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Thr 329
Production Book 1

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Naomi in the Living Room- Christopher Durang

Core Action

- most important line in the play?- I need a big couch to sit on because I'M A BIG PERSONALITY!!!!

- most important sound in the play?- silence due to its contrast to the characters. The characters are loud and bold while the moments they are silent plays with the ideas of norms as well. How we react to the absence of sound is explored with the characters and make a difference.

- most important moment in the play?- When John comes out dressed as Johnna- The moment of the show when you question if Naomi, in the world of the play, is truly the one breaking norms.

- most important rule in this world?- Acceptance

- Where and when is the play set?- Naomi's living room. The play can be placed in any time of year and can be flexible on year in which is it placed.

-What are the differences between the characters?- Honestly not much, they are all eccentric but deal with their quirks in all different ways. The characters are more similar then they try to make it appear. This is seen in the reveal of John's secret, the moments of Johnna loosing it/reactions to John's secret, and how throughout the show the gap between John and Johnna versus Naomi becomes smaller and smaller.

-What is the core action of the play?- The finding of balance in how one begins to accept norms. For example, what are the norms for each individual character vs. the norms of our current society? How are these norms broken and pushed? What patterns do we notice of our own norms due to the reactions of others? I believe all these ideas are explored in this play.

• Character descriptions

- Naomi- Woman with mental insanity or extreme eccentric tendencies. Very picky and sensitive. Norms mean nothing to her. Late 50's to early 60's. Can be played by either man or woman.
- Johnna- Wife of John, Daughter in Law of Naomi. Sentimental and easily distraught. Needs to look similar to John. Early 30's to mid- 30's.
- John- Son of Naomi and husband to Johnna. Not easily phased. Needs to be comfortable dressing as a woman. Early 30's to mid- 30's.

• **Justification**

-What drew you to the material? When and how did you first encounter the material?

I first encountered this script in 9th grade. I saw it performed in a one act play festival put on at my school by a student director. Honestly I don't remember much about that performance. What I do remember was the large characters and unexpected turn of events with John coming out dressed as a woman. I was drawn to this script because of its playful nature and exploration of norms. The difference to the reactions, words they say, and the actions they perform all say different things. I think this is something very common in society but is rarely addressed. I feel as though this script playfully addresses our hypocritical and judgmental society.

- How will this material help you achieve the goals that you set out for yourself at the beginning of the term?

- Flexibility in casting gives me more opportunity with working with men.
- Makes me have to play with humor
- Realistic world
- Dealing with drag elements and sexual moments in the script will bring out an exploration of sexuality with subtlety. Also creating a relationship between John and Johnna that is lovingly realistic will also help me with creating a romantic relationship.

- How will this material continue to enhance your strengths as a director and how will it continue to diminish your weaknesses?

I think this show will help me with my strength of creating real emotional characters. This script brings me more possibilities of character development with my actors due to the characters personalities being large in nature. I also have the strength of creating bonds between actors and this is a very important part of this production. This show will help diminish my weaknesses of not pushing focus on key words. This show, in the actual text, makes certain words more important by bolding them in the script or repetition. This textual support will

support me in the exploration of those words with my actors of how to make them key and significant each time they are spoken.

Also warm ups are a must for this show since there will be a lot of exploration needed and organization on my part. My love for the script will make it easier for me to do this. Also blocking can be a struggle for me, but since this script calls for a very specific set, it will help blocking be more exploratory. Characters need more space and have specific norms in which to explore the set. How can we break the norms of the living room space, more specifically the couch, rather than the normal expectations of that room? (example: does Naomi sit on top of the couch, not the bottom. Does she sit on the edge or middle? Does she even sit on the couch or does she lie down? Does she sit on it upside down?)

• **One-Act Goals**

- What are you hoping to achieve with this material?

I really want to play with physicality and humor. I want to be able to explore these aspects of the play, rather than my beginning directing piece which was so text focused. I want to be able to convey these ideas of hypocrisy and playing of norms in a fun way. I want to be able to make a point through humor but also make it something enjoyable for the audience. I want to experiment with the length of silences, the messages that can be shown just through movement, and how something can be humorous but true to the script. By playing with the norms of performance, my cast and I can explore what norms we personally experience and find out how we react when we break them. Also Naomi's actions and choices need to be as bold as her words, and working with physicality will naturally bring in the humor and the breaking of norms.

What are the Obstacles / Challenges

- What strategies will you employ to overcome and/or deal with each?

1. Naomi- Male or female... With playing with the ideas of norms I can't decide if I want Naomi played by a man as a women or a female. I plan to look at the script and also go off of auditions and see what doors open or close for me to stay true to the text. I am going to let auditions guide this choice.

2. John looking like Johnna, do I cast similar looking people? Find similar outfits? How to I make sure he has time to change? I guess I will just see how casting goes and once I have my actors begin looking at the subtle foreshadowing that could occur or look into costume possibilities. I plan to work with the actors to create foreshadowing but also making John more masculine at the beginning (or casting a more masculine actor, not someone you would expect) so that the change in the middle of the play is more dramatic and small details on looks can be over looked.

3. Length- I need to play with physicality and humor. Let the piece take it stride and if it's under, it's under. Not pushing it or diminishing its integrity to fit a construct. I plan to experiment with lack of action and noise in order to create length but use it to my advantage for the characters of this piece.

4. Age of characters- the characters need to be older, so I need to do a lot of character work and research in order to make the age believable on stage.

• **Dramaturgical Materials**

- Playwright Biography:

Christopher Durang grew up in New Jersey; his father was an architect and an alcoholic. After he was born, his mother had three stillborn babies. He was a catholic school boy when he was younger, but has explored with many faiths since (interesting to note a few of his plays make fun of religious Christian characters). His parents divorced when he was 19 and he had to testify against his father in court. Shortly after this event he began to come to the realization of his homosexuality. His mother passed away from cancer in 1979. He attended Harvard where he got a B.A. in English and then attended Yale School of Drama. (Information found from New York Times article *Christopher Durang Explores the Afterlife, Including His Own* by Dinitia Smith)

- Writing of the play:

No information was found.

- History of past productions:

This production was first performed by Home for Contemporary Theater in New York City in December 1988 (www.theatredatabase.com). I could not find much production history for this show. *Naomi in the Living Room* is normally performed in collection with presentations of other one acts.

- Other works by the playwright:

Nina in the Morning, The Actor's Nightmare, For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls, Beyond Therapy, Sister Mary Ignatius Explains It All For You, Baby with the Bathwater, Laughing Wild, A History of the American Film, Betty's Summer Vacation, Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge, Sex and Longing, Durang/Durang, 'dentity Crisis, and more.

Common themes of strong female characters, breaking of norms, interesting life styles, and comedy are shown in a lot of Christopher Durang's works.

- Historical, cultural, political and religious background:

Naomi in the Living Room was written and first performed in 1988 but published in 1994. This era dealt a lot of strides in the gay rights movement. Harvey Milk had been a big figure in 1978, Wisconsin outlawed discrimination by sexual orientation in 1982, and the Don't ask Don't tell policy in the military was implemented in 1993 (<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0761909.html>). The culture of this time was beginning to open up more to characters like John (whether he is gay or not is up to interpretation). Also the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders) IV was significantly revised in 1980. Mixed State (of dysphoric mania) is a mental disorder that seems to fit Naomi that was printed in DSM IV (info on DSM found on Wikipedia).

- Criticism

I could not locate any scholarly criticism of this show.