.

There isn't an aspect of this show that isn't perfectly planned and executed. From the choice of actors to a basement instead of a stage, there wasn't one detail overlooked.

I would not suggest this show to someone weak of heart because of the vividly grisly nature of the entire plot; but having seen the show three times thus far, I would recommend it to those wanting a chilly, yet sadistically humorous, thrill for free.

From child violence to unconditional love, the show will shock and surprise. Seating is highly limited due to fire codes, so I suggest early arrival if you plan to go.

"The Pillowman" is playing Friday at 10 p.m. and Saturday at 6 p.m.

Section 3: Sauce's Promotional Posters

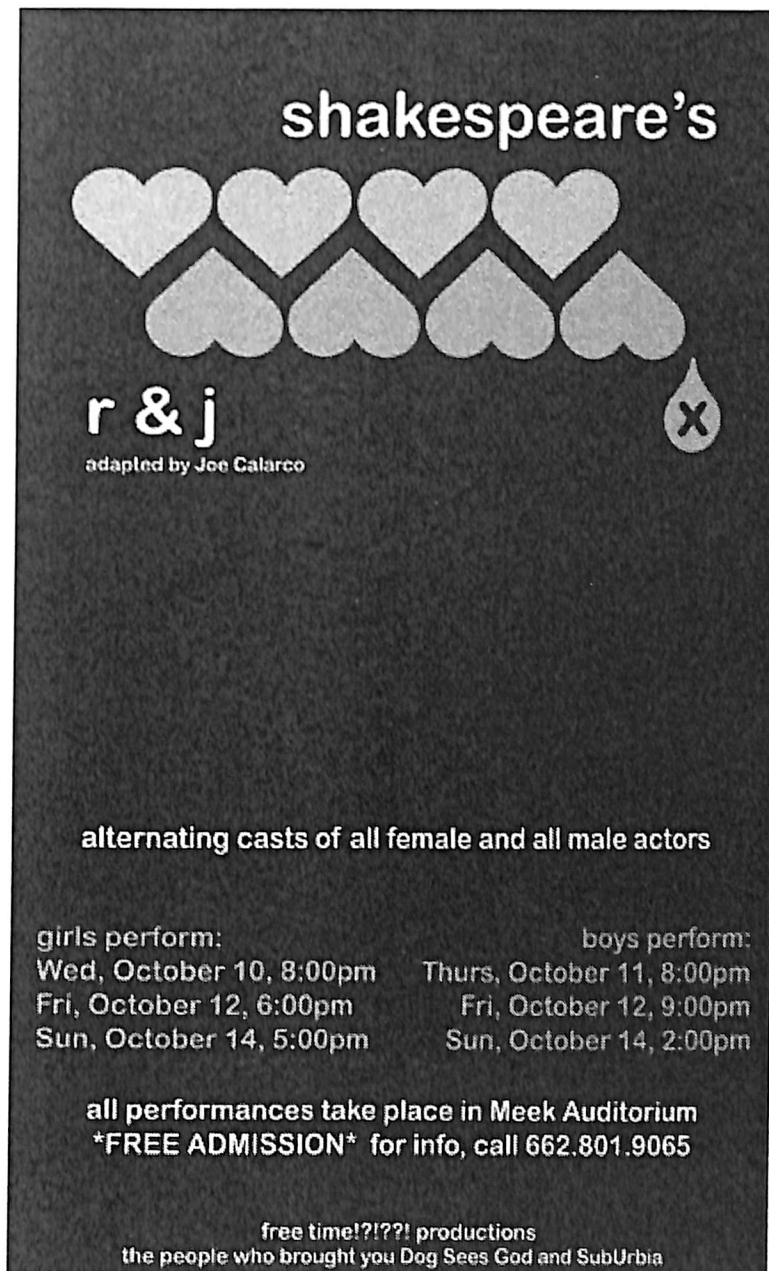


Figure 15: *Shakespeare's R&J* Poster



DOG SEES GOD

CONFESIONS OF A TEENAGE BLOCKHEAD

Friday, November 3, 2006 @ 8:00pm
Sunday, November 5, 2006 @ 1:00 and 4:00pm
Fulton Chapel

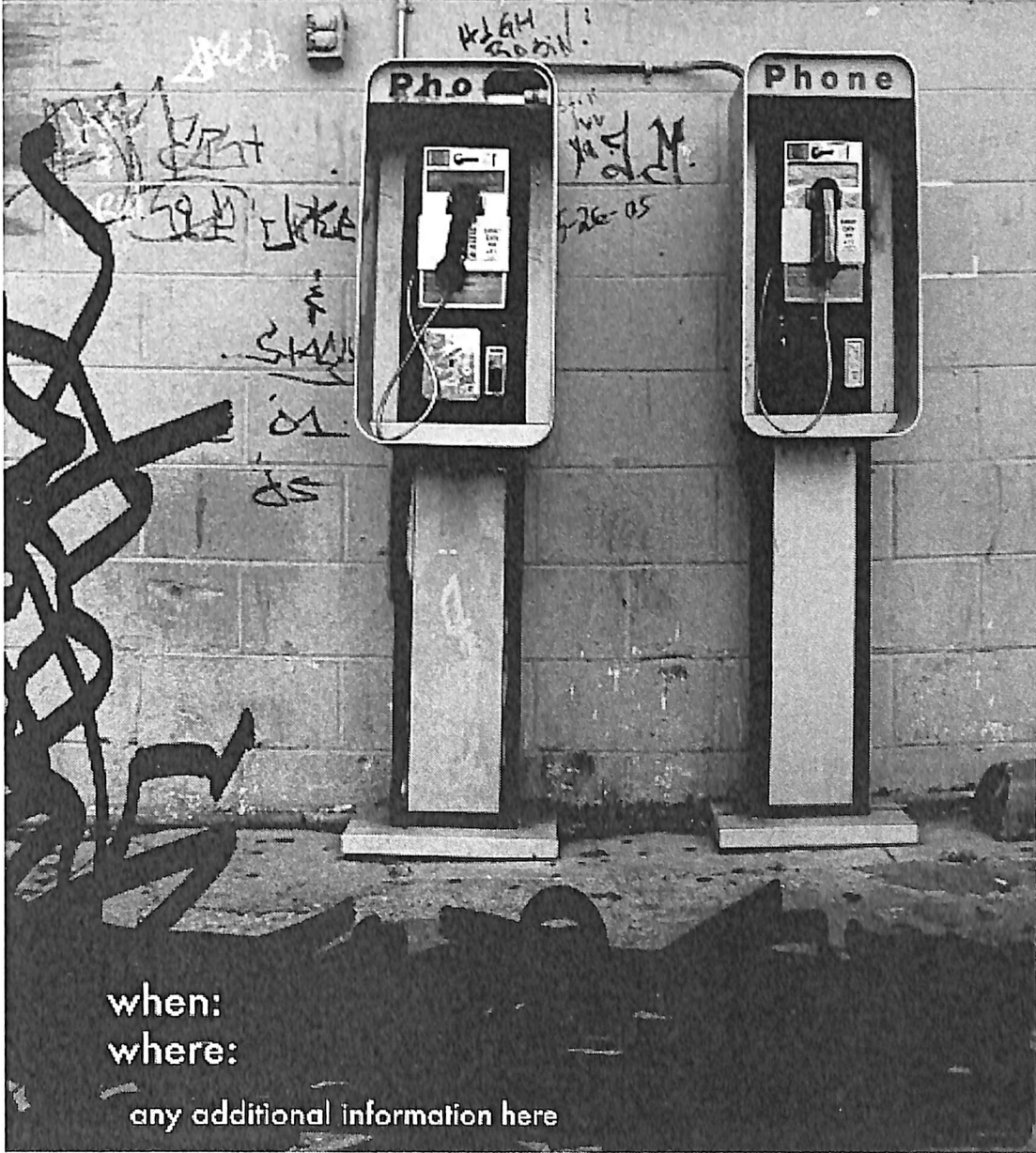
Free Admission

****this show contains adult themes and language****

Figure 16: *Dog Sees God* Poster

from the people that brought you DOG SEES GOD
FREE TIME?!?! Productions presents

suburbia



when:
where:

any additional information here

Figure 17: SubUrbia Poster

THE **+**PILLOW**+**MAN



LOCATION: BASEMENT OF SOMMERVILLE

THURS, NOV 1

8:00 PM

FRI, NOV 2

7:00PM & 10:00 PM

SAT, NOV 3

8:00 PM

SUN, NOV 4

8:00 PM

**THERE WILL BE AN EXTREMELY LIMITED NUMBER OF SEATS.
PLEASE SHOW UP EARLY.**

FREE TIME?!?! PRODUCTIONS

Figure 18: *The Pillowman* Poster

Section 4: Royalties

I mentioned before that Derek and I were not necessarily well learned in the area of theatre business and management. One thing that we were fairly ignorant about was royalties. Whenever we produced our first show, *Dog Sees God*, we were fairly secretive about it to the faculty and our peers because we were not sure how everything was going to work out. So just days before we opened, we had a terrific back page article on the show in the Daily Mississippian. For our chair, Dr. Rhona Malloy, this was the first that she had ever heard of us performing a show. When she did find out, she inquired about us paying royalties. Well, Derek and I were a bit perplexed about such a question. We were not charging admission; surely royalties would not come into play. We were very wrong. So there was a big, big problem that we had to handle before we opened our show. We had no way to charge admission now because we had already set up posters advertising free admission. But we had to pay royalties now because we had a huge article in our school paper, and if the Dramatist script distributor were to catch wind of us performing our show without paying royalties, the university could be sued.

It was an extremely stressful time, but we decided that we would continue with the show, and just ask for donations from anyone who wanted to pay. Well, after the first of our three *Dog Sees God* performances, through donations alone we had already made more money than we needed to pay royalties. Our audiences were so appreciative of us presenting such a powerful show, that they were willing to give us money with no obligation. That level of excellence is what we wanted to achieve from then on, to put on shows that were so well produced that people would WANT to give us money. I am

proud to report that we have always made enough money to pay for royalties, through donations alone.

CHAPTER VIII: DIRECTING

For the last show, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, I decided it was my time to direct. I, of course, still wanted to act, so I cast myself in a small, relatively easily staged part. As a director, I have to look at the play in a completely different way than I have ever had to before. I had to develop a concept and theme for the show, and I had to decide how I wanted to present the action. The play itself could be described as contemporary fantasy expressionism, so many of the conventions could be very abstract. I began to research the themes of the show, such as a heaven/hell, hope, religion, justice, and I brought together several pictures and literary works to help me direct this play. I have enclosed all of this material in the thesis.

My main source material was of course the Holy Bible, as all the mythology that *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* pulls from comes directly from the Holy Bible. Each character has either a historical record in the Bible or represents some spiritual concept of the Christian religion. I felt that it was extremely important to have personal connection to the religious text to direct the show. The show depicts a trial in purgatory over the soul of Judas Iscariot. Different characters give their accounts and expert opinions on the judgment of Judas. The philosophical implications are vast and, in a way, shook my spiritual foundation.

My concept revolves around the idea of hope. I have set up a courtroom type set

up in purgatory, and the action jumps from the courtroom, into Judas' lair, where different character watch over Judas while they address the audience. It was very important to display a fusion of the period with the contemporary, because that fusion was already present in the language.

Practically, I cast the show based on looks and acting ability. I was also very careful to pay attention to each actors attitude, work ethic, and ability to produce under pressure. I feel like my cast is extremely talented and work together effortlessly. This show contains the largest cast that FreeTime!?!? has ever used.

As a director, staging and blocking is my weakest area. I think I have done a fine job, but I am not necessarily geometrically inclined like some great directors. I direct shows paying more attention to the tone and emotional value, rather than pictures. Directing a show like *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, which contains very rich emotional values allows me to play to my strengths, and at the same time helps me become more comfortable with visual blocking.

While I was very nervous when I started staging the show, I found that once I got the hang of it, much of the blocking became very natural. My method as a director is to begin with blocking, and be very specific with my actors about what I want. I find specificity breeds creativity. Personally, as an actor, I crave direction. I don't want freedom, I want constraints. So I direct how I would like to be directed. Of course, I give the actors plenty of time to create their own distinct characters, which all of them did. Because my actors brought SO much to the table with their characters, I was able to give to them equally a number of directions to help drive the story and create an entertaining beautiful display of art.

The show will open at 2:00pm on Sunday May 4, 2008 and will run Monday and Tuesday, May 5-6 at 8:00pm. Because of the busy theatre schedule, we were forced to schedule the run of show during finals week. While it may affect our audience numbers, I do not feel that it will be too detrimental, as many students receive extra credit for coming to see our shows. Finals week is generally a good time to rack up some extra credit.

CHAPTER IX: PERSONAL JOURNEY

This project, which I have turned into my “thesis”, is a strange beast, because for the life of me I cannot seem to really quantify the amount of work that was put into this theatre company, nor can I truly express the enormous effect that the work has had on me personally. As an artist it is not easy for me to academically break down the scholarly value that FreeTime!?! Theatre has had on my life and on student life here at Ole Miss. When trying to quantify or even qualify the work, I always think of the enormous amount of compliments that we have received from our satisfied audience. One audience member sent a letter to Derek on Facebook, which to me encompasses the impact that FreeTime!?! has had on the Ole Miss Theatre, and is confirmation to me that what we did was worth while, and no one can tell me otherwise. This student, following the run of *Dog Sees God*, wrote:

“Am I really alive? Sure, I'm walking but do I live? Dogs see God in their masters; Cats, in mirrors. What does that make me? These questions and countless others shackled my mind as I left Fulton Chapel. I watched people I've spent years with walk out like estranged zombies, inspired but saddened, awestruck and reserved. Lips bit raw and tear-glazed eyes hiding behind oversized sunglasses. Thank God it was sunny. It was an incredible performance. It had that innate power to it that is too much at once but leaves

you wishing it hurt more, wishing it meant more. It was beautiful. It seemed as if some divine explanation was delivered through the energy, efforts, time, and most importantly, the hearts of a handful of college theatre students. Van wants us to immerse ourselves in life. Why are we hesitant to?

God, a chapel, divine explanations. I think about these words and I ask myself 'What really happened today?'

Ok, so maybe there are too many questions in this note for it to have a strong, centralized message. But maybe that's the point. Maybe the questions are the motivators; the life you lead and the choices you make, the answers. I want to sincerely thank everyone involved in this production. It was truly wonderful.

-CV-

I was able to do something while here. Just as this respondent was unable to describe fully what it was that made our performance so wonderful, it is difficult for me to really put to words the impact that FreeTime!?!? had on my life. It is my legacy that I will leave at Ole Miss. It was important and beautiful, because it was done out of love. It was done out of the desire to get together with best friends and create art, something so sincere and primal that it only occurs when you are not looking. There is nothing that makes me feel more proud or complete.

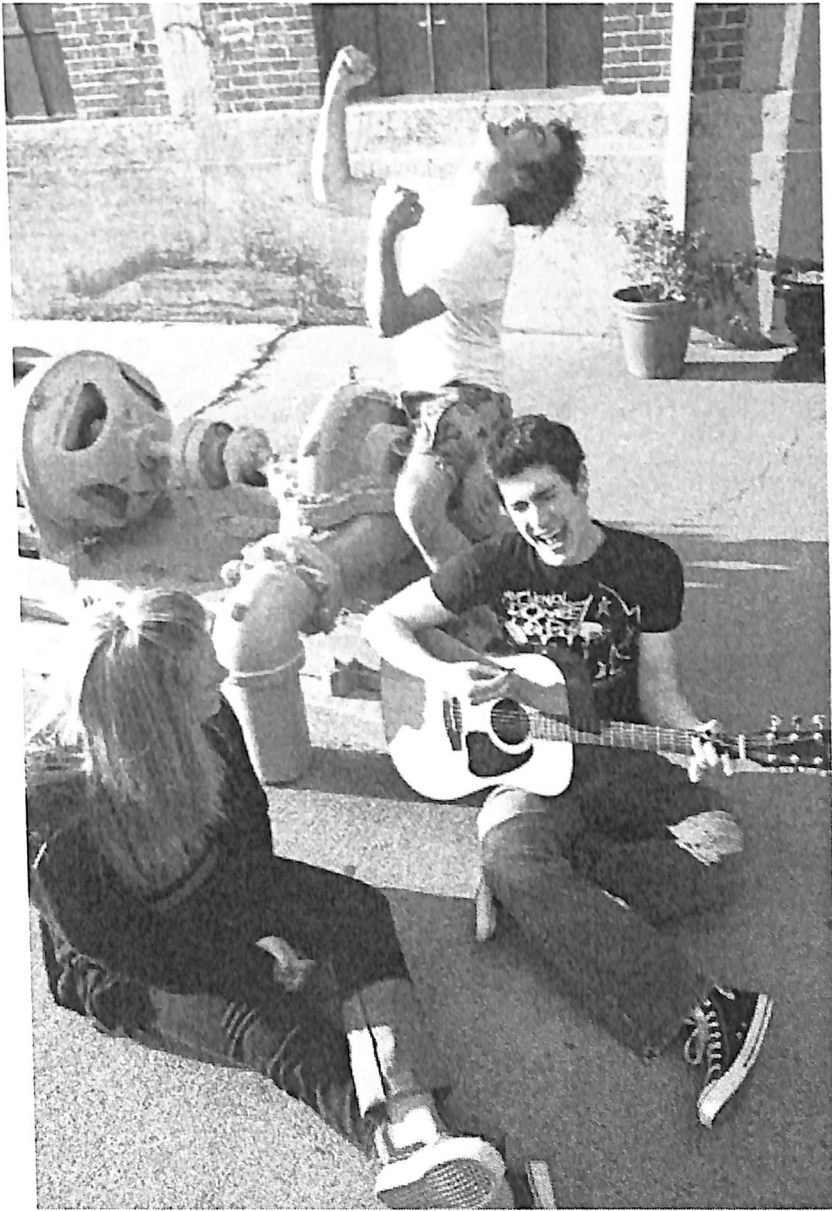


Figure 19: Playing Guitar

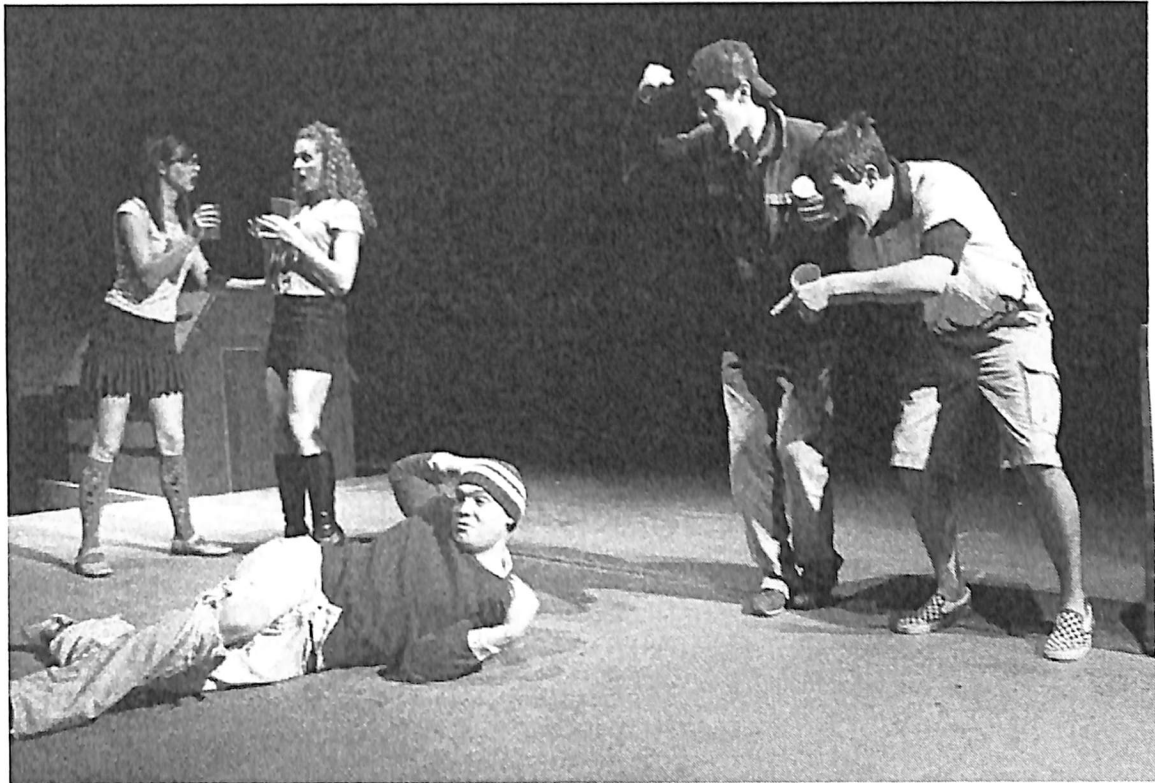


Figure 20: Dancing



Figure 21: With Friends



Figure 22: Love