Creating Controversy: An In-Depth Look at the Creation of Redux

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Creating Controversy: An In-Depth Look at the Creation of *Redux*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the University of New Orleans in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Film and Theatre Theatre Performance

by

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Abstract

The following thesis will provide a detailed account of the process by which Redux, a devised play produced by The Radical Buffoons, was created. I will explain how I developed various original characters as well as the acting choices I made along the way. I will shed light on the social climate that inspired this piece and the historical implications that influenced our work. Redux was performed on January 28th, 30th, 31st, and February 4th, 6th, and 7th of 2022 at The Hotel Peter Paul in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Keywords: Devised Theatre, Commedia Dell’Arte, Clown, Acting, Theatre, Black Women, White Supremacy Culture, Pandemic, Police Brutality, Blackface
Introduction

In the spring of 2020, I was in a production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* that was derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic. After the nationwide lockdown, society began to open more, and my collaborators and I realized that we were living in a completely different world. We found that the catastrophic effects of the pandemic, the George Floyd protests, and our ever-changing relationship with the internet transformed our collective consciousness far too significantly to ignore. Jon Greene, director of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and artistic director of the Radical Buffoons, decided to meet the moment head-on and construct a piece of theatre that addresses this new world through the perspective of two Black women: Kendra Unique and myself. The next two years would be dedicated to devising a new play, *Redux*, that confronts the trauma we have endured the past few years. In this thesis, I will be discussing my actor training and application at the University of New Orleans as well as how *Redux* was brought to the stage. I will address *Redux*’s theatrical style influences from clown to Commedia dell’arte as well as the sociological impacts that coronavirus, police brutality, and blackface minstrelsy had on our work. This thesis will also elucidate the concept/script-building process we underwent in addition to our fruitful rehearsal period and subsequent performances.
Research

I. Acting Methodology and Implementation

In my undergraduate education, there was one area of study that was left significantly underrepresented: movement. The program I was in did not provide movement courses, which left me a blank slate when entering graduate school. While taking FTA 5830, Advanced Movement, I gathered valuable insight into my body and how I would like it to function while performing. The first unit we covered in class was Quality of Movement; this unit asked the class to explore free and improvised movement. We were forced to clear our minds of any pre-planned choreography and embrace moving around the space freely. Because I come from a dance background, this was particularly difficult for me; I had a lot of trouble allowing myself to embrace my instincts. I was manufacturing my movement, which was blocking me from completely connecting to my body. During this work in class, I began to slowly forget that I was performing in front of my classmates. I eventually began to clear my mind and follow the instincts of my body. This trust that I formed with my physical instincts helped greatly in my future performances. During rehearsals of RapUnzel, a production I did with the Radical Buffoons during my first semester, we were encouraged to play with our movement choices as much as possible. Our director’s concept for the show was a 1990s cartoon; this interpretation asked the actors to use our entire bodies to resemble the speech and movement patterns of cartoons. This was physically taxing work because each line of dialogue required exaggerated movement and expressive diction. The Quality of Movement unit in Advanced Movement class was extremely helpful to me because it allowed me to make interesting choices during RapUnzel. I was playing the role of Kenzee, RapUnzel’s closest friend. My physical interpretation of her character was greatly shaped by the Quality of Movement knowledge because my mind was free
to play. Bearing in mind Kenzee’s desires and overall values, I used Quality of Movement to find how she expresses herself physically. Kenzee’s physical vocabulary used frequent variations of levels, expressive arm movements, and taking up as much space as possible. I ended up being extremely proud of my work in *RapUnzel* because it stretched me as a performer. It was the first show I had done that asked so much of me physically and it helped me implement my new movement training.

One of the biggest shortcomings in my artistic process has been consistent over-preparedness in terms of overall character building. In the past, I have carefully crafted characters before starting rehearsals. By the time the character got on its feet, I had already made up my mind about who the character was. This negatively impacted my performances greatly because I would remain stagnant in my choices. Each performance, I would make the same choices, never straying from the methodical recitation of the lines that I had established early in the production process. I did not allow myself to make discoveries about the character while I was working on the production. This is a problem that plagued the roles in my undergraduate career. This misguided method made all my characters stale and it prevented me from truly engaging with my scene partners. While studying for my comprehensive exam, I had the opportunity to read *Beyond Stanislavsky: The Psycho-Physical Approach to Actor Training* by Bella Merlin, and it greatly changed the way I think about character creation and helped me to break the habits that were holding me back. Merlin states that “…the secret of spontaneous reaction on the stage is simply to pay ‘limitless attention to your partner’” (99). Merlin goes on to explain that the key to giving truly engaged performances while locking onto a scene partner is to be in a constant state of improvisation. This forced me to examine how I had been conducting myself on stage and it became apparent that I needed to free myself from pre-planned
actions and allow myself to be affected by my partner. The psycho-physical acting method that Merlin defines provided me with an acting methodology that both made sense to me, and made my acting come to life. She defines psycho-physical acting as “that inner feeling and outer expression happen at the same time” (27). After learning about this marriage between outer stimuli and inner monologue, I began to allow my scenes to affect me, rather than forcing myself to feel false emotions that caused uninspired verbs. This greatly helped my in-class work as well as the student films I acted in after learning this method. Unbeknownst to me, I had experienced a profound psycho-physical acting moment while working on *Fool For Love*. During the run of the show, we had one performance that stood out from the rest. This specific night saw several “hiccups,” or unrehearsed moments that made the performance seem more alive. During the climax of the play, May tells both Eddie and Martin the real and unromanticized story of their father. Just as I was about to give my monologue, Justin Davis (who was playing Eddie) accidentally spilled water on me. In character, I pushed him and launched into my monologue. It was the best and most emotional night for that scene. I felt so extremely connected to the words, and my scene partners. Because of the spilled water, I was particularly engaged in the scene, and it helped me become an active party on stage. After this experience and learning more about psycho-physical acting, I took this methodology and applied it to my work in *Redux*.

Due to the pandemic, the way we did theatre greatly changed. The productions we were able to produce safely did not allow us to perform on the stage in front of a live audience. During the production of *Single Black Female*, we did the show over Zoom instead of performing the play on stage. This was one of the greatest acting challenges of my life because not only were we tasked with performing a play in front of a computer camera, but I was also in a separate space from my acting partner. For extended scenes in the play, we were not looking at our computer
screens; this was challenging because viewing one another on the computer screen was our only way of seeing each other. In the beginning stages of rehearsals, I was concerned with how I would be able to pull off such a difficult task. It was not until I began implementing the methods from *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* by Melissa Bruder that I started to understand how I was going to make the performance both alive and well connected. *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* emphasizes the “truth of the moment or that which is actually happening in the scene as you are playing it” (40). Bruder explains that finding the truth of the moment encourages intent listening and engaging with one’s scene partner. This was extremely difficult when we first began rehearsals because, for the first few weeks, we had to get used to using a new medium for theatrical performance. Once the newness of acting through Zoom wore off, I was able to completely rely on my scene partner. Danielle James (who was playing SBF 2) and I were forced to keep ourselves flexible; we had to base our responses to each other on what we were receiving from the other, rather than using preconceived interpretations of the scene. When I finally began to fully focus on what Danielle was contributing to the scene, my concentration and my execution of the scenes improved because as *A Practical Handbook for the Actor* states, “if you develop the habit of placing your concentration on the other person, you will be too busy to be self-conscious and all that you do will be in adjustment to the scene and the other actors on stage” (43). Embracing the truth of the moment applied to the technical aspects of *Single Black Female* as well. Despite using technology to pull off the performance, I never felt taken out of the action of the play because both Danielle and I embraced the uniqueness of the situation. For example, rather than attempting to furtively adjust our computer screens and treat the computer as if it was not there, we embraced it fully. Both Danielle and I would make moments out of our
interactions with the technology and, in character, adjust ourselves in the computer camera as if we were primping for a selfie.

II. Redux Inspiration and Cultural Context

In March 2020, I was in rehearsals with the Radical Buffoons for a production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*; the production was slated to be performed in April 2020. This production had been the most intense process of my career at the time; in addition to the number of lines in the play, it was an extremely physical show that required intricate clown influences. I was particularly inspired by the concept for this show because it intended to make a powerful statement about race in America that I was extremely excited to share with New Orleans. Our version of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern depicted women of color who were constantly trying to please the White royal family. Despite their loyalty to the royals, they were treated as disposable lackeys who were never given a proper briefing on the situation and tasks at hand. As a result, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were forced to roll with the punches and attempt to keep up, which is a burden that I see Black women suffer through daily. In the middle of our rehearsals for the show, the world shut down and entered a nationwide lockdown that would end up lasting for several months. Initially, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* was supposed to be postponed; the original plan was for us to resume rehearsals in the fall of 2020 and perform the show in late August. Due to the serious nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the protests that were sparked by the murder of George Floyd, Jon Greene, our director, decided to head in a different direction. By the time our production of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* was canceled, the world had greatly changed, and we decided that the art New Orleanian audiences needed to see should reflect that change. Jon proposed devising a new play that was designed around Kendra Unique and me, who was playing the Guildenstern to my Rosencrantz.
Reflections on our experiences in the world as Black women mixed with the complicated nature of the pandemic, and thus began the devising process for Redux.

A large portion of Redux is inspired by the stay-at-home order that forced Americans into quarantine. During this quarantine, people were attempting to navigate mandatory isolation that, as reported by every major news outlet, has never been felt in modern American history. The pandemic reportedly has caused the mental health of people around the world to deteriorate, and not only caused people to be shut in their homes with little to no human interaction, but it also saw many people lose their jobs and/or face unprecedented financial struggles. Pew Research Center found that 25% of adults in America lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Financial strains and the overall uncertainty of the pandemic forced American adults to acknowledge their mental health struggles; according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, 4 in 10 adults reported symptoms of depressive or anxiety disorder during the pandemic. Communities of color especially felt the negative mental health effects of the pandemic; a study conducted by the Commonwealth Fund found that “Latino and Black adults have experienced economic hardship during COVID-19 at a rate between two and three times greater than White adults.” The study also concluded that people of color, women, and lower-income adults have the highest risk for mental health concerns due to the pandemic.

The part of the pandemic that we wanted to focus on while creating Redux is the way people chose to entertain themselves while navigating lockdown. Because people were not allowed to make use of public spaces like restaurants or performance venues, we were forced to find ways to entertain ourselves at home. A survey by Lending Tree/Qualtrics found that the most popular new hobbies people picked up during the pandemic were reading, baking/cooking, gardening, meditation, and writing. The internet was an extremely important part of the
pandemic because it was one of the biggest information resources that helped everyone stay up
to date with the ever-changing status of the pandemic. It also kept everyone entertained and
connected to family and friends. Pew Research Center found that 90% of adults claimed that the
internet was essential to them during the pandemic.

According to eMarketer journalist, Alexandra Samet, in March through May of 2020, a
Harris Poll found that between 46% and 51% of respondents experienced an uptick in their social
media use since the beginning of the pandemic. Social media was a significant part of how
people around the world spent their time during the coronavirus pandemic. After learning new
hobbies and watching every show and movie available to stream, people turned to social media
to entertain themselves and inform them of the latest pandemic news. Reportedly, endless
scrolling became one of the go-to ways to pass the time during the lockdown. When crafting
Redux we wanted to explore the extreme boredom that came from the shutdown. In the finished
script, we included an entire section dedicated to the pandemic and the patterns we formed while
we were in lockdown.

The other inspiration for Redux came from the devastating loss of yet another Black life
at the hands of the police. On May 25, 2020, a man named George Floyd was murdered in police
custody in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Floyd, who was attempting to make a purchase at a
convenience store was accused by a store employee of trying to make his purchase with a
counterfeit $20 bill. The Minneapolis police were called to the scene where they put Floyd in
handcuffs and pinned him to the ground. Derek Chauvin, the officer who had taken Floyd down,
knelt on his neck until he lost consciousness. Chauvin kept his knee on Floyd’s neck for over
eight minutes while three other officers stood by watching without ever intervening. Despite
Floyd expressing his inability to breathe, Chauvin never moved which eventually caused Floyd’s
death. This was an obvious act of police brutality by a White officer against a Black person. The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) rules that people of color are far more likely than White people to be killed by the police in America. They state that there is a 1 in 1,000 chance that a Black man in America is killed by police. George Floyd’s unjust murder rightfully sparked public outrage so fierce that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, people around the world took to the streets in support of Black lives.

Floyd’s murder was particularly painful to people across the United States because there was video evidence of Chauvin’s brutality and the other officers’ indifference. The video of this attack was widely viewed across the country and updates on the situation were heavily consumed due to the nationwide shutdown. People were stuck inside with nothing to do but take in information. The American police force has a history that is steeped in anti-Blackness. PNAS notes that “Black men are about 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police over the life course than are White men.” PNAS also found that Black women are 1.4 times more likely than their White counterparts to be killed by the police. American people have been exposed to years of unjust murders of Black people like Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Breonna Taylor, and Trayvon Martin. After each of these losses, people around the United States began to grow more and more frustrated with the broken systems that allow the reckless losses of Black people. George Floyd’s murder sparked a series of protests around the world in solidarity with the Black community. The Black Lives Matter Movement was at the forefront of these protests that were expressing their frustrations with the police’s refusal to stop killing unarmed Black people. Cities all over the United States and several across the world marched in the name of George Floyd.

After experiencing the cultural shifts that came about from both the pandemic and the George Floyd protests, Jon Greene felt that it would not be appropriate to ignore the ways that
life had changed since stopping rehearsals for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Jon, Kendra, and I decided that we would address the new world we were living in and allow ourselves to comment on the chaos of the time. Once we decided to place the target of our devised work on the pandemic and our experiences as Black women, we got to work on crafting various characters.

### III. Original Characters

Before we began coming up with a structure or writing a script, we formulated characters that we eventually built our script around. The first big decision we made was that both Kendra and I would create clown characters. Jon’s extensive training made him the ideal mentor and teacher throughout the process of creating these clowns. After studying physical performance and theatre making at Boston University, he trained in Italy with Maestro Antonio Fava at Scuola Internazionale Dell’Attore Comico; there, he specialized in Commedia Dell’Arte, mask work, and broad comic character creation. Clowning is one of his specialties and it had been a huge part of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. Clowning is a comedic acting style that evolved from European court jesters in the Middle Ages. Later in this thesis, I will expand further on clowning. As we shifted our focus to *Redux*, we wanted to incorporate clowning into our new project. Our clowns were the first characters that we started to build. The biggest advice Jon gave us when we were coming up with our clowns was to work from ourselves. He suggested that we take the most vulnerable parts of ourselves and work from there. After focusing on the clown’s body and the various ways the clown may interact with people, we did an exercise to see the clowns in action. Our clowns were asked a series of questions that were like an interview. Our biggest goal during the exercise was to answer the questions as honestly as possible while maintaining our characters. When my interview concluded, it was clear that I had not tapped into
a clown as much as I had wanted to. Because of my limited knowledge of clowns, I formulated a
more of a traditional character and not a clown. Jon pointed out that clowns experience extreme
emotions and are not rooted in typical human behavior. During my first attempt at my clown
character, I had tapped into some intense feelings of anger and angst. I used a tense body that Jon
said was reminiscent of MMA fighter, Ronda Rousey. Though this attempt did not work, Jon
told me to not throw away the characterization completely. He told me to keep working on it
because we would eventually come back to it. This character would go on to be Jaq, one of my
most difficult characters. On my second attempt at my clown, I decided to embrace my naturally
anxious nature. When I utilized this, my clown characterization was far easier to formulate. My
character body became extremely shriveled and small. My clown became a nervous nelly type
person who was overly cautious, but still extremely curious. When I presented my second
attempt at a clown to Jon, he asked both Kendra and me to come up with something tangible that
we pictured when taking on our clown bodies. Because my character's body was so small and
tense, I thought of a raisin and a raccoon because of the way I held my hands close to my body.
From this point in the process, my clown’s name became Raisin Raccoon.

After having a clearer idea of who our clowns were, we shifted our focus to new
characters. The first character I began working on was Jaq, who was a product of my first clown
attempt. One of the characteristics of Jaq that stuck out most to me was her anger. When I would
do improv exercises with Jon, her anger would be the driving factor in her responses. She
became defined by her angst and her dissatisfaction with her life. From the time I began working
on Jaq, I knew that she was very young. Her attitude and her point of view are that of someone
who is in her late teens or very early twenties. I also knew that Jaq was going to be Black. When
I started investing in her development, I was extremely inspired by the alternative Black girls
that are all over the internet on social media sites such as TikTok. The stereotypical image of Black womanhood often takes on a very specific notion that does not necessarily apply to all of us. Blackness is not a monolith and I wanted to embrace that idea with Jaq. She is extremely sad and angry at the world. She is someone who was not shown love during pivotal times in her life. During one of our character-building meetings, I was doing an improvisational monologue as Jaq where I finally figured out that she is a lost soul. When we began putting the script together, I wanted Jaq to present a sad poem to Lollipop, who is Kendra’s clown character. After my first monologue draft, Jon and I decided that she does not just present a single poem, she speaks in poems. The direction Jon gave me as I began writing her poems is that she is like a banshee. I wrote five poems for her that were all varying in length. Her poems reflect on her exile from civilization, her brokenness, and the pathetic physical location that we placed her in, the Bog. The Bog is the story’s lowest place both literally and figuratively. It is a place where waste is dumped, which is fitting for Jaq and her outcast state.

The next character I began to develop was my first White character, Jennifer. When I was first thinking of the direction of the character, I was very inspired by the snobbish White women I witnessed growing up. The kind of woman that inspired Jennifer is the picture-perfect “basic” girl that one may find on Instagram posting her pumpkin spice lattes. I knew off the bat I wanted her to be proficient in microaggressions. Women like Jennifer come from money and have no understanding of true hard work and effort. When I was formulating Jennifer and her quirks, I decided to come up with a list of everything I wanted her to be. This would be a practice that I used with the rest of my characters. On my list, I included that Jennifer was a salon owner. In later improvisations, I determined that the name of her establishment is Luxury Salon, and she came to own it because her father bought it for her. This is one of her defining traits in terms of
her empathy as she assumes that because she has a business, everyone should “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” and “work” as hard as she does. I also added that she comes from the suburbs of Chicago. I used Chicago as my jumping-off point because I am more familiar with the privileged people in the Midwest. After all, that is where I am from. I decided that if she were from a suburb of a city with a high Black population, she would have an idea of what Black people are like without any real experience. After seeing my first characterization of Jennifer, Jon said that she would fit in perfectly with the women of Baton Rouge. When I began writing Jennifer’s monologue, I decided to add that she is a micro-influencer in addition to her salon owner status. I wanted to include her social media presence because many privileged people like her present a very positive image online, but do not channel that positivity into their everyday lives. I started her monologue by complaining about her followers’ lack of engagement on her social media accounts. I also wrote some physical comedy that includes Jennifer forcing Lollipop to take her picture. To end her piece, Jennifer pays attention to someone else long enough to notice that Lollipop “does not belong” on the High Road, where she resides. This prompts Jennifer to begin recording Lollipop because Jennifer “fears for her safety.” After seeing the danger in Jennifer’s blatant discrimination and lying, Lollipop hurriedly leaves the High Road.

My first male character came next: Bill Brown. I modeled him after my impressions of toxically masculine rural men. In the list I made for Bill, I included that he is a lover of guns. This ended up being a crucial part of his character because when we started building the script, I introduced Bill to the audience while he was hunting. The people who inspired Bill are the men who intensely support the second amendment. My initial list also mentioned his conservatism. Bill is the kind of man who would support a political outsider like Donald Trump. He would believe in individualism and buy into propaganda about the opposing side of his beliefs. During
one of our improvisation workshops, I made Bill an expert outdoorsman; he became a connoisseur on various combat styles and weapons. At the end of the improv, Jon and I agreed that he should be a survivalist who is completely reliant on the land. When I was considering what Bill looked like, I pictured an older version of Larry the Cable Guy. I wanted him to be a middle-aged man who clings to antiquated forms of masculinity to maintain his youth and strength. When I wrote his monologue for the script, I originally had him hunting deer and giving Lollipop a tutorial on how to defend in the event of a bear attack. After receiving some notes and further development, I wanted to highlight his fixation on a possible attack that may come from a different kind of threat; instead of a bear, I zeroed in on his disdain for a political party in the world of the play that I created called “Conversationalists.” Knowing that Bill is a conservative, I wanted to color the world of the play with an opposition that resembles real life, without exactly copying American politics. I chose the name “Conversationalists” as a play on socialism because conservatives tend to fear it despite their lack of knowledge on the socialist platforms.

After presenting my development on Bill, Jon asked Kendra and me to come up with one last White character; this one was supposed to be an “intellectual.” So far, our White characters had been uneducated, so we were looking for some balance in our representation of White people that one encounters in the world as a person of color. The intellectual character I created was Tom Sharpe. When I initially began brainstorming about who he was, I wanted to make him a journalist who attended an Ivy League college and was writing for a conservative publication. I was greatly inspired by right-wing pundits like Ben Shapiro and Tucker Carlson. I wanted to embrace their unique way of debating as well as their tendency to talk “at” people instead of talking to them. After some research, I found that journalists like this would regurgitate the same rehearsed talking points that were not exactly relevant to the discussion at hand. These same men
are also the kind to exclaim that “facts don’t care about your feelings,” which was a sentiment that I wanted Tom to express at some point in the script. The quality that Tom has that my other characters do not is his indifference and callousness; when the character finally got on his feet, this vision of him was sustained and built upon further once I began writing his monologue. Tom is an important character because he is the last person that Lollipop meets on her journey through the dystopian world of internet personalities. His position on the map is on the top of the mountain, one of the most prestigious places to be in the world of the play. He was deemed the guardian of this place because I wanted his presence to be a metaphor for the kinds of White people that Black people encounter when they reach their goals and get to hold important positions. The White people they encounter do not allow them to take up space despite earning their accomplishments. Throughout my life, I have heard a hopeful narrative that if Black people work hard and achieve excellence, they will be accepted and treated well by their White counterparts, and this is not at all what I have experienced. When Lollipop finally reaches the Mountaintop at the end of her journey, Tom meets her there, gives her a consolation prize, and discourages her from staying there.

After developing three extremely distinct and specific White characters, Jon challenged us to create two more Black characters that were just as clear-cut as the White characters. As I was searching for inspiration for my next character, I looked to the social media app TikTok because I had found a community of people that I wanted to showcase. The spiritual community of TikTok is known for its in-depth astrological readings, manifestation tactics, and tarot card interpretations. During the first stages of the pandemic, I had fallen upon this community and began to form an appreciation for what they do and how they share their knowledge with their audiences. With this in mind, I began making a list of characteristics of my next character, Sage.
I made her a spiritual bookstore owner who reveres astrology and reads tarot. I wanted her to be as welcoming and positive as the women I see on social media, which helped me when I was finding her voice and her body. When crafting Sage’s monologue, I wanted her to have the essence of a Disney princess and give off warm and welcoming energy. I decided to make Sage’s contribution to Lollipop’s journey a heavy dose of spiritual guidance and support. Sage is the first one to interact with Lollipop and she realizes right away that Lollipop has lost her voice. Sensing that she needs help, Sage decides to cleanse Lollipop’s energy and give her a tarot reading. The reading determines that Lollipop has been lacking energy and has been feeling stagnant, but she is on the precipice of a big change that will cause a metamorphosis for her. I wanted to give a lot of care to the tarot reading because it is a practice that I greatly respect, and I would never want to be careless or offend its practitioners. I carefully researched the meaning of each card and crafted my reading around that. After the reading, Sage recommends that Lollipop makes the journey to the Mountaintop to find her voice. Sage’s role in the story ended up being very important because she is the one to set the plot of the second act into motion.

For my last character, I wanted to round everything out with a male character. After reflecting on the kinds of men I would want to represent, I came up with Steve Washington. I was inspired by Black capitalist patriarchs like Steve Harvey. When crafting this character, I wanted to emphasize the motivational positivity that many Black male elders radiate. My original list of characteristics for Steve included that he was from Atlanta, Georgia, was in his fifties, and was a family man. I wanted Steve to be the kind of man to constantly be sharing unsolicited advice to people about how to live their best life and reach their full potential. I also included in his list that he was a podcast host; when I was considering what a man like Steve does for a living, I knew it would be important that he come from seemingly humble beginnings.
This would make it easier to justify his never-ending advising. When I began writing the script for Steve, I included that he worked his way up the corporate ladder and was a working stiff for a long time. Steve eventually gained some status through his corporate position. Because his wife told him to finally follow his dreams, he quit that corporate job and started his podcast. The name of the podcast is Old Catz, and it is all about Steve passing along what he has learned in his life to all the “high-value brothers” who tune in. In the story, Steve is the last person that Lollipop meets before finally making it to her final destination, the Mountaintop. Lollipop stumbles into Steve’s studio as he records an episode of his podcast, Old Catz. The topic of conversation on the episode is gratitude and Steve tells his listeners that they need to be thankful for all the good in their lives and they need to incorporate gratitude into their daily routines. When Steve begins to go more in-depth about his personal experiences, he shifts focus and begins to tell both the audience and Lollipop that they both need to realize their greatness and that they should not waste their lives dreaming. To reach their full potential, they must start doing the work now if they want to reach their goals. This speech was designed to motivate Lollipop to make the final climb to reach the Mountaintop and finally find her voice.

IV. Concept Building

When we first began devising this play, we decided to start with the feelings we were experiencing during the lockdown. We were inspired by time loop movies and the feeling of being in limbo. Kendra and I were asked to define what it means to be in limbo and how those experiences have nuance. Once we were able to arrive at a collective definition of both a time loop and limbo, we moved forward with coming up with a structure that would serve both of those ideas.
During our initial discussions about overall concept and script building, we considered taking inspiration from the plays of ancient Greece. We originally considered doing an adaptation of a Greek play. After reading several Greek plays, we loved *The Frogs* by Aristophanes; we had an appreciation for the adventurous style of story that was being told. *The Frogs* follows Dionysus and his slave, Xanthias, as they journey to Hades to speak to the deceased playwright, Euripides. The characters in the play shift their physical appearance to fit in with unique situations and settings. The idea of changing our physical appearance to exist in specific settings was particularly inspiring for us. Because we were wanting to address race relations in America and how Black Americans are forced to code-switch to exist in certain settings, we took this concept and ran with it. We decided that we would not do an actual adaptation of the play, but we did keep the idea of changing personas in an ever-changing story world. This was the point at which we decided that we would each craft various characters that we would play ourselves. We determined that we would have a base clown character that we would always come back to, but we would shift into our various original characters throughout the show. After determining that a literal adaptation was not the direction we wanted to go, we had to find the right structure for plugging in our original characters.

During one of our generative workshops, we had an intense brainstorming session in which we figured out how we would structure the show and how we would insert all the characters we had spent so much time formulating and specifying. We decided that we would do the show in three parts, each taking place in a different environment: our pandemic-inspired isolation spaces, an internet metaverse, and a limbo space. This workshop helped us give shape to the piece because it answered questions about how we wanted to endow our concept with a plot.
The first section we tackled was the isolation space in quarantine. Without inhabiting our clowns, we split the stage in half and chose a side of the space for our own. After making our selection, we were given ten minutes to use painter's tape to form a space that our base clowns would exist in during their isolation. When we created our space, we then assigned meaning and function to every part of the space. As our clowns, we were asked to simply exist in those spaces and explore what came up for us while noting any discoveries that were made during the exploration. Once we completed this exercise, Jon noticed that we had been forming habits and patterns while in these separate spaces that were almost rhythmic. Though we did not keep the particular actions we found during this workshop, we did maintain the idea of having a specific pattern while in our isolation spaces. During the workshop, we were also asked to identify an item that would provide our characters with some comfort while they navigated complete isolation. After deeply considering this, Kendra determined that a plant would be her comfort item and I decided that a blanket would be mine. With this in mind, we were instructed to incorporate our comfort item into the actions and patterns we had found. At the end of this workshop, we discovered that the first section of the piece would need to consist of both Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop indulging in their comfort items while also bouncing from activity to activity to combat the staleness of isolation.

During this same workshop, we began to build the vehicle for our other characters to exist. Between Kendra and I, we had formulated twelve characters in addition to our base clowns and we were faced with the difficulty of finding a compelling way to introduce our unique creations. Before our workshop, we had discussed various ways our characters could make their appearances. One of the most significant ideas we had, as we entered our workshop, was using a
“map” like the action-packed, adventure fantasy video game, *The Legend of Zelda*. This was the concept we built on and eventually used in our script.

To begin creating the map that our characters would exist on, we took the painter's tape from our isolation space exercise to form a literal map on the floor of the space. Kendra and I worked together to create a shape on the floor of the stage that resembled a map for our characters. Once we had done that, Jon asked us to label each part of the map and what we intended to exist in that specific spot. The spots on the map ended up being the Mushroom Forest, the Low Road, the Hills, “Off the Grid,” the Bog, the Studio, the Cave, the High Road, the Valley, the bottom of the Mountain, the Oasis, and the top of the Mountain. After identifying the various parts of the map, we were instructed to write out the names of each of our characters. We then were asked to place each name of our original characters on the map. Jon asked us to justify why each character was in his/her specific locations. For my characters, I placed Sage in the Mushroom Forest because I envisioned her character to be a forager who is always one with nature and the outdoors. I placed Bill in the Hills because he is an outdoorsman who has no real use for highly populated places filled with people. I put Jaq in the Bog due to her overwhelmingly depressive and frail state of mind. Jennifer was put on the High Road because the location suggests exclusivity and privilege. Steve was placed at the bottom of the Mountain because he, like many Black men, is successful, but not on top. Lastly, Tom was put on the Mountaintop due to his privileged place in society and his insistence that he is better than any and everyone. Once we made the decisions about our characters’ place on the map, we began an extensive improvisation; during this, Kendra and I went through the map and took turns speaking as our original characters while the other person would intently listen as their clown character. This was the foundation on which we built our script for the second act.
During our brainstorming sessions for the third act, we embraced the lost feeling the entire world is seemingly experiencing in our current moment. Society seems to be in a particularly vulnerable place, so when Jon, Kendra, and I created the third act, we placed the clowns in a lost state of limbo that we referred to as Tuesday. The name Tuesday derives from our original discussions of time loops and limbo. We played with the idea of being stuck on Tuesday and not being able to break out of the time loop to reach Wednesday. We ultimately discarded this idea but using Tuesday to refer to limbo stayed. Before creating our script and plans for the third act, Jon moderated a conversation between Kendra and me in which we discussed what we as individuals wanted from White society to make us feel more comfortable as Black women and what we needed, in general, to make this current moment easier to live through. The discoveries we made during the discussion heavily informed how we constructed the third act. When the crafting process began, we concluded that it would be powerful for Kendra and me to speak as ourselves to our clowns who had just undergone their exhausting journey. The clowns are lost, disappointed that they did not find the fulfillment they were seeking, and depressed. After getting a phone call from Kendra and me, the clowns accept that not being okay is fine.

V. *Commedia Dell’Arte and Masking Original Characters*

*Redux* features twelve distinct original characters that both Kendra and I created for over a year and a half. As the reality of a live performance of the piece came into view, the large question of “how do we distinguish each character?” became more of a pressing issue. Due to Jon Greene’s extensive training and knowledge of Commedia dell’arte, we decided that to differentiate each character, we would mask them. Commedia dell’arte is an improvisational form of masked acting that dates back to Italy in the sixteenth century. The intricately designed
masks indicate a specific character type that the actor embodies once the mask is on their face. In John Rudlin’s book *Commedia dell’arte: An Actor’s Handbook*, he states that “the personality of the actor is thus overtaken not by an author’s scripted character, but by the persona of the mask to be played” (34). Commedia has several stock characters that have a specific mask, body position, way of moving, and place in the social hierarchy. Before diving into masks of our own that indicated our original characters, we were introduced to Commedia stock characters.

The characters on the bottom of the social hierarchy are the Zanni, who are the servants. One of the most prominent Zanni characters in Commedia is Arlecchino, who is usually the servant to another character, Pantalone. Arlecchino is constantly working, but always makes huge mistakes in his work. Rudlin describes Arlecchino as “quick physically and slow mentally” (78). Rudlin also points out Arlecchino’s juxtaposition between his simple mind and extremely complicated bodily movements; these characteristics are only emphasized by his overly positive and energetic personality. He has a low center of gravity and is in constant motion.

One step above Arlecchino is Brigella. He is still a Zanni and a servant, but he holds more status over Arlecchino; he is what Rudlin calls the “first Zanni.” He differs greatly from Arlecchino because his quick wit is what drives his actions during his scenes. Many times, Brigella is plotting his mischievous schemes or assisting others with their impish plans. Unlike Arlecchino, Brigella’s misanthropic attitude makes him “selfish and always ready for a trick” (87). Physically, he slithers from place to place “lithe, cat-like, without apparent muscular effort” (86).

Conversely, Pantalone is typically at the top of the social hierarchy in the world of Commedia. He can be the boss of the Zanni and the father to the lovers. He is an old man who holds an incredible amount of wealth. A lot of the storylines that involve Pantalone surround his
money. In other circumstances, he serves as an obstacle for the lovers and their marriage plans. Because he is an old man, his body position is crunched. He does not move quickly, “but his head, feet and hands are still active” (94).

Il Dottore is another old man who is sometimes a rival of Pantalone. He is a scholar who has many years of schooling and education under his belt. To the dismay of his fellow characters, he will often talk at length about the multitude of subjects in which he is an expert. His incessant lecturing is so prominent that “he is never put off his stroke by parody, interruption, or even physical abuse” (101). His large physical stature makes his love of eating more apparent and informs his bodily positions.

The lovers are high-status characters who are, many times, the cause for the action in Commedia scenarios. Due to the high maintenance nature of these characters, they appoint the Zanni to help them get what they want, which is usually the affection of another lover. Though these characters are unmasked, they wear exaggerated makeup and use strong facial expressions that mimic the expressiveness of a mask. They are constantly swaying, and they float rather than walk. The lovers’ wants are quite narrow because “they are primarily in love with themselves, secondarily in love with love, and only consequentially in love with the beloved” (109).

Il Capitano is a seemingly high-status character who is a shameless quack. He is a former military man who is typically new to the town that the play is happening in. Many times, he regales listeners of his time in the military, but what he says is not to be believed. Physically, he makes a point to take up space and exhibit his general manliness. Rudlin points out that the mask Il Capitano dons is unmistakably phallic.

In Redux, only the White characters are masked, meaning that the Black characters would be brought to life with facial expressions alone. One of the main reasons we chose not to mask
the Black characters is due to the dark history in America of othering Black characters through minstrelsy. Though the origin of blackface dates back several centuries, it gained popularity in America after the Civil War. Research notes that minstrel shows were tools that were used to dehumanize Black people and prevent the public from viewing them as equals. Various minstrel characters were based on the racist notions that Black people were lazy, foolish, overly sexual, and morally corrupt. Despite Black Americans not having the opportunity to participate in the entertainment industry, their likeness was used to create the first uniquely American form of entertainment. Minstrel shows saw White performers cover themselves in either burnt cork or shoe polish to give themselves black skin and would impersonate Black people. American Heritage Magazine points out that minstrel shows showcased Black people either living on a Southern plantation or adjusting to life after moving North. The characters were depicted as idiotic simpletons, making ridiculous mistakes that would make everyone in the audience feel superior. The contemptuous nature of the minstrel show rightfully gained disdain from the Black community. Frederick Douglas, the revered abolitionist, said that White people performing in blackface were “the filthy scum of White society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their White fellow citizens.” Many blackface performers were Irish, a community that was not as accepted by American society as some of their White counterparts. Blackface minstrelsy allowed them to make a spectacle out of a marginalized community that was “below” them. In an attempt to break into show business, Black performers banded together to form all Black minstrel shows. These shows put the authenticity centerstage and depicted Black people and experiences truthfully. Unfortunately, White audiences only wanted to see harmful stereotypes, so they never gained the popularity that traditional minstrels did. The evolution of show business brought an
end to the minstrel craze, but its effects on the Black community are still very much alive as evidenced by the multitude of scholarly works uncovering harmful depictions of Black people in the media.

VI. Clown Influence

Redux’s story is told through the perspective of the clowns that Kendra and I created. The insertion of clowns into this show is appropriate considering the political history of clowns. Louise Peacock in Serious Play: Modern Clown Performance defines clown theatre as a form of theatre that “use[s] mime to communicate to the audience a deeper message which is more closely linked to the social or political ideas of the performer” (77). The modern art form of clowning derives from court jesters; these staples in the royal court began around the twelfth century and lasted through the sixteenth century. The height of the court fool’s popularity was in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The jesters held significant positions in the societies they lived in as they were the truth-tellers of their time. They were the only ones with proximity to the monarch who could give them honest feedback on their rule. Peacock claims that “the jesters’ relative freedom of speech made them particularly useful when it was necessary to voice an opinion in opposition to the actions or ideas of the monarch or noble to whom they owed allegiance” (117). Peacock also suggests that because of the jester’s close relationship to the ruler they served, they were able to manipulate them. However, the trend of “foolishness” in humor began to wane in popularity and as a result, so did the court fool.

Clowns, as we know them, can be sorted into a few basic categories; the Whiteface clowns don delicate makeup and a face that is painted White. Peacock explains that they hold the most status amongst the clowns due to their intelligence. Below the Whiteface clown is the Auguste, which is typically what we think of when we picture clowns. Though they are desperate
to succeed, their obvious incompetence gets in their way. They usually find themselves being the recipient of Whiteface’s pranks. Many times, they will wear ill-fitting clothes and a red nose. Lastly, there is the Tramp or Hobo Clown. These clowns wear tattered clothes that are far too big. They wear a downturned mouth that suggests permanent sadness. Though the Tramp could be considered a type of Auguste, they stand apart from their other clown counterparts because they inspire pity in the audience.

In *Redux*, our clowns are mostly nonverbal, which is one of the staples of clown performance. Peacock suggests that this trope stems from the potential language barriers that clowns faced while traveling the world. If the performers were in a country that did not speak their native language, there was a risk that the humor would be completely lost. Physical comedy is universal, so nonverbal clowning dominates clown performance. This lack of language provides a challenge for clowns because they are tasked with gaining the empathy of the audience. Peacock states that “the audience must be able to empathize with the character who struggles to get things right, but he must not descend to such depths that our attitude towards him becomes mocking or satirical” (29). When the clown finally does succeed at completing their task, the audience applauds and celebrates their victory. Our goal during *Redux* was to gain support from the audience. Because the clowns are experiencing the metaverse for the first time, they automatically share the same unfamiliarity with the world that the audience does.
Production Process

I. Commedia Workshop

When we first began regular rehearsals for *Redux*, Jon decided that we would have a Commedia dell’arte workshop that would serve as an introduction to how to act with masks. I was extremely excited to do so because I have always wanted to know more about Commedia based performance. We wanted to start our regular rehearsals with the mask workshop because we figured that the knowledge we gain from it could help us make more informed choices when we start rehearsing our original masked characters. When we unanimously voted to mask our White characters, Kendra and I needed to learn how to properly act with masks. Even though our characters were not Commedia specific, we got to experience what comes with using a mask.

Before diving into specific Commedia characters, we started with mastering complete neutrality. Without masks, we shifted our bodies to be neutral. We straightened our spines, softened our knees, and made sure that our arms hung at our sides. Once we could stand in neutral, we began to move around the room. This was particularly difficult because we were tasked with walking without any indicators of our personalities. After walking around as neutrally as possible, we put on completely neutral masks and did the same. This felt particularly awkward because the neutrality made me feel alien-like; the neutrality felt inhuman. With our neutral masks, we tried an exercise that asked us to go on stage, move a chair, sit down, then leave the stage. Doing all these actions was extremely uncomfortable, but I thought stripping everything away was very helpful once we started putting our characters on their feet.

The first Commedia character we started with was Arlecchino; Jon informed us about who he is, his position in the Commedia hierarchy, and his general demeanor. Jon described him as being like the television character, SpongeBob SquarePants. To begin our introduction to
Arlecchino, Jon taught us the correct way to move and hold our bodies to bring him to life. Arlecchino’s body has a low center of gravity. The most challenging part of his character is that he is in constant motion. He can switch directions on a dime and his consistent bouncing is exhausting to execute. We learned about Alrecchino’s walk and had the opportunity to practice it around the space. After practicing his body and walk, we got to wear an Arlecchino mask. Once we put the masks on, we got to do an exercise as Arlecchino. We got onstage and Jon, speaking as Pantalone, would give us various tasks to do as Arlecchino. The goal of the exercise was to stay in character and find the most efficient way of getting the tasks done. Whether or not the task was done correctly was irrelevant. It was very tiring to execute because Arlecchino is very physical. I was out of breath by the end of it. During the “scene” I learned that I have great difficulty expanding my mind past what is “logical.” Arlecchino does not use logic to do his tasks, and I was using too much of my real-world logic to do the exercise. This is a difficulty that I experienced a lot during this process. I also had a hard time finding consistency in his voice. I would choose his voice, get tired from the constant motion, then drift into a voice with a higher pitch that was closer to my natural speaking voice.

The next character we looked at was Il Capitano. This character was particularly fun to learn. We began the same way we did for learning Arlecchino; we found his body first, then we began to walk like him. Il Capitano exudes machismo and takes up a lot of space with his presence. He stands extremely tall and flourishes with his arms to seem grander. He has a long stride and when he walks, he uses his chest to lead him. He has a macho-man-type voice that is very deep. His internal rhythm is a lot slower than Arlecchino's, so he was more comfortable to bring to life physically. Il Capitano always has a sword with him, so when we were mastering his walk, we would occasionally use that to punctuate our sentences. Once we started using the
masks, we got to try an exercise that would allow us to act as Capitano. We were instructed to go on stage and regale a triumphant story of Capitano’s past, but at the climax of the story when he goes to pull out his sword, it gets “stuck.” This was fun to do but it made some of my shortcomings with mask acting apparent. I had a hard time keeping my eyes open wide while donning the mask. Jon made sure we knew that while acting with a mask, you must always mimic the face the mask is making and widen the eyes so that the mask comes to life.

We tackled the Lovers next. Even though they are not typically masked characters, it was helpful to learn how to make a character exaggerated without the assistance of a mask. We started with forming the body of the Lovers. We began with their basic stance, which involved us getting on our tippy toes and constantly swaying. Once we established their bodies while static, we began to play with their walk. Jon pointed out that the Lovers always lead with their shoulders, so we got to experiment with how to do that. The Lovers are never standing still, so it was particularly difficult to establish their “static” position. I also had a hard time finding their breathy voice. When we first began working on these characters, my voice for the Lovers was far too cartoonish and high-pitched. After some practice, I learned to pitch down my voice while also maintaining the airiness they require. We had a chance to further our character work with the Lovers in an exercise that allowed Kendra and me to get on stage in character and trade compliments. As we dove deeper into the exercise, the compliments became more and more self-centered until we were practically complimenting ourselves. The Lovers helped me to understand that maintaining consistent energy is extremely important when it comes to characters who are not masked.

Another Commedia character we had a chance to learn was Pantalone, the old man. Pantalone was extremely hard for me because Pantalone is not supposed to move quickly.
Though his walk is a short-stridden shuffle, he does not reach his destination quickly.
Pantalone’s body is crunched down on itself and his elbows are usually pinned to his sides while his bent wrists keep his hands free to be able to count at all times. Maintaining his crunched body shape while also moving slowly was an illuminating challenge for me because it revealed that I tend to move too quickly on stage. Our Commedia exercise to further explore Pantalone was getting onstage, yelling for Arlecchino to move a chair, then deciding to do it ourselves. Pantalone is not at all strong, so part of the exercise was to attempt to move it, then fail miserably. This exercise taught me to slow down because I was moving far too quickly and did not provide an ample amount of time for Pantalone to move through his problem-solving and ultimate defeat.

When we started working on Brigella, we got the opportunity to look at a character that does more reacting rather than initiating the action. Brigella is also a Zanni, but he is slightly above Arlecchino in status, so he gets to boss Arlecchino around. Brigella is a snobby servant who is never satisfied with what is happening around him. Brigella stands up tall, usually with his hands clasped in front of him. His voice quality is low, nasally, and exudes snooty energy. Our Brigella exercise allowed us to react in character to Arlecchino (played by Jon) and his inability to correctly follow Brigella’s instructions. The goal for the exercise was to give Arlecchino tasks to do, but not completely lose his temper when Arlecchino messes everything up. This character was extremely helpful for me to explore because it challenged me to keep my eyes wide and expressive while experiencing a wider range of emotions. Though it was not easy, it was helpful to start implementing the habit.

Il Dottore was the next character we learned during our Commedia workshop. I was thankful we got to learn this character because it helped me simulate a bigger stature. Il Dottore
is a big man who carries his weight in a very particular way. When we were learning how to take on his body, I was learning how to create a character body that is much larger than my own. It was very helpful in our character work down the line. Il Dottore has a little bounce in his walk and his constant rumbling sounds give him life. Our character exercise for him had us taking the space in character and giving a “lecture” about one of the many subjects he is an expert in.

The last established Commedia character we looked at was La Donna, the overbearing wife of Pantalone. She is typically a bigger-bodied woman who walks around with her nose in the air. Her snobbish attitude creates a permanent scowl on her face. For our La Donna exercise, Jon, Kendra, and I stood in a circle in character and traded backhanded compliments to each other. Our work with La Donna was extremely brief, but I appreciated our work with her because I took inspiration from her for my original character, Jennifer.

Once we completed our work with the established Commedia characters, we got the chance to explore our creativity with a mask. Both Kendra and I were given a mask without any particular character attached to it, and we were tasked with exploring the mask and allowing a character to take over it. With Commedia, knowing what you look like in the mask is crucial to bringing the character to life; this is because the actor must mimic the facial expression of the mask. Kendra and I were given ten minutes to play in the mask independently and in that time we came up with voices and bodies that we felt matched the mask. After our allotted time, we got to do an improvisational exercise in which we got to introduce ourselves in character and simply exist as that character. After performing our initial characters, Jon had us form a completely new character with the same mask. After taking some time, we did the same improvisational exercise with our new characters. It was extremely helpful to do this exercise
because the work we would do later with our original characters mirrored what we did with the character-less masks. It proved that a mask has various possibilities that can be mined.

After our mask workshop, Jon, Kendra, and I discussed our characters and how they relate to the Commedia stock characters. Jon asked us if any of our characters were similar to the Commedia ones. Luckily for me, almost all my characters were able to nicely fit into the Commedia archetypes. Jennifer is like La Donna in her snobbish nature and walk. Tom is like Brigella in his snarky nature and body position. Sage’s constant swaying and general body are reminiscent of the Lovers. Steve’s larger-than-life persona and body are very much like Il Capitano. Jaq’s constant sorrow is very much in the vein of a character we did not get to cover in the workshop, Pulcinella, the sad clown. Lastly, Bill is a combination of Il Dottore and Il Capitano due to his endless talking about his survivalism and his exaggerated machismo.

II. Character Choices

After determining what our original characters would say in their monologues, Kendra and I then had to focus on bringing those characters to life with specific choices for their voice and body. When I was considering what I wanted Sage’s voice to sound like, I originally wanted her voice to be very slow and controlled. My first attempt at her voice was pitched down lower and the slowness of her cadence allowed me to experiment by sliding the pitch up and down when I spoke. The more I played with the character, I found that Sage is not nearly as Zen and relaxed as I had originally planned. One day as I was rehearsing Sage, Jon directed me to lean into Sage’s manic nature. With this one note, I realized that Sage’s passion for the spiritual realm is too great for the slow and low-pitched voice that I had intended. Instead, I embraced more of a sing-song type voice that was inspired by Disney’s Snow White. My biggest hurdle in making this change was ensuring that my new choice was clear enough to be heard. Once I made the
conscious effort of overly enunciating, my voice slowed down enough to be understood while also staying true to the manic pixie nature of Sage. Jon and I also figured out that Sage is not only a spiritualist, but she is also an actual pixie. Though this is not outlined in her monologue, it is one of the defining characteristics that helped me shape her body and walk. I started shaping Sage’s body around the Lovers in Commedia. Though she constantly sways like the Lovers, I built upon that foundation with her unique flourishes. She punctuates her words with grand arm gestures that look as if she is always casting a spell. Her walk reminds the audience of her fairy-like nature because instead of walking, she bounces. Using her energetic and bouncy walk allowed me to lean into her mania. When I embraced the energy that comes with Sage, I was able to let go of convention and make her the excited, passionate pixie that she was supposed to be.

When I was figuring out what I was going to do with Bill, I had more of a clear idea of how I wanted to bring him to life from the beginning. Physically, I started working from Il Capitano and the way he takes up space. Bill is the kind of man who asserts his masculinity and his place in society physically. His static stance is extremely wide and his legs are consistently spread. The walk that I figured out for Bill maintains the spread legs, but I decided to keep a bend in the knee to give Bill a light bounce when he walks. Because of his age and the command he attempts to have in a room, I slowed his walk down significantly from mine. For his voice, I wanted Bill’s voice to have a traditionally masculine husk that would not only suggest age but also traditionally masculine values. I pitched down Bills’ voice from my own, but that presented a new problem: enunciation. On Jon’s suggestion, I started to overly enunciate everything that Bill said because it helped solve the problem with my words getting lost in the low pitch, but it also gave me a new character choice to use. Bill is already a know-it-all when it comes to the outdoors and survival tactics. The new pronunciation tactic helped me lean into his
“mansplaining” nature. When we added our character masks to our rehearsals, it greatly helped me specify each of my characters, especially Bill. When we began working with Sarah Vandermeer, who designed and constructed our masks, Kendra and I were challenged to take a closer look at our characters and describe them in a way that would help Sarah physically construct their essence. I explained to Sarah that Bill is a man’s man who is defined by his physical prowess and love of the outdoors. I mentioned that his hobbies, like hunting, have weathered his skin and made it leathery. His insistence on being as manly as possible inspired her to add a beard to his design, which was an addition that I loved. When Bill’s mask was ready to be worked with, it felt like the finishing touch to his character. In Commedia, the actors look at themselves in the mirror, so they know what they look like before they begin performing. Jon helped us figure out that when working with the masks, we must mimic the face the mask is already making, and that bit of advice was crucial in helping me find the static faces of my characters.

During my work with Jaq, I had an extremely hard time figuring her out. She was always a disgruntled teenager; however, the more I worked on her, the less I understood how I wanted her to express herself. During some of our generative workshops, Jaq was the least clear out of all my characters. I could not find her voice and I was not sure what she wanted to say to Lollipop. During an improvisational exercise, I explored the idea of Jaq being a loner by choice and denying her need for human interaction. This was an idea that I carried with me during my first draft of her character monologue. When Jon and I determined that she would only speak in poems, I seemed to have even more trouble determining her voice and body. When rehearsing her scene, I played with a multitude of voices, but none of them seemed to stick. Jon told me to explore guttural sounds that would stop Kendra in her tracks when approaching me. After some
thinking and experimenting, I started to make Jaq’s voice extremely nasally and whiny. After making this adjustment, I started to finally understand the appropriate direction in which to take the character. When I started using the whiny voice, Jaq became more of a traditional depressed teenager. I started elongating many of her words, which was helpful in terms of giving the voice choice nuance and color. For her body, Jon and I decided that Jaq would exist on the ground, almost as if she had been overcome by quicksand. I particularly liked this choice because it is reminiscent of the angsty teenagers who never leave their bedrooms. Jon gave me a note to thrash around during my monologue and add in some exaggerated movements with my arms. This note was very helpful for me because despite Jaq only being on the ground for the duration of the scene, it provided her with a physical choice that would still be dynamic from the floor.

Jennifer’s characterization was extremely clear to me from the beginning of our rehearsal process. Even during our initial discussions about Jennifer, her voice and attitude were clear in my mind. I wanted her snobbish nature to come through strongly in both her voice and body. When I started to consider how to make her voice as specific as possible, I had to focus on slowing down my natural cadence to fit what I thought was more appropriate for Jennifer. The comedy of Jennifer lies in her belief that no one thinks like her and no one understands her point of view. Slowing her down helped me to suggest this sentiment, despite it not being explicitly written in the text. Her voice resonance lies more in the back of the mouth, and I found myself using more of my chest voice for this character. Physically, I wanted to convey Jennifer’s self-absorbed nature by constantly touching her hair and fussing with it. It became a fun character choice that I could always go back to. When I discussed my vision for Jennifer’s mask, I told Sarah that I envisioned Instagram-worthy makeup for Jennifer. Because she is a micro-influencer, I thought it would be appropriate for her to have the same look as the women I see
online. Sarah made the genius choice to give Jennifer exaggerated cheekbones and upper lip, which only doubled down on her fakeness. When I was able to mimic the look of the mask, I was more effective in fully committing to the privileged gentrifier that I wanted Jennifer to be.

Steve was another character that I had an extremely clear vision of. Steve’s voice had been very consistent from the beginning of our process to the end. Like Bill, I pitched Steve’s voice down quite a bit from mine because I wanted to have a traditionally masculine tonal quality. I also wanted to give Steve a slight twang to suggest both informality and regional location. Steve was inspired by men like Steve Harvey, so I was influenced by their unique cadence. It is defined by the smoothness and legato-like quality. I wanted to suggest Steve’s coolness and confidence with that special cadence; thankfully, it was clear enough that I could adhere to it without wavering. One of Steve’s defining character traits is his distinct laugh; his laughter is one of the ways his older age presents itself. I wanted to create a laugh for Steve that is reminiscent of Black elders. I did this by throwing my body into it and widening my mouth to create a “heh-heh” sound. When making Steve’s physical body, I felt that it was important that he was physically expressive. I did this by making sure that he talked with his hands, shifted in his chair, and threw his advice to Lollipop when he deemed necessary.

Tom Sharpe was a character that took a lot of time to develop; I had a hard time finding his voice. Originally, I played with using speed with him, but it was not working because it was difficult to understand what I was saying. It was not until I embraced my original inspiration, Ben Shapiro, that I could find his voice. I dropped the voice into my chest, but I gave it a nasal quality that was loosely inspired by Shapiro. After the voice was clarified, I had to figure out Tom’s body. I was extremely thankful for our Commedia workshop because our work with Brigella was very helpful for me. Tom takes on the static body of Brigella, despite him being
seated for his monologue. When he is making a point to Lollipop, he stops his task of writing in his ledger to peer over his desk, very much like the right-wing pundits that he was inspired by.

III. Exploring Different Theatrical Styles

Redux was unlike any other show I have had the chance to work on due to the movement-based pieces that occur in Act I and Act III. During the first act, Lollipop and Raisin Raccoon move around their isolation spaces in an intricate sequence that happens without dialogue. When we began staging the first act, Jon made it clear to Kendra and me that it would function like a ballet. Later, Bunny Lushington, our technical director, even lit the opening sequence like ballet so that our silhouettes were emphasized. This section of the play was extremely challenging for me to stage because it forced me to free my mind completely and follow my instincts. For our isolation spaces, Jon had Kendra and me explore a monotonous activity that was easily repeatable. My first instinct was to choose knitting, a hobby that I knew many people had begun as part of the nationwide lockdown. When I started implementing knitting into our first act, Jon and I found that it was too complicated. Instead, we changed knitting to crochet, so I would only need to use one needle. Once Kendra and I solidified our monotonous activity, we began looking for the multitude of ways we could use our objects. After exploring all the ways crocheting can be done conventionally, I began to play with the ball of yarn and the crochet needle itself. This gave us options to choose from when we began to cement all the Act I actions.

We did the same exercise for an item that would give us comfort. I originally started with a blanket, but we put the blanket on a dress form to bring the item to life when I interacted with it. In addition to the obvious uses for a blanket, I began to dance with it and used it as a puppet. These choices felt true to the character, so Jon asked me to keep them in the final product. After finding actions with our various objects, we then had to determine how to interact with our
The keyboards are a crucial part of the first act because it is the way we transition into the second act of the show. Lollipop and Raisin Raccoon engage in so much negativity online, that it becomes all-consuming; they fall down the internet rabbit hole so severely, that it causes a literal door to the internet metaverse to open. Because we wanted a loud sound for typing, we used electronic keyboards that would create a distinct sound when the keys were pushed. Figuring out the blocking for all this was a challenge for me. Despite my background in dance, I was having trouble experimenting with typing. We started building that section by playing a rhythm game. While patting our legs, one of us would start a base rhythm and the other person would build a new rhythm on top of it for a while. Then, the first person would begin a new rhythm, and so on. I became extremely frustrated with myself during this exercise because I had trouble coming up with unique rhythms. I found myself locking up because my mind and body were not working together to make these creative rhythms. Thankfully, we collectively decided to create consistent rhythms that we would use each performance. This was a relief to me because it was creatively taxing to invent a new rhythm each time we rehearsed the sequence. Once we established what we wanted to do each time we were at the keyboards, we had all the key aspects of our first act. Kendra and I each had a unique pattern of spending time with our monotonous items, our comfort items, and the keyboards. Jon, Kendra, and I determined that it would be easier for us to navigate our paths by counting sets of eight and later sets of six to keep ourselves in time with each other. During our rehearsal process, we used a metronome during the first act because we wanted the clowns’ regiments to be very precise. The idea of having our show scored with music was always an exciting possibility for Jon, Kendra, and me. Because of the ballet-like first act, we decided it would be the perfect opportunity to add some music. Once we blocked the first act, we filmed the entire sequence. We then sent the whole sequence to
Redux’s composer, Kyle Sobzcak, who built a piece of music that perfectly matched up with what we had created.

While we were rehearsing, there were several mental blocks that I had to overcome during the process to fully embrace my characters. My theatrical background consists of mostly realism, so my job as an actor has been extremely straightforward in the past. I would use the script to come up with motivations and objectives. Technically, we did do that with Redux. What made applying those principles to the text difficult was the fact that I wrote my lines. When I had written the lines, I was not considering how to bring them to life as an actor. I had separated my writing from acting, which gave me a strange set of obstacles to overcome. When we first began rehearsing the second act after blocking it, my delivery of the text was flat and lifeless. I had neglected my duty as an actor to assign verbs and objectives to the scenes. I was only trying to embody the character’s essence, rather than giving them something concrete to achieve. After all, capturing someone’s essence was what I was attempting to do with my writing. Jon reminded me that each of these characters has an agenda that they are trying to push onto Lollipop, and this unlocked something significant for me; his note helped me remember what my primary goal as an actor is by releasing my duties as a writer. It also added considerable dimension to all my characters because I was not solely focused on the type of person they were. I was finally thinking about the ideas they wanted to impart onto Lollipop and how they would accomplish that. This particularly helped me while bringing my Black characters to life. Steve was especially clarified with this change. When I embraced his capitalist nature and his want to impart that on the next generation of Black people, he began to come to life. His intentions became clearer and he started to become much more than someone shouting into the void via podcast. Sage also became more distinct; she is someone who wants to share love and light. With my adjustment, it
became important to her that Lollipop got direction both in her life and on her journey ahead. For Sage, she is the only one who can point Lollipop in the right direction, so embracing this mindset helped me intensify Sage and her divine advice. Sage wants to bless Lollipop and be the one to gift her with life-changing clarity, so I raised the stakes for the scene. For Jaq, she uses her poetry to lure Lollipop into her pit of despair. Ultimately, she is a sad person who is alone in the world and she senses someone coming into her space when Lollipop crosses her threshold. To have a bit of company in the Bog, she attempts to draw Lollipop in so she is not alone anymore.

While performing our clowns, Kendra and I would give the light to the other person while they performed their characters. However, Jon made a huge note to both of us that would challenge us to play with our circle of attention. While performing as our characters, we were directed to look out towards the audience even if we were talking to the clowns. If we had the impulse to look at the clowns, we would need to wait until we were in between sentences. While playing the clowns, we were directed to look at the characters while they spoke. However, when the character looked at us while we were playing the clowns, we would take our focus out to the audience. So at all times, someone would be looking at their scene partner and someone would be looking at the audience. This is a tactic that Jon referred to as triangulation. This is because there is a constant triangle of attention between the clown, the character, and the audience. Implementing this tactic was a unique challenge to execute consistently because my background in realism gives me the urge to make eye contact with my scene partner. When the change in focus would happen sharply, it was easier for me as the clown to take my attention out to the audience. When the change was a bit more casual or slow, it was harder for me to correctly change my attention. When performing the characters, it took me a long time to finally get into the habit of taking my attention to the audience; it did not feel natural or truthful at first. I had to
realize that *Redux* is not a realistic play and therefore, the acting should not be realistic either. Once I allowed myself to embrace the absurdity of the piece, I no longer felt strange facing the crowd.

Embracing the absurd was the most freeing discovery I made during the entire process of *Redux*. Despite knowing that the show is clown and Commedia based, I still was trying to make it realistic, like the plays I have done before. I did this because realism is where I feel the most comfortable. When I was trying to make the characters realistic, I felt extremely uncomfortable, and I was not making any bold choices. Jon pointed out that this show is Commedia, and that Kendra and I should be free to go as big as we wanted. After that, I completely let go and allowed my characters to take me wherever they wanted. My gestures got bigger, my laughs were more defined, my diction became clearer, and I felt more comfortable. It was no longer awkward or stiff. I was living as the characters instead of trying to analyze them from the outside. This also gave me the freedom to enjoy the work instead of judging it or myself.

This change of mindset even helped me with my work as my clown. Listening on stage in a realistic play looks extremely casual compared to listening for a clown. Jon informed us that, as our clowns, we would need to do intense listening. He made it clear to us that clowns feel deeply and are extremely vulnerable, so their intake of information would need to reflect their nature. The main challenge for the intense listening was to refrain from obvious indicators of communication, such as a nod in agreement or specific hand gestures. Our clowns serve as sponges in the world of the play; they absorb all the energy that the characters expel. Kendra and I were challenged to be passengers during the scenes; however, the transference of energy made it simple for me to let go and react instinctively to the exaggerated characters that Kendra
created. *Redux* helped me improve my listening skills because it forced me to be always engaged with my scene partner.
Post-Production Analysis, Critique, and Self-Assessment

Overall, the audience response to Redux was more positive than I had expected. The show can be harsh and although it is technically a comedy, a lot of the content is not funny. A friend of Jon Greene came to the show on a night that had a smaller and mostly White audience. This crowd was not nearly as responsive as all our other audiences, so Kendra and I thought that they either did not enjoy the show, or they did not understand it. It was not until Jon’s friend shared his viewing experience that Kendra and I realized the kind of show we created. Jon relayed to us that his friend “liked seeing it with a smaller house where the depth was easily felt and not everything could be so immediately laughed at by a large crowd, because ‘let’s be real, a lot of that stuff isn’t actually funny at all!’” Hearing this completely changed how I judged the audience’s responses for the rest of our run. I realized that although Kendra and I wrote our monologues with a comedic edge, they are still rooted in truth, which is hard to accept. Jon also expressed that “the laughter started to taper off around Lotus/Jennifer as things went from comedic to difficult.” I was so focused on my duties as a performer, I did not consider this shift in the audience reaction. After he pointed this out to us, I noticed this too. The audience was forced to accept that these characters live amongst us in the real world; the gravity of this truth washed over the audience so much so that by the last characters, they were making very little sound.

I was proud to find out that our piece had resonated with Black women. Friends of mine who came to see the show told me that they greatly appreciated this work and that alone lets me know that Redux was a success. This show was built by Black women. We reflected our lived experiences to the audience, and the Black women in our audience were able to identify with what we were presenting. Even if people in our audience were unfamiliar with what Black
women see and experience in the world, there were universal truths that everyone can understand. I believe the mind-numbing passage of time in quarantine, the endless array of personalities online, and the confusion/hopelessness we feel in our current moment bind us together as a society. Ultimately, Redux was for everyone, and everyone received it.

Despite the confrontational content of Redux, the most questioned choice we made as a team was to omit a curtain call. Taking bows and performing a curtain call is my least favorite theatre tradition. In certain plays, I believe that it undermines the end of the show because it allows the audience to distance themselves from the piece they have just watched. By saluting the performers, the audience is relieved of any intense feelings or emotions the show may have brought up. It is a blatant reminder that the play was not real; it was a work of fiction. It plays into the notion that theatre and art, in general, are a form of escape. The curtain call signals to the audience that the fantasy is over and the real world is calling. This is not what I wanted for Redux. What we created is real for us and the ideas we presented play a large part in our daily lives. I felt that a curtain call would be letting our audience off the hook. If given the opportunity to applaud us, the audience can dismiss pity for us or guilt they may feel. I expressed my desire to skip the curtain call to Kendra, who loved the idea. She, too, wanted the audience to leave our show without the closure that traditional plays provide. We determined that bowing at the end would compromise the ending that we worked so hard to craft. We finally took the idea to Jon Greene, who fully supported us. After we opened the show, Kendra and I discussed many times how much we loved not doing a curtain call. After creating and performing an intense piece like this, it was best for our mental health to leave the space without having to confront an audience. On our closing night, Jon asked Kendra and me if we wanted to take a bow to celebrate our last performance. We considered this, but we still opted to not take our bows. Though we were proud
of our work, we did not feel that having applause from the audience was important enough to undercut our show. For many performers, a curtain call gives them closure, a moment of glory, and an ego boost. Neither Kendra nor I needed that. We were proud of the piece, and we knew that what we created was special. That was enough for us. Our triumph did not rely on applause. Our victory lay in the knowledge that we dared to tell the truth.

I am extremely grateful to Jon Greene and the Radical Buffoons for this incredible experience. Devised theatre was an art form that truly scared me. I was intimidated by this process and several times during our work, I was overcome with fear. Creating this piece of art was an emotionally exhausting experience for me due to both the subject matter itself and the daunting task of participating in a creative process with which I was unfamiliar. I struggled with my sense of belonging and remembering that my voice is valid. Despite both Jon and Kendra being incredible and generous collaborators, I was harsh with myself. I did not give myself grace nor did I permit myself to fail. This is my only regret. My rigidity sapped the love and joy out of this piece for most of the process, and it took a heavy toll on my mental health. It was not until I relinquished control that I began to find the fulfillment that Redux had always intended. I had to surrender to trial and error to truly enjoy myself. Once I was finally able to stop judging my work and contributions, I felt comfortable; at last, I could embrace the process. I am extremely thankful for both Jon and Kendra because they both empowered me and uplifted me. Their reminders that my contributions were valuable helped me realize that theatre creation should never be about seeking perfection. Perfection does not and will never exist, and I needed to learn that.

Working on this piece forced me to evaluate my theatrical contributions that extend beyond acting. Devised theatre intimidated me because it would demand the implementation of
skillsets that I do not use. Though I utilize my creativity to interpret characters and text, I have never felt inclined to use my creativity to write or create concepts from scratch. Despite my contributions to *Redux*, I still do not consider myself a writer and never will. Because the building process of the show was so intense, I was focused on scriptwriting for most of our rehearsal process. It was not until the entire show was constructed that I could focus my attention solely on acting. This was completely new to me. Taking on the responsibility of the script made me extremely uncomfortable because I was not confident in my writing talents. Though I created the characters, I was anxious about putting their wants and objectives on paper. I was unsure of my ability to write coherent monologues that were worthy of being performed for an audience. I agonized over whether my monologues were funny or creative enough. Eventually, I had to put these anxieties to the side and focus on the truth of the characters I had created. Though it was extraordinary to create a piece from scratch, some of my favorite parts of acting were not present in the devising process. Though I was telling a story, I did not take a piece of text and interpret it like I typically do. I created the characters and their monologues, so I did not have the challenge of taking someone else’s words and interpreting them. *Redux* helped me rediscover what I love about acting as well as introduce me to my hidden talents. I am proud of the way I stretched my theatrical prowess for this piece.

The vulnerability that it takes to create original work cannot be achieved without having trust amongst collaborators. We were able to create a safe environment that was conducive to creation because Jon, Kendra, and I all established a relationship with one another that was based on trust and respect. During our rehearsals for *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, we were working closely because we were undergoing an intense introduction to clowning; Kendra and I also needed to establish synchronicity between us because the characters Rosencrantz and
Guildenstern move as a unit for most of the play. This foundation made it easier to transition to a creative arena. Jon Greene is experienced with working and collaborating with people of color, so he gave Kendra and me the space to always express what we needed as performers, collaborators, and individuals. As a Black person, I believe it is crucial to work with people who reject the pillars of White supremacy culture in the theatre. Throughout my theatre career, I have learned that the theatre community maintains values and conventions that are rooted in White supremacy and patriarchal standards, which does not provide a safe environment for BIPOC creatives to thrive. The entire Redux team did not allow those previously established conventions to affect our show and it greatly benefitted the piece. The two years that we spent creating Redux were filled with various events in our world that were traumatic and intense. When the weight of those events became too much for any of us, we would take a break from our work to process. For example, when the insurrection happened in Washington D.C on January 6th, 2021, our team was emotionally exhausted. Rather than pushing through and continuing our work, we had a heartfelt and cathartic discussion about the event and decided to take time to ourselves to process. Jon’s understanding and consideration for our well-being provided a safe environment that made it easier to share ideas and experiences that would eventually be incorporated into the piece.

Redux helped me improve my acting skills because I was forced to bring several characters to life. To differentiate each character, I needed to make them extremely distinct. This show challenged me to take my characters farther than I have ever taken characters before. Though Redux is a unique style of theatre that called for exaggerated characters, I feel more confident going forward in my future endeavors. Now that I have brought hyperbolic characters to the stage, I know that I will be able to perform more traditional characters better."
showed me the importance of big choices. Going forward, I will do my best to make large and committed choices when rehearsing. Discoveries cannot be made when the actor is tentative, and I am determined to go forth in my acting career making those large choices without being afraid of being “wrong.”
**Conclusion**

Upon reflection of my time learning and working in New Orleans, I have concluded that I have gained both confidence and skills that I know will serve me well in my acting career. *Redux* was transformative for me as an artist and for that, I will always hold it close to my heart. After creating a piece of theatre dedicated to my truth as a Black woman, I look forward to telling more stories that echo the same sentiments. *Redux* further proved to me that theatre is a powerful tool to spread awareness, inspire change, and start conversations. I plan to go forth in this field striving to do just that. Once I leave the University of New Orleans, I look forward to diving deep into new works, ideally written by Black women. Additionally, I enjoy classical theatre, such as Shakespeare, and I will take every opportunity to perform it. Demystifying forms of theatre that have not been traditionally associated with Blackness is part of my mission as an artist. Black voices are valid in all forms of theatre, and I will always work to ensure that people who look like me get to see themselves on stage or screen. I will audition and network as much as possible so I can, one day, become a full-time actor.
Works Cited


Conceived & Created by
Alexandria Miles  Kendra Unique  Jon Greene

Written by & Starring
Alexandria Miles & Kendra Unique
Directed by Jon Greene

Asst. Direction & Stage Management by Pamela D. Roberts
Production & Technical Design by Bunny Lushington
Mask Design by Sarah Vandermeer
Original Composition by Kyle Sobczak
Poster Design by BunchHaus
Chads: Ben Fox & Jay Canova

ACT 1 - Quarantine
Raisin Raccoon
Lollipop

ACT 2 - The Metaverse
Raisin Raccoon
Lollipop
Sage - A Manic Pixie
Komorro - An Angry Young Man
Bill Brown - A Survivalist
Bored Rabbit - An incel
JAQ - A Depressed Teen
Lotus Wilson - A "Shaman"
Jennifer - A Gentrifier
Aunt T - An Elder
Steve Washington - A Capitalist
Erika - A Poptimist
Thom Sharpe - A Beausocrat
Traceigh - A Suburbanite

ACT 3 - Tuesday
Raisin Raccoon
Lollipop

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REDUX
Created by Alexandria Miles, Kendra Unique, and Jon Greene
Produced by The Radical Buffoons at The Hotel Peter Paul
Technical Design by Bunny Lushington
Stage Management and Assistant Direction by Pam Roberts
  Masks by Sarah Vandermeer
  Composition by Kyle Sobczak

January 28th-February 7th 2022
I. PRESHOW

Two sides with the same set up: A table with a keyboard and stool and a comfy ottoman. On one side is a blanket on a dress form. This is Raisin Raccoon’s side. On the other side is a plant on a plinth. This belongs to Lollipop.

Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop sit on the stage in the comfy ottomans. Raisin Raccoon dangles a crochet needle at the end of some yarn; Lollipop dangles a ball on a string at the end of a cup (MONOTONY LOCATION). They sit in silence, swinging them like clock pendulums as the audience enters.

Preshow Announcement:
Phone Rings three times.
"Hello. You’ve Reached REDUX presented by The Radical Buffoons. You will be here for - 80 minutes. You will have no intermission. Bathrooms can be found on either side of the entrance through which you came. In the event of an emergency please physically exit through said entrance. Should you experience feelings included - but not limited to - anxiety, depression, confusion, indigestion, insomnia, repetitive stress injury, or feelings of worthlessness please consult the experts at facebook, webMD, BuzzFeed, FoxNews, or google. In the event of societal collapse please wait patiently for your instructions."
Beep.
The Mailbox is full and currently not accepting new messages. Goodbye.

BLACKOUT

ACT 1. Quarantine
The Dance of Isolation, Self Care, and Despair

Lights Up
(4/4 at 96 BPM)
Mutual Placement
- Comfort Location
  - Raisin Raccoon rubs blanket
  - Lollipop Tends to Plant

Black Out

Lights up
- Keyboard Location
  - Raisin Raccoon taps 1-2-3-4
  - Lollipop Adds Flourishes

Black Out
Lights up

Different Placement

- Monotony Location
  - Raisin Racoon sits with yarn facing backward.
    - Wrap ball, pull string; repeat
- Comfort Location
  - Lollipop facing forward with the plant.
    - Spray spray, hair pat; repeat

Black Out

Lights up

- Comfort Location
  - Raisin Racoon, sits at the base of the blanket patting it
    - down->out; repeat.
- Keyboard Location
  - Lollipop sits at keyboard location typing.
    - 1-2-and-3 down down down; repeat

Black Out

Lights up

- Keyboard Location
  - Raisin Racoon sits typing
    - one-two-three-TAP TAP; repeat
- Monotony Location
  - Lollipop sits on the pillow, legs spread wide, swinging the ball around in
time with the music.

Black Out

Lights up

First Multi Location Sequence
(all counts of 8)

- 1 = both in monotony location
- 2 = both in monotony location
- 3 = both in monotony location
- 4 = look at keyboard
- 5 = get up
- 6 = walk over to keyboard
- 7 = reroute to comfort
- 8 = comfort
- 9 = comfort
- 10 = slow burn to keyboard
Black Out

Lights Up
At The Keyboard
(all Counts of 8)
- 1 = typing in rhythm
- 2 = typing in rhythm
- 3 = reaction

All Music stops
(counts of 8 below)
- Furious Typing - 1-2-3-4-5-6
- Break - 7-8-2-2
- Furious typing - 3-4-5-
- Break - 6-7-8-3-2
- Furious typing - 3-4-5-6-7-8
- Break - 4-2-3-4-5-6-7-8
- Extra Long furious typing (8)
- Extra long furious typing (8)
- Extra long furious typing (8)
- Extra long furious typing (7)
- Send on 8

- Comfort ostrich (untimed/silent)
  - Raisin Racoon and Lollipop each hide in their comfort locations

Blackout
- SFX: “The Mailbox is full and currently not accepting any more messages. Goodbye”

Lights Up
(Felt Timing, No BPM)
EATING SECTION
- Raisin Racoon and Lollipop stand on a diagonal Center Stage, Raisin Racoon eats from a box of raisins, Lollipop Sucks on a lollipop.
  - They each take licks/bites of their food, take a deep breath, then switch spots
  - They each take licks/bites of their food, take a deep breath, then switch spots
  - They each take licks/bites of their food, take a deep breath in

Blackout
• SFX: “The Mailbox is full and currently not accepting any more messages. Goodbye”

Lights Up
(3/4 at 196 BPM)
ATTEMPTED JOY
(counts of 6)
• Raisin Raccoon Dancing with Blanket/Lollipop Dancing With Plant
• Raisin Raccoon Dancing with Blanket/Lollipop Dancing With Plant
• Raisin Raccoon Dancing with Blanket/Lollipop Dancing With Plant
• Both stop, Both Look

(3/4 at 225 BPM)
(counts of Six)
• Raisin Raccoon Dancing with Blanket/Lollipop Dancing With Plant
• Raisin Raccoon Dancing with Blanket/Lollipop Dancing With Plant
• Raisin Raccoon Dancing with Blanket/Lollipop Dancing With Plant
• Both stop, Both Look

(3/4 at 250 BPM)
(Counts of 6)
• Raisin Raccoon Dancing with Blanket/Lollipop Dancing With Plant
• Raisin Raccoon Dancing with Blanket/Lollipop Dancing With Plant
• Raisin Raccoon Dancing with Blanket/Lollipop Dancing With Plant
• Lollipop TAPS once in time
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon TAPS once in time

• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Lollipop TAPS Multiple Times

(counts of 6, Double Time)
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon TAPS multiple in time
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Lollipop TAPS multiple in time

• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue dancing, Lollipop drifts towards keyboard
• Raisin Raccoon TAPS multiple in time

(counts of 6, Triple Time)
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop Put down plant and Blanket and sit at computer.
• Lollipop Types Frantically
• Raisin Raccoon Types Frantically
• Lollipop Types Frantically
• Raisin Raccoon Types Frantically

(counts of 6, quadruple Time)
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop both type frantically
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop both type frantically
• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop both type frantically

• Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop Hit keyboard and scream furiously into the air with all their might.

The Portal Opens
Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop turn to see it. Get up from their desks and approach it. They stand before it, in all its glory.

The portal swallows them up whole.

II. THE METAVERSE

Lollipop and Raisin Raccoon stand at the Signpost of the Metaverse. It points in two directions: “The Mountaintop” one way and “The Oasis” The other. Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop size up the size post. Then each other. After a moment they leave in opposite directions.
Raisin Raccoon leaves towards the Oasis and Lollipop towards the Mountaintop.

As Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop continue on their journey through the metaverse, it shape-shifts to suit the locations in which they are in; a weird digital hybrid almost the same as our own and yet… not quite.

SAGE of The Mushroom Forest

Lollipop enters the Mushroom forest. Sage is there. She communes with nature. She sees Lollipop.

Sage: Hi Starseed! How are you feeling this glorious day? Oh wait, don’t be afraid! I’m Sage, guardian of this beautiful mushroom forest. Are you okay? I know the forest can be a scary place. Oh, my goodness, I know what’s happening here. Have you lost your voice? I thought so. Don’t worry, I can help you. May I give you a reading? I’m an intuitive and it’s so clear that you need some answers from Spirit. Let’s cleanse your energy first. There. Now, let’s pull some cards for you, yes? Oh, we have the death card: we are going to see the end of a cycle for you. You’ll be undergoing a metamorphosis. This is a good thing, I promise. Just remember to stand in your truth during this change. It definitely looks like this change is coming at the right time. I have the ace of wands in reverse. Have things been feeling kinda stale lately? Maybe you’re having trouble generating energy? OK, well, eight of cups is telling me you’re leaving that behind! I see the excitement and inspiration you seek on the horizon, but just make sure you don’t forget who you are during your endeavors. Ace of swords is saying you’re about to have a breakthrough. This can be extremely cathartic, but also very exhausting, so protect your energy. Spirit is telling me that a high place will be significant. I know this landscape very well and I know a place that I think can help you. The Mountaintop inspires voices of all kinds. I am confident if you go there, your voice will present itself again. To get there, you go through the hills and past the bog. From there, you take the high road to the base of the mountain. Then all you have to do is climb up. I am so happy the universe brought us here! It’s always a blessing when an open hearted person comes to the mushroom forest. You should come back when I do my foraging practice! I make a fabulous mushroom tea! Be careful out there Starseed!

Lollipop leaves Sage behind, Tarot Cards in hand,

The metaverse shifts.

KOMORROW on The Low Road

Raisin Raccoon enters. Komorro sits on bench waiting for the bus. Raisin Raccoon sits down next to him.
Komorrow: Ay. You know this bus been taking forever lately. I been waitin’ here for like an hour already damn. I just started this new job working at the gas station with my uncle just outside the Oasis and I cannot be late again! On the first day he said if I’m late one time, he’s gonna tell my momma. If I’m late two times, he’s gonna tell my momma and kick my ass. If I’m late three times he’s gonna tell my momma, kick my ass, and write me up to HR! If I’m late 4 times he’s gonna tell my momma, kick my ass, write me up to HR, and fire me. What kind of gas station got a HR?! Im a grown ass man and I gotta stand up on the bus cuz my ass already been kicked two times. I ain't never gonna touch my kids. They ain't ever gonna know what that's like. They ain't gonna know what waiting for the bus is like. Imma drive a Cougatti or something. Imma drive em to school and to work every day. Well. Maybe not nothing too fancy cuz some cop gon pull me over like you own dat nigga? Man, what he even mean by late?! I ain't never seen no clocks in there. Fuck time, bro.Might be faster to walk! But you gotta go all around there and then through the valley and I don’t go through the valley no more. Everybody askin’ me, who are you? What house you live at? Like shit. I’m just walkin! You be alright though.

Raisin Raccoon leaves in the direction she was headed. Komorro remains.

The Metaverse shifts.

BILL BROWN of the Hills

Bill Brown is laying on the ground, shotgun in hand, keeping a lookout in the distance. Lollipop cartwheels in, landing right behind Bill.

Bill Brown: Shhh... Quiet. I’m hunting talkies. You always have to keep an eye out for ‘em. They’re sneaky bastards. You’ve never been hunting before, huh? I can tell. You soft or something? You look soft. Bill Brown. Oh weak shake. My daddy always said not to trust anyone with a weak handshake. The hills are not for softies, that’s for sure. This out here is rough terrain. Now you got to be smart up here, and I don’t mean that Booksmart bullshit. That won’t get you anywhere out here. When all them conversationalists, or whatever the hell they’re called, start their attack on good and decent patriots like me, you gotta know a thing or two about survival. Hell, a buddy of mine’s brother in law’s cousin almost got his arm blown off by one of them talkies. He was just out reinforcing the steel on his panic shed, when some conversationalist terrorist ambushed him. If he hadn’t been smart and didn’t know the art of disarming, the bastard would be without an arm, maybe both. Here let me show you: when they come at you, you gotta hit them with the sneaky backstep. (Does it) come forward with a windmill (Does it) then disarm your opponent (Does it). Now you may not have too much trouble out here in the hills, because those coward talkies are too afraid to go toe
to toe with men like me. They didn’t show up because they were scared. You know why that is? It’s cause out here in the hills, we show no mercy. You know what to do if you come face to face with a talkie? All right let me show you. You Gotta make yourself as large as possible. So stand like this. Uh-huh, now slowly wave your arms so they know you mean business. Mhm, now if they still try to give you trouble, you just grab your crossbow and you go nuts. *(He enacts an apocalyptic gun ballet).* If you ever wanna piss off a talkie, you just say “I love Martin!” The talkies will know what that means and they hate it! Now a softy like you won’t last a minute if you’re out here being reckless. The conversationalists haven’t attacked the hills yet, but they can at any moment, so don’t be out here being dumb, you hear me? Now remember those moves I taught you!

*Lollipops shows him the moves and quickly leaves the scene and Bill Brown protecting his land behind her.*

**The Metaverse shifts.**

**BORED RABBIT OFF THE GRID**

*A video game headset is sitting on a plinth center stage. Raisin Raccoon enters cautiously. She approaches the headphones. She examines them in her hands. Then she takes a seat on the plinth and puts them on.*

**The moment she does Bored Rabbit Appears.**

**Bored Rabbit:** Oh heyyy there RR 345! Nice to uh “meet you”. The quiet type, eh? I like that. That must mean you’re a good listener. I’ve never really had a woman in my life who like listened, you know. Cuz you like you know like women don’t really listen but you really do! That’s super cool! Hehe uh so what brought you into the dating Sphere? Heh. I pop in here every once in a while but heh you know. I’d rather be working on my ecoin strategy and listening to Jurgen Pewtersen on Starcast. Im a little off the grid and it’s hard to feel connected sometimes ya know. So like where you from? you’re from outside the oasis right? Yeah me too. I wouldn’t ever want to go there though. It’s literally built for snowflakes. It’s all spas and restaurants and fuzzy blankets but like where’s the humanity? Where’s the struggle that makes you a real person? And the new high priest is an imbecile.. “Healthcare for all” yeah right. Some people need to learn to work for their injections. And really the oasis is just ruined now by all the people outside screaming about the water. Like if you couldn’t protect your water, then why do you deserve it? That’s just how the world works. So uh, what’s your favorite sandwich to make? I’m not good at cooking but I do make a good ham and cheese haha speaking of bread, what do those protesters even want? It’s unfortunate that we were unsuccessful in putting Cyberica back into the hands of its rightful owners. A Johnymous says there will be another opportunity, even greater than the one before. I’m prepared. One day I’ll
get to spit right in the face of The High Priest and rip off his lizard mask to find the true Creature underneath. Speaking of creatures, do you have any pets? I hope not a dog. Dogs are for weak-minded people who can’t be alone. Also I’m allergic. So do you want to know anything about me? I’m definitely and alpha type, just don’t have a pack yet, you know. It astounds me that these people don’t see what’s truly going on in this country. It’s in plain sight! Lizards have been running everything since the beginning of time. They make lizard people at their private hospitals and deploy them as politicians. Why have I never seen The high priests baby pictures? Because he was born as a 28 year old man and went straight from the hatchery to the legislature. All in front of America’s eyes. Frickin’ blind. Like MY GOD we’ve been fucked ever since those lizard freaks landed in -

_Raisin Raccoon cannot take anymore. She removes the headphones and Bored Rabbit no longer heard - continues on his rampage. She anxiously leaves as quickly as she can._

_The metaverse shifts_

_JAQ in the Bog of Despair_

_JAQ, a depressed teen, cloaked in black, lays prone in a swampy bog. Lollipop enters, moving forward, unaware of JAQ's presence. JAQ moans and stops Lollipop in her tracks._

_JAQ:_
Beware dear traveler: peace is gone
For Wretched souls have come to rule
they thrive on silence from the strong
So find your voice and beat the fool

_Lollipop tries to quietly sneak past her._

Aimless floating in the hopeless dark
This cowardly cur hides from the light
who once fought for a piece of the prestigious high
now willingly socks in the same follow

_Another wail stops Lollipop in her tracks._
Booted from the place where the worthy gather
I was forced into bleak and Lonesome exile
now I have surrendered to my Fate down here
confident in my unworthiness to live up there
How much time has passed
Since the booting of Jacqueline
she has lost her mind.

JAQ’s sadness intrigues Lollipop who proceeds to approach. When she gets close enough JAQ grabs Lollipops arm and tries to pull her down into the bog. Lollipop tries to escape.

What once was sunny, now rotten darkness
a fragile soul crushed with cruelty
hopelessly kicking in a sea of despair
deservedly deteriorating at the bottom of the bog.

Lollipop eventually breaks free and leaves JAQ there to whine and weep on her own.

The Metaverse shifts.

LOTUS WILSON in the Studio by The Bog

Lotus Wilson is preparing for her class. Raisin Raccoon enters, noticeably frazzled from her encounter with Bored Rabbit. She almost bumps into Lotus Wilson. She turns to leave but Lotus Wilson stops her, turns her around and begins to speak. While she talks she forces Raisin Raccoon (without consent) into her shamanistic Yoga class.

Lotus Wilson: Ah! Thank you for coming! A few minutes late but that’s okay! Time is fluid. Unfortunately the fluidity of your time has affected the fluidity of mine so we’ll have to skip the breathing and go straight into downward dog okay and Hmmmm im noticing a great sense of depletion within you are empty. You are nothing. You need to be re-energized and healed. You’re so lucky you have me. Press through, chest to the floor and chest up upward dog, as if you’re blooming like a flower! You know this pose is what really opened up my divine feminine energy, let’s cycle through again. This time really dive into it and scrape your female pelvis right across the floor and lean back until you can feel a stinging at the top of your spine! That’s healing! Ah yes! Lets cycle through again and as you pull in the energy from Mother Earth, I’d like to read you a passage from my spirit journal, because the power of words may help to heal you: Hi again. I know it’s been a while, but this Lotus shriveled there for a bit. I’m back on my bloom shit though! Diary, I’ve really gotten a grasp on this energy thing. I’ve been able to take hold of my most powerful chakras - my root sacral, and wow the healing and transcendence I’ve been able to experience through my womanly vagina! I truly believe I can heal the ‘verse of all its sickness if I keep harnessing this gorgeous transference of energy. I want the leaders of the verse to give back the water calmly and apologize sincerely. I
want the protesters to find peace in their hearts to stay on the sidewalks. I hope the high priest has a change of heart and learns to lead this nation with love instead of greed and donates all his salary to the poor starving children in Dafrica. I want to flood the world with my feminine energy. The clit wields this POWER, dear diary! Mix that with a bit of meditation, a mantra, a mudra, a mandala, Santeria, hoodoo, the holy rites of the earl of the sandwich of the monte Christo, and some 432hz binaural beats and BOOM. I can shoot pure energy out of my vagina. I was hoping I’d discover something like this during all this time alone, but I have to admit. I fell off of my energy work there about 3 days into the isolation, when I realized it was really real. I overdid it on my microdosing and ended up just tripping for about 2 weeks straight, and that brought up some really scary thoughts. Don’t worry, diary. I channeled them all, and have shot them right out through my womb canal. Even though I’ve just discovered this, I will begin teaching this! In my class we will do 1000 downward dogs until our womb is fully exposed and released to the flow of the universe!

_Lotus Wilson leaves. Raisin Raco on is stuck forever doing Sun Salutations, stuck, unable to leave and absolutely exhausted._

**The Metaverse shifts**

**JENNIFER out on the High Road**

_Jennifer is on stage. She is glued to her phone. Lollipop comes stumbling in having narrowly escaped the bog. Jennifer barely looks up from her phone as she speaks._

_Jennifer: What? My engagement is down! What the hell is happening? Ugh, that stupid protest is out anyone can talk about. Those conversationalists are just crybabies if you ask me. I mean, if the pollution coming from the mountaintop is so bad, why aren’t they the ones cleaning it? Like if you have such a problem with it, why would you waste time protesting? Like get to work. Seriously, if you want something in life, you gotta work for it. Look at me (snaps selfie) when my father bought me my salon, I worked my butt off to make it the best. Oh yeah, I’m Jennifer. Follow me at LiveLaughLoveJen on all socials. I own “Luxury Hair Salon” and I am a micro influencer. Here, take this. People literally don’t understand the meaning of hard work._ *(She poses for Lollipop to take the picture)*__  

_they just want handouts, and that’s not how it works. *(She poses for Lollipop to take the picture)*and it’s always the same kind of people too *(She poses for Lollipop to take the picture)*. But I do not allow that trash in my salon or on my feet. *(she takes the phone back and is once again glued)* Speaking of which, what did you say your name is? You’re not from around here, are you? I can tell. Well you need a special permit to be on the highroad. Where is yours? Well you can’t be here *(Starts recording)* I kindly asked this thing for their high road permit and now they’re attacking me! I had to start*
recording because I literally fear for my safety. What is happening to the highroad? It literally is not safe for us nice hard-working people anymore. You do not belong here -

Jennifer, still recording, chases Lollipop off the highroad.

The Metaverse shifts

AUNT-T in The Cave

Raisin Raccoon is still where we last saw her. She is laid out on the ground, exhausted from never-ending Sun Salutations. In the distance we hear a dinner bell ringing. Suddenly Auntie appears at the mouth of the cave, right next to where Raisin Raccoon is sitting.

AUNT-T: Dinner!! (she sees Raisin Raccoon). Oh! How do you do! Come on now (she invites her in) Let's get you a plate. No one goes hungry around here. You must be new. And you look right downtrodden. Nice to meet you, I'm aunt T. I ring the bell at the edge of this cave so it echoes through and all can hear. So you don't speak when you enters somebody home? Had all kinds of people through. Some of them need home training just like you, but that's alright. That doggone rabbit kid be coming through here just about every week. Looks like its the only time he eats something nutritious. He be talking all kinds of stuff though. I don't pay him no mind. Just let him eat. Cuz I bet if I don't let him eat he'll call and have the oasis shut me down! They can try. I ain't afraid no damn popo. It must be your first time out in these woods! Well. Be careful. Don't take any wooden nickels and if they offer you a NFT of a real pretty wooden nickel, don't take that either. Don't go worryin' about them folks anyhow, you know them folks that look like the palm of ya hand. They just all talk nowadays. Unless they start crying, then get a boat cuz yo ass gone be out to sea. You know they ain't never gonna change. You know they always been out here, acting scary, gettin' red in the face over just walkin' past you on the sidewalk. Its cuz they confused, baby. Can't understand no right from wrong, and got a different set of rules when they been wrong. Can't shut the fuck up but wanna demand you teach them everything, how is that even gon work!? Wanna look like you but not be you. Plus they already know what the fuck's going on up in that Oasis but they positioned real nice and they wouldn't dream of givin' that up. Cuz why? If it ain't broke to them, why would they fix it?!! look at white folks like this (She looks over her glasses) until they prove they got a lil stability in they head. Shoooo, half the white people i know I BET would have me hunched over in the fields if they ever got the chance - haha - cuz you know Aunt T can't stand up straight no mo. Just imagine. Even my friend Bill up on over the hill , if we were suddenly all transported back to 1832 or whatever, they'd be lookin' at me from the porch shruuggin' like - I'm sorry that's the way it is! Hah! Oh was that harsh? Wadn't nothin' harsher than slavery. You know, God just had to make some balance in the world. We was doin' good in Dafrica. Real good.
Inventing math and all that shit. Eating right out the fertile soil, getting strong and tall like our ancestors. Chillin’ with our titties out. Now that’s freedom. I wanna go back to that. That’s why I took them babies outta that white school. They gonna learn from me and the earth. *(a timer goes off)* Ok now, my next seating is in 20 minutes haha. You better be on your way. But make sure you got some leftovers. Some of this, some of this, Ooh here, this too - Wait no that’s a special treat for me. Now this. Okay. *(Calling out)* Bring me back my tupperware now!

*Aunt-T and the cave drift off the way they came, as Raisin Raccoon, now rejuvenated, starts the journey back up.*

**The Metaverse shifts**

**STEVE WASHINGTON at the base of the Mountain**

*Steve Washington sits in a makeshift podcasting studio. He starts to speak before Lollipop enters. When he sees her, he brings her into the booth with him as a special guest.*

*Steve Washington:* Aye Welcome back to the old cats podcast everyone. I am your host, Steve Washington and it looks like we have a special guest at the bottom of the mountain today. How are you doing man? Today I wanted to talk about gratitude. Let me tell you – the best thing I ever did was incorporating thanks to my daily routine. I really am blessed man, I really am. When I took a chance and left my corporate life behind, I was scared to death. Look, I have a family to take care of. I was not about to get out there and fail. But my wife, my ride or die, she held me down. She told me “look Steve, you just do what you Gotta do because it’s your time now.” And she was right. I was stuck but I am grateful for that woman because she helped me see that my dreams matter. And now look. I get to live my dreams and pass along what I know to all of you. To all my high value brothers out there, don’t get lost in the grind. Don’t dream your life away. Start today. Make those little changes that will eventually get you where you want to be. I am living proof. But look, I am not perfect ya’ll. I wish I had taken my shots sooner. I am an old cat and I am proud of my accomplishments, but let’s be real for a second: I didn’t start my self-actualization journey until later in life. Now, that suits me just fine because I found my calling, but you Youngbloods out there need to be better. For my special guest in the studio today, I see that you’re capable of greatness. I see it. But you have to realize your own greatness. It takes someone strong to make it to the top of the mountain. It really does. I wanted to do it myself, but I found what fulfills me. I found what I was put on this earth to do. But I can see that you’re still figuring all that out. Lemme tell you, if you make that climb, you’ll find what you’re looking for. My time has passed, but you can do it. The mountaintop is the place for greatness and I wanna see you doing your thing and basking in the glory up there one day man. And when you
do, imma need you to give your boy a shout out to all your new important friends! We are trying to secure an Old Catz TV show ya'll! But hey, that's all we have time for today, everyone. *(He shooos away Lollipop. She rises and tries to leave the way she came, she can't.)* Thank you so much for listening ya'll. Make sure you like and subscribe to Old Catz Podcast. *(She returns to him and he more aggressively shoos her away, she sticks her hand out to shake and he kicks her out of the studio)* If you subscribe to the Old Catz Pay-Me-On, you can get exclusive content like my 5 step guide to becoming a king. I will link that for you all down below. Thank ya'll so much again for listening, have a blessed one.

Lollipop, confused, exits in a completely new direction while Steve finishes out his podcast and dances to his outro music.

**The Metaverse Shifts**

**ERIKA from the Valley**

Erika is in a spotlight, warming up her voice and body. Raisin Raccoon enters and sees her. She is intrigued. Erika spots her and calls her over as quick as she can.

**Erika:** Hey Girl! Can you sing? I need backup vocals for my new music video! Ooohh… You don’t have your voice yet. That’s okay honey. Can you dance: here’s the combo: *(she starts a full dance choreo while she talks through her song. She does not give Raisin Raccoon time to object or really learn the number)*

*All the Black Queens are getting vaccines*
*Better run, catch a cab, cuz we gettin’ both jabs.*
*Heyyyyy Heyyyyy and another one.*

And this is the chorus.

*Meet me at the place where the water flows*
*Touch me on my face one time before you go*

It's about the health crisis. They say your feet swell up and then you have to go back to isolation cuz you can't walk. Anyways here we go

*Just follow our lead and you might succeed.*
*But keep that mask over ya gab unless you wanna catch a stab.*
*Heyyyyy*

*(she moves swiftly to her center stage, practically trampling Raisin Raccoon. She sings in the spotlight with everything she’s got).*
Find a black woman, and "say Thank You God,
For your time, your beauty, and your knowledge so broad.
Here's some cash and a diamond or two or three,
Cuz if we ain't out here together we still ain't free

I came up with some of that at the rally for liberation of Oasis workers. They always hand me the megaphone cuz I be rhymin' on the fly sometimes And then we end back to back.

Yesss! I hope you think this is a hit cuz its about to drop all over the valley next week! I want all the girlies and the baddies to be bumping my music and then in a few weeks the video comes out! And I found somebody to do a feature! so that'll be a whole mother round of fun! If only the other dancer would get here! I swear she's always late. Has no respect for my time. And she had the nerve to say I didn't have the right look for pop!! This is pop. This is pop right? Pop! Ugh. As soon as she said hip hop I shoulda been done. She's one of those oasis types, literally born there cuz her parents couldn't find anywhere else interesting to live hah. You know, I got into the oasis on pure talent. Just by singing the virtual anthem! Stuffy in there though. I was born in New Oasis that as we all know is now annexed but it still didn't count when I tried to get in. I still had to be great. You know finding your voice always starts with breathing. That's how I found mine. I breathed til I could hum. Then I hummed until I could sing! Skipped right over talking though obviously you see I'm real good at that right now! Oh my gosh, I'm gonna be late! I've gotta get up to the oasis for my recording session (Raisin Raccoon perks up at mention of the oasis). Oh you're going there too? We can go together. And we can rehearse on our way.

Erika leads Raisin Raccoon off the stage, working through the choreo she had originally explained.

The Metaverse shifts

THOM SHARPE at the gate to the Mountaintop

Lollipop enters, the journey is almost complete. She comes to a new location, though it seems more indiscriminate than the rest. Thom Sharpe sits at a desk with a large feather pen and book. He barely looks up from his work when he talks to her.

Thom Sharpe: Who are you? No name, huh? Well what brings you to the top of the mountain? Do you know someone here? Well, uninvited outsiders are frowned upon up here. I was placed in this position to hold up the ideals of the mountaintop and people like you simply do not fit. People like you don't respect the sanctity of the mountaintop. People like you can't begin to understand the intelligence it takes to exist up here. People like you don't belong here. Oh, what? Is that unfair, snowflake? Is it fair that people should be crucified for using language that certain uncouth musicians in their records? What about free speech? Hm? See, people on the outside are hypocrites. They cry for equality, but that is not what they want. What they want is a plushy free for
all filled with orgies, drugs, and men wallowing into women's restrooms. It's sick, and I refuse to keep my mouth shut about it. They're the kind of people to cry over something silly, like saying Merry Dickmas because it's not inclusive enough. But they'll violently riot against historic statues like that of Robert Igli. It's simply absurd. They want to take over and call the shots, but they forget who gave them the freedom to have all these opinions. Men like me made it possible for those sheep to have a voice. And how are we repaid? With slander and threats. But see, the decency of the mountaintop relies on its fairness. Up here, we have true equality. We are all on the same page about how to make this land great. What we have here is utopia, so we must protect that. Because I am a man of integrity, here is this (He produces the same blue blanket that was Raisin Raccoon's item of comfort in Act 1). We usually give these to our residents after they make their trip up here, but after some pointless handbook changes, we have to give these to anyone who walks up. So here, your mountaintop token. Do you feel included now?

He giggles, snifflas, and goes back to his work. Lollipop is just left standing there, holding this blanket. Not able to leave and not sure if she can stay. It seems for the first time she is truly lost.

The Metaverse shifts.

TRACEIGH at the Gates of the Oasis

Raisin Raccoon arrives at the gates of the oasis. No one is there. Suddenly Traceigh is in front of her, welcome music plays and Traceigh speaks; Raisin Raccoon is not sure if this is a human or a robot or if this is just a welcome video.

Traceigh: Hello and Welcome to the Oasis! I am Traceigh and I will be providing you with some introductory information on this fine Tuesday afternoon. The oasis is the place where all searching souls come to rest, relax, and rejuvenate! Well, not all! We maintain a standard of peace here. I'm sure you understand and may even come to appreciate! Our selection of condo styles is very diverse! We even have a tropical themed neighborhood for all you exotic types! Our amenities include crystal clear pools, 12 different fusion fitness classes, and biweekly community potlucks! Here are a few community guidelines:

1. Oasis membership is contingent on good neighbor-ism, excellent social standing, and regular charitable contributions.
2. When bringing food to the potlucks please ensure the meals are completely organic, pepper-free, and adhere to the diet of the month, which is posted on every neighborhood bulletin.
3. The Oasis Agricultural office can provide you a list of approved plants for in and around your condo. Growing of food is strictly prohibited as it attracts rats and freeloaders. Any deviation from the landscape protocol will result in immediate disposal.
4. Large hairstyles are not permitted at any Oasis Personal Development Lectures. It’s purely a visibility issue!
5. Due to recent unforeseen conflicts, anyone who is associated with any known protesters will be swiftly ejected from the Oasis, even if there is no evidence.
6. Oasis peace officers reserve the right to make any assessments and judgements as is necessary under Oasis law.

Now that you’ve heard the guidelines, please say your name to accept. *(Raisin Raccoon cannot speak).* I’m sorry. We did not register that. Please say your name to accept *(Raisin Raccoon cannot speak).* I’m sorry. We did not register that. Please accept our sincerest apologies along with this complimentary gift *(the plant that was Lollipop’s item of comfort in Act 1 appears).* The Oasis Agricultural Commission encourages all Oasis hopefuls to plant one of our trees and maybe soon you’ll find an Oasis near you! Better luck next life.

*Raisin Raccoon is just left standing there, holding this plant. Not able to leave and not sure if she can stay. It seems for the first time she is truly lost.*

Blackout

**III. TUESDAY**

*Lights up.*

*Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop are standing in the same space. It is no longer the metaverse of Act 2 but also not the same space as act one. They stand side by side. Lollipop holds the blanket and Raisin Raccoon holds the plant. They are both wearing ‘smiley face’ masks. They are bewildered.*

*It is silent.*

*They look at the object in their hands*
*They look diagonally outwards away from each other.*
*They look back to the object in their hands.*
*They shift they way they are holding the object.*
*They return it to how it was.*
*They look diagonally outward away from each other.*
*They look at each other.*
*They look at the object the other is holding*
*They look at each other with attitude.*
*They look to the object*
*They look diagonally up and away from each other.*
*They look at each other.*
*They swap places (but not objects)*
- They look at the object.
- They each walk a small circle in space with the object.
- They look at the object in their hands.
- Rainbow Raccoon dances with the plant / Lollipop does calisthenics with the blanket. It is joyless
- They stop.
- They look at the item in their hands
- They put it down in front of them.
- They look at each other.
- They switch places (object stays)
- They pick up their original object in their new spot
- They look at each other.
- They swap spaces again
- Raisin Raccoon dances with the blanket, Lollipop does calisthenics with the plant. It is still joyless.
- They stop.
- They hold their objects.
- They look up at the sky
- They look at each other.
- Raisin Raccoon steps towards Lollipop to offer her the blanket.
- Lollipop recoils at the thought of someone invading her space.
- Raisin Raccoon steps back to her spot.
- Beat
- Lollipop holds out the plant for Raisin Raccoon.
- Raisin Raccoon shakes her head no
- They both stand facing forward looking at their object.
- Beat
- They both turn and approach each other.
- They stand face to face with their objects. Unable to give it away or keep it.
- They boil over with frustration.
- They put their objects down in between them
- They step away from each other, they retreat into familiar anxiety.
- They stay there facing away deepening into anxiety.

_A Phone Rings. They hear it. They turn. They see it. They walk to the phone, and in the first act of communal behavior they carry the phone between them to a spot on stage. It continues to ring. They pick it up and hold the receiver between their ears. They sit down next to each other as they listen._

_The sounds of a lively and crowded party can be heard. On the phone is Ally and Kendra, the two actors who played the main roles. They are calling from another time and dimension. They speak through the phone to Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop._
• Recorded dialogue plays. It is both uplifting, full of love, and some difficult truths.

The voices on the phone leave abruptly, hanging up the phone on their end. The stage is once again silent.

Raisin Raccoon and Lollipop put down the phone, but leave it off the receiver. They carefully take their masks off.

RAISIN RACCOON: Are you ok?

LOLLIPOP: No. Are you?

RAISIN RACCOON: not at all.

They reach out and hold hands. A moment of solidarity for hard times. Then after a moment, they let go. They each put their masks on and leave the space.

THE END.
Vita

Alexandria Miles is from Terre Haute, Indiana. She got her B.S from Indiana State University where she majored in Theatre with a minor in Dance. She began her graduate studies at the University of New Orleans in 2019 where she studied Theatre Performance with a concentration in Acting. While at UNO, she performed in the University’s productions of *Fool for Love, Single Black Female*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. 