Voices in my Head: An Improvisers Approach to Becky Mode’s Fully Committed

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Voices in my Head: An Improvisers Approach to Becky Mode’s *Fully Committed*

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

by

Drew Stroud

B.A. Illinois College, 2016

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Abstract
The following thesis will focus on improvisational theatre and its importance in my overall process in the creation of Becky Mode’s *Fully Committed*. I will explain my previous knowledge and theories I brought to the University of New Orleans and run in tandem with the techniques and discoveries I learned during the process of my Master of Fine Arts, both in the classroom and on the stage. *Fully Committed* was performed in the Robert E. Nims Studio Theatre September 23rd, 24th, 25th, 28th, 29th, 30th, and October 1st, 2023.

Keywords: improv, theatre, Meisner, Becky Mode, Fully Committed
Introduction

In the Spring of 2018, I decided to apply to graduate schools. I completed applications yearly for the same handful of schools but never clicked submit. The timing was wrong, or I just decided it was not what I wanted. Whatever it might have been, I created an excuse not to go through, not to have to deal with the potential of rejection, and not have to deal with the idea of my world completely shifting out from under me. I was content with not rocking the boat.

While I succeeded in acting, I had found a new affinity for teaching and leadership that I did not fully appreciate before. I wanted to help bring my knowledge of theatre, particularly that of improvisational theatre, to future generations of actors to help build more truthful and grounded actors. But I also realized a goal like that could only go so far without obtaining some sort of terminal degree in theatre. Whereas graduate school had historically seemed like an under-motivated choice, during the Fall of 2019, graduate school became a necessity for me to progress forward in my career.

In truth – graduate school was always going to be a means to an end for me; I was expecting to go to graduate school and maybe learn a thing or two, but in the end, the process did not matter: what mattered to me, before coming to the University of New Orleans, was for me to get three letters to go behind my name that would designate me with the qualifications to teach in academia. I soon learned that graduate school wouldn’t be just checking boxes, but instead, it would take me on a journey of self-discovery that would help me hone my previously developed skills while pairing them with the new challenges and opportunities that graduate school had to offer.

Whereas my work as an actor has always been influenced by my understanding and appreciation of improvisational theatre, in this thesis I will lay out the direct impact it has had on
my growth while also focusing on how it was paired with the training I received at the University of New Orleans. I will support this by breaking down my process as an actor, examining data collected from a workshop I led, and comparing my process with the real-world application of Theatre UNO's production of *Fully Committed*. By the end of this paper, the reader will have a further appreciation of the journey and observations I made on my quest for self-discovery.
**The Groundwork**

*Improvisational Theatre*

The root of my acting training is built on the foundation of a strong background in improvisational theatre. My introduction to it officially began in high school with some after-school classes, but I developed a deeper understanding of the craft and expanded my knowledge at Illinois College under the direction of Nancy Taylor Porter. Her extensive training with the iO (formerly ImprovOlympics) in Chicago made her a valuable resource in my growth. Upon graduation, my wife and I started the improvisational theatre group Capital City Improv in Springfield, Illinois, where we applied our undergraduate knowledge to actual practice. My love for improvisational theatre grew as I developed my skills as an actor, continually drawing from my improv experience to enhance my acting skills. As I learned one technique from acting, I found the similarities it had with improv and vice versa. In this section, I will cover the theoretical approach of improvisational theatre.

Many theorists will tell you there are different tenets to improv, and a good improviser could find a justification in each one as accepting reality is something improvisers are extremely versed in. To establish some common ground, I will use Patricia Ryan Madson’s book *Improv Wisdom*. While her theory focuses primarily on how we can apply improvisational theory to our every day, she does an excellent job of explaining the basic guidelines to the improviser.

Madson starts with the concept any young improviser always hears: “say yes.” As she puts it: “say yes to everything. Accept all offers. Go along with the plans. Support someone else’s dream.” (Madson 27) Improv is the action of creating something out of nothing in the moment, for an audience who only knows the information you’ve just given them. The idea of “yes” is to encourages improvisers to focus on accepting what information is given by their scene partner. This yes, often paired with an and, means that the given idea is accepted, and more
information is added for further scene progression. As Madson explains: “Agreement begins the process; what comes next is to add something or develop the offer in a positive direction. Avoiding this next step is a form of blocking.” (Madson 30)

Another key point, as Madson describes, is to listen to one another. “Life is attention, and what we are attending to determines to a great extent how we experience the world.” (Madson 67) She describes that a strong improviser is also extremely in tune with what is happening around them. How does one accept the reality if one does not see the reality? A good improviser always listens to their partner because they need to know every detail that is shared. Improvisers cannot be internal thinking (stuck in their head) because there is so much more going on around them, requiring their focus to be completely external. Madson goes on to describe a student who woke up and took in the world around him; she explains: “…when he started looking outside himself, his experience blossomed. For those of us caught in a spiral of self-absorption and rumination, the redirection of our attention outward can have a profound effect. Where we are looking makes a difference.” (Madson 69) Improvisers need to understand the whole puzzle of the situation, not just what they personally bring to the table. This means genuinely listening and watching the world being created.

Improvisers love mistakes. Mistakes are how people learn, build, and grow. They are also essentially non-existent in the moment, as a mistake is simply a step of the process. As Madson states: "Making mistakes is how we function. We do not consider them as something to be avoided; they are part of our operating system." (Madson 103) This does not mean improvisers go around looking for mistakes; rather, they accept that mistakes are just a part of the creation. Once the “mistake” has been made, there is no turning back, so the only choice is to move forward. Additionally, it allows us to explore a different understanding of how some function
works. But most importantly, by destigmatizing the mistakes, improvisers are allowed to take the bold risks that are necessary to strike gold. “A constructive response to a mistake is to notice it, acknowledge it, and if possible, use it.” (Madson 104)

In founding Capital City Improv, a significant tenant was focused on bringing a new medium of theatre that was lacking in Springfield. Because of this lack, education was a key point in developing the troupe. This meant we knew educating would be the backbone in our development. At the end of every show, we would sit as a group and discuss what happened: what we enjoyed and opportunities for improvement that we noticed. Once that period was done, we accepted that the past was in the past and that we could no longer change what occurred; we did not allow our young improvisers to let their past failures measure their future successes. Madson’s view on mistakes: When mistakes happen, adjust and move forward, is my favorite tenet of improv.

One person does not and improv troupe make. As discussed with paying attention, improvisers need to be incredibly in-tune with those around them. The selfless improviser knows that they are second fiddle to their partners. “Consummate improvisers are marked by their generosity, courtesy, and ability to watch out for the needs of their teammates.” (Madson 123) If an improviser is constantly focused on their scene partner, they are focused on the world around them. Adding information that will make their scene partner look better, in turn, makes the entire scene great. However, when a selfish improviser only takes in praise from their partner and does not support them, then the scene will be a braggadocio-self-centered production, and that person might as well do stand-up comedy. Improvisers shape their characters and worlds together by working together, naturally advancing the scene. Madson states further, “you cannot improvise successfully without applying the rule of consideration.” (Madson 132). Support cannot be
superficial. Improvisers must truly believe in their partners and their support must be genuine. This is a fundamental difference between improv and some acting theories. Improvisers care more about the environment and building the world around them than searching internally for motivation for their character alone.

The last important tent of improv: enjoy the ride. The creation of something out of nothingness is remarkable. An improvised performance means creating an entire story, beginning to end, from the suggestion of one word – making something out of nothing. Improvers get to be playwrights, actors, directors, set designers, and stage managers, all at once within one performance. Isn't that remarkable? Improv is meant to be fun; that is why it is often associated with comedy. "Find wonder, remembering how to play, inhabiting a classroom where there are no wrong answers —these are things we all yearn for. If we lose touch with our faculty for play, we do so at our peril.” (Madson 139). Over the course of my improv training in conjunction with my acting training, I have learned to enjoy the ride, driving my advocation and love for improvisational theatre.

In review: Improvisers accept the reality that they are given. They live in the moment and pay attention to everything happening around them. They take big risks and know that any mistake made is just an opportunity to learn and build. They have the utmost respect in their scene partners and understand that by supporting others they are supported. Lastly, they enjoy the ride. While improv is often associated with comedy, improvisers take their craft seriously in order to have fun and make the best outcomes possible. Doesn’t that sound like the makings of a solid actor? If only there was a theory or an approach that shared this mindset...
Meisner

In my first year at Illinois College, I was involved in a production of *Almost, Maine*. The show is comprised of cute minuets of various couples in the small town of Almost in the state of Maine. It follows a slew of characters who fall in-and-out of love over the course of twelve different scenes. In the original casting, four actors play all the characters, resulting in many different changes and requiring strong choices. In our production, the director squeezed out as many roles as she could in order to make it more enriching in the academic setting. [In fact, it is how my wife and I fell in love. Over the course of our scene together, she got to hit me with an ironing board constantly, and I had to act like I did not feel it.]

At our very first rehearsal, the director sat us all down and explained her vision for the show: every actor would have one scene that we would use the Meisner Technique to explore. Now keep in mind, I was kid from a high school in the middle of a cornfield. I barely knew what acting was, let alone being told about some weird technique all about repetition. I had no idea what to expect; I just knew I would be talking about the color of my stage partner's hair a lot.

Sanford Meisner developed the Meisner Technique because he believed the method acting technique needed to be updated. He wrote: "actors are not guinea pigs to be manipulated, dissected, let alone in a purely negative way. Our approach was not organic, that is to say, not healthy.” (Article https://www.themeisnercenter.com/history.html) He believed the actor needed to find how to live truthfully in the imaginary circumstances. His technique is “designed to get you out of your head and into your gut. For that to happen, you must learn to put your focus and attention on the most important thing: the other actor.” (Sanford)

Sanford Meisner’s book *Sanford Meisner On Acting*, offers a full glimpse at the technique, giving the reader a true understanding and appreciation of the methodology. Early on, he explains the repetition exercise, which he prefaces by saying: "How many people in this class
can hear very well? … Can you repeat what you hear absolutely accurately? I’m talking simply. I don’t mean the Declaration of Independence.” (Sanford 20)

His method, with the idea of focusing on your partner, is built on just observing the world as it is. Put into practice, that means you sit across from your partner and study them. You could notice that they have blonde hair, so you would say: "You have blonde hair," to which they would respond, "I have blonde hair." This goes on, back and forth, just focusing on the observation. As the technique develops, and changes are noticed, they are stated. The overall result Meisner is going for with the exercise is that actors are not worried about what they are saying or doing, but rather paying attention to what their partner is doing and saying. “There is a time when the verbal contact between you changes, and it is based on instinct.” (Meisner 27). He goes on later: “It is based on the fact that all good acting comes from the heart, as it were, and that there’s no mentality in it.” (Meisner 37) Actors (and humans) love to overthink. Meisner’s technique takes the thinking out of it and requires the actor to just “do”. To be in the moment, to be present, and to be aware of the world as it currently is.

This technique was applied to my scene in Almost, Maine. During the time, I felt a connection to the material, but I am not sure it stuck with me. Luckily, in my junior year, in my Acting II class, we focused strictly on the Meisner technique. In this class, we took everything that Meisner’s book discussed and applied it to our scene work. Again, I learned this acting methodology as I became more comfortable with improvisational theatre. In improv, we focused on truthfulness and being in the reality, and as Meisner said: “the truth of ourselves is the root of our acting.” (Meisner 45)

One of Meisner’s strongest beliefs, that counters his opinion on method, is the idea that the imagination is just as strong, if not stronger than our own past experiences (Meisner 79).
Emotional trauma associated with our past experiences is one negative, but all past experiences are also moving targets. As humans grow and change, so do their opinion of past experiences. For example, as a child I was kicked off the baseball team before tryouts concluded. At that moment, it was the utter destruction of my life. As more and more time went on, I found less and less connection to that destruction and now find more humor in it. Who knows what my opinions of that will be twenty years from now?

The most important thing I take away from Meisner is his belief in leaning on improv and its importance in the development of an actor. “At the early stage of our work, you must rely on your instinctive reaction to the playwright’s text.” (Meisner 97) Meisner does not want actors to come fully prepared with their lines, he wants them to come fully prepared with intentions. Then use those intentions to get to the root of the dialogue. “The text is like a canoe…and the river on which it sits in the emotion. The text floats on the river. If the water of the river is turbulent, the woods will come out like a canoe on a rough river…The text takes on the character of your emotion.” (Meisner 117) Actors should, of course, be aware of the playwright’s text; the character’s lines and their importance, but they need to be more aware of the existence of emotion in those lines.

The interesting thing about improv and Meisner, even as similar as they are, is that I did not really develop a full appreciation of them until I came to the University of New Orleans. Before, I had two theoretical concepts that were siloed, but made me the actor I was. But, by being able to explore both concepts in an academic setting, I’ve found a way to bridge the gap, and piece the two together, finding their true importance to my development as an actor. The intriguing inquiry, however, is that both theories are rooted in the actor focusing solely on their stage partner. How do these theories play a part in an actor engaged in a one person show?
Classroom Development

*The voice...*

If you had told me when I was younger that I would be standing in the middle of a New Orleans apartment, during a global pandemic, making random noises and manipulating my voice to sound cartoonish: all in the name of academia – I might have looked at you like you were crazy. Nevertheless, in the Fall of 2020, after packing my life up and moving halfway across the country, that is precisely where I found myself. FTA 5301: Vocal Stylizations is one of the most impactful classes that I have taken while at UNO. In coordination with this class, we had a discussion and studied some of the work of The Roy Hart Theatre. As Paul Silber, a company member, stated: "I have no formulas, there is no technique. The only technique is listening to what you're hearing, and hear what you're listening to, stand where you're standing, see what you're looking at...Be where you are when you're there." (Hart 196) Being ever-present and experimenting and testing is a crucial factor in the Roy Hart methodology. Further, Alfred Wolfsohn states: “My first concern is to free my pupils from the fear of heights and the fear of depths conditioned in their voices by tradition’ (Hart 197)

In a show where the actor is required play thirty-plus characters, vocal variety is vital. This class helped me create a repertoire of characters I would later draw from when finding the voices for the multitude of characters I played in *Fully Committed*. As an improviser, I am used to creating spontaneous characters in the moment for the sake of the scene. I know that strong characters must have a unique movement and a unique voice to add a dimension. We find the use of an accent to be a way for actors to differentiate their voice, but the strong actor will use all of the techniques discussed above. Some of my strongest character creations came while driving to and from rehearsals, classes, or wherever I may have been headed. In the early process, before I had memorized the script, I would recite old monologues from *Exhausted Paint*, a one-person
play I had done previously. While reciting them, I would change the placement of my voice and explore different sounds potential characters could have. Whenever I got to where I was going, I would write down my discoveries so I could bring them into the rehearsal space and use the voice in my character discovery.

As I became more familiar with lines, I would spend my car rides discovering different varieties for the characters. I started by just running through the lines in a neutral tone and focusing more on my character’s intention and objective. From there, I would explore pitch placement. Early on, it was decided that the female voices would still be placed in my chest as opposed to going falsetto. Resulting in a fuller sound, allowing the character to carry through the whole space and not get lost. As such, honing in on pitch and resonance became the first step of my process. As I repeated the line, I would differentiate what note to start on. As that was narrowed down, I would move the placement around my head trying to find unique voices that not only resembled the character but that would also create variety between the other thirty parts. I experimented with how quickly or slowly I would state the lines, played with the cadence, and dissected the way the character spoke each line. Additionally, I took the time to not only find what worked best, but also what felt the best for vocal health and longevity. This whole exploration was extremely familiar, because it is the same journey that we went over in FTA 5301; from sitting on the floor with Kalo playing various notes on the piano, to practicing in front of the class and workshopping our characters. FTA 5301 allowed me to become even more comfortable with the "playground" space of vocal development.

Additionally, Vocal Stylizations gave me an important appreciation for vocal health. There are shows in the past that I clearly abused my voice, resulting in complete blowouts. I realized that I would sacrifice my voice for the betterment of the character. Sometimes, even leaning into
the abuse to make a moment as realistic as possible. This was an extremely unhealthy practice and Kalo's class helped me overcome that. As Kalo said, the body is an instrument we must take care of. This class helped me understand why vocal health is important and the techniques and tips I could follow that would later serve me in *Fully Committed*.

*The character…*

Before graduate school, I had wrote to full-length plays and countless sketches for improv shows. Writing was a cathartic thing I found almost independent of my work as an actor. Early in my tenure at UNO, I signed up for the ENGL 6200: Seminar in Playwriting, taught by Gab Reisman. Initially, this class was initially highly intimidating for me: I was an actor who wrote for fun, learning with professional writers. My goals for this class were to accept that I was not the world's greatest writer, learn the creation process, and see how I could use playwrighting to further my development as an actor.

My first play in this class, was a ten-minute virtual play (COVID times…) called *Zoom & Gloom*. It was a farce that brought together a group of talent-lacking community theatre members and had them attempt to put on a play where all things technical that can go wrong do go wrong. My main inspiration came from hours of working virtually, dealing with the common troubles that occurred: a microphone being too loud or too soft, business etiquette going out the window regarding wardrobe, and general lack of understanding technology. These things together created a snapshot of the reality we were in, a world where Zoom was king, and everyone was terrible at it. My biggest takeaway from this course is that I learned the creation process begins by looking at the world around me, analyzing that reality and then extrapolating on it. With *Zoom & Gloom*, I did just that. I observed – a skill that translates from playwrighting directly into improv and the Meisner acting techniques.
Later in the class, I worked on a full-length play that was essentially about a cursed theatre where actors were dying left and right called *And Then There Was One*. In my approach here, I started by creating dynamic characters and putting them in certain scenarios. From there, I had the characters engage in improvisations with each other allowing a complete word vomit to occur on the page. It was not always good; most of it was terrible, but this freedom of expression allowed me to create vibrant characters I could then weed through in order to determine what worked and what could be cut. The overall practice of expression gave me not only a chance to create, but it also allowed me to sharpen my improvisational-focused mind during a global pandemic that forced us from practical studio classes, into an online format.

Strong characters do not just exist; they must be workshopped. Characters must be taken to their extremes to find out where they live. Often, actors focus on their character's life, but this analysis can be shallow compared to the extreme depths a character can reach. A script can only give so much description, and a character is more than just the words on a page. Fully fleshing out characters is necessary as an actor, and playwriting gave me the means to do just that.

After taking ENGL 6200, I took FTA 6250: Seminar in Screenwriting with Henry Griffin, where the focus shifted from writing a stage play to writing a screenplay. After completing one of the more challenging classes, FTA 6060: Concept, Conflict & Character, this class came in sequence. These two classes together introduced me to a concept known as the *bone structure*. Lajos Egri put forth a format that splits characters into three distinct categories: their physiology, their sociology, and their psychology. We as actors may consider this the dramaturgy of the characters we play. The bone structure provides a concise rubric to help guide character creation. Egri explains in his book *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, from which the bone structure is delineated: “It is not enough, in your study of a man, to know if he is rude, polite,
religious, atheistic, moral, degenerate. You must know why. We want to know why man is as he is, why his character is constantly changing, and why it must change whether he wishes it or no.” (Egri 33) That said, characters cannot be one-dimensional in writing, just as they cannot be one-dimensional in acting. This was not life-shattering news. The actual practice of creating and writing my characters created the framework I would need to craft the Fully Committed ensemble.

Being present...

An important part of acting is being truly connected to the moment. In the moment is more important than moments that were previously rehearsed, memorized lines, or preconceived ideas. Having an authentic connection to the moment means actors must match and play off whatever energy their partner has created for them. Too often, actors have experienced a scene partner who was not connected, only invested in creating their own character. Picture it: you are on stage with your scene partner and everything they do is robotically the same. The way they put the cup down, the cross they make to you; the dramatic pause they take before they deliver the line. This is (arguably) a good acting technique, because a hirable actor can hit their marks, but are they truly acting? Are they connected to the moment, or are they connected to the routine they have established? While sticking to blocking and the established world that you, your director, and cast have created is important, I believe that if an actor gets too focused on recreating the same performance every night, they are doing a disservice to the show, the audience, and most importantly, to their fellow actors.

This conceptual idea shone through for me most in FTA 6330: Graduate Acting, taught by Lauren Hines Turner in my final year at graduate school. The framework of the course was to create our own piece of work, as an ensemble, through the guiding nature of viewpoints. In class,
we worked as an ensemble to adapt the work of *Everybody* by Brandon Jacob-Jenkins and create a presentation for our final class. Throughout the process, the work morphed into a fully staged production with very little rehearsal, resulting in a 90-minute fully memorized show for an audience. The truth behind the production was an under-rehearsed performance that was lacking some crucial theatrical sequences which more rehearsals would have helped shape into a more presentable piece. However, we were left with a sandbox of exploration in front of an audience, resulting in a rare treat for an actor.

In the moment of a chaotic performance, by which I mean a performance where we as actors could not feel the ground underneath us, we had to rely on our instincts to carry the show forward. We could not force ourselves to get into the rut of an exact recreation because the creation itself did not yet exist, but simultaneously we also had the stimulus of an audience watching us, which meant we had to be in performance mode. For actors who fear living outside their routine, this can result in them ignoring audience stimuli and shutting down completely. However, for the actors who can lean in and allow the crunch to occur, they can find the world of uncertainty can lead to momentary decisions they never thought might exist.

FTA 6330 reinforced my thinking of how important improv training truly is. It’s a misconception that improv in acting is only good for covering up mistakes or lack of structure. Actors with improv training accept that whatever is happening on stage and they see their stage partner for what they are in that reality, regardless of structure. Once they’ve accepted that, they build on it. As demonstrated in FTA 6330, when the structure is shaky, actors must look at their partners and shout: yes, and!
Practical Growth

During my time with the University of New Orleans, I participated in five staged productions varying from Shakespeare to contemporary theatre. While each production was extremely important in my overall development, I will highlight three that truly aided my growth as an actor prior to my thesis production of *Fully Committed*.

Smithers

My first production with the University of New Orleans was *The Emperor Jones* by Eugene O’Neill, directed by Bill Ware, a person who has been a good friend of mine and consequently directed me in my thesis role.

*The Emperor Jones* follows the fall of Brutus Jones and his slow descent into madness as he is chased across the island on which he was a dictator. His wronging of the island’s people for too long, convincing them he was unkillable, leads to his eventual demise. Because they feared him harming them, they obeyed his every move until they crafted a bullet that could kill him. My character, Smithers, was an old, cockney, white man who took advantage of the situation and was riding the coat tails of Brutus Jones. Due to me being much younger than the character’s suggested age, my Smithers walked around with a cane, and I wore aging makeup. Smithers frightens Brutus into running in hopes that he will die, so he can, in essence, take over the throne. Smithers only appears at the beginning and end of the show and serves as an antagonist to the already villainous protagonist. The role of Smithers interested me because it offered the opportunity to learn a cockney accent and would allow me to work with Justin Davis. Justin, a third-year graduate student, was proficient in his craft and that was stimulating to observe.

As mentioned, the cockney accent initially drew me to this role. It gave me the challenge to master a new accent I had always considered to be out of reach. While preparing for this role,
I was taking Vocal Stylizations, which benefitted me greatly. This allowed me to not only work with Kalo in the classroom setting, but the established relationship also made our cockney lessons more beneficial. One extremely useful video for me was “Actor Learns a Cockney Accent in 6 Hours” which followed an actor named Marty who was preparing to audition for *A Christmas Carol*, which would require him to have a cockney accent. In that video, his vocal coach, Page Clements, went over a variety of lessons to help improve his voice. The very first takeaways is to appreciate the importance of Standard British as they have similar vocal placements. Another poignant lesson is to remember that "the actor's job is to be understood, work towards the accent, but be understood." Different from the video examples Clements had shown wherein the actors were hard to understand, she urged Marty to make sure he was being clear and consistent. It also gave me a character reference of Michael Caine, who I could study and analyze to get the further placement of what the cockney accent would require. This video was not the only resource I used to find my cockney accent, but it did lay a solid foundation. Sadly, the cockney accent never appeared in *Fully Committed*, but the techniques of developing a dialect and the training habits I learned started with my cockney process.

In addition to the cockney accent, Smithers walked around with a cane and a limp. This specific body movement was something I was familiar with after playing Richard III in undergraduate, but Smithers different from Richard in a few ways, for example, though Richard was crippled, he was still very agile and able to engage in fight scenes, whereas Smithers had minimal mobility. So, while I could draw on my experiences with Richard, I did have to adjust and create different movements to sell the character further. This type of movement and fine-tuning my movements to create unique characters was essential in developing my character movements for *Fully Committed*. 
In my second semester at UNO, I was cast as Father in Sarah Ruhl’s *Eurydice*. In this modern retelling of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, the audience follows the tale through Eurydice's point of view and her escapades in Hell before Orpheus' arrival. Upon her arrival, she completely loses her memory and stumbles upon her Father, of whom she has no memory. Father helps her recollect her memories through various lessons and stories that eventually lead to her remembering everything. When Orpheus arrives, and the two begin their journey out, Eurydice's fatal flaw leaves her forever trapped in Hell. Because Father believes she will get out successfully, he intentionally forgets his memories to ease the pain, leaving Eurydice completely alone, resulting in her too forgetting everything and succumbing to Hell.

Father was a compelling role for me because it was my first time playing the “role model” archetype. This type of supporting role meant that I was not only aiding the protagonist, as you might see in a companion, but I was mentoring the protagonist as well. It was special to me because it was my first show back with a live audience due to the Coronavirus pandemic. What challenged me the most about this production with this was the double casting decision. In this production, the directors, Maggie Tonra and Richon May, double cast the lead role of Eurydice with two marvelous actors, August Lasseigne and Josie Oliva. This decision resulted in split rehearsals so both actors could get repetition they needed, but also resulted in two times as many rehearsals for the rest of the cast, since we had to run through the script or scenes slated for work that night with each actor. This meant we, as a cast, had to be open about over-rehearsal and communicating with the directors if anything was not working.

It also provided a challenge that, as an improviser and Meisner lover, I enjoyed. It gave me a chance to have two-different experiences with two-different actors. It meant I needed to not
only relate to the script, but to be genuinely and uniquely connected with my stage partners as well. Every line had a different choice, which meant I needed to respond in a way that made sense in the moment, not just in the way that was rehearsed. I enjoyed this because not only did it keep the script fresh, but it also gave me the opportunity to try out different tactics during the rehearsal process and flesh out my character.

Another exercise that Maggie used that I appreciated was the idea of scripted improvised rehearsals. The approach would be for one actor to use their actual lines and the other actor to respond naturally and realistically to the moment, regardless of what their line was. An example of this practice was put to use in the initial scene when Father discovers that Eurydice has arrived in Hell. At first, he’s delighted to see her but quickly realizes she has no idea who he is and does whatever he can to make her remember. While he tries to spark a memory for her, she ultimately leaves the scene, not knowing who he is, still. When Maggie did not feel that that message was being portrayed, she thought it would be smart to try out these improvised rehearsals where I could say whatever I wanted. Using my subtext and emotions to drive the lines allowed me to connect with the true meaning of the lines, not just the text. With that concept nailed down, we then applied my newfound emotional connection to the actual lines, which allowed for a deeper connection to the character. While I have always accepted the importance of improvisation in my acting, these lessons helped me connect those ideas.

Vincent van Gogh

In my second year, I was approached with the challenge of play Vincent van Gogh in Justin Maxwell’s Exhausted Paint: The Death of Van Gogh. This one-person show is told in complete disorder, as there is no throughline plot. Instead, each scene is selected at random, after the audience picks the order at the beginning of the show. This means the audience gets to follow
as van Gogh goes through moments of complete happiness, moments of complete despair, moments of triumph, and moments of failure. This effect mirrors the bi-polar-like condition van Gogh was rumored to have and leaves the audience with a whiplash feel, similar to van Gogh’s life.

The easy take from this show is that it gave me the confidence to navigate a one-person show successfully. It taught me the importance of pacing and how the audience as to become another character for you to play off of since there is no other scene partner. It taught me the importance of the words and the story and how to connect entirely to a character since it is the only person the audience will experience. This was vital for my understanding of *Fully Committed.*

*Exhausted Paint* instilled a new confidence in my ability as an actor, and without that confidence, *Fully Committed* would have been near impossible to perform. It is important for actors to understand their abilities and how those abilities translate into potential, but talking about their own potential has the tendency to skew pompous or egotistical. Some actors may confuse their potential with ability and over-estimate their actual abilities. Others may be too timid to speak up about their sheer talent. Whatever it may be, actors must walk the fine line between exuding confidence and coming off as cocky. If one does not have that belief in themselves, the self-doubt that exists is likely to take over. However, if an actor is overly confident in themselves, it may lead to false self-appraisal or even give them a reputation as a diva. *Exhausted Paint* helped me realign what I thought my potential was and what I believe my potential is. It gave me a solid understanding that I had what it takes to go into my third year and face any challenge. *Fully Committed* was a challenging show, but *Exhausted Paint* pushed me in ways no role ever has, nor do I believe any role ever will. This role forced me to completely
dissect every scene and fully commit to Van Gogh’s objectives. It also pushed me to have those tactics to be pliable. While each scene existed by itself, and while the audience was experiencing a show of disorder, there still needed to be a smooth connection between each scene. This meant little bits of energy that were in a previous scene would be carried forward into the next scene, which changed the way Vincent would attempt to reach his objectives. Not only did this force me to be fully present, but it also uncovered a deeper confidence in my own acting abilities. That confidence was important during the Fully Committed process, as elements of self-doubt would rear their head from time to time.
Fully Committed

This devastatingly funny one act follows a day in the life of Sam Callahan, an out-of-work actor who mans the red-hot reservation line at Manhattan’s number-one restaurant. Coercion, threats, bribes, histrionics—a cast of desperate callers will stop at nothing in their zeal to land a prime reservation, or the right table. Amid the barrage, Sam’s got his own needs to contend with—his recently widowed dad wants him home for Christmas, and he’s up for a choice part at Lincoln Center. While juggling scheming socialites, name-dropping wannabes, fickle celebrities and egomaniacal bosses, can he manage to look out for himself?” (Mode)

The plot of this show is simple and calm. We meet Sam Callahan, a down-on-his-luck actor who works in the reservation office for a fancy Manhattan restaurant. Before work, he auditioned for a part in a musical at the Lincoln Center but is not feeling very great about it. His day starts normal enough, fielding general inquiries from various customers, collaborating with the staff upstairs to navigate any problems, and juggling different personal calls. All of this starts to spin into chaos when he finds out that not only is his boss not coming into work, but his co-worker also has the day off, leaving Sam completely alone on the lines. A wide variety of customers call in with a never-ending list of demands: lighting arrangement, a song for someone's parent's anniversary, and last-minute reservations, to name a few. As Sam gets deeper into the chaos, the realization of his dwindling acting career becomes increasingly evident, and he must come to terms with the fact that maybe this is not the path for him. He eventually gets a
pep talk from an unlikely source, leading him to find his backbone and successfully use his connections to get everything he needs.

This story is not anything unique or special. The larger-than-life characters, as described in the Character Bible, drive the show forward. You have the "bro" chef who thinks he is the greatest thing on this planet, the French maître d' with enough personality for the whole ensemble, and Mrs. Sebag, every service worker's worst nightmare. On top of that, you have true-to-life characters like Sam's dad, the sweet-and-caring hostess, and the laryngitis guy who tugs at your heartstrings. This play is a slice of life, peopled with larger-than-life characters, all of which are neatly wrapped in a bow when you see a solo actor.

One actor. Thirty-plus characters. 75 minutes. It is absolute insanity for any actor. The actor playing Sam must convince an audience that they are thirty different characters while also driving a plot forward and effectively keep the audience engaged without overly confusing them. Simple enough. This is a challenge any actor would want to sharpen their teeth on. So, I got to work.

Pre-Rehearsal – Character Bible
When Bill and I found out about *Fully Committed* we were ecstatic that we would be working on it together. Over the past three years, we had the opportunity to collaborate on three different shows, both of our first and last shows at UNO. We decided to approach this show with the idea of creating something unique. Our first rehearsal was at a restaurant, where we came in discussing what we both wanted to get from the project. This started in July, about four months before we would even perform the show. We agreed to come to our first official rehearsal with inspirations for each character so we could start brainstorming what these characters might look like.
Between the first meeting and our first working rehearsal, I put together a larger character bible that split each of the characters from the whole sum of the script to a self-contained guide for each character. This bible contained all of the lines for that character as well as any notes the script provided. This gave me a baseline for each of these characters that helped me separate and analyze each character to find the differentiation I was looking for. From there, I started noting what each character could be inspired from; this ranged from characters I have seen in real-life to animals to conceptual ideals. That approach allowed me to find something unique for each character without relying on only one method to achieve it. It’s important to note here that these were just overall starting points; this process allowed more creation to arise naturally instead of trying to plan something out. I approached our first rehearsal with my bible in hand and inspiration approaches noted.

Rehearsal Process

The first read-through of the script taught me one thing: this was going to be a massive undertaking. Reading the script aloud let me explore what sort of vocals we might use for characters, and let me test placements for safe vocal usage. It was the start of the major throughline problem that existed throughout the process: slow down! With a one-person show, I had a hard time accepting that quiet was okay. Which was completely out-of-character for me, because Exhausted Paint was an example of a show where I lived for the silence and understood it’s importance. There was something about playing multiple comedic characters that presented an obstacle for me to overcome. This is one obstacle that I never fully overcame, but the improvement between first read-through and the final performance is evident.

The script follows the main story of Sam Callahan – he was the center of the show, driving the plot forward and his character needed to be supported. If Sam’s story is lost in the
chaos, then the heart of the show is lost as well. Keeping this in mind, we agreed that a neutral "Drew" voice would be the best choice. Therefore, Sam would be Drew, and Drew would be Sam, who allowed us to have a neutral reset in-between each character. Sam also needed to be the most fleshed-out character. Because he speaks the most and has the most prominent character arc, that was an easy task. My primary connection with Sam was the idea of an actor trying to find out what is next in their life; Sam being a struggling actor on the cusp of giving up. This is a relatable scenario every actor can grab onto, so I found the truth of his character and used him as the base of the show.

As we moved forward, we divided the show into three chunks, so we had more specific areas to work on. The play is set in one continuous scene, with only one actual break for the actor to leave the stage and get water. There are no indications of movements or beats within the script, so we decided to split it into thirds so we could work each third one day of the week. In this approach, we could run through just those pages, experiment and fix what was not working, and then rerun them multiple times to make the scenes fluid. While this worked, theoretically, I could not fully embrace the characters, and while I had some distinctions, many of the characters still flowed together. To me, it felt as though we were repeating a similar track but not necessarily building on the track. Bill recorded our rehearsals, which allowed me to watch the playback, and I saw little growth in my characters. Seeing the stall in character growth, I suggested that we shift our focus to specific character movement, finding the body, and taking a break from the script. Not only did this allow for some much-needed vocal rest, but it also allowed me to continue to fine tune my characters.

So, at our next rehearsal, we turned our focus to improvisation and used my strengths to help us further explore the characters. Bill orchestrated an exercise that took one line of dialogue
from the character and had me repeat the dialogue while exploring the space. In this exercise, we found ourselves just simply focusing on character. This was vital in my finding differentiation between each character. After a few minutes of repeating lines and walking around, Bill asked me questions with the expectation that the character would respond. One of my favorite responses was Sam's dad, Ed, recalling the first time he met his wife... an awkward approach in a grocery store as she was looking for grapes to buy. I could feel Ed's love for his wife, and it made me really find a connection on a level I previously did not know existed with him. Conversely, I remember playing as the Chef and leaning into the venom that he had. These exercises reminded us that while the script was important, it was a hindrance as we were not where we need to be with the character development. By taking a step back and looking at the characters, I found a more impactful connection with my characters and felt more comfortable with the switches that needed to occur. I am ever grateful to Bill for listening to my suggestion and working collaboratively when I expressed the concern for my performance. These moments of improvised creation are some of my most cherished memories from the overall process.

As we returned to the script with our newfound development of these characters, I connected on a deeper level. At this point, the characters started to gain more dimension and were not simple caricatures, but real-life humans with wants and needs. It is important to note that some of these characters did live animated, caricature type lives, but there was truth found in their actions. In improv, the focus is on the truthfulness of the moment and comedy is extracted from the truth. People find humor in something they can relate to – because they recognize themselves in what they’re laughing at. Watching a show full of caricatures, why would anyone care about any of their problems? If Ed were just surface level, would the audience be disheartened when Sam lets him down? If Carolann were only a menacing hound constantly
harassing Sam, would their final exchange be believed? Sam could not be the only likable character. He needed the other characters to help create the reality for the audience – and for me to be able to create that reality, I needed to buy into them fully. This rediscovery allowed two interesting things to happen: 1) more distinct moments were developed for these characters, be it their posture, voice, or whatever differential that was needed, and 2) the characters became separate entities truly playing with each other.

Distinct Characters
As someone who is twenty-seven pages into a thesis discussion on a one-person show, it is safe to assume you, the reader, have consumed live theatre before. Think back to the most recent production you have watched. In that production, what did the actors do to differentiate themselves from the other actors? Did they use different body language to communicate? Were there accents or voice pitches used? Did their costume and casting help a great deal with you being able to tell the characters apart? There is a massive difference between thirty actors playing one character each and one actor playing thirty characters. Namely, as an audience member, you can typically spot the differences because of different physical beings embodying the roles they’re playing. Those actors are responsible for creating personalities for their characters to help round them out and make them identifiable to the audience.

Now, look at *Fully Committed*: thirty characters, some of whom join us for less than two lines and never appear again. Could you imagine the utter dread you would experience if you had to watch an actor perform thirty characters, all with similar vocal choices and physicalities? Though the argument for enjoyment can be left open for discussion, a guaranteed truth would be the challenge of following what is happening. The biggest challenge of this show lies here: how do we differentiate them? In our rediscovery of the characters, we played with the vocal choices
for every character. We tested the limits of those vocals to probe for vocal health. Some characters (looking at you, Judith) put too much strain on my voice, and I had to lean into different choices for finding her voice safely. As we played around with improvisations, we also played around with how the voice would resonate. What was important was the execution of the script and we discovered how character development made the script flow. I found a new connection that allowed me to truly start differentiating these characters, which led to a true separation of each character to exist on their own.

*Voices in my head...*  
As an actor with heavy improvisational training, someone who relies so much on my partner’s energy through matching and co-existing with them in the world, one-person shows create a great solitude that leave me longing for interaction with a scene partner. As discussed in the theoretical section, I live for being in the moment and allowing the natural development of whatever happens. I want to play with my partners – because I believe that is where genuine acting exists.

As we jumped into the script, a unique moment occurred in a rehearsal. Sam was on the phone with the Chef as he made a particularly disheartening comment towards Sam. In a brief second, I was the Chef delivering the line to Sam and felt the energy leave my body while simultaneously feeling the energy enter Sam. There was an exchange between these characters where I noticed Chef delivered a line in a specific way different than usual, so Sam matched the energy Chef delivered and morphed to serve the scene. This specific interaction unlocked a discovery for me: these characters are all living their own lives and have opinions on everything that occurs around them. You might be thinking: of course, you bonehead, that is acting! However, before this moment, it felt like I was Sam, and Sam was portraying 30 other
characters. But the truth of the matter was, I had to be Sam. I had to be Chef. I had to be Jean-Claude. It couldn’t be Drew portraying the characters, otherwise they’d fall flat. There had to be a constant connection between someone sending and someone else receiving energy. This little mindset shift opened me up for the most productive moments in the rehearsal process.

From this moment on, we shifted from questioning Drew: "Drew, why did Jean-Claude do that" to the character: "Jean-Claude, why did you do that?" Our process shifted from funneling information through the actor to the character to giving it to the character directly. Bill commented on how it helped him separate his notes more easily and gave him a focus point. It helped digest the note with that character directly in mind. It also allowed me to further separate the characters from each other.

A running problem for us during the entire process was pacing. The first time we did the show, I forgot it was okay to take pauses and allow our characters to go through processing. It felt like as the only voice, my job was to keep the show running at all times. This is, of course, was highly inaccurate to real life and truthfulness, the motto of improv. Bill's most significant notes were to slow it down and find ways to allow the phrases to be stretched out. While there was utter chaos, it was important to give Sam and the audience the breather they both deserved. One thing that helped with my pacing problem was Bill's approach to finding individual phrases through the script and focusing on the character's arc. Each conversation became an arc that needed to have a start-middle-end. These arcs gave us a natural break as each conversation ended. It gave Sam the time he needed to find a breath and move on to the next chaotic shift. The separation of the characters gave us moments to play with the different reactions. It gave us time to allow a character to send energy but also left space for the character to receive it. As a result, pauses became my friend and we used them to morph the show's overall cadence and pace.
Tech Rehearsals

There were over two-hundred sound cues in this show, between the reservation phone ringing, my cell phone ringer, the buzzer going off, and the Chef calling in. Not to mention the well-over one hundred light cues, all coordinated to shift as the various characters came in and out of the scene. The crew running the boards were remarkable, and I am forever thankful that we started practicing with sound early in the rehearsal process.

Tech rehearsal was when the sound effects and light cues shifted from being just cues to becoming other characters within the world of *Fully Committed*. This allowed me to connect with the other elements as they were integrated into our overall process. Additionally, it gave me a feel for the show and let me see how all the elements paired together. Since we decided to run sound cues from the first rehearsal, I developed a personal relationship and understanding with the cues, and they became second nature. Further, tech crew learned my character’s mannerisms which contributed to the show to running smoothly.

During tech rehearsals, we also started to get a feel for what the show would be like with an audience. As guests came in to watch, it gave us an idea of what the general reaction could be, helping to find moments of pausing and connecting with the humor which is at the forefront of the play. Those moments left me itching for a packed audience, and I proclaimed one last night: "I'm bored, and I need an audience."

By this point, we had rehearsed the show enough and were ready to show it to people. My previous remark should not be confused as a claim of me stating I could only perform at my best with an audience, but rather me acknowledging that that was the next step in the process of a successful show. While we as artists enjoy the creation process as we develop a show, I too believe we must enjoy the final product. The audience, especially in a one-person show, is a crucial element that helps differentiate theatre from film or television. My feigned boredom in
that comment focused less on the fact of my needing an audience and more on the focus that I was ready to open the show.

As we transitioned into the preview performances, the audience clearly gave a new depth to the characters. The audience became the pulse for me because I could not rely on other actors for temperature checks. The audience's acknowledgment and response allowed me to stay on track and be aware of the road that they are on. I had to acknowledge the existence of the audience so I could stay truly in the moment. Navigating a one-person show without an audience is not a fun experience. While the show should not be about the audience, the audience almost becomes a scene partner for you in a one-person show. While I got comfortable sharing the energy between my characters, the audience became a third party where my energy could be flung. The audience does not influence the show by any means; it just lets you know the show has life. After weeks without real audience interaction, receiving their reactions are always a fun experience.

Performances

“Hi! It’s Bryce, Gwenth Paltrow’s assistant…” When Bryce would spring into that curtain call speech, I knew it was time for action. In my hands, I was armed with a mitten and some throat-coat tea. I was dressed for a frigid New York City winter as I sprung up the steps backstage to then enter the audience's view as I went down into the basement. As soon as I turned the corner, the reservation phone would blare its loud ring to alert me that the day has begun. I threw my backpack down and got ready to take on the action of a chaotic restaurant positioned in the middle of Manhattan.

During one of our first weekend performances, the whole crew was put to a real test when I accidentally mismatched a sequence towards the end of the show. At one point, the
buzzer went off, and I mistakenly answered the buzzer as Bob instead of Jean-Claude. Instant alarm bells went off in my head as I realized the mistake. In this chaotic moment, there was not anything I could do except push forward. Luckily for me, the tech booth knew exactly what they were doing, and we recovered flawlessly, unbeknownst to the audience.

While performing the seven additional performances that followed our two preview performances, I found myself falling more and more into the truth of my characters. The journey of self-discovery, for me, does not stop on opening night, as I believe characters should constantly be alive from opening night to closing night. This could be misinterpreted as me saying actors should constantly be changing their performance. This is not true. The journey during the rehearsal process should be the creation of characters. If characters are properly fleshed out, those moments of new discovery are not actors “going off the rails”, but rather them living in the world and reality that have created for their characters. I believe a good actor must always be aware of the changing world: this means to not correct “mistakes” that might happen, but to fully commit to the moment they are in, to be truthful and to turn those “mistakes” into opportunities that further define their character’s existence.
Post-Performance Reflection & Critique

In September of 2021, when I submitted this show, I was sitting in a small Airbnb in Texarkana, having evacuated from New Orleans due to Hurricane Ida. Bill was also sitting in the apartment with me, and we reflected on how fitting it would be if we ended up on each other’s thesis projects. In my submission to the department, I stated: "I believe this is a truly unique show in that the actor and director will develop an important bond unlike most theatrical productions. There is also a great relationship the actor and director must develop to fully commit to the show.” The selection of Bill and me on this project made this statement come to fruition, and that is something I am most grateful for. Upon conclusion of the show, I found myself relieved. The show meant so much to me, but it also was incredibly draining. Maintaining pristine vocal quality while performing a 90-minute, non-stop, physically demanding show, and drinking more tea in two months than I had in my entire life drained me. It never made me not enjoy the show, but it truly made me appreciate the work that actors do. The best part was getting home and chugging a bottle of chocolate milk that my wife bought me after swearing off dairy for the entire production process to help maintain vocal health. It was a lot of work, but it is exactly what I signed up for.

There was a stretch during rehearsal where I did not think the show would get to where we needed it to be, and even in reflection, I am not sure we extracted everything out of it that we could. My fears stemmed from a few factors: would my voice hold up for the run of the show, was I giving my all to every character, and was this the show that would summate my graduate career at the University of New Orleans? First, the vocal demand of the show is out of this world, and somewhere in the middle of our process, I became highly aware that I needed to use better vocal techniques to support my voice. I had one week where I completely lost my voice and could not speak due to poor practice. When this happened, it made me focus more specifically on
my vocal health, but it also followed me like a shadow and made me lose sleep and overthink: was I losing my voice or was I tired from speaking all night? Secondly, there were so many characters to keep track of, and they all needed enough uniqueness. Even upon conclusion, I worried that I didn’t bring the characters as far as I could. Finally, I questioned if this was a good summation of my career at the University of New Orleans. I often think comedy is second tier to drama, especially in the academic setting, and I just wondered if *Fully Committed* really captured everything I learned over the past three years. My self-doubt and these questions reared their ugly heads in the middle of our process and stayed with me even after the show's conclusion. It was not until I started crafting this paper that I began to piece together the whole story.

Further reflection of these fears through the creation of this paper have helped me dissect and deeply appreciate the overall process and the eventual conclusion of the show. The vocal issues that arose stemmed from historical issues I experienced: in *Richard III*, I had a kingdom of a hoarse voice and ended up pushing through on the final performance; in *Exhausted Paint*, I pushed my voice too hard, resulting in me losing some upper vocal range. *Fully Committed* forced me to realize the utmost importance of vocal health – something I did not take quite as seriously in my past. It scared me that I might not be able to reach where I needed to be, and through this fear, I developed a better process of checking in with myself to make sure I was comfortable with what I was doing with my voice. When it came to me entirely driving my characters to where they needed to go, I may not have achieved exact perfection of the roles, which is okay. I have already argued my belief in living on the edge and how over-rehearsal can harm a show. My characters were not perfectly executed, but they executed perfectly the way they needed to. Finally, if this paper has done one thing, it has shown me that this was the exact show I needed to do. It brought together all the things I have worked on over the past three years.
and allowed me to fully develop 30 unique characters in a theatrical and enjoyable way for the audience. One could make an argument that it was not as moving or profound as other potential roles, but it did what it was supposed to do for me, and that truly is what the thesis project is about.

I look back at this project with joy. It was a challenge and afforded me the opportunity to create comedic characters in the academic setting. It allowed me to connect with a good friend and work together to create something we both were proud of. Finally, it taught me the importance of being connected with scene partners, even if all of those scene partners existed in my head.

The creative team on *Fully Committed* all strived to push and get the most out of each other. Bill was strong-minded on what he wanted for the production but also willing to swing with the punches to get the show what it needed. He put the show first in every decision he made and got the most out of me by pushing and challenging me. Zachary and Laural were formidable forces that kept the train on the tracks. They spent so much time in the trenches with us, making sure the show had the adequate rehearsal it needed. The technical team, with the incredible set design by Jacob Bensimon, the elaborate light design by Diane Baas, and the never-ending sound cues by Caleb Isaacson, all left us with an exceptional show. In a one-person show, these elements were elevated even more because while they’re always present in ensemble productions, the lack of other actors resulted in a hyper-focus on the other elements. If we had not all worked in unison with each other, there is no way this could have been successful.
Conclusion

Theatre truly is a wonderful place to discover yourself.

My path at the University of New Orleans gave me many opportunities to truly discover myself. Coming in, I brought my theories and concepts, built and shaped by the Meisner technique and improvisational acting. Those were then paired with the various classes focused on vocal quality, storytelling, and ever-present awareness that all actors must have. While these lessons persisted, my new and old techniques were tested with various theatrical productions that continued to push and develop me. While my thesis role of Sam in *Fully Committed* became the culmination of all that training and experience, the more important focus is on my overall journey as an actor.

As I move forward as an actor, I will focus on how my improvisational skill can be connected to my acting technique. I will explore my vocal quality while maintaining safe vocal expression and technique. Storytelling will be at the center of all my creations as an actor. Most importantly, I will continue to discover myself as an actor, a human and a general theatre practitioner.
Case Studies

In order to further defend and explore my usage of improvisational theatre as the groundwork of my methodology as an actor, I have included two case studies that show this methodology in the real world. The first will be the examination of a production where improvisational theatre was our only guiding light. The second will be an analysis of a workshop I hosted focusing on the importance of improvisation in the actor’s toolbox.

Case Study 1: Bonnie & Clyde

In October of 2018, The Springfield Theatre Centre was amidst performances of their fall musical, Bonnie & Clyde. This thrilling musical follows the infamous couple from their early meetings to their fatal finale, all through the lens of a rockabilly soundtrack. While the main focus of the show is Bonnie and Clyde, the B-plot follows the story of Buck Barrow, Clyde’s brother, and his wife, Blanche Barrow, as they keep track of the Barrow gang via a series of letters that Buck receives. Multiple times Clyde tries to persuade Buck to join him, but Buck often follows the advice of his wife to stay away from him. After a few failed robberies, Buck finds that he must follow after his brother to help him, eventually ending in his own demise. In the final scene, Bonnie & Clyde drive off toward their bloody conclusion. All of that murder and robbery, of course, makes for a perfect musical.

In this production, I was cast in the role of Buck Barrow, a role I played three years prior at Illinois College during my junior year there. We had a short run over the course of two weekends, and after opening weekend, we were prepping to return for our final shows. On Friday night, our Clyde had some vocal difficulties but managed to navigate his way through the show. Early Saturday morning, he woke up unable to speak and alerted our director of his difficulties. As one can imagine, it is impossible to do a musical called Bonnie & Clyde when your titular
male role cannot speak, let alone belt out any of the songs from the show. In most cases, you may expect an understudy to fill in for the role; in some cases, have the actor act while you have an off-stage voice sing; or worse off, perhaps you cancel the show and wait for your lead to recover. Unfortunately, none of these solutions were viable. No understudy existed; the actor was unable to even talk; and canceling, though an option, the theatre wanted to be a last resort. Instead, the director asked if I would step into the role of Clyde with four hours of rehearsal. Two truths were consistent that the director could rely on: I had a familiarity with the show, having performed it three years prior, and knowing that the actress playing Bonnie and I had a relationship bonded by improvisational theatre. The final decision was made and we sprung into action getting everything in order.

Moving me into the role of Clyde resulted in my role needing to be filled. We were fortunate enough that our musical director also was in the Illinois College production and was able to pivot into the role. An initial thought was to move our vocal director into the role of Clyde, but the decision was made to lean on my improvisational technique as opposed to focus on learning the role completely. When we arrived at the theatre, we had roughly four hours until the curtain went up. We rushed to the dressing room in order to get fit into the costume and start working on lines for the show.

As discussed, we did not look for 100% perfection on the lines. We knew that was nearly impossible; Clyde is on stage for 70% of the show, he has multiple songs, and there was a sequence of fights that needed to be rehearsed. We would have to lean on the idea of completely understanding the character and relying on improvisational techniques to get through the script. The discovery of the character was more important than the perfection of the lines.
In a way, this echoes the sentiments of that which was discovered during our production of *Everybody* in FTA 6330. When we shifted our focus away from the lines and just focused completely on the character, we were able to fully create and achieve what we needed to do to bring Clyde to life. In a discussion with Hope Cherry, who played Bonnie, she said: “Improv made an impassable mountain into a challenging foothill. We had all the right tools to make it work: both leads had improv experience, both leads trusted each other in improv scenes before, and both leads understood scenes from an improv perspective (meaning we understood the importance of a beginning, middle, and ending), and both leads had confidence in their improv abilities.”

While the idea of filling in for a cast member is not a foreign concept, I believe our approach with the improvisational training is what made this process as smooth as it could be. Cherry goes on to say: “If one or both of us hadn't had improv experience, we may not be able to think as quickly on our feet as our characters. I wasn't afraid because you understood the character of Clyde and how he might react in a situation.” The improvisation did not shape what the show was, but rather the improvisation allowed us to live in the world that these characters created. We took the rules that existed and made it so our characters were truthful to the circumstance that existed.

Cherry concludes: “If we hadn't been confident in our own improv skills, it could have tanked the show. As leads, we had to be the leaders for the rest of the cast. I wasn't afraid as we were both confident in our own skills and one another's skills. I think this confidence helped everyone else remain calm and in the moment.”
Case Study II: Workshop
On January 10\textsuperscript{th}, 2023, I hosted an improvisation workshop at the University of New Orleans with a focus on using that skill set in one’s creative endeavors. The workshop was five hours and included eight participants with varying degrees of theatre and improv knowledge. The overall goal for this workshop was to explore different methods to explain the improvisation method to actors and see if they could find the importance in their own work.

The workshop started with a discussion about the importance of improv and how it relates to theatre. As discussed at the start of the paper, improv can be split into a multitude of tenets, but we narrowed them down to a center structure: focusing on supporting your stage partner. This was our focus over the course of the workshop.

I asked the participants what they thought the “point” of improv was:

“You have to really be in the moment and let your instincts take charge”

“Improvisation is both it’s own art form and also the building block on which acting sits”

“Improv is the catalyst for breaking actors out of the over analytical side of their minds and gets them to live truthfully in the moment.”

The above are all common discussion points that we have seen thus far in this paper (and this was before we dove into the workshop!). After a brief discussion, I led the participants through some basic improvisation warm-ups. We worked at getting the participants out of their mind so they could be fully involved in the exercises. My goal was to help the actors realize the importance of being fully connected to what is going on, as opposed to allowing their thoughts to muddy up the situation.

An essential element of improv is the accepting of your stage partner and the reality that they create (the Yes, And… of improv). This is a mantra that every improviser will scream at you when you ask them about improv. To drill this in, we started with an exercise that honed in
on listening to their stage partner. In this exercise, the actors had a conversation with their scene partner about anything. The importance of this was not the content of the scene, but rather the concept of truly listing to their partner. They listened to one another and once the first speaker was finished, the second speaker used the last letter of the last word the other actor said to start their next sentence. For example:

**Partner A:** It is getting pretty chilly out here  
**Partner B:** Even though we brought these blankets!  
**Partner A:** So I guess we should try to build a fire or something?  
**Partner B:** Great idea!

The point of this exercise was that they could not think at all about what their next sentence or thought would be until they knew exactly how their partner’s thought ended. By focusing on every word, the actors were truly in the moment, and less focused on trying to plan what came next. As one participant said: “it felt like weights for the ears to get you used to really listening to your partner.”

Next, we really nailed down the positivity and acceptance vibes. In the exercise **Five Things**, the participants were given a category and would have to respond with five things that fit into that category. The participants were encouraged to take no breaks and to not think about what they are saying, and instead focus on just saving five things. This meant in some cases the five things would not actually fit into the category: but that was okay! The other participants, regardless of what the original player said, would enthusiastically shout: “YES!” after every single item the player set forth. I wanted the participants to not care as much about what was being said, but instead accepting that whatever reality was created, it was their job to support their stage partners. So if a player were doing this and they were given “colors” as the category
and they said: “banana,” instead of shutting that down and denying it’s existence as a color, we
would agree and accept their reality as truth. This helped us sharpen the YES, which was
important in supporting a scene partner.

Once the positivity was found we started to make more natural scenes. The actors formed
two lines and performed a three-line scene with a partner. The pattern is as follows:

**Partner A:** [Statement]

**Partner B: Yes And...** [Additional information that builds on the original statement]

**Partner A: Yes And...** [Further information that builds on Partner B’s statement]

This "scene" though somewhat choppy, allowed the participants to connect the concepts
of acceptance into an actual scene. While the scenes were not thoroughly thought out or
complete, it continued to help the participants engrain this concept in their brains.

Then, I continued to add different variations of this game atop this concept. Ideas focused
on: removing the physical “yes, and” but still making sure they were accepting and building on
their scene partners ideas, focusing on their scene partner, and helping create a reality in those
first few sentences. All of these concepts were and are important for improvisers to create their
reality.

As a five-hour workshop, I knew there was no way that I was going to develop a group of
fully trained improvisers, but I knew we could see immense progress, and help the participants
find the ability to connect improv to their own acting methodology. The final sequence of the
workshop was an improvised scene with conflicting objectives. I gave two improvisers
objectives that actively went against each other: i.e., one wanted to move in with the other,
whereas the other wanted to admit they had cheated. The trick was that the improvisers could not
talk about these goals and could only use them as the subtext behind their lines. Their focus was
to really support the reality their scene partner created and to stay in the moment. This was magical to watch because the actors were able to use these techniques to stay-in character and move forward with the story.

After the workshop, I asked the participants for feedback and thoughts. Here are a few of their offerings:

“It’s okay to take your time and to not necessarily know where you’re going - your scene partners got you” (Eleanor Humphrey)

“I think it's important to be able to roll with punches in the acting world. [Stuff] happens and how, in live theatre and film, you deal with it and handle it speaks volumes about your ability to change pace and go with the flow.” (Eduardo Turcios)

“Go with the flow more and worry less about judgment. Take care of your scene partner, let them take care of you, and that will take care of the scene. Be confident in your choices, even if they end up being a mistake.” (Caylee Sanders)

This workshop needs more fleshing out, but I truly believe I have started to hone in an important truth: a smart actor has improvisational theatre in their toolbox.
Character Bible

One important piece of the *Fully Committed* rehearsal process was to differentiate between the various characters. In the show, the actor not only plays the real-life character of Sam, but he also must play the various characters who call in. One way to help me track the differences between these characters was to create a character bible that I would then modify through the rehearsal process. This gives the reader insights on the inner-working of the characters. Included is the character description per the script.

**SAM**
An actor from the Midwest

*Age 27ish. Struggling actor.*

*Neutral voice*

**MRS. VANDEVERE**
An old-moneyed Park Avenue socialite. Terminally dissatisfied. The modern equivalent of landed gentry.

- *Old: 60-70*
- *Inspiration: My rich-socialite grandmother/horse like*
- *Struts as she walks, is always presenting in her movements.*
- *Immediately demanding of Sam with no regards to anything else.*
- *What have previous conversations with her looked like? Why is so charmed to know it’s Sam she’s talking to?*
- *Upper class, snobby accent. Every word we hear has to feel like she believes what she is saying is of the utmost importance.*
- *What happened with her and Carolann?*

**BRYCE**
Gwyneth Paltrow’s personal assistant. Aggressively friendly and extremely effeminate. Bryce treats his work with the utmost gravity, as a neurosurgeon might.

- *A young professional: 28-35ish*
- *Inspiration: Rod from Avenue Q/a jackal?*
- *Movement precise and motivated.*
- *Over the top supportive of giving Gwyneth what she needs. Can be pleasant but still wants business to be done.*
- *What is Bryce and Sam’s relationship?*
- *What does Bryce think about working with Bob and Sonya?*
- Voice through the nose? Something in the upper-male range.

**MRS. WINSLOW**

- Southern. Brimming with charm.
- Mature. Age 50-60
- Inspiration: The Office – murder mystery episode/a Camel (?) something with a large rear. As she walks this jiggles back and forth.
- A southern queen who is not in touch with the NYC food scene. The type of person who assumes every restaurant wants to see her. She is the most important person in her small southern town.
- A voice like molasses, slow and dripping.

**BOB**

- More self-important and condescending than many a customer, he is the reservations manager. Afflicted with a loud, annoying laugh.
- Age: 40
- Inspiration: Donkey with a loud heel-haw
- Low center of gravity, perhaps a large beer belly.
- Did he stumble into this job? Maybe related to the Chef somehow?
- How did he get Sam to come back to the restaurant? More than likely Sam asked to come back, how does that make Bob feel? Is there a sense of entitlement knowing Sam can’t do anything better than this place?
- How often has Bob gone to job interviews during work and what excuses has he used?

**MIDWESTERN SECRETARY**

- Practical and plainspoken.
- Age: 40
- Inspiration: Lady from the Facebook commercial who has that thick Midwest accent
- Sweet-hearted. Assumes that like most restaurants in her small town people can get a table same day with minimal wait.
- “Crazy” foods to her would be gumbo
- Lean into that Fargo accent, hard

**CAROLANN ROSENSTEIN**

- The ultimate restaurant regular. An iron-willed, helmet-haired socialite with far too much time on her hand.
- Age: 60-70
- Inspiration: My landlord mixed with a Python
- Why does she need to talk to Jean-Claude so bad and what really is their relationship??
- Where does the rivalry with Vandevere come from?
Old Jewish woman, Brooklyn accent. Really hit on those words.
Her arc is important: make the audience root against her until we finally need her help in the end. That satisfaction of the pay off

**STEPHANIE** The sweet-tempered British luncheon hostess.
- Age: 20s
- Inspiration: office bestie
- What does she really want to be doing? Maybe works in fashion?
- Anxious and nervous – onset cause for working for Jean-Claude
- Is Sam her best friend?
- Soft and sweet voice

**OSCAR** The restaurant’s business manager. Gentle, distracted, eccentric.
- Age: 35
- Inspiration: a muppet character with a terrible cold
- The biggest supporter you might find. He only wants the best for everyone.

**CHEF** Though he makes a big show of modesty, the Chef is a world-class narcissist, obsessively cultivating his own star status and worshipping at the alter of celebrity. Vain, petulant, and mildly thuggish, the Chef seems more like an overgrown frat boy than the international culinary sensation that he is. He talks in an ultracool, disaffected, offhandedly sexy way, almost as if he’s giving phone sex.
- Age: 20s
- Inspiration: a bro-dude who has had everything given to him
- What does he really think of Sam? Is there maybe a hinge of pride because of the type of work he is?
- How did he get into this business?
- The Chef enters the room with the expectation that everyone listens to him, he is God’s gift to the earth, and his cooking styles and abilities cannot be matched.
- How do we make the audience love him while also hating him??

**SAM’S DAD** A retired gym teacher from the Midwest. Very sentimental when it comes to Sam, but not accustomed to expressing emotions.
- Age: 50-60
Inspiration: Ted Lasso
This is the heart of Sam, this is what keeps him grounded and it’s really what drives him forward.
How do we show his disappointment?
My dad loves to be on the phone and saying nothing: so does Sam’s dad. Let’s see how that works.
How does Sam’s dad feel about his relationship?
Where did “adios amigo” come from? Did they watch a show together that he really latched on to?

**JERRY MILLER**
An old acting schoolmate of Sam’s. Passive-aggressive, violently self-involved, falsely humble.
- Age: 28ish
- Inspiration: every annoying college theatre rival we’ve all experienced
- Did they date???
- What is Jerry trying to prove to Sam?

**JEAN-CLAUDE**
The original French maître d’. Wildly theatrical and drunk with his own power, he indiscriminately humiliates the various waiters, busboys and customers who cross him. Prone to frequent tantrums and intermittent bouts of charm, Jean-Claude can turn on a dime. One minute he’s filled with contempt of the entire universe and the next he’s manically fawning over a big tipper.
- Age: 40
- Inspiration: a French crab/Lumiere from Beauty and the Beast
- Is he actually French or is he putting on a show?
- How did he get this job?
- What is the deal with him and Carolann? Does he actually find her ugly... or maybe he’s having an affair which is why his wife calls??
- What is Jean-Claude’s opinion of Sam?

**CURTIS**
Sam’s agent’s assistant. A highly therapized pontificator.
- Age: 30
- Inspiration: Alexis and David mixed together from Schitt’s Creek
- Why is he so bitter?
- Is Curtis a struggling actor too or how does he actually feel about actors?
- Curtis-Jerry-Bryce are all in similar veins as characters, need to make sure to keep them separate.
DOMINIC VECCINI  A low-level mobster.
- Age: 34
- Inspiration: a squirrel as a mob member

MRS. SEBAG  Always on the verge of total hysteria, waiting for the world to wrong her. She aggressively commandeers a large household staff, and anyone else who will let her.
- Age: 56
- Inspiration: Karen
- Has way too much money, thinks way too highly of herself
- Need to allow her rage to build from simmering to hysteria
- What does Sam learn from her that he applies when he steps into the role of customer later??

HECTOR  A prep cook from the Dominican Republic who does the Chef's ordering and prepares the staff meal. Good at the requisite macho kitchen posturing, he is actually a closet softie.
- Age: 32
- Inspiration: ???

MR. DECOSTE  A mysterious stranger.
- Age: 43
- Inspiration: Christian Bale meets the joker
- How do we get this weird character to join this story? Who is he? What is he doing here?
- What if he is semi-sociopathic?
- Over the top, big eyes, crazy.

HESTON BLUMENTHAL
- Age: 40ish
- Real life! Study him up and look what he is like

LARYGITIS GUY  An incredibly nice guy who talks like he has laryngitis all the time.
- Age: 60
- Knows Sam’s dad
- Connection for Sam back to reality
- Need to find vocal safety! Don’t push the throat too much.

**BON APPETIT EDITOR’S ASS.** In a constant state of panic.
- Stutters a bit

**JUDITH RUSH** A retired furniture dealer from a small town in upstate New York, with delusions of grandeur and a constant sense that the world is cheating her. Still, sort of cute in spite of herself.
- Age: OLD!
- Moves around like she has a very broken hip
- No idea where she actually is

**FOX SEARCHLIGHT LADY** A bitter workaholic.
- Age: 46
- Overworked, takes that out on other people
- Like most customers, think’s she’s entitled to everything

**STEVEN** Sam’s sensible older brother. A real straight arrow.
- Age: 34
- Can’t understand why Sam is so selfish
- Lays it down, brings him back to reality

**JANE LASSITER** An editor at *Bon Appetit*. In the midst of a longstanding feud with the Chef.
- Age: 53
- Demanding

**JEAN-CLAUDE’S WIFE** A big, tough French lady. Sounds a lot like Jean-Claude.
- Age: 40
- Wants to know what Jean-Claude is up to

**CORPORATE DOUCHE** He’s done a lot of leadership training.
- Age: 35
- Why does Chef hate him so much?
- Is this our chance to make Ned into a good guy and make it seem like the Chef is crazy?
- Super supportive (over the top almost)

**NANCY**

- **Bob’s wife.**
- **Age:** 43
- **Sweet, simple, naïve**

**RICK/CARSON AVIATION**

- The kind of unflappable, even-keeled guy you want to have behind the controls of an airplane.
- **Just wants to do his job and keep everyone calm**

**SOFIA VEGARA.** *(Nick Cage)*

- Can’t do the accent for Sofia. Feels somewhat offensive as well
- Weirdly enough Corporate Douche is similar placement as Nick Cage, let’s try it out.
FULLY COMMITTED

Sam, an actor from the Midwest.
Lights up on the reservation office. The phones are ringing.
Sam rushes down the stairs, puts on his headset, and...

SAM. Good morning, reservations; could you hold please?

Mrs. Vandevere—an old-moneyed Park Avenue socialite.
Terminally dissatisfied. The modern equivalent of landed gentry.

MRS. VANDEVERE. Is the chef there? It's Bunny Vandevere.

SAM. No he's not. Could you hold please?

MRS. VANDEVERE. Is Jean-Claude there?

SAM. No he's not, could you hold please?

MRS. VANDEVERE. Is Bob there?

The phone is still ringing.

SAM. No, he's not. Could you hold on for one minute?

MRS. VANDEVERE. For one minute.

SAM. Good morning, reservations; could you hold please?

Bryce. Gwyneth Paltrow's personal assistant. Aggressively friendly and extremely effeminate. Bryce treats his work with the utmost gravity, as a neurosurgeon might.

BRYCE. Hi, it's Bryce calling from Gwyneth Paltrow's office!!

The phone is still ringing.

SAM. Okay, one moment. (On to a new line.) Good morning, reservations; could you hold please?

Mrs. Winslow—Southern. Brimming with charm.

MRS. WINSLOW. [Sure]—

Still ringing. New line:
SAM. Good morning, reservations; could you hold please?
More self-important and condescending than many a customer.
Bob is the reservations manager. Afflicted with a loud, annoying
laugh.

BOB. Sure!
Still ringing. New line:

SAM. Good morning, reservations; could you hold please?
Midwestern secretary—practical and plainspoken.

MIDWESTERN SECRETARY. Sure!
Still ringing. New line:

SAM. Good morning, reservations; could you hold please?
Carolann Rosenstein-Fishburn, the ultimate restaurant
regular. An iron-willed, helmet-haired socialite with far too
much time on her hands.

ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. Well, I don’t have a choice now, do I?
The phone stops ringing for a brief moment. Sam buzzes
upstairs.


STEPHANIE. Morning, Sam.

SAM. Hey, Stephanie. Have you seen Bob?
The phone rings.

STEPHANIE. No, but when he comes in will you tell him that there’s
a photographer from Bon Appétit magazine who’s been waiting up
here for the chef since 8:30.
Still ringing.

SAM. Okay. (On to a new line.) Reservations, could you hold please?

MRS. VANDEVERE. No, your minute is up. Who am I speaking with?

SAM. This is Sam.

MRS. VANDEVERE. (Suddenly kissing up.) Sam, darling. I didn’t
know you were still working there. It’s Bunny Vandevere.

SAM. Oh hi, how are you?

MRS. VANDEVERE. Well, we’re exhausted; we’ve just come back

from Cuba. Now, I know it’s last minute, but Mr. Vandevere and I
want to come in tonight with our good friend, Malcolm Gladwell,
and we can be very flexible—anywhere between, say, 7:30 and 8:00.

SAM. Okay, one moment please. (Putting her on hold and buzzing
upstairs.) Hello upstairs. Jean-Claude? Oscar!!

OSCAR. Samuel, greetings and salutations. How are you?

SAM. Good, Oscar, how—

OSCAR. Did you see they had The Grinch on TV last night?

SAM. Scrolls through a customer database.

OSCAR. That’s marvelous, thank you so much Sam. And good luck to you!

New line:

SAM. Good morning, reservations; could you hold please?

BOB. (Mocking Sam.) Good morning, reservations; could you hold
please?

SAM. Hello?

BOB. (Big laugh at his own joke.) Hey Sam, it’s Bob!

SAM. Hey Bob, where are you?

BOB. Not there!

SAM. Yeah, I know. Where are you?

BOB. The L.E.; can you believe it? My car stalled out in the middle
of the passing lane. It was the scariest thing that has ever happened to me. I mean, basically I'm lucky I'm still alive.
SAM. (Unmoved.) So when are you coming in?
BOB. (Still cracking himself up.) Don't go overboard with the sympathy, Sam. I'm waiting for a tow.
SAM. Where's Sonya?
BOB. Oh shit.
SAM. Shit what?
BOB. Sonya's not gonna be in today. (Defensive.) Look, she just found out her father has lupus.
SAM. Oh no. That's terrible.
BOB. And I didn't have time to cover her shift.
SAM. What?! Bob, are you kidding me?
OSCAR. (B zoning in.) Samuel.
SAM. Yes, Oscar.
OSCAR. I'm going to the bank.
SAM. Okay.
BOB. Sam.
SAM. Yes, Bob.
BOB. I'll be there as soon as I can. You'll be fine!
SAM. Another big laugh, then he hangs up.
SAM. (Moving on to a new line.) I'm sorry to keep you waiting, how can I help you?
MRS. WINSLOW. (Sympathetic.) I'm hoping you can. My husband and I are big foodies. We saw the little segment the chef did on The Today Show, and we're coming to New York the weekend of January the thirteenth and we are just dyin' to come in and eat with y'all.
SAM. Ma'am, unfortunately we're fully committed that weekend.
MRS. WINSLOW. You're full of what now?
SAM. We're really, really, really full.
MRS. WINSLOW. But it's over a month away!
SAM. (Apologetic.) Actually, we work about three months in advance. On the sixth day of every month the third month out opens up for reservations.
MRS. WINSLOW. Are you sure you don't have anything darlin'? We are two teeny tiny people.
SAM. Well, size isn't really the problem, ma'am. I just don't have anything at all weekends through March.
MRS. WINSLOW. Well bless your heart darlin', as long as y'all stay humble. Bye-bye.
She hangs up.
SAM. (New line.) Thank you for holding, how can I help you?
BRYCE. (Frighteningly cheerful.) Hi, this is Bryce calling from Gwyneth Paltrow's office!
SAM. Oh hi, Bryce. How are you?
BRYCE. I'm fine, thanks, who's this?!!!
SAM. Sam.
BRYCE. (Pathologically excited to talk to Sam.) Sam!!! I didn't know you were still working there! How are you?!!
SAM. Good, how are you?
BRYCE. Super! How's the acting career?
SAM. It's okay.
BRYCE. (Gushing sympathy.) Oh, it's such a tough business!! Hang in there!!
SAM. (About to respond.) Thanks, it's--
BRYCE. (Not waiting for a reply; quickly shifting gears.) Okay, Gwyneth would like to come in this weekend with fifteen people, on Saturday night at 8 pm, and she's gonna need a round, freestanding table, hold on for just one second... (Checking his records.) ...it's number seventeen.
SAM. Okay.
BRYCE. Thanks! You can put that under her name, Gwyneth Paltrow. And you can confirm that with me. I'm Bryce!!
SAM. Right, and the number there?
BRYCE. (Very hush-hush.) Okay, it's 646-866-2250, and I know you'll be discreet with that information.
SAM. Of course.
BRYCE. Thanks! And you know she doesn't eat legumes, right?
SAM. Right.
BRYCE. And no female waitstaff at the table!
SAM. Okay.
BRYCE. Thanks a million!
SAM. (On to another line.) Thank you for holding, how can I help you?
MIDWESTERN SECRETARY. Good morning, I'm phoning from the offices of Dr. Sharon Mallone up here in Milwaukee. She's planning a trip to New York later this month and she'd like some details regarding your cuisine.
SAM. All right, the chef calls it "molecular gastronomy."
MIDWESTERN SECRETARY. (Stymied.) Molecule—
SAM. It's sort of a way of cooking that embraces scientific technique to enhance the culinary experience.
MIDWESTERN SECRETARY. Okay, could you fax us over a menu?
SAM. (Grabbing an old menu.) Well the chef changes the menu from day to day, but I could read you a few items off last night's menu, if you'd like.
MIDWESTERN SECRETARY. That'd be great.
SAM. (Reeling it off, matter-of-fact.) All right, we've got crispy deer lichen atop a slowly deflating scent-filled pillow, dusted with edible dirt."
MIDWESTERN SECRETARY. (Dumbfounded.) Okay...
SAM. Smoked cuttlefish risotto in a cloud of dry ice infused with pipe tobacco.
MIDWESTERN SECRETARY. Okay...
SAM. And nitro-frozen shaved foie gras enshrouded in a liquid-chicken filled orb.
MIDWESTERN SECRETARY. (At last a familiar item.) Oh, good. You do have chicken and things of that nature, okay! And what is the average price of a meal?
SAM. Somewhere between $250 and $350 a head, depending on——

MIDWESTERN SECRETARY. (A little more than she'd bargained for.) Okay then, thanks for your help! Bye-bye.

She hangs up.

SAM. (On to a new line.) Thank you for holding, how can I help you?
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. (Like a drill sergeant.) First of all, I've been holding for ten minutes! Number two, you have to do something about that music. Those crescendos are really very piercing. All right now, I need to speak to Jean-Claude regarding Friday evening. It's Carolann Rosenstein-Fishburn.
SAM. He's not in yet, can I—

Dial tone; she's hung up.

Okay. (To himself.) Nice talking to you.

The phone rings.

(Feature line.) Good morning, reservations; could you hold please?

Though he makes a big show of modesty, the chef is a world-class narcissist, obsessively cultivating his own star status and worshipping at the altar of celebrity. Vain, petulant, and mildly thuggish, the chef seems more like an overgrown frat boy than the international culinary sensation that he is. He talks in an ultra-cool, disaffected, offhandedly sexy way, almost as if he's giving phone sex.

CHEF. (Barely awake, he's calling from bed.) Who's this?
SAM. Hi Chef, it's Sam.
CHEF. Sam, how's he going?
SAM. Good, I—

CHEF. Lemme talk to Jean-Claude.
SAM. He's not here yet—

CHEF. Lemme talk to Oscar.
SAM. He just went to the ba—

CHEF. Lemme talk to Bob.
SAM. (Anticipating a hissy fit.) He's not—

CHEF. (Having a hissy fit.) What the fuck is going on over there?!!! Where's Bob?
SAM. His car just broke down on the L.I.E.
CHEF. So who's on the phones?
SAM. Just me right now.
CHEF. (Snarling) Just you? Where's Sonya?
SAM. She just found out her father has lupus.
CHEF. (Deeply paranoid) Yeah? That's a good one. Tell her I need a doctor's note.
SAM. Okay.
CHEF. Pass me up to the hostess.
SAM. (Buzzing upstairs) Stephanie, Chef on line two.
    Sam's cell phone rings. It's in his backpack on the other side of the room, and he runs to get it. There's terrible reception in the basement and Sam has to find the one place in the office where he can hear the caller.
Dad! Hold on one second, okay? Dad, can you hear me?
    Sam’s dad—a retired gym teacher from the Midwest. Very sentimental when it comes to Sam, but not accustomed to expressing emotion.
DAD. Hey kiddo! How are you doin'?
SAM. I'm all right. How about you?
DAD. Not too bad. How'd you do on that play audition?
SAM. Pretty good.
DAD. Didja get the article I sent you on the guy from NCIS?
SAM. Yeah, thanks.
DAD. You know he graduated St. Bridget's about three years after you left. I didn't even know he was an actor.
    Sam's cell phone rings again.
SAM. Yeah. Dad, can you hold on for one second?
DAD. Okey-dokey.
    Sam clicks on to the other line.
SAM. Hello?
    Jerry Miller, an old acting schoolmate of Sam's. Passive-aggressive, violently self-involved, falsely humble.
JERRY. Hey man. It's Jerry. Just want to download about my audition.
    The phone rings.
SAM. Oh, hey Jerry, could you hold on for one second?
JERRY. Do your thing.
    Sam runs back to the desk and picks up the phone. New line:
SAM. Reservations, could you hold please?
BRUCE. Yeah, it's Bruce; I'll hold!
    Sam runs back to his cell phone.
SAM. (Back to Dad.) Sorry Dad. You know, I should probably try and get through these lines and call you later.
DAD. Okay, kiddo. Hey—didja ask the chef about Christmas?
SAM. Not yet.
DAD. I was just looking at the little graph on Expedia and they're saying we should buy now.
SAM. Okay, let me—
STEPHANIE. (Buzzing in.) Sam! It's the chef on line two.
SAM. Dad, let me call you back in a couple of minutes. That's the chef.
DAD. Okey-dokey. Adios amigo.
    He hangs up.
SAM. Adios.
    Sam returns to the desk and picks up line two.
CHEF. (Still half-asleep.) What did we do last night?
SAM. (Checking the computer) It looks like $41,700.
CHEF. How's my cookbook doing?
SAM. (Googling) It's number eight in cookbooks.
CHEF. And what about Bobby Flay's book?
SAM. Number sixteen.
CHEF. What a loser. What does lunch look like?
SAM. We're all booked up.
CHEF. (Snarling) What did you just say? Did you forget my new policy?
SAM. No, we're "fully committed."
CHEF. That's more like it. Any V.I.P.s?
SAM. Diane Sawyer at 1:15.
CHEF. Who's that?
SAM. She's a famous TV reporter.
CHEF. (Unimpressed.) Oh. Anyone else?
SAM. Alan Greenspan at 1:30.
CHEF. Who's that?
SAM. I don't know. The name sounds familiar but I don't really know who he is. Let me look him up.
CHEF. (Losing interest.) Nah, who gives a shit.

He hangs up. Sam's cell phone rings. He runs to get it. It's Jerry.

SAM. Jerry. I'm so sorry.
JERRY. I can barely hear you.

Sam moves around, trying to find the sweet spot for reception.
SAM. Yeah, I'm at work. I get really shitty reception down here.
JERRY. God, I don't know how you do it, Sam. If I had your job, I'd shoot myself. (Then.) How was your audition?
SAM. It was okay. How was yours?
JERRY. I don't know. I mean, I thought I gave the worst audition of my life, but apparently not 'cause I have a callback this afternoon.
SAM. Really.
JERRY. Oh God. I knew I shouldn't have said anything. Is this weird for you?
SAM. No. It's fine. Congratulations.
JERRY. Look Sam, they could still call you back. You're so fucking good.
SAM. Thanks, Jerry. Do you know how much longer they're seeing people?
JERRY. I keep hearing different things. Mateo said he thought it was just tomorrow. But someone else said they're seeing people all week.
SAM. Mateo's going in too?

JERRY. Look Sam, don't get into a shame spiral just because that HBO thing fell through.

The phone rings.

SAM. I'm not. I have to grab this line.

The phone keeps ringing.
JERRY. Look, I know it's really weird that we keep going up for the same parts. But I feel like the only way we can maintain our friendship is to be totally and brutally honest with each other, even if it hurts.
SAM. Okay, I have to go.

Hangs up with Jerry, then picks up a new line.

Reservations. could you hold please?
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. It's Carolann Rosenstein-Fishburn calling for Jean-Claude. Did you forget to give him the message?
SAM. One moment please. (Buzzing upstairs.) Hello upstairs!
Jean-Claude!

Jean-Claude, the original French maître d'. Wildly theatrical and drunk with his own power, he indiscriminately humiliates the various waiters, busboys, and customers who cross him. Prone to frequent tantrums and intermittent bouts of charm, Jean-Claude can turn on a dime. One minute he's filled with contempt for the entire universe and the next he's manically fawning over a big tipper.

JEAN-CLAUDE. Allo, be brief.
SAM. Hi Jean-Claude, it's Sam.
JEAN-CLAUDE. (Mildly pleased that it's Sam.) Sam, what can I do for you? (And then snippy.) I'm trying to get ready for lunch up here.

SAM. Carolann Rosenstein-Fishburn on line four.
JEAN-CLAUDE. (Disgusted.) Oh my God. I hate that lady. No sex appeal at all.
SAM. Do you want to talk to her?
JEAN-CLAUDE. She's so ugly Sam, you can't believe it. She has a face like a dog.
SAM. Jean-Claude.
JEAN-CLAUDE. I’m just telling you the fact of the situation.
SAM. (Back to Mrs. Fishburn.) Okay Mrs. Fishburn, I can’t find Jean-Claude, but I’ll have him call you as soon as he gets in.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. Who is this?
SAM. Sam.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. Sam, tell Jean-Claude it’s an urgent situation.
SAM. Are you sure there’s nothing I—
Dial tone; she’s hung up. To himself.
Okay. Love you too.
Then onto a waiting line.
Thank you for holding, how can I help you?
BRYCE. Hi Sam, it’s Bryce from Gwyneth Patrow’s office!!
SAM. Hi Bryce, what can I do for you?
BRYCE. Listen, I can’t remember if I specified that Gwyneth wants an all-vegan tasting menu on Saturday night, did I?
SAM. No, actually you didn’t.
BRYCE. Oh sweet Mary! Okay, (To his assistant.) This is why I always double-check these things three and four times!!! (Back to Sam.) Okay, so she definitely needs an all-vegan tasting menu. That’s a locally sourced, no-fat, no-salt, no-dairy, no-sugar, no-chicken, no-meat, no-fish, no-soy, no-rice, no-foam, no-corn tasting menu for fifteen, okay?
SAM. Okay, I’ll make a note of that.
BRYCE. Super, that’s all for now, thanks a trillion!!
He hangs up. Sam goes back to the computer and enters what seems to be the new piece information.
SAM. No corn.
A beat—Sam is listening for something...silence. He calls his cell phone.
CELL PHONE/OUTGOING MESSAGE. Hey, it’s Sam. Leave me a message.
Sam punches in the code. (Note: the below should be pre-
recorded.)
AUTOMATED CELL VOICE. You have one new message and two saved messages. First new message received at 10:25 A.M.
AUTOMATED VOICE. This is Time Warner Cable with an important message for Sam Callahan. Please call our business office between 10 A.M. and 8 P.M. to avoid service interruption.
AUTOMATED CELL VOICE. End of new message.
Still no phone calls. Sam makes one last call.
CURTIS. Sam’s agent’s assistant. A highly therapeutized pontificator.
CURTIS. Triad Talent.
SAM. Hey Curtis, it’s Sam. Could I talk to Diana?
CURTIS. She...
Silently communicating with Diana, who’s dodging Sam.
...I don’t have her right now. Is there something I can help you with?
SAM. I was just calling to see if you had heard anything from Lincoln Center.
CURTIS. Sam, if we had heard anything I would have called you.
SAM. No, it’s just that I was talking to Jerry Miller, and he said he’s going back to Lincoln Center today, and I wanted to know if they’ve finished calling people back for Malvolio.
CURTIS. Okay, I know you two have a super-toxic, codependent thing going on. But why don’t you worry about your career and let Jerry worry about Jerry’s.
The phone starts to ring.
SAM. Well, can you have Diana call me when she gets back? If you can’t reach me on the cell you can try me at the restaurant.
CURTIS. (Unimpressed.) Oh...I didn’t know you were back there.
SAM. Yeah, I’m back.
It’s still ringing.
CURTIS. All right Sam, I’ll give her the message. Ciao.
SAM. (Finally picking up the phone.) Reservations, could you hold please?
CHEF. Sam, how many times is the phone supposed to ring before
you pick it up?

SAM. (Sheepish.) Two.

CHEF. And how many times was that?

SAM. Sorry, Chef.

CHEF. I'm in the cab. Any messages?

SAM. (Reading from a message pad.) Yeah, there are a few from last night. Helen Mirren called.

CHEF. (Perking up.) Really? She's so hot. Anything else?

SAM. There's a message from your agent. They want you to be a guest judge on Chopped.

CHEF. Fuck that. Anything else?

SAM. Your trapeze instructor called, and there's something from your restaurant supplier.

CHEF. Really? What does the restaurant supplier want?

SAM. He wanted to let you know that your Excalibur 9 deluxe immersion circulator is in.

CHEF. Oh, cool! I'll be there in five.

He hangs up. The phone rings.

SAM. Reservations, could you hold please?

Dominic Vecchini, a low-level mobster.

VECCINI. (Thuggish.) All right.

SAM. (Beeing upstairs.) Steph, is the staff meal up?

STEPHANIE. Give me two seconds, love. I've just got to seat my 12:15.

The phone rings.

SAM. Reservations, could you hold please?

Mrs. Sebag (pronounced "sebag"), always on the verge of total hysterics, waiting for the world to wrong her. She aggressively commandeers a large household staff, and anyone else who will let her.

SEBAG. (Livid.) No. I cannot! Are you kidding me?!

SAM. Okay, how can I help you?

SEBAG. (To an offstage lackey.) No, Maria. Don't drag the vacuum—

(To Sam.) I'm calling to confirm my reservation for Saturday night. Your confirmation policy is ridiculous. I don't know why you people don't use OpenTable.

SAM. And your name?

SEBAG. Sebag, S-E-B-A-G.

SAM. And how many people?

SEBAG. Three.

SAM. And what time?

SEBAG. Six or six thirty. I don't know. (To Maria.) No Maria, not that sponge. (To Sam, trying to get off the phone.) All right, am I set?

SAM. I don't see it here ma'am, could it be under another name?

SEBAG. (Starting to flip.) What do you—No, it's under Sebag.

SAM. Well, I'm looking under Sebug right now and I don't see it anywhere so I'm wondering if there's another name you could have put it under.

SEBAG. (Gearing up for battle.) Do you mean to tell me—I made it myself under the name of Sebag! What's going on there?

SAM. Well, ma'am I—

SEBAG. Oh my—I cannot believe this is happening! (Screaming to her offstage husband.) Barry, they don't have our reservation! Oh my God! I can't believe you're doing this to me!!

The phone rings.

SAM. Okay ma'am, could you hold for just a second?

SEBAG. No!

SAM. Ma'am, I have to get this phone, I'll be right back.

On to his new line:

Reservations, could you hold please?

MRS. VANDEVERE. Sam, it's Bunny Vandevere!

SAM. I'll be right with you. (Back to Sebag.) Okay ma'am, I'm—

SEBAG. Who am I speaking to?

Bunt, a strategic decision.

SAM. Dante. Aha?

SEBAG. Dante, put me on with a manager right now!!
SAM. Ma'am, right now the reservation manager isn't here, but I can take a message and he'll call you back.

SEBAG. No, Dante! This is an emergency.

SAM. (Tiring logic.) Okay then, what I'd like to do first is read all the parties of three I have on Saturday, in case the reservation was mistakenly put at the wrong time, or under the wrong name. Okay?

SEBAG. (Left with no alternative.) Okay, all right go ahead!!

SAM. (Scrolling through the list.) Okay, Duff, Lamb, Tisch.

SEBAG. No-no-no.

SAM. Goldberg, Buckley, Peyton, Miller.

SEBAG. No-no-no-no.

SAM. And... Yamaguchi.

SEBAG. (Shrieking.) Dante!

SAM. I'm sorry, ma'am... I don't know what else to tell you right now. I—

SEBAG. Tell me that you'll honor my reservation which I made over three months ago!

SAM. I can't do that until our reservation manager gets—

SEBAG. (To her offsiding husband.) Barry! They're screwing us over. I can't believe they—

Trips over a mop as she hangs up.

Goddamnit, Maria! And she's gone.

SAM. (On to a new line.) I'm so sorry sir, how can I help you?

VECCINI. Yeah, my parents are regulars with youse and they're coming in tonight at 5:00 for their anniversary. And I wanted to see if the waiters could sing their favorite song at the table.

SAM. Okay, what's the name of the song?

VECCINI. "The Lady Is a Tramp."

SAM. Are you love that song. My parents were big Sinatra fans. What's your last name, sir?

VECCINI. Vecinni, Dominic Vecinni.

SAM. Okay, hold on. (Buzzing upstairs.) Jean-Claude?

JEAN-CLAUDE. Ye-ees.

SAM. There's a guy on line three who wants one of you to sing "The Lady Is a Tramp" for his parents' anniversary.

JEAN-CLAUDE. Oh my God! That's so tacky! What is this? A Chuck E. Cheese?

SAM. What do you want to do?

JEAN-CLAUDE. (Disgusted by the mere thought.) What's going on?

SAM. Viscinii.

JEAN-CLAUDE. (Apparently he's a good tipper.) Oh you kidding? Of course. Give him whatever he wants.

SAM. How much are you going to charge him?

JEAN-CLAUDE. I don't know. $25.

SAM. Well, pick up line three. (On to a new line.)Thank you. holding, how can I help you?

MRS. VANDEVERE. (Nodding.) Sam, it's Bunny VanDevere. I must be awfully busy today—

SAM. Yeah we—

MRS. VANDEVERE. Listen, I forgot to tell you, we're going to my table thirty-one tonight.

SAM. (Scrolling through his dinner list.) That shouldn't be a—(Finding it.) Actually, someone's reserved table thirty-one tonight.

MRS. VANDEVERE. (Unfazed.) Well, we always sit there; we sort of have a standing reservation.

SAM. Well actually, we have a lot of customers who like to sit there, and it's been reserved.

MRS. VANDEVERE. Sam, we're coming in with Malcolm Gladwell. You do know who he is, don't you?

Sam has no idea who he is.

SAM. (Strolling as he Googles.) Yes, of course I know who—

MRS. VANDEVERE. He's one of the most important living writers in this country.

SAM. No I just—the table's been reserved.
ANDEVERE. Well, who reserved it?
N can't tell you that Mrs. Vandevere.

VANDEVERE. Why not? I'm going to see who's sitting there.

A beat.

Carolann Rosenstein-Fishburn? 

M. (Reluctantly) No, his name is Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed, okay?

RS. VANDEVERE. Well, why don't you give us table nineteen then.

AM. That's actually been reserved too.

MRS. VANDEVERE. (Deeply peeved.) Oh for heaven's sake Sam, it's not rocket science. Why don't you have Bob call me when he gets in? You don't seem to have the skill set to handle it by yourself.

She hangs up. The chef's special phone buzzes, indicating that he's in his office.

From this point on, each time Sam has to communicate with the chef, he has to get up and use this designated "bat phone."

SAM. Yes, Chef?

CHEF. I'm in my office. Let me talk to Bob.

SAM. He's still not here.

CHEF. That's fucking fantastic. Any new messages?

SAM. No.

CHEF. Did Ben Affleck call?

SAM. No.

CHEF. (Pissed) Damn it. (Impetuous.) All right from now on, I have another new policy. I want you to transfer every single one of my calls straight to my office. I'm sick of you guys deciding who I get to talk to, okay? That's my privilege.

SAM. Of course.

CHEF. But if Ned Finlay calls, you can tell him that I don't ever want to see his fat ass in this restaurant again, right?

SAM. Okay.

CHEF. And don't forget about my helicopter.

The phone starts ringing.
you want to bring your new friend for the holiday, if that's what's holding you up.

SAM. Thanks, Dad. That friend is actually out of the picture.

DAD. Oh that's too bad, kid. He sounded like a nice fella.

SAM. Yeah. Not quite as nice as I thought he was.

DAD. Well then you're better off without him.

SAM. Yeah... You know what. Let me talk to the chef about the schedule right now and I'll call you right back, okay?

DAD. Okey-doke. Adios amigo.

SAM. Adios.

Sam hangs up with his dad. The phone rings.
(On a new line.) Reservations, could you hold please?

A horrible combination of paranoid and aggressive, Mr. Buxbaum is a reservationist's worst nightmare.

BUXBAUM. I don't know if I have that much time.

SAM. Oh god. Hold on.

Sam heads to the bat phone.

Chef?

CHEF. (Annoyed.) What do you want?

SAM. I was wondering if you decided whether the reservation office is open on Christmas or not?

CHEF. Open.

SAM. And Christmas Eve?

CHEF. Open.

SAM. And are you gonna need me and Bob?

CHEF. Well, I need one of you and if I'm not mistaken, Bob has seniority.

SAM. Okay, thanks.

Sam starts to dial his dad's number, but can't go through with it.

STEPHANIE. (Buzzing in.) Sam, you're not going to like this. The staff meal's gone; they put it out without buzzing us.

SAM. No.

STEPHANIE. I'm sorry, love, I think Bob's got some Cheetos in the file cabinet.

SAM. Thanks. (Buzzing up to the kitchen, which is really loud.) Hello? Hello in the kitchen! Hector?

HECTOR. Yes, Mr. Buxbaum. I'm sorry, I was in the middle of something.

SAM. (Getting testy.) Okay, but I don't have time to explain.

HECTOR. That's different, okay? If you didn't know it's up is different. Because I made it okay?

SAM. (Getting testy.) Okay, but I can't leave the office today so I never knew you made it.

HECTOR. Why you getting your attitude at me, pendejo?

SAM. (To Hector.) I'm not getting an attitude, I'm just really hungry. Never mind. (On a new line.) Reservations, how can I help you?

BUXBAUM. (Gratesquely angry.) Yes! This is Mrs. Buxbaum! It is vital that I speak to the chef ASAP!

SAM. He's in a meeting right now, can I ask what it's in regard to?

BUXBAUM. Yes, I was speaking with a Sam earlier this morning and he was extremely rude.

SAM. (Taken aback.) This is Sam.

BUXBAUM. Well, I don't know who you thought you were speaking to this morning, but I will not stand for it!

SAM. (Genuinely confused.) I'm sorry ma'am, did we speak this morning?

BUXBAUM. What do you mean, did we speak this morning, you motherfucker?! Are you accusing me of lying?!

SAM. No, I just—

And suddenly Mrs. Buxbaum bursts into hysterical laughter,
revealing herself to be Bob, playing a practical joke.

BOB. Hi Sam, it's Bob! You didn't know who I was did you?
SAM. Yeah, you're hilarious. Where are you?
BOB. I told you Sam; I'm waiting for a tow.
SAM. Oh my—Bob, it's 1:30 and I haven't even eaten yet.
BOB. Lighten up, champ. I'm doin' the best I can.

STEPHANIE. (Buzzing in.) Sam! Hello.
SAM. (To Bob.) Well hurry. (To Stephanie.) Yes?
STEPHANIE. (Furtive.) Do you know anything about... Heston Blumenthal coming in today?
SAM. (Understanding the magnitude of the situation.) No.
STEPHANIE. Well he's up here, and he's not on the list.
SAM. (Complete disbelief.) No.
STEPHANIE. Yes.
SAM. (Scrolling through the list, panicking.) Well, I don't see anything about it down here.
STEPHANIE. He insists he made a reservation last week.
SAM. Can you bump somebody?
STEPHANIE. I've just sat my last table. (Beat; as if she's announcing a major tragedy.) I think he's going to have to wait.
SAM. (A disaster of epic proportions.) Oh my God.
STEPHANIE. Where's the chef?
SAM. In his office.
STEPHANIE. Buzz me if he comes up this way.

The bat phone buzzes. Sam rushes over and picks it up.

SAM. Yes, Chef?
CHEF. What the fuck is going on down there? What is Heston Blumenthal doing in the lounge?
SAM. I don't know.
CHEF. (Losing it.) You do understand he was my fucking mentor, Sam. He basically invented molecular gastronomy.
SAM. No, I know. There's just nothing down here about it.
CHEF. What do you mean there's nothing down here about it? What are you doing all fucking day?
SAM. I mean, I never spoke to him and there's nothing in the system or—
CHEF. Get him on the line.

The phone rings.

SAM. I'm sorry?

Still ringing.

CHEF. I want you to buzz up to the lounge and ask Heston Blumen-
thath who he talked to when he made the reservation.
SAM. Okay. *(On to his new line, flustered.)* Good morning—good
afternoon, reservations, could you hold please?

Mr. Decoste—a mysterious stranger.
MR. DECOSTE. I'd like to come in tonight at 7:30.
SAM. *(Distracted.)* Unfortunately sir, we're fully committed tonight.
MR. DECOSTE. *(Nonplussed.)* So what'll it cost me?
SAM. What'll it cost you?
MR. DECOSTE. I'm assuming that for the right price, you could
find me a table.
SAM. *(Dawning on him.)* Oh...actually sir, we're not supposed to
accept any kind of—
MR. DECOSTE. *(Testing the waters.)* Any kind of what?
SAM. Gifts or gratuities.
MR. DECOSTE. All right, what's your name?
SAM. Sam.
MR. DECOSTE. All right, thank you, Sam.

He hangs up. The chef buzzes in. Sam runs to the bat phone.
SAM. Yes, Chef?
CHEF. What did Blumenthal say?
SAM. I haven't—

CHEF. *(Barking.)* Now!!
SAM. Okay, *(Buzzing upstairs.)* Steph? Can you put Mr. Blumenthal
on the line?
STEPHANIE. *(Utterly baffled.)* You want to talk to—
SAM. Don't even ask.
STEPHANIE. *(Confused, handing the phone to Blumenthal.)* All right.

Heston Blumenthal.
HESTON BLUMENTHAL. This is Heston Blumenthal.
SAM. Hi Mr. Blumenthal, this is Sam from downstairs...the chef
actually wanted me to ask you who you spoke to last week when
you made the reservation.

HESTON BLUMENTHAL *(Annoyed.)* My assistant called and
confirmed this twice.
SAM. Yeah, actually we're just trying to correct the situation down
here. Do you remember who you spoke to?

HESTON BLUMENTHAL. It was Bob. I always speak to Bob.
The phone starts to ring.
SAM. *(Cheered.)* Okay, thank you so much!

He picks up his new line.
Good afternoon, reservations; could you hold please?
Laryngitis guy—*an incredibly nice guy who talks like he has
laryngitis all the time.*

LARYNGITIS GUY. Absolutely!
The chef buzzes. Sam runs to the bat phone.
SAM. Yes, Chef?
CHEF. Who did Blumenthal speak with?
SAM. *(Joyous.)* Bob.
CHEF. I'm gonna cut his fucking balls off.

He hangs up.
SAM. *(Gleefully moving on to a new line.)* Thank you for holding,
how can I help you?

LARYNGITIS GUY. *(Genuine, pleasant.)* You're very welcome.
Who'm I speaking with?
SAM. *(Taken aback by the sound of his voice.)* Sam.
LARYNGITIS GUY. Sam, how are you today?
SAM. I'm good; sounds like you have a bad cold.
LARYNGITIS GUY. No, this is how I talk. It's sort of a permanent
cold.
SAM. Oh, I'm sorry.
LARYNGITIS GUY. Not a problem. I get that all the time. Now I
know it's a long shot but I'm wondering if you have anything at all
this weekend.
SAM. I'm sorry sir, we're fully committed this weekend.
LARYNGITIS GUY. Do you mind taking my name and number in
case anything opens up?
SAM. No problem.
LARYNGITIS GUY. Terrific. The name’s Dan Rappaport and my number is 574-566-0890.
SAM. That’s South Bend. I grew up on North June Street.
LARYNGITIS GUY. No sir. What’s your last name, Sam?
SAM. Callahan.
LARYNGITIS GUY. Any relation to Ed Callahan?
SAM. That’s my dad.
LARYNGITIS GUY. I’ve known your dad for twenty-five years. He coached all three of my kids at Saint Bridget’s.
SAM. No way.
LARYNGITIS GUY. Oh sure. You’re Sam, the actor in New York—right?
SAM. Yeah…
LARYNGITIS GUY. He is so proud of you, my God. He sends out these email blasts every time you get a good review.

*The phone rings.*

SAM. Hold on one second. (New line.) Reservations, could you hold please?

Bon Appétit editor’s assistant—in a constant state of panic

EDITOR’S ASSISTANT. Um. Okay. I guess so.
SAM. Sorry about that, Mr. Rappaport.
LARYNGITIS GUY. (Through painful-sounding coughs.) Dan, please.
Call me Dan.
SAM. Dan, that sounds like it really hurts.
LARYNGITIS GUY. No, it’s fine. I’m used to it.
SAM. This may be way out of line, but have you ever tried working with a vocal coach?
LARYNGITIS GUY. Can’t say that I have.
SAM. Yeah, you know, I used to blow out my voice all the time and when I started working with a vocal coach she gave me a few simple exercises that made a huge difference.

LARYNGITIS GUY. No kidding. What kind of exercises?
SAM. Well, like try opening your mouth as wide as you can, like you were about to yawn and go— (Opens his mouth and sings a beautiful scale.) La-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-
LARYNGITIS GUY. (His version sounds like a wounded animal.)

*The phone rings.*
SAM. Good. Hold on one second. (Picking up.) Reservations, could you hold please?

The phone is still ringing.

BRYCE. Hi, it’s Bryce! I’ll hold.
SAM. (New line.) Reservations, could you hold please?

Judith Rush, a retired furniture dealer from a small town in upstate New York, with delusions of grandeur and a constant sense that the world is cheating her. Still, sort of cute in spite of herself.

JUDITH RUSH. Hello? Hell—
SAM. I’ll be right with you, ma’am. (Back to Laryngitis Guy.) You know what, Dan. Let me call you back first thing tomorrow morning and see if I can help you out, okay?
LARYNGITIS GUY. That’d be great. Sam. (And then.) Hey listen, I was so sorry to hear about your mom. She was a real nice lady.
SAM. Oh, thanks.
LARYNGITIS GUY. How’s your dad doing?
SAM. He’s doing all right.
LARYNGITIS GUY. You guys taking good care of him? Keeping him busy?
SAM. Yeah.

The chef buzzes in.
Dan, that’s my boss. I gotta run. But I’ll talk to you soon.
LARYNGITIS GUY. You take care now.

Sam runs to the bat phone.
SAM. Yes, Chef?
CHEF. Pull the Blumenthal file.
SAM. Okay, hold on one second.

*Sam rushes to a file cabinet and pulls out the file he needs, then heads back to the bat phone.*

Got it.
CHEF. What appetizers did he eat the last time he was here?
SAM. *(Reading from the file.)* It looks like frozen polenta with honey mastic, codfish foam, and bubbling crock of head cheese.
CHEF. Did he finish all his dishes?
SAM. Looks like everything except the crock—
CHEF. *(Seething.)* Motherf*uck! Buzz Jean-Claude and tell him to hold the head cheese.
SAM. Okay. *(Buzzing Jean-Claude.)* Jean-Claude, Chef wants you to hold Blumenthal’s head cheese.
JEAN-CLAUDE. Tell the chef to hold his own goddamn head cheese.

He hangs up.
SAM. *(On to a new line.)* Thank you for holding, how can I help you?
EDITOR’S ASSISTANT. Oh my God. I’ve been holding so long I forgot who I called.
SAM. This is Restaur—
EDITOR’S ASSISTANT. Oh right, you guys. Okay, I’m calling from Jane Lassiter’s office at Bon Appétit magazine. She really needs to talk to the chef, like now.
SAM. One moment please.

*Sam heads to the bat phone.*

Chef?
CHEF. What the fuck do you want?!
SAM. Jane Lassiter’s office is on line three.
CHEF. Tell her I’m not here.
SAM. Do you know about the photographer from Bon Appétit waiting in the lounge?
CHEF. *(Mocking Sam.)* Sam, you do know that I’m trying to prepare an alternate appetizer for Heston Blumenthal, who’s also been waiting in our lounge for over twenty fucking minutes like a regular fucking customer.

He hangs up.
SAM. *(Back to the assistant.)* Ma’am? The chef’s in a meeting but I’ll have him call you as soon as he’s done.
EDITOR’S ASSISTANT. *(Paralyzed with fear.)* Um. Yeah. Okay. Sure.

She hangs up.
SAM. *(Onto a new line.)* Thank you for holding, how can I help you?
JUDITH RUSH. Hello? Hello? Who am I speaking with?
SAM. This is Sam, how can I help you?
JUDITH RUSH. Sam, I was in the restaurant last night with my two daughters and— *(As if she’d forgotten to mention it before.)* I’m a senior citizen!
SAM. Okay...
JUDITH RUSH. And the maître d’ insisted that he would take care of us, and when the bill came he charged us for everything!
SAM. Okay...
JUDITH RUSH. Evidently, he thought he could take advantage of a senior citizen.
SAM. Okay, I’m not sure I understand the situation.
JUDITH RUSH. He insisted that I was not entitled to the double-A.R.P. discount!
SAM. Ohh... well I don’t think we do accept that discount.
JUDITH RUSH. *(Offended.)* I’m eighty-six years old.
SAM. No, it’s not that—
JUDITH RUSH. And I’ve gone through a lot! Three eye operations. Cataracts in my left eye and glaucoma in both eyes. And previously I had a bladder suspension also.

The phone rings.
SAM. Okay, one moment please. *(On to his new line.)* Reservations, could you hold please?

Fox Searchlight lady, a bitter workaholic.
FOX SEARCHLIGHT LADY. I’m calling from Fox Searchlight.
SAM. I’ll be right with you. (Back to Mrs. Rush.)

JUDITH RUSH. (Mid-thought, as if she hadn’t noticed Sam was gone.) And that was just the sciatica. You see, people think that an elderly person is not going to check the bill. But I did! I was in business thirty-five years as vice president of the Rush Furniture Company in Herkimer, New York.

SAM. Ma’am, why don’t you give me your name and I’ll ask the chef about the double-A.R.P. discount.

JUDITH RUSH. Mrs. Judith Rush.

SAM. All right. I’ve got your number right here. Is there anything else I can do for you?

JUDITH RUSH. (Angling for a bigger discount.) Well, to be honest with you, I was very disappointed with the quality of the food.

JEAN-CLAUDE. (Buzzing in from the kitchen.) Allo Sam! Sam!

SAM. Hold on one second, Mrs. Rush. (To Jean-Claude.) Yes, Jean-Claude.

JEAN-CLAUDE. Why you didn’t tell me Alan Greenspan was a V.I.P. Sam.

SAM. Jean-Claude, it says V.I.P. right by his name. Double red.

JEAN-CLAUDE. Yeah, but I didn’t know who he is so I give him a table right by the kitchen door and now Diane Sawyer tell me he’s a big deal.

SAM. How was I supposed to know?

JEAN-CLAUDE. That’s part of your job Sam. I mean, really!

SAM. (Imitating Jean-Claude.) “That’s part of your job Sam. I mean, really.”

OSCAR. (Buzzing in.) Samuel, I remembered what I was going to say. No Ned Finlay.

SAM. Yeah, I got it. Thanks, Oscar. (Back to Mrs. Rush.) I’m sorry, Mrs. Rush. Now where were we?

JUDITH RUSH. I was saying that I was very disappointed with the quality of the food.

SAM. I’m so sorry to hear that. What did you have?

JUDITH RUSH. We had the— (Badly mispronounced.) —dubbe...
FOX SEARCHLIGHT LADY. (Correcting Sam.) Ma’am.

SAM. (Mortified.) I’m sorry ma’am, we’re fully committed Fridays and—

FOX SEARCHLIGHT LADY. All right, second choice: Saturday, the sixteenth, the twenty-third, or the thirtieth.

SAM. Actually ma’am, right now all my weekends are fully committed through March so—

FOX SEARCHLIGHT LADY. Well, it has to be one of those three weekends.

SAM. Well, if you’re looking for a weekend, I could either offer you the waiting list or you could call back on the sixth of January for an April reservation.

FOX SEARCHLIGHT LADY. What a bunch of pretentious crap.

SAM. (Taken aback.) Ma’am, I know it’s hard to make a reservation here, but I’m just doing my job.

FOX SEARCHLIGHT LADY. Yeah, well why don’t you go fuck yourself.

She hangs up. Sam is stunned. He sits there for a second in a mild state of shock, disliking his job intensely. Before he can muster the strength to move, Oscar buzzes him.

OSCAR. (Buzzing in.) Hello, Samuel. I forgot to ask you, how was your audition?

SAM. It was fine. Thanks for asking, Oscar.  

All right!  

Sam makes a phone call.

CURTIS. Triad.

SAM. Hi Curtis it’s Sam. Is Diana there?

CURTIS. Oh, hi— (Indicating who it is for Diana.) Sam. (Back to Sam.) I still don’t have her, Sam, but I gave her the message.

SAM. Curtis, have you guys been getting bad feedback about me?

CURTIS. Sweetie... I know we’ve had a bit of a dry spell, but you need to focus on all the victories you’ve had. You had the Pippin tour last year. You came very close on the HBO thing. The Neopoint commercial.

SAM. I’m not sure that goes in the victory column.

CURTIS. Sam, I know the business with HBO was disappointing, but we’ve been over this. They decided to go in a different direction with the role. That’s all.

SAM. Well did they ever say why?

CURTIS. Sam, you’re very talented, everyone knows you’re talented...

SAM. But?

CURTIS. However. You do tend to convey a certain lack of... entitlement.

SAM. Excuse me?

CURTIS. A sense of deserving, a sense of worthiness, a sense of status, if you will.

SAM. Have people actually said that, or is this your personal interpretation?

CURTIS. (Getting snippy.) Sam, you asked for feedback and I gave it to you. Now if it’s making you this upset, and it sounds like it is, I think you need to look within and see why it’s bothering you so much.

The phone rings.

SAM. Okay, thanks. (New line.) Good afternoon, reservations; could you hold please?

ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. This is Carolann Rosenstein-Fishburn calling for the third time today.

SAM. One moment please. (Buzzing upstairs.) Jean-Claude!!

JEAN-CLAUDE. Be brief.

SAM. Carolann Rosenstein-Fishburn on line three.

JEAN-CLAUDE. She’s so ugly, Sam, you can’t believe it. She has a face like a catfish.

SAM. (Back to Mrs. Fishburn.) Okay Mrs. Fishburn, Jean-Claude can’t come to the phone right now, but I’ll have him—

Dial tone; she’s hung up. Again.

(To himself, as if she’s still there—.) You know, Carolann, I think you and I need to take some space from each other right now, okay?

Sam buzzes upstairs.

Stephanie?
JEAN-CLAUDE. No, it's not Stephanie. Why are you buzzing us all
day long?
SAM. Jean-Claude, can you watch the phones for like two minutes?
I need to grab some food and I'm about to pee in my pants.
The phone rings.
JEAN-CLAUDE. Sam, what are you, five years old? I have
Blumenthal standing here waiting for a table! I can't watch the
phones for nobody!
He hangs up. Still ringing.
SAM. (Picking up a new line.) Reservations, can I help you?
BRYCE. Hi Sam, it's Bryce from Gwyneth Paltrow's office. I think
you forgot about me before.
SAM. I'm sorry, Bryce.
BRYCE. No, I know how busy you are, but I just got out of a meeting
with Gwyneth and we wanted to go over one last detail with you.
SAM. Okay.
BRYCE. We wanted to know how close table seventeen is to the
lighting sconce.
SAM. How close?
BRYCE. Yeah.
A beat, and then.
Okay. When Gwyneth was in last time, she found the lighting a
little harsh, so if table seventeen is too close to the sconce, rather
than change tables, what she'd like to do is change bulbs, from
whatever it is you're using to something a little softer, which we
would be more than happy to supply.
SAM. (About to get testy.) Bryce, I—
BRYCE. Sam, don't worry! I'll send my assistant over and we'll take
care of it. His name is Tasha and I'll have him run over with
some Edison bulbs at 5:00.
SAM. Okay.
BRYCE. Super, that's all for now! Thanks a gazillion!
He hangs up. The phone rings.
message is: We have a photographer who has been waiting for the chef in your lounge since 8:30 this morning and I would like to know what is going on over there.

SAM. Okay.

JANE LASSITER. And you can tell him that if he can't behave like a grown-up and play nicely with us, we'll have to kill the piece. She hangs up on him.

STEPHANIE. (Buzin g in.) Sam, please! I can't leave the podium right now.

SAM. Oh Steph...

STEPHANIE. (Desperate.) Please, Jean-Claude is apoplectic.

SAM. (Whispering.) Mmm... The phone rings.

Hold on. (New line.) Reservations, could you hold please?

ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. (Livid.) No, it's Carolann Rosenstein-Fishburn. Put Jean-Claude on the phone this instant!!

SAM. He's in the middle of lunch service, can I take a message?

ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. No, this is an emergency! I want you to tell Jean-Claude that we are entertaining a major cultural dignitary this Friday, and if we do not resolve this situation right away, we will transfer all our future business to Eleven Madison Park!

SAM. Okay, one moment please.

JEAN-CLAUDE. (Buzin g in.) Allo Sam!!

SAM. Jean-Claude, line two and line four are both for you.

JEAN-CLAUDE. Sam, you have to go to the restroom right now!

SAM. No, I have four lines on hold—

JEAN-CLAUDE. What do you mean no?

SAM. Why can't you get a busboy?

JEAN-CLAUDE. Are you crazy? Listen Sam, we have to clean up the situation immediately in case Mr. Blumenthal go in there! Do you understand?!! The chef buzzes in.

SAM. (To Jean-Claude.) Hold on, it's the chef.
Sam runs to the bat phone.
Yes, Chef?
CHEF. (Perversely curious.) What'd Lassiter say?
SAM. She wants to know why you've kept her photographer waiting since 8:30 this morning.
CHEF. Yeah, well maybe she should have thought of that when she wrote that shit about my vegetable dust.
SAM. (Humoring him.) Uh-huh.
CHEF. (Very fret-boy.) What a bitch. She's a bitch, right?
SAM. (Pretending to commiserate.) Yeah.
CHEF. What else did she say?
SAM. She said she's going to kill the piece if you can't behave like a grown-up and play nicely.
CHEF. Yeah, good. The only thing she can play nicely with are my balls.
       He hangs up.
JEAN-CLAUDE. (Buzzing in, frantic.) Sam!!! Did you clean it up?
SAM. Get a busboy.
       The phone rings.
JEAN-CLAUDE. Listen, no more fooling around. Mr. Blumenthal just ask me "Where is the bathroom?"!
SAM. Oh God...hold on.
       Sam picks up.
Reservations, could you hold please?
DAD. Hey kid, it's your old man. Couldn't get through to you on the cell.
SAM. Sorry, Dad. My reception is really bad down here.
DAD. Don't mean to keep bugging you, but I wanted to see if ya talked to the big guy yet. I'm about to head out to grab a bite with your uncle.
SAM. Yeah, it doesn't look too good.
DAD. (Covering his disappointment.) Oh well, that's okay.

SAM. I'm sorry, Dad.
DAD. No that's okay, amigo. You gotta work, you gotta work. I got all the other kids coming.
SAM. I'll come in February. In a lot of ways it'll be better.
DAD. Yup. Don't worry about me. You need anything kid? You okay for cash?
SAM. No, I'm fine.
       The chef buzzes in.
Dad, I gotta go. Let me call you back a little later.
DAD. All right then. Adios amigo.
       He hangs up.
SAM. Adios.
More buzzing. Sam heads to the bat phone.
(Dreading this.) Yes, Chef?
CHEF. (Out of control.) What the fuck is going on down there? Jean-Claude just told me you refused to go to the restroom? What kind of horseshit is that?
SAM. Chef, I didn't refuse, I just—
CHEF. Sam I'm not asking you, I'm telling you, okay???
SAM. Chef, that's not part of my job.
CHEF. It's not part of your job? Sam your job is to do whatever I goddamn tell you to. And right now I'm telling you to get into that fucking bathroom.
SAM. I don't understand why you can't get a busboy.
CHEF. You don't need to understand, Sam. Just get up here and clean it up!
       Sam stands up and exits.
Blackout—during which time we hear overwrought classical music, phones ringing out of whack, and snippets of Jean-Claude's conversation upstairs in the lounge. All recorded.
JEAN-CLAUDE. (Manic.) Sam! Sam! What line is my wife on? Allo? Allo! Stephanie, please check on table thirty-one and see what the delay is. (Then suddenly.) Mr. Blumenthal? Where are you going? To the bath-
room? So soon? I mean we hardly even started our conversation. I don't
do know how you doing, how the little Blumenthal is doing or anything.
A beat, as Blumenthal leaves.
Okay, I see you in a minute. (Wild cursing in French.) Luis, qui est-ce qui
se passe? Where is the goddamn busboy? Putain! (Desperately buzzing)
Sam! Sam! Sam!
A moment of silence in the dark, followed by a flushing sound.
Lights up again on Sam, walking back down into the reser-
vation office, trauma-stricken after his experience in the
bathroom. The intercom buzzes.
(Still buzzing) Sam! Sam! Sam!
SAM. Yes?
JEAN-CLAUDE. Did you get to the restroom in time?
SAM. Yup.
JEAN-CLAUDE. Oh wonderful, I got the Blumenthal table ready
right now. Everything's under control.
He hangs up. The phone rings.
SAM. Reservations, how can I help you?
CORPORATE DOUCHE—he's done a lot of leadership training.
CORPORATE DOUCHE. (Singing) "Luck be a lady tonight!"
SAM. How can I help you?
CORPORATE DOUCHE. (Still singing) "Luck be a lady tonight!"
SAM. One moment please.
He puts the guy on hold for a beat, takes a moment to gather
himself, then returns.
Thank you for holding, how can I help you?
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Thank you for being there. Who am I
speaking to?
SAM. Sam.
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Hey, Sam. What do you have for me this
weekend?
SAM. I'm sorry, sir. We're fully committed this weekend.
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Sam, you sound a little low.
SAM. Is there another date I can help you with?
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Sam, what's the matter?
Sam takes a beat, then it just sort of comes out.
SAM. Well, I hate my job. My boyfriend moved out last week. And
the thing is I've always loved doing more than anything else in
the world isn't really working out so well. I think maybe the universe
is telling me it's time to go in another direction.
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Sam. I don't think the universe works
that way. Things don't really go in a straight line. You go up. You go
down. The important thing is to hold on to your own power.
SAM. I'm sorry. I'm so embarrassed. I can't believe I—
CORPORATE DOUCHE. No. No apologies. Sam. Now I want you to
repeat after me. "I am the most powerful person in lower Manhattan."
SAM. "I—" No. I'm sorry. I can't.
CORPORATE DOUCHE. No, Sam. Think about it. I run a
$200,000,000 company and here I am kissing your ass. How does it
feel?
SAM. It feels okay.
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Okay. Now I want you to practice taking
that feeling of power and applying it to the rest of your life. Sam.
Can you do that for me?
Sam smiles. Even though he doesn't totally buy his sh*t,
this guy has somehow made him feel a little better.
SAM. I can give it a shot. Now what can I do for you?
CORPORATE DOUCHE. How about Saturday at 8:00?
SAM. How about 10:00?
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Beautiful.
SAM. Last name.
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Finlay.
SAM. First name?
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Ned.
SAM. Okay, Mr. Finlay. You're all set. Jacket and tie for men,
o.kay?
CORPORATE DOUCHE. Of course! Now you hang in there.
SAM. Things are going to get better.
SAM. All right, we'll see you on Saturday.

He hangs up. Sam suddenly remembers where he's seen the name Ned Finlay. He langes for the phone to try and reverse the damage. No luck.
The intercom buzzes.

HECTOR. (Buz-zzzzzz. from the kitchen.) Hey, papi. They told me what happened to you. That's disgusting.
SAM. (Horrified.) Hector—I just took a reservation for Ned Finlay.
The phone rings.
HECTOR. Oh shit, papi. You're so fucked. You want me to make you some food?
SAM. No thanks, Hector. (Picking up the line.) Reservations, could you hold please?

Nancy, Bob's wife.
NANCY. Hi Sam, it's Nancy.
SAM. (Desperate.) Nancy, where is Bob?
NANCY. I guess he's still at Bed Bath and Beyond.
SAM. Bed Bath and Beyond?
NANCY. Didn't he tell you, Sam? He has a job interview today.
Regional sales manager.
SAM. Oh right...
NANCY. Have him call me as soon as he gets back.
SAM. I sure will. (Buzzing upstairs.) Stephanie.
STEPHANIE. Oh love, I'm so sorry; it must have been awful.
SAM. No, it's not even that. Bob's wife just called and told me that he's been on a job interview all day.
STEPHANIE. No!
The bat phone buzzes.
SAM. I'm just—hold on.

Sam heads to the bat phone.
Yes, Chef?
CHEF. (Perversely curious.) Was it gross?
SAM. Yes, it was gross.
CHEF. Oh man, I can't believe you did it.
The phone rings.
SAM. Yeah, well, I did it.

Sam hangs up on the chef and picks up the phone.
Reservations, could you hold please?
BOB. Hey Sam, it's Bob. How you holdin' up?
SAM. (Fit to be tied.) Bob, where are you?
BOB. I'm about two minutes away. Nancy's takin' me in.
SAM. That's funny because she just called to see how your job interview went.
BOB. (Starting to sweat.) I don't know what you're talkin' about.
SAM. (Having fun.) Really? Well I hope you do know something about Heston Blumenthal's lunch reservation. I believe he said he confirmed it with you, but when he showed up he wasn't even on the list! It's been causing quite a ruckus around here.
BOB. Sam, I really don't like the tone you're taking with me.
SAM. Really? Well maybe you'd prefer to talk to the chef.
BOB. Sam, don't—

Sam puts Bob on hold and heads to the bat phone.
SAM. Chef, Bob's on line two.
CHEF. Well, goody-goody gumdrops.
The phone rings. Sam picks up.
SAM. Reservations, could you hold please?
CURTIS. Surprise, surprise. Guess who has a callback at Lincoln Center tomorrow?
SAM. (Ecstatic.) Oh my God—Curtis!
CURTIS. Tomorrow morning at 10:30.
SAM. Do I need to prepare anything?
CURTIS. Just a strong sense of personal entitlement. Toodle-oo.
He hangs up.
SAM. (Buzzing Steph.) Steph, I got the callback.
STEPHANIE. Oh Sam! Congratulations!
SAM. (To Steph.) Thanks, Steph.

The chef buzzes in.
Hold on, it's the chef.

Sam runs to the bat phone.

Yes, Chef?

CHEF. What time do I need to leave for the heliport?

SAM. (He completely spaced the helicopter.) I think it's in half an hour. Let me just double-check. (To himself.) Shit.

Sam runs back to his desk and frantically looks for a file on the computer. His cell phone rings. Sam rushes over to get it, sees that it's Jerry, debates picking up, then can't help himself.

Hey Jerry.

JERRY. Hey man, I just got back from Lincoln Center. I saw your name on the list. You must feel so good about that.

SAM. Yeah. How'd your callback go?

JERRY. You know, it was actually really, really good. It was one of those auditions that didn't even feel like an audition. It felt like we were just doing the play. Bart was there and he just looked riveted the whole time. I just feel like he totally gets me.

SAM. Uh-huh. That's great.

JERRY. Yeah, I mean I feel like I've finally started to develop a relationship with the people up there. God, it's so weird what we put ourselves through. Years and years of training and all this preparation. And in the end, it's all about connections, isn't it?

The chef buzzes in on the bat phone.

SAM. Jerry, I have to go.

JERRY. All right, well call me right after your callback. God, I'm just really proud of us for being so honest with each other about this whole audition process.

Still buzzing.

SAM. Yeah, me too.
SAM. Is there an emergency?
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. Yes, there most certainly is. Put Jean-Claude on the phone this instant.
SAM. (Exasperated.) Mrs. Fishburn, Jean-Claude’s in the middle of service, but he’ll call you as soon as he’s done, okay?
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. I am not hanging up until you put him on the phone.
SAM. Hold on for one second.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. I’ll hold all day.
SAM. (Buzzing upstairs.) Jean-Claude!! Carolann Fishburn on line three.
JEAN-CLAUDE. Sam, she’s so ugly.
SAM. (Back to Mrs. Fishburn.) Mrs. Fishburn, he can’t come to the phone right now.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. I know he’s there and I’m not hanging up until you put him on this phone.
SAM. Well, he’s still busy, but you are welcome to hold on for as long as you like.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. Okay, I will.
SAM. Okay, good.

The phone rings.

Sam picks up a stray line.

How ya doing there?
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. I am not hanging up until you put him on the phone.
SAM. (Perversely sensitive.) I know, I’m just checking in.

The phone rings.

Reservations, how can I help you?

Mr. Decoste—the mysterious stranger.
MR. DECOSTE. Sam, how are you?
SAM. Good, how are you?
MR. DECOSTE. Did you get my package?
SAM. No, I don’t think so.
MR. DECOSTE. I had a messenger leave something for you at the bottom of the stairs.

Sam crosses to the stairs, finds an envelope.
SAM. Okay, I did find it...

Sam opens the envelope.

MR. DECOSTE. And?

He pulls out a huge wad of cash. Thinks about it and—
SAM. When would you like to come in?
MR. DECOSTE. How about 7:30?
SAM. And your last name?
MR. DECOSTE. Decoste.
SAM. And how many?
MR. DECOSTE. Two.
SAM. We’ll see you tonight at 7:30.
MR. DECOSTE. All right. Thank you, Sam.

He hangs up.
JEAN-CLAUDE. (Buzzing in.) Allo Sam!
SAM. Jean-Claude. Bob left a name off tonight’s list. Decoste, party of two, at 7:30. And he’s a V.I.P.
JEAN-CLAUDE. Oh, he’s a V.I.P. I’m so happy for him! (Sucking up.) Listen, you silly-billy, you need to do a really big favor for me, okay? Remember, we took a special request for the Vecchi table at 5:00? (Dripping with charm.) Well, it’s so funny because I’m asking all the waiters, do they know the words to the song “Lady Is a Tramp” and nobody seems to have heard of it before. So I—
SAM. No way.
JEAN-CLAUDE. Oh, Sam. Come on, you supposed to be an actor. It’s good experience. You never know, maybe the guy has connec-
JEAN-CLAUDE. Oh Sam, I thought you were my buddy.
SAM. No, I'm not.
JEAN-CLAUDE. Oh forget it! I mean if you were really an actor, you wouldn't be answering phones all day now, would you?
He hung up. Stung. Sam picks up a spare line. He's not sure who's there.
SAM. Thank you for holding, how can I help you?
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. It is Carolann Rosen—
SAM. Oh right. (Suddenly taking charge.) You know what, Carolann,
Jean-Claude has left for the day.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. You have got to be kidding.
SAM. (Losing patience.) No I'm not. Why don't you just put your name on our waiting list for Friday and call it a day.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. (Through clenched teeth.) All right, you little brat. Put me in the first slot in the V.I.P. priority waiting list.
Party of six. I believe my color code is magenta. And why don't you put it under the name of our guest of honor—André Bishop. Maybe you've heard of him. He's the artistic director of Lincoln Center.
A beat.
SAM. Actually, I have heard of him.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. Is that so?
SAM. (Testing the waters.) Yeah, it's so funny that you should mention his name because I actually up for a part in a show at Lincoln Center.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. (She's biting.) Really?
SAM. Uh-huh. In fact, I'm going back for a callback tomorrow morning. At 10:30.
ROSENSTEIN-FISHBURN. Well Sam, that is funny because I just got off the phone with André and I happen to know that there is nothing he loves more than the opportunity to help out a struggling actor.
SAM. Really?
BOB. (Whispering.) I'm upstairs.
SAM. Get down here! I want to go home.
BOB. Look Sam, I'll be down in two seconds. I just want to wait till the chef leaves. I don't want him to see me.
SAM. I thought you had a job at Bed Bath and Beyond.
BOB. To tell you the truth Sam, the interview didn't go that well so I'd really appreciate it if you didn't mention it to the chef.
SAM. Really? Well I hope you won't mind if I make a few little schedule changes.
BOB. Yeah, yeah. Whatever you want, Sam.
SAM. I remembered that you wanted to pick up a few extra shifts, so I'm gonna put you down for mine on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth.
BOB. Whatever... Hey wait a minute, that's Christmas!
SAM. Yes, it is. And by the way, you took a reservation for Ned Finlay.

_The chef buzzes in on the bat phone. Sam picks up._

Yes, Chef?
CHEF. _(Livid.)_ When the fuck is my car coming?
SAM. Twenty-five minutes.
CHEF. _(Calming down.)_ Oh, Cool.

_A beat._

Hey Sam—do your hands smell like shit?
SAM. No, they don't.
CHEF. _(Cracking up.)_ I can't believe I made you do that.
SAM. Me either.
CHEF. I owe you, Sam. You want some food? I could make you some monkfish liver that'll bring you to your knees.

_A beat._

SAM. You know what, Chef, I don't really care for your monkfish liver.

_A beat._

CHEF. What did you just say?

SAM. It's actually one of your weaker dishes.
CHEF. _(Floorred.)_ Are you serious?
SAM. Yeah, I am.
CHEF. _(Cowed.)_ Do you like my frozen polenta?

_The phone rings._

SAM. _(To chef.)_ Yeah, it's okay. Hold on. _(Hangs up on chef and picks up new line.)_ Reservations, how can I help you?
CURTIS. Sam, Curtis. You're not going to believe this. Diana just came back from a meeting at Lincoln Center and she was talking you up, so much so, that André Bishop himself wants you to stop in and say hi after your audition.

_A beat._

See Sam, we're always working for you, even when you think we're not.

_He hangs up. The chef buzzes. Sam heads to the bat phone._

SAM. Yes, Chef?
CHEF. How do you feel about my lavender foam?
SAM. _(Sincere.)_ Oh, it's excellent.
CHEF. _(Wounded.)_ You're just saying that to be nice.

_The phones start to go nuts._

SAM. No, I'm not. I really like it. Ask Stephanie.
CHEF. All right, I will.
OSCAR. _(Buzzing in.)_ Samuel. I heard about your callback. Break a leg.
SAM. Thanks Oscar.

_Sam takes a beat, then dials a number._

JERRY'S MACHINE. This is Jerry Miller at 646-499-3210. Your call is really important to me. Please leave a message and I'll get right back to you as soon as I can.
SAM. Hey Jerry, it's Sam. _(Playing dumb.)_ Listen, I just found out I'm supposed to pop my head in Andre Bishop's office when I go up there tomorrow. I don't know what that's all about, but I just wanted to fill you in because I know it's really important to you for us to be
JEAN-CLAUDE. Yes-yes-yes!! What are you waiting for?
SAML. I'll be right there.

Sam dials another number.

DAD'S MACHINE. Hey, it’s Ed. I can't get to the phone right now so leave me a message at the beep tone.

SAM. (Into the machine.) Hey Dad, it's Sam. Are you there? I just wanted to let you know there's been a little change of plans and I'm gonna go ahead and book that flight after all. So, I'll see you soon. Adios amigo.

He hangs up. Sam hangs up and starts gathering his things, singing a few bars of “The Lady Is a Tramp” as he heads up the spiral staircase.

SHE GETS TOO HUNGRY FOR DINNER AT EIGHT SHE LOVES THE THEATER BUT NEVER COMES LATE SHE NEVER BOTHERS WITH PEOPLE SHE HATES THAT'S WHY THE LADY IS A TRAMP

The bat phone buzzes. Sam turns around for a moment and considers picking it up, then decides against it and continues his ascent, singing as he rushes up and out.

End of Play
Bibliography


The author was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He got his B.A. from Illinois College where he majored in Theatre and Economics. He co-founded Capital City Improv, an improvisational company based out of Springfield, IL, with his wife Carly Stroud, and ran education and training from 2017-2020. In 2020, he began his graduate studies with the University of New Orleans Film and Theatre graduate program. While at UNO, he performed in the University’s productions of *The Emperor Jones, Eurydice, Exhausted Paint, Romeo & Juliet* and *Fully Committed.*