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First Year Showcase: Producing the First Year Showcase as a capstone to my last three years at UMW Theatre

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University of Mary Washington

First Year Showcase

Producing the First Year Showcase as a capstone to my last three years at UMW Theatre.

Cate Puglia

THEA 482: Senior Project

Gregg Stull

16 November 2021

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Journal

Pre-Audition and Gaining Interest

August 17-23, 2021

My first few days of working on the First Year Showcase mainly consisted of contacting Gregg Stull and Ben Lechtman to determine some information about audition time and the show time. Professor Stull asked me about dates I believed would work for each, but he also suggested some that he knows have worked in the past. We decided on some dates and I started working on the forms and a Facebook post that would be sent out for the actors and directors. There was a brief moment where I considered changing the audition date, but in the end it was decided that keeping the original dates during the first week of classes would be better. It might be interesting to try out seeing how auditions would work further into the first week of classes or even into the second week. It is acknowledged that we wanted to get people to audition before they found other clubs or activities. However, there may be some scheduling difficulties in the future if any freshmen are participating in the second or third Klein show as those rehearsal and show dates may have some conflicts.

The post on Facebook was put up on August 19th (see Appendix A). There was some interest early on, but a lot more interest picked up the day before auditions started. I found that one really effective method of grabbing the first year's attention was through contacting all the FSEM professors in the Theatre Department. They all agreed to make an announcement on Canvas with a poster I had designed (see Appendix B). I also spoke to a class in person. All of these methods proved to be very successful, we had 15 people signed up to attend auditions. The potential actors and directors all filled out a Google Form to sign up (see Appendix C).

Auditions

August 24-25, 2021

Auditions went quite smoothly. We had 14 people attend over two days; the person who could not attend was feeling ill. There were nine people auditioning on the first day and five people on the second day. They all read two scenes from *Proof* by David Auburn. In order to show a more diverse number of skills, everyone read scenes that allowed them to portray their different strengths in emotions and movement.

One important aspect about auditions was making sure everyone who wanted to audition could, even if they had a conflict with the audition time. There were four people who had to audition at a separate time, but making it easier for them to audition ensured that people were not unable to go just because of a timing issue. After their audition, I sent them another Google Form (see Appendix D) to inquire about more important information. Ideally, all of this information would have been in one form to streamline the process and reduce the amount of paperwork the actors had to do, even if it was digital. In the future, I would also suggest getting headshots of all the actors because by the time I was casting them, I could not remember what everyone looked like with only their names and a few notes on a screen to reference.

Trying To Find Directors

August 25-September 9, 2021

Directors were told the sign up information at the same time as the actors (see Appendix A). However, similar to the actors, it was a slow build to getting enough people to sign up. Once I knew that 14 actors would be in the show, I knew I would have to find enough directors who could handle that number of people. My assumption regarding the directors was that many were waiting for the Klein cast lists to be posted before they committed to the project. Unfortunately, even after a week of the announcement, there had been very few people signing up. I decided a more proactive method of contacting people had to be made, so I emailed several theatre majors that I knew who could potentially be interested in directing. Despite the messages being in several places, I knew that there would still be people who did not see the announcement.

By September 9th I was able to recruit five directors. I think going forward it would be imperative to find more active methods of locating directors, maybe reaching out earlier and trying to convey more of the positives of directing to students who would not typically want to direct. This show gives new directors a chance to work in a low stress environment that is intended to be the basics of a scene, keeping all the technical aspects on the back burner to allow the actors' skills to shine through. I also believe that many people assumed the workload would be too stressful. This assumption could have some truth to it, but as long as the directors are proactive and do not wait too long to begin, I think the process can run quite smoothly.

Checking In

October 4-18, 2021

In order to make the process move forward, I found it really important to check in with the directors throughout the rehearsal time. I remember hearing a story from an actor who was in the First Year Showcase during their first year who said that their group did not meet very often to rehearse and they felt unprepared in the week leading up to the performance. In order to lessen the chances of this happening, I think it is important to check in with everyone to make sure the scenes are moving along by attending a rehearsal. I did not want to micromanage anyone, but over a seven week period I think it is appropriate to check in at least once or twice, especially closer to the date of the show. I was able to check in with all the directors at least once throughout a two week period. All the directors were moving at an appropriate pace and I was happy with the progress they were all making. I did not want to color their directing style so I tried to keep my input minimal beyond reminding them to be aware of their spacing since many of the groups rehearsed outside of Studio 115. Additionally, I reminded them to use furniture that exists and not to mime it if they do not have to. For instance, one group was using a desk but did not use it in the rehearsal I saw. I suggested they use the desk they wanted during the show so that the actors would be accustomed to the spacing.

Finding The Crew

October 30-November 7, 2021

The next task that I had was finding the crew. I knew I would need a stage manager, a light board operator, a sound board operator, and a house manager. Luckily, there were very few sound cues needed throughout the show so the person who volunteered to be the light board operator was able to also be the sound board operator. My goal for the stage manager was to find someone who might be willing to step up to the role. I did not think the stage manager needed to have extensive experience, as long as they were willing to learn I was happy. I also know that many of the stage managers in the department are extremely busy. I posted on Facebook to the UMW Theatre Students group to see if there was anyone interested in the position. Amelia Emory, one of the directors, volunteered to be the stage manager. I did not see an issue with this and I thought it would be a great opportunity for her to do something a little different. The house manager ended up being a director whose group unfortunately had to drop out of the First Year

Showcase*. I was also very happy to have Shaun McBride, the Studio Committee house manager come in and help train the house manager. The way in which the technicians were recruited was a bit piecemeal, I think in order to avoid this I should have attempted to find people a little earlier in the process. Nonetheless, I was able to find the number of people needed to help run the show.

*This situation will be explained more in the section “Group Drops Out.”

Making the Playbill and Inviting Guests

November 7-16, 2021

I made the playbill for the show (see Appendix D). I was told by Mr. Lechtman that Hannah Chester, the Studio 115 Marketing Assistant, would be able to provide me with information regarding the Studio Committee and other information that would need to be in the playbill. I was able to put together most of the information, but unfortunately Ms. Chester did not respond to some of my emails asking for more information. Luckily, Mr. Lechtman was able to provide assistance once again and sent me the information I requested. I did forget to insert the statement about wearing a mask into the playbill, which was something I was told to add. However, I was able to remind people at the beginning of the performance to keep their masks on and refrain from videotaping or taking photos during the show.

Around this time I reminded the actors that they could invite family and friends to the show, and the mask and vaccination requirements for attending. On November 12th I sent out an email to the professors in the Theatre Department to remind them of the show on Tuesday, November 16th (see Appendix D). I also had a similar poster sent out on the Studio 115 Facebook page.

Group Drops Out

November 10-11, 2021

On November 10th James Lau, one of the directors, emailed me that in the last few weeks his group had been struggling to meet up. Unfortunately, his group had four people and despite my efforts to assign the actors based on their schedules and conflicts, they still had issues trying to meet up weekly. I suggested to Mr. Lau that he give the actors two options, they could either drop out or try to push through. Despite their efforts to meet, they still ran into timing issues. Mr. Lau decided that they would not be ready for the show on November 16th and cancelled their

performance. This was regrettably the best option for the group as we did not want a performance done unless they were able to really commit and find the time to meet and learn all their lines and blocking.

This incident was one that I was really hoping would not occur. When I saw their scene several weeks prior they had been working slowly but steadily through their content. I was not there for every rehearsal so I could not speak to the true issues each member of the group had, but I do believe it was just unlucky timing and circumstances that ended up stagnating and halting their progress. For one, I knew that one of their actors was cast in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* which was obviously good news, but severely limited some of their rehearsal time. Additionally, when I did attend their rehearsal some of the actors brought up new conflicts that they had not originally put in their form. This also made it hard to schedule rehearsal time. In the end, it was quite an unfortunate loss to the show and one that can hopefully be avoided in the future by more flexibility and transparency with conflicts on both the actors and directors part. It also brings up the question of whether the First Year Showcase should be auditioned after any potential first year and transfer students are cast in Klein shows.

Setting Up the Space

November 13, 2021

I was lucky to have the aid of Austin Napier, the previous lighting designer and electrician for Studio 115, available for some consultation over the phone regarding what he had previously done for shows in Studio 115. He advised that we would only need around 8 lights. I had the help of Alex Rojas, the light and sound board operator, for hanging and programming the light board. We were able to set it up in less than three hours over the weekend before tech. Mr. Lechtman was also a valuable source of knowledge regarding the set-up for the sound board. He was also able to go over some general information about running a show in Studio 115.

Technical Rehearsal

November 15-16, 2021

Technical rehearsal started at 3:45 PM and the first group arrived at 4:15 PM. Each group had 45 minutes to run through their scene. This was the most efficient way to give each group an appropriate amount of time without having to keep everyone in rehearsal for the entire evening.

Many people still had conflicts in the evening that we were trying to work around. It was important to me that they had enough time to run through their blocking, especially since many of them needed to adjust a little based on the six feet minimum distance from the audience. We also had to train a few people on remembering to put their mask on when they walked through the aisles. At the end of the rehearsal, Mr. Lechtman recommended that we run through the whole show at least once to give the actors more time to practice the change over from scene to scene. We decided to have the actors come about an hour earlier on November 16th to have one last dress rehearsal.

Before tech rehearsal started, Ms. Emory and I discussed what we thought was the best way to order the scenes. In the end it was based on the set pieces each scene needed. The order we chose would allow each subsequent set to only have to take away one small item and some props. During this time, I wondered if it would have been better to find someone to be the run crew so that moving the set pieces would have been easier. Ultimately, it was easier to have each cast move their own sets to reduce any confusion. However, in a more ideal situation I would have been able to order the scenes regardless of their set, allowing for a more purposeful order. If I were able to choose, I might have placed the comedic piece as the last scene to end on a higher note.

Final Dress Rehearsal

November 16, 2021

The final dress rehearsal was held at 5:30 PM on the day of the show. In the end, for timing purposes we decided to only run through fully a few of the scenes, but practice all the transitions and the actor's final bow. There were two scenes we especially wanted to run through, Nate Huff's and Ben Lechtman's. Mr. Huff's scene had a few issues regarding remembering lines so we wanted to give his actors a chance to run through the entire scene all together before the final performance. Mr. Lechtman's scene was the most technically challenging as it had an extra light cue and several sound cues. In the future, it may be easier to just have one longer tech rehearsal if time could permit it. This would make the process a little more efficient, even if actors and directors had to leave and return due to classes. Additionally, it would have been a bit more helpful if we had been given the extra light and sound cues earlier as we only had two opportunities to run the cues with the scene. Based on my experience, I now see that it was

possible to add in a small number of special light or sound cues if the scene asks for them. In the future, especially if the rehearsal is longer, I think it would be nice to consider increasing the technical aspects a little bit.

Showday

November 16, 2021

The show was on November 16th at 7:00 PM. As previously mentioned, the actors arrived early for one last run through. Audience members began arriving at 6:15 PM and we started allowing people in at 6:45 PM. There were a few small technical hiccups, but overall I believe the show ran quite smoothly. I think the small issues could have been greatly decreased by more time being dedicated to technical rehearsals, giving the actors a greater chance to really learn all the transitions and the flow of the show. This could be aided by either a longer rehearsal, or potentially having two technical rehearsals scheduled at the start of the process. The show was about 40 minutes long and there were 25 people in attendance. Audience members were required to wear a mask at all times and their vaccination cards were checked before they were allowed entrance to the theatre. They were reminded of the mask policy at the beginning of the show. They also signed in to ensure that if there were a COVID related issue, contact tracing would be possible. This was all in accordance with University policy regarding live shows.

Obstacles to the Process

Throughout my process producing the First Year Showcase there were a few issues that I faced. One of my more prominent issues was my lack of experience in working with Studio 115. When I was offered the option to be the producer for the First Year Showcase I was very excited, and I am still glad that it was what I chose as my senior project. Being the producer for the First Year Showcase was an opportunity to utilize and strengthen many of the skills I have been cultivating my last three years of college. Despite my skills, there were still some instances where I found my lack of previous Studio 115 involvement hindered my progress. Maybe there were times where I assumed there would be more involvement from the Studio Committee, whereas if I had more familiarity with the typical procedures there would have been less confusion.

As previously stated, another issue that I had was when one of the groups was forced to drop out. I believe that my communication with the directors was too sporadic which was why Mr. Lau's scene was able to spiral so suddenly. I would email the directors every few weeks to check in, but I did not come to their rehearsals in person as often. The group that dropped out was a learning experience for the future, teaching me that if I attempted to check in more often I might have been able to help more actively.

One last major issue that I faced was the recruitment of people to participate. In the end, I was able to find people for all the roles I had to fill. However, it often felt like a bit of a scramble to find someone to work. This issue most likely originated from my lack of experience with running a Studio 115 show and more limited connections within the department. Even though I know a large majority of the theatre majors, there are still a significant number of people I clearly do not know. COVID-19 did have some hand in this as it was hard to meet new people when we were all stuck at home. However, I also needed to give myself more time to find each person, perhaps starting a few weeks earlier to give people a greater chance to learn of the opportunity.

Recommendations

For the future, I have some recommendations to the next producer of the First Year Showcase to make the process a little smoother. To address my first problem, choosing someone who has had more experience with Studio 115 to run the show would probably make the experience a little easier. This could be someone who has directed a show or is on the Studio Committee. Alternatively, despite my multiple meetings with Mr. Lechtman, there was always some information I felt like I was missing. If it were possible to create some sort of checklist or manual for information that is important to running a show, that would definitely make the process easier. It was also a little unclear as to the level of involvement that the Studio Committee would have throughout the making of the show. Mr. Lechtman was extremely helpful throughout the entire semester, he was almost always available to help answer my questions. On the other hand, I had virtually no interaction with the rest of the committee. I sometimes felt that Mr. Lechtman was doing the work of ten men. He was an incredible source but I repeatedly felt bad that he had to be the one to answer every question I had, instead of being able to distribute some of the work to his fellow Committee members. This could be alleviated by a clarification of the Committee's role with shows not produced directly by Studio 115. Studio 115 is an amazing asset for everyone in the UMW community and I believe in many ways it functions exactly how it is intended to. It gives students the freedom to work and learn while doing shows with their peers that they have more influence over. So long as any new director or producer for Studio 115 is told the exact terms of creating a show for Studio 115, I think some of the miscommunication I felt would be solved. Maybe when Studio 115 moves from duPont to the new theatre building, there will be an opportunity to switch up how the Committee functions, making it more like a real theatre company that just happens to be run fully by the students.

My second problem was regarding the communication I had with my directors. For future producers, I think a weekly check in with all the directors through email, would help prevent miscommunication. Additionally, making sure communication between the producer, the Studio Committee Chair, and the directors is prioritized to avoid any chances of messages being missed. In this particular instance, the weekly check ins would have spotted the lack of rehearsal time for Mr. Lau's group and there could have been more preventative measures taken. In a Klein show, there are daily rehearsal reports, for the First Year Showcase a general update and rehearsal

report done once a week could be extremely helpful. This could be applied to any show that is produced in Studio 115; it ensures that everyone who is involved is kept in the loop.

Lastly, my final major obstacle was the recruitment of people. This issue did have some justification in COVID-19 taking away some opportunities to meet and find more people. However, in the future there could be more communication with people in the relevant classes earlier on to source help. For example, to find more actors I sent out a flyer to professors of classes with many first years. To find more potential directors and technicians, the producer could reach out to Professors Michael Benson, Bridgette Dennet, Cate Brewer, and Marc Williams. These professors are all unique in that their focuses put them in direct contact with people who could potentially be willing to work a light board or learn how to stage manage. The First Year Showcase has a pretty simple set up so it is an amazing opportunity for those who are new to theatre to try something different. Additionally, forging connections and relationships with many people within the department will aid the future producer in being able to find people to participate.

Final Thoughts and Reflections

Overall, my experience producing the First Year Showcase was an amazing opportunity for me to learn and grow as an arts administrator. I believe that my work on this show was meaningful and impactful. It allowed me the chance to work with many of my peers and meet new people. Theatre is all about making connections, whether that is as an actor on stage with an audience or a producer interacting with people during the recruitment of more workers. Despite some of the issues I had during the process, I was able to persevere and continue finding solutions, especially with the support of the people around me.

Looking back at this semester, I am very glad that I opted to produce the First Year Showcase. Throughout the process, there were definitely highs and lows to what I was doing. I was happy to have the opportunity to prove to myself and those around me that I could produce a show. The chance to display the skills and abilities I have been working so hard on, all in one place. Working on this project, I was able to overcome some of my insecurities. It also shined a light on some that I had been unknowingly choosing to overlook. I think I am more confident in my abilities and knowledge and I have more clarity in what is important. I have been aware that I was slowly building a repertoire that would allow me to accomplish many things, but this project has bolstered my confidence in my thoughts toward the future and life beyond UMW.

In order for any work to get done, the foundation must be strong and in theatre it is often built on the communication between participants. Communication can be as simple as checking in to make sure everything is progressing, or as important as the director conveying their vision for a show. Another strength I have been able to build on is taking initiative. Being the producer meant that I had to be comfortable reaching out to people, speaking up, and being truthful. This meant that when I was told that a group was not confident they would be able to perform by November 16th I wanted to reaffirm my support in the decision and communicate to the actor's that despite the unfortunate circumstances I knew they had done their best. Creating an environment where people feel supported was important, I would always try to remind people that if they ever had any issues they could reach out to me. Communication and initiative can be linked together so that I am able to easily spread my message.

I have always believed that I was good at time management, but I think this project really showed how much I can improve in that area. I think the inherent time commitment for college

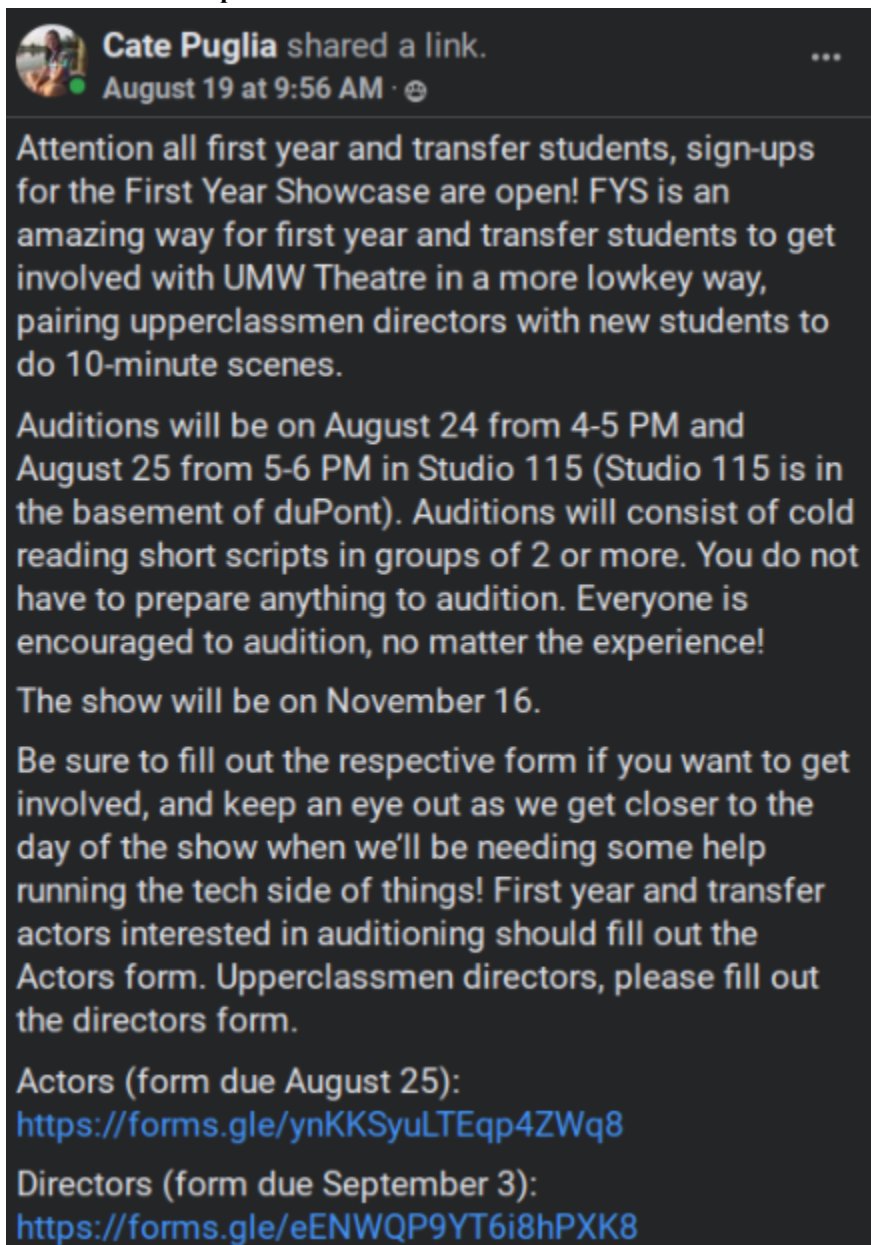
can often take up much of a student's focus. It was during this semester where I saw the true effect that a lack of time management could have on my own productivity. Despite always wanting to work on the First Year Showcase, it sometimes felt like I would have bursts of work interspersed with moments of nothing. This was both lucky and unlucky in that I had time to dedicate to all of my classes and work, but then had times where I felt like I was slowly drowning under all the pressure. I believe this project has reinforced my priorities and how I have to keep a clearer focus on what needs to get done. This semester also gave me the time to remember to breathe and be more deliberate in my actions. Sometimes when I get overwhelmed I want to feed into my emotions, but these past few weeks whenever I would get frustrated I would try to remember that I had time and people who supported me. Being levelheaded and dependable is important in an industry that relies so heavily on connections, so I am pleased that I was able to improve on these skills.

UMW fosters an environment that encourages teamwork and collaboration. When I look back at my time at UMW I have felt this support most when I worked with the Theatre Department. When I first started at UMW, I knew that I wanted to do theatre, but I did not know what exactly that would look like in ten years. The department helped me realize my passion for theatre and the directions it could take me. I will be able to pursue a career in the theatre industry with all the lessons I have been taught. My relationships that I have forged with both my peers and professors will aid me in the future as I continue to grow and learn.

The First Year Showcase is a unique show because of the people who are in it. This show could impact how a potential theatre student views the entire Theatre Department for the next four years they are at UMW. Being the producer put me in a position to work with some of the newest potential members of UMW Theatre, a role that I did not take for granted. Producing gave me the chance to strengthen relationships with the people who I worked with and my own skills and abilities. I am extremely grateful that I had the opportunity to produce this show as my senior project.

Appendix

A. First facebook post

A screenshot of a Facebook post by Cate Puglia. The post is on a dark background with white text. It includes a profile picture of Cate Puglia, her name, and the text of the post. The post is dated August 19 at 9:56 AM and includes a link icon. The text of the post is as follows:

Attention all first year and transfer students, sign-ups for the First Year Showcase are open! FYS is an amazing way for first year and transfer students to get involved with UMW Theatre in a more lowkey way, pairing upperclassmen directors with new students to do 10-minute scenes.

Auditions will be on August 24 from 4-5 PM and August 25 from 5-6 PM in Studio 115 (Studio 115 is in the basement of duPont). Auditions will consist of cold reading short scripts in groups of 2 or more. You do not have to prepare anything to audition. Everyone is encouraged to audition, no matter the experience!

The show will be on November 16.

Be sure to fill out the respective form if you want to get involved, and keep an eye out as we get closer to the day of the show when we'll be needing some help running the tech side of things! First year and transfer actors interested in auditioning should fill out the Actors form. Upperclassmen directors, please fill out the directors form.

Actors (form due August 25):
<https://forms.gle/ynKKSyuLTEqp4ZWq8>

Directors (form due September 3):
<https://forms.gle/eENWQP9YT6i8hP XK8>

B. Poster made for professors

***FIRST YEAR SHOWCASE
AUDITIONS***

**Sign up today to audition for
the First Year Showcase!**

**Audition dates and times:
TUESDAY 8/24 4-5 PM // WEDNESDAY 8/25 5-6 PM**

Use this link (<https://forms.gle/ynKKSyuLTEqp4ZWq8>)
if you want to sign up or join the UMW Theatre
Students Facebook page for more information. Sign
up is available until 3 PM on Wednesday.

CONTACT CPUGLIA@MAIL.UMW.EDU IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.

C. Links to original Google Forms for actors and directors

- Actors: <https://forms.gle/Yhp5K1Rw9ngrhctY8>
- Directors: <https://forms.gle/PVp3kAkD1JYh4QTd7>

D. Link to Google Form for actors after their audition

- <https://forms.gle/YSCTp8AZb85sVGQVA>

E. Playbill



FIRST YEAR SHOWCASE

NOVEMBER 16, 2021

The Clean House

Playwright: Sarah Ruhl
Director: Nate Huff
Actors: Lucy Parente, Kinsey Sullivan, Nikki Rizzo

Collected Stories

Playwright: Donald Margulies
Director: Amelia Emory
Actors: Bella Molseed, Leah Reaves

Time Flies

Playwright: David Ives
Director: Ben Lechtman*
Actors: Carter Bussey, Cameron Hovey, Emma Lehman

Key Exchange

Playwright: Kevin Wade
Director: Oscar Leon
Actors: Martha Stitt and Blaise Wingold

Production Team

Producer	Cate Puglia ^{o*}
Stage Manager	Amelia Emory
Light/Sound Board Operator	Alex Rojas
House Manager	Jimmy Lau

Acknowledgements

Gregg Stull, Taryn Snyder, Jon Reynolds, Brandon Prendegast, Bridgette Dennett, Cate Brewer, Michael Benson, Marc Williams, Kenny Horning, UMW Theatre

STUDIO COMMITTEE

Committee Chair	Ben Lechtman*
Marketing Assistant	Hannah Chester*
Play Curator	Riley Salazar*
Technical Supervisor	Tommy Kelleher*
House Manager	Shaun McBride
Committee Members	Shannon Nichols*

The Studio 115 Committee is dedicated to the education of our students through expanding their knowledge of the theatrical process. We seek both to provide a professional and structured environment, and to create opportunities parallel to those created by Klein Theatre and UMW Theatre through challenging material.

Sterling Barbett*
Anson Stevie*
Emma Hastings*
James Lau

An * denotes a member of the national theatre honor society, Alpha Psi Omega.

Advisors to the Committee:

Gregg Stull, Bridgette Dennett, Kevin McCluskey, Cate Brewer, Marc Williams, Jon Reynolds, and Taryn Snyder

An * denotes a member of the national theatre honor society, Alpha Psi Omega.
An ° denotes a student fulfilling partial requirement for Senior Project

F. Poster to invite professors



IS PLEASED TO INVITE YOU TO THE SIXTH ANNUAL

FIRST YEAR SHOWCASE

—
NOVEMBER 16, 2021

**THE SHOW BEGINS AT 7 PM AND SEATING IS FIRST COME
FIRST SERVE.**