

CREATING A MODERN LUCIANA
THE COMEDY OF ERRORS
A STUDY OF MY PROCESS IN SHAKESPEARE'S FARCE

By

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to examine and articulate my process as an actor in preparing the role of Luciana in the Pittsburgh Public Theatre's 2007 production of William Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*. To do this I will describe the relevant aspects of my particular process in individual sections: Research and Poetic Analysis; Theatrical Style; Building the Character: Physical & Vocal Life; and Moments Before. I will also discuss rehearsals and critique my work in performance, addressing such elements as my command of the language of Shakespeare's verse and my ensemble technique. I will also include feedback from colleagues as well as published critical reviews. My assertion is that I have demonstrated a mastery of the craft of acting, in this case in a style-genre, and that my particular process, one of preparation and technique, is viable for maintaining a technically sound as well as entertaining performance. Throughout a career in acting one develops his own process, adapting to each individual work experience. My particular process has served me well in successfully creating roles onstage. It is my goal in this exploration to articulate how I achieve this success in my work.

Process Summary

Over the years I have trained with many different acting teachers and worked with numerous theatre companies from the experimental to the commercial.

My process is a combination of the various techniques I have learned over the years and the wealth of information I have accumulated from both conservatory training and professional work experiences. In addition to physical theatre training, I worked with Equity¹ theatre companies before and while attending drama school, so I had already begun to understand the more “condensed” process of the commercial theatre by rehearsing and performing on stage with seasoned professionals like comedian Barry Pearl², British actor Donald Ewer³ and the American Repertory Theatre’s Jack Willis⁴, actors who all had a share in mentoring me at one time or another. I have developed a process based on what works for me, but I am always learning, so my process will keep evolving as long as I continue in my professional life as an actor.

My actor’s process is a gradual and natural “layering” of various elements, from initial reading to closing night and consists of initial research, text analysis, creating inferences and back-story, building the physical and vocal life of the character based on text as well as production concept, living within the ensemble and the world of the play and, finally and most importantly,

sharing the experience with and including the audience. Of course, every play requires a slightly different approach depending on genre, production concept and director, so part of my process is adapting to the specific “culture” in which I am working. The following sections will detail the above-mentioned aspects or “layers” of my process in *The Comedy of Errors* starting with an overview of plot and production concept, and touching on relevant visual elements such as set and costuming.

Plot and Production Concept

In *The Comedy of Errors*, a merchant of Syracuse, in search of his lost twins, is arrested in the rival city of Ephesus and is threatened with death if he cannot pay a heavy fine. At the end of a zany tangle of confused identities, in which one of his sons is arrested for debt by a leather-clad officer, the father is reunited with the twins and with their mother, the beloved wife from whom he had been separated in a shipwreck thirty- three years before. The merchant’s life is spared, his fine is forgiven, the son’s debt is settled, and the family is magically restored. (Greenblatt, 80)

The plot of *The Comedy of Errors*, a confusing knot of comical situations revolving around two sets of identical twins separated during a shipwreck as children and reunited years later in the same town, is described in further detail in the Folger Library edition of the play by editors Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar:

The scene opens in Ephesus as Egeon, a merchant of Syracuse, has just received a death sentence unless he can pay a fine of 1,000 marks. Enmity between Ephesus and Syracuse has resulted in the imposition of such penalties upon merchants of one city who visit the other. In answer to the Duke's question as to his business in Ephesus, Egeon relates this story: The ship that was taking him, his wife and twin sons, and the twin sons of a servant woman from Epidamnium to Syracuse foundered in a storm. He and one of each pair of the twins were rescued separately from his wife and the other two boys, who were carried to another port. After eighteen years his son begged to be allowed to seek his brother and set out accompanied by his servant, the other twin. For the past five years he (Egeon) has traveled all over Greece seeking his lost family. Egeon's story moves the compassionate Duke of Ephesus. Although he cannot revoke the penalty, he grants Egeon a day to seek the necessary sum to save his life.

The concept and design for our production of *The Comedy of Errors* was a present-day, urban farce, taking place in the "New York-esque" international city of Ephesus, with its melting pot of citizens including a Chinese merchant, a Spanish building superintendent, an Indian doctor, a Courtesan from Queens, a Russian messenger, a Jewish goldsmith, and plenty of clumsy cops to spare--all governed by a Godfather-like Duke. The set was a combination mini-replica of New York City's Columbus Circle and Times Square. Clever signage filled the airspace over and around the circular set in the form of colorful commercial advertisements spoofing Shakespeare's plays. Some examples of this were: "Desdemona Linens," "Lear Real Estate," a lingerie ad for "Fortin Bras," "Duncan Doughnuts," "Desperate Wives of Windsor," "Star Crossed Coffee" (a la Starbucks) featuring young hipsters in love, etc. The sign idea was not only brilliant and one of a kind but it also created an

excellent pre-show entertainment, getting the audience laughing before the actors even appeared. (See production photos--appendix B)

The central characters in our play were dressed in bold, solid colors and “color coded” to aid the audience in following the potentially confusing plot. Our costumer dressed Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse, the twin brothers separated at sea as children, in burgundy and their respective twin servants Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse, in bright blue. The international citizenry was dressed in an array of traditional costume or clothing indicative of ethnicity, religion or occupation. Helena Ruoti⁵ and I as sisters Adriana and Luciana were dressed in “nine to five” professional clothes as owners and operators of The Phoenix Italian Restaurant. My costume, presumably as the accountant for the restaurant, (see appendix B) consisted of a sensible, brownish skirt, a robin’s egg-blue cable-knit sweater set, brown leather pumps, a necklace of pearls, a wrist watch, and eye glasses which, as will be explained in the character analysis section, would become an essential part of Luciana’s physicality.

Our *Comedy of Errors* was intentionally fast-paced, up-beat and non-stop with sound effects galore, including plenty of amplified farts and funny sounding

“thwumps” every time one of the Dromios was beaten by his master Antipholus. All of the action seemed to thump in time to a wacky car-chase-jazz-klezmer soundtrack replete with whirling saxophone riffs and wild drum solos. I came across the following passage in Stephen Greenblatt’s 2004 book, *Will In The World, How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*, and I find his impression of how William Shakespeare experienced big city life is very much akin to the rhythm, pulse and tempo of our boisterous production of *The Comedy of Errors*:

And it is the London crowd--the unprecedented concentration of bodies jostling through the narrow streets, crossing and recrossing the great bridge, pressing into taverns and churches and theatres--that is the key to the whole spectacle. The sight of all those people – along with their noise, the smell of their breath, their rowdiness and potential for violence – seems to have been Shakespeare’s first and most enduring impression of the great city. (169)

Research and Poetic Analysis

Shakespeare creates Luciana, the virtuous sister of Adriana, who pleads the cause of forbearance in marriage and who eventually becomes the bride of Antipholus of Syracuse. (Bevington, 96)

The version of *The Comedy of Errors* used in our production was prepared and edited by our director Ted Pappas. Although a specific edition was not cited in our scripts, my understanding is that we were using a hybrid of the Arden Shakespeare⁶ and other established versions including the First Folio⁷. I will

cite lines from the play using the Folger Shakespeare Library edition for referencing line numbers.

My process began way before the first rehearsal with private study and research which consisted of reading the play repeatedly, noting textual character facts, looking up meanings of unfamiliar words, mining my lines for the rhetoric and emotional clues and for an understanding of plot and character trajectory. It was necessary for me early on to understand the text from an almost academic standpoint, for example, knowing the meanings and pronunciations of every word in the entire play. This kind of preparation is especially important for classical plays because of words that are either unfamiliar or out of circulation. First, I scanned my text referencing my Shakespeare Lexicons⁸ for contextual meanings of all words I would speak. For example, the word credit in Shakespeare has a variety of meanings including “belief,” “faith,” “reputation,” and is also used as a verb meaning “to believe” or “to do honor. In Luciana’s speech to Antipholus of Syracuse in Act III, scene 2, credit means “faith”:

Alas, poor women! Make us but believe,
Being compact of credit, that you love us.
(lines 22-23)

My understanding of the line is this: we women are low on faith in men, we lack credit, being the weaker sex, so we rely on men to instill in us the faith we lack. Next, I read the play through several times, excavating textual information about my character, looking for such things as Luciana's relationship to others and herself, a sense of any character journey or *arc* that could be found, plot line and where my character appeared on that line.

I came to Luciana knowing little about the character, having no previous experience with the role except an audition in New York for the Actor's Theatre of Louisville production in the 1990s. There existed, for me, no pre-conceived idea or quintessential portrayal of Luciana to which I could refer as a springboard. She was a clean, blank page to me. One of the first discoveries I made about Luciana is that she seemed to have a lot figured out about the behavior and motivations of those around her. She did not feel the need to contemplate *her* life so much as she needed to lecture others about *theirs*. I found evidence of this character trait in Act II, scene 1. Luciana enters following Adriana from inside the Phoenix. The two sisters are discussing the possible whereabouts of Adriana's husband, Antipholus of Ephesus who is late for dinner. Luciana pleads with her sister to be patient, stating:

A man is master of his liberty;
 Time is their master, and when they see time
 They'll go or come. If so be patient, sister.
 (lines 7-9)

When Adriana ponders why men seem to have more privileges than women

Luciana explains:

Why, headstrong liberty is lash'd with woe.
 There's nothing situate under heaven's eye
 But hath his bound in earth, in sea, in sky.
 The beasts, the fishes, and the winged fowls
 Are their males' subjects, and at their controls.
 Man, more divine, the master of all these,
 Lord of the wide world and wild wat'ry seas,
 Indued with intellectual sense and souls,
 of more pre-eminence than fish and fowls,
 Are masters to their females and their lords:
 Then let your will attend on their accords.
 (lines 15-25)

Luciana is saying that God made man the master of all living things, including women, therefore women should defer to men without question. This was indicative of the character's way of seeing and understanding the world. I noticed that the speech had a biblical ring to it so I first mentioned it to my mother who is knowledgeable about the Bible. She guided me to the first book of Genesis. I looked it up and sure enough found a very similar passage in Genesis. If these words of wisdom from Luciana sound familiar it is because they are her interpretation of Genesis, chapter I, verse 26:

Then God said, "let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along on the ground."

From this I surmised that Luciana was a Christian who *believed* to such an extent that she would use the Bible as her guide in instructing Adriana about marriage and love. Knowing that Luciana had a Christian affiliation was a useful piece of information for me as an actor, though whether she was Catholic or Protestant would not have made a huge difference in my process of characterization. Since the *The Comedy of Errors* (dating approximately between 1592-1594), was written and performed during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, could safely assume that Luciana was written as a "Protestant" character. Ted Pappas, our director, thought of the inhabitants of the Phoenix in our production as a loud Italian family and I equated that idea with Italian-Catholic. Also, Emilia, The Abbess at Ephesus, was presented as a "Mother Superior" type nun who lectures Adriana in Act V, sc. 1, and both Helena Ruoti and I, as the sisters, deferred rather fearfully to her. The "Catholic" choice just made sense. Some additional research revealed that Shakespeare *added* the character of Luciana as a Catholic symbol (a sister character did not appear in the Plautus original).

Luciana is the patient, passively resistant new Catholicism of Shakespeare's own day, which recommended a difficult obedience. The scorned Adriana represents old Catholicism, whose slackness drove the country into the arms of the reformers and which too late regrets the consequences. (Asquith 59)

I decided that her apparent reverence for the Bible made Luciana more a follower than a free, independent thinker; she speaks to Adriana about forbearance and obedience. Later on in the play, however, in her scene with Antipholus of Syracuse in Act III, scene 2, she reveals a surprisingly mischievous side by encouraging dishonesty for the purpose of avoiding marital strife:

Look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty;
 Apparel vice like virtue's harbinger;
 Bear a fair presence, though your heart be tainted;
 Teach sin the carriage of a holy saint;
 Be secret-false: what need she be acquainted?
 (lines 12-16)

Here, she is basically urging Antipholus of Syracuse, whom she believes is Antipholus of Ephesus her brother-in-law, to hide his infidelities and behave kindly to Adriana. This could very well be interpreted as mischievousness on Luciana's part; she seems to be having a bit of fun inventing different ways to express the idea of how to hide one's infidelity, but it is also strong evidence of Luciana's strict observance about obeying the rules governing men and women: A man may be master of his liberty but that does not mean he should

flaunt his exploits in front of his wife. The action I ended up playing in the scene was *to instruct* Antipholus, *to remind* him about appearances, and *to convince* him to instill the proper “credit” in his wife despite his marital dishonesty.

Reading through the play early on was also about following my instincts with regard to character, identifying what attributes were immediately accessible or recognizable in me and already *were* the character so to speak; qualities that probably got me cast in the first place. My task, however, in creating a living, breathing Luciana in *The Comedy of Errors* would be to first, honor the actual textual **facts** Shakespeare provided me with: My name is Luciana; I live in Ephesus; Adriana is my sister; Antipholus of Ephesus is my brother-in-law; I am not married but wish to try marriage one day; I believe people ruled by jealousy are fools; I believe in patience and forbearance; I want my sister to forbear and trust in her husband; I think our servant Dromio is useless, a “drone” and an ass; I think it is acceptable for Antipholus to deceive Adriana in order to keep the marital peace; I have mistaken Antipholus of Syracuse for my brother in law Antipholus of Ephesus; Antipholus of Syracuse praises my beauty and my speech and describes me as “possessed with such a gentle, sovereign grace, of such enchanting presence and discourse”; Antipholus of Syracuse is in love with me; I quote the Holy Bible; I am a Christian; I defend

Adriana's honor to Antipholus of Ephesus, the Duke and the Abbess of Ephesus.

I would next have to fill in the spaces in between and around the text, to flesh out the character details Shakespeare *didn't* write. For this I created inferences about Luciana based on the production concept for the play. Our urban setting was current, present day-urban, and our core family-Adriana, Antipholus of Ephesus, and Luciana-were portrayed as the owners and operators of The Phoenix Italian Restaurant. The following are my **inferences** about the Luciana who existed in this particular world: I am thirty-something years old but my actual age is none of your business and I mean that in a nice way. God doesn't care how old you are. I live in a small neatly furnished apartment above our family restaurant, The Phoenix, in city of Ephesus. My sister and her husband live in the building too but their apartment is much bigger than mine. I mean who am I to comment on how people spend their money? A large, black onyx cougar figurine can make an excellent centerpiece, if that's your thing. We are a loud but loving Italian family. I keep things in order and do the bookkeeping. I am very good at my job. I am frugal with money. My sister and her husband are always fighting about something which is why I am in no hurry to get married. I am a stickler

about rules and regulations. I believe that men rule the world and women should follow their lead. I like to read the Harry Potter series of books about wizards and witches--fascinating and delightful! I wish I had a magic wand then I could control my crazy sister. I also like to read the Bible and I believe everything the Bible says. I am not really interested in getting involved in the marital strife between my sister Adriana and her husband Antipholus. I wish my sister would shut up for once and stop trying to be a man. At least I wear *skirts*, not *slacks* all the time. Slacks are men's clothes! I am not in a hurry to get married because I am not sure I can handle all of the things that go along with it..."conjugal relations" and things of that nature: Adam and Eve stuff, forbidden fruit and all of that. I keep a very neat house but my sister is sloppy which drives me crazy. I have been picking up after her since we were children. I never got into trouble with my parents because I was very good at following the rules. I am smug about the fact that my sticking to the rules has never gotten me into tight squeezes of any kind. Life is just so much easier when you follow the rules! I like to listen to classical music because it sounds like all then notes are in order. After dinner most evenings I prefer to sit by the window and read. Currently I am reading *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* and the Bible. If I sit by the window I can see what is going in the street in front of our house. That way, if my sister is being a shrew and causing a disturbance, I can haul her inside and spare us the embarrassment.

I go to church three times a week on Sundays Wednesdays and Saturdays. I am a good Catholic. I love my sister even though she teases me relentlessly. I like my brother-in-law too--he's OK. I wear sensible shoes always and prefer to dress in skirts and sweaters because that's what I wore in Catholic school and I am comfortable in that uniform.

Following my Shakespeare training in Kristin Linklater's⁹ technique, "Freeing Shakespeare's Voice" as taught by Bonnie Raphael¹⁰ at the A.R.T. Institute, here are some examples of what I would have been looking for in the more technical aspect of poetic analysis: assonance which means the resemblance of sounds; alliteration which has to do with the repetition of consonants at the beginnings of words; consonance, the repetition of vowels and consonants *within* words, antithesis which deals with comparisons and opposites, and ladders or lists of thoughts that build one on top of the other. As this training taught me, paying close attention to these figures of speech would allow me to discover clues about how to act the role, so I used this technique as a "textual guide" in crafting my character:

Becoming aware of figures of speech allows us to notice moments when Shakespeare uses them for a particular effect, whether consciously or with the unconscious brilliance of natural genius. If you let them affect you sensorily, they perform one or all of the following services: 1. Lead you to

discoveries about the character you are playing; 2. Create the emotional tone of a scene; 3. Do half your acting for you. (Linklater 79)

Below is a sample of my text analysis for a speech from Act III, scene 2, where Luciana, very indiscreetly, urges Antipholus of Syracuse to be discreet. The /`/ symbol is used to indicate the stress of the iambic pentameter, five stresses marked for each line.

And `may it `be that `you have `quite for`got *regular iambic*

A `husband's `office? `Shall, An`tipho`lus, *regular iambic*

`Even in the `spring of `love, thy `love-springs `rot? *initial trochee;*

alliterative /s; consonant /v/

Shall `love, in `building, `grow so `rui`nous? "*ruinate*" in *First Folio*;

antithesis

If `you did `wed my `sister `for her `wealth, *alliterative /w/*

Then `for her `wealth's sake `use her with `more `kindness;

regular iambic

`Or if `you like `elsewhere, `do it by `stealth: *assonance; initial &*

medial trochees

`Muffle your `false `love with `some show of `blindness.

alliterative /f/; initial trochee; fem. ending

Let `not my `sister `read it `in your `eye; *regular iambic*

`Be not thy `tongue thy `own `shame's `orator; *regular iambic*

Look `sweet, speak `fair, be`come dis`loyal`ty; *regular iambic*

A`pparel `vice like `virtue's `harbin`ger; *antithesis; alliterative /v/*

Bear a fair `presence, though your `heart be `tainted; *assonance*

Teach `sin the `carriage `of a `holy `saint. *antithesis-sin vs. saint*

Be `secret `false. What `need she be ac`quainted? *regular iambic;*

alliterative/b/ next 7 lines

What `simple `thief `brags of his `own a`taint? *medial trochee*

'Tis `double `wrong to `truant `with your `bed, *regular iambic;*

consonance /b/

And `let her `read it `in your `looks at `board. *regular iambic*

Shame hath a `bastard `fame, well `mana`ged; *regular iambic;*

assonance /a/

Ill `deeds is `doubled `with an `evil `word. *regular iambic, alliterative*

& consonance /d/

A`las, poor `women, `make us `but be`lieve *regular iambic;*

consonance /m/; alliterative /b/

(`Being com`pact of `credit) `that you `love us; *alliterative /k/*

Though `others `have the `arm, `show us the `sleeve; *antithesis;*

medial trochee

`We in your `motion `turn, and `you may `move us. *regular iambic;*

alliterative /m/; consonance /ou/, /u/

Then, `gentle `brother, `get you in a`gain. *regular iambic; alliterative /g/*

‘Comfort my `sister, `**cheer** her, `call her `wife: *alliterative /k/; regular iambic,*

‘Tis `holy `sport to `be a `little `vain *regular iambic*

When the `sweet `breath of `flattery `conquers `strife. *assonant*

/f/,/v/,/th/; initial trochee

(lines 1-29)

I analyzed the text looking for the acting prompts Shakespeare intentionally gave me. The lines of text I have bolded above, represent unusual one line, iambic, end-stopped sentences, which suggested to me that they were of special emphasis. The alliterative /sh/, /ch/, and /"judge"/ sounds throughout the speech, marked underlined or bold, in words like "shall" and "shame," suggested a soft yet persuasive, emotional tone in Luciana's attempt to correct Antipholus; the underlined letters at beginnings of words, and sometimes within phrases, mark alliteration. In Act III, scene 2, when Luciana says:

Be secret false. What need she be acquainted?
 What simple thief **brags** of his own ataint?
 Tis double wrong to truant with your bed.
 And let her read it in your looks at board.
 Shame hath a **bastard** fame, well managed;
 Ill deeds is doubled with an evil word.
 (line 16-21)

She is repeating the plosive (breath stopped by the lips then “exploded”) sound “b” and also the “d” sound which suggest that she is annoyed with Anipholus and therefore speaking emphatically to him. In the line, *We in your motion turn and you may move us*, Luciana is using repetitive open “assonant” vowel sounds and alliterative /m/ sounds suggesting a pleading tone. The repeat of the percussive /k/ sound in the third to the last line in the speech is suggestive of a scolding tone and perhaps quickened pace, her last attempt to instruct him before returning to The Phoenix. The “Or if you like elsewhere, do it by stealth” line contains assonant medial /e/ (as in “bed”) vowel sounds which can be elongated, suggesting an almost mischievous, conspiratorial tone. There is a very fun Alliterative exchange of shared iambic near the end of the scene:

Luciana: Why call you me ‘love’? Call my sister so.
 Antipholus of Syracuse: Thy sister’s sister
 Luciana: That’s my sister.
 Antiph. Syr: No!
 (lines 64-67)

The entire speech is, in fact, a “ladder”, an accumulative variation on a theme, as she tries to make her point to Antipholus of Syracuse. This ladder suggested a build in intensity so I had to find a way to convey the ladder through an increase in tempo, volume, or intensity, expanding the ideas and

images one on top of the other. Ted's direction for this speech was to play *inventing* the images, and to *love* hearing myself speak, to think of myself as a *poet*. My voice and speech teacher, Bonnie Raphael, described the ladder as a process of topping the previous thought with a new and better one; a sort of "not only *that* but..." type of build. I have also heard the ladder described as placing the thoughts on shelves, each one higher than the one before and matching that image with a climbing vocal energy.

The text is the place I would return to repeatedly throughout the rehearsal process as well as the entire run of the show. A practice of mine is to read through the entire play every day from before the start of rehearsals to the final performance. I attribute this habit/obsession to the actor Alvin Epstein¹¹, another Shakespeare teacher of mine from the American Repertory Theatre Institute, who was devoted to the practice himself and influenced me to do the same. I have become superstitious about abandoning the habit! In the beginning I read the play once through for the story/plot as a whole, then again paying particular attention to my scenes and where they fell in the journey of the play, mapping out my trajectory, then each day until closing performance.

A note about preparation: I never regard the first reading with the cast as my opportunity to become acquainted with the play, but as the first day of rehearsal so part of my process is making sure that I am as prepared as I can possibly be for the transition from private study to working with an ensemble. The first read is often a cast and director's only opportunity to hear and experience the play as one, and it is the base-line screen from which to begin. Again-essentially my process is about *being prepared*.

Theatrical Style

The Comedy of Errors is unique in that it represents Shakespeare's foray into the world of farce. It is believed, in fact, that Shakespeare based his play on two Roman comedies, *The Two Menaechmuses* and *Amphitruo* written by Plautus.

The Comedy of Errors is a superb illustration of Shakespeare's "apprenticeship" in comedy. It is more imitative of classical comedy, especially of Plautus than is Shakespeare's mature work. (Bevington 96)

Although Shakespeare's indebtedness to Roman drama is obvious in his adaptation from Plautus, he had behind him a native tradition of farce which gave to the buffoonery of *The Comedy of Errors* a familiarity that added to its theatrical effectiveness. (Folger Library xi)

Part of my process in *The Comedy of Errors* would be dealing with the issue of theatrical style, specifically that of the physical medium of farce. My earliest professional acting experiences were with experimental theatre ensembles like The Independent Eye¹² and Deva Associates¹³, who devised their own plays or re-imagined classic plays from an abstract or purely physical approach. I not only trained with these companies but originated roles in several ensemble-created devised plays working closely with artists like Camilla Schade¹⁴, Conrad Bishop¹⁵ and Terri Mastrobuono¹⁶, who taught me ensemble technique and how to be clear in my physical life on stage. Terri Mastrobuono's company, Deva Associates, developed a technique called "Graphic Mime," which I would describe as a commedia-esque extension of the physical clarity and precision of classic mime without the aspect of illusion, used in creating very real, but essentially physical *speaking* characters. Having trained in that technique would prove useful in my portrayal of Luciana in *The Comedy of Errors*, for farce is a physical medium and its characters must be drawn legibly.

I also have performed in a number of classical and contemporary farces such as *The Liar* (Florindo) by Carlo Goldoni, *The Beaux Stratagem* (Mrs. Sullen) by George Farquhar, Georges Feydeau's *The Lady From Maxim's* (Duchess), Neil Simon's *Rumors* (Claire) and Michael Frayn's *Noises-Off* (Poppy). These past

performances relied heavily on broad physical characterization and allowed me to apply the techniques I had learned from working in physical theatre. My recent training at Point Park University Conservatory of Performing Arts would prove relevant as well. A few months before *Comedy* rehearsals began in the spring of 2007, as a graduate student at the Conservatory of Performing Arts in pursuit of the M.F.A., I took a course entitled "Acting in Farce" with Ingrid Sonnichsen¹⁷ who, coincidentally, had been on the faculty of my original drama school, the A.R.T. Institute at Harvard University, in Cambridge. The course was not only a wonderful prerequisite for working on *The Comedy of Errors* but it was serendipitous that Ingrid was cast in the production as Emilia, Abbess of Ephesus, lost wife to Egeon and mother to their two children the Antipholus twins. Ingrid's course in farce reminded me about some key elements: **Structure**--Prologue, set-up for confusion and chaos, confusion and chaos, solution sought, resolution found, celebration for all. **Timing**--Physical and Vocal: Sometimes a turn of the head at just the right moment may mean the difference between getting the laugh or setting the clarity of the moment. Timing can also be a technical count if there is a sound cue involved, or it can come from an instinctual "knowing" or "feeling" how long any one moment can and should sustain before it dies, killing both the moment and the laugh. A "slow burn" turn of

the head, for example, will usually get the laugh if the other actors on stage hold for it. Film and Broadway actor Barry Pearl (remember the silly guy “Doody” from the film *Grease*?) whom I had worked with in summer stock, taught me a few things about *the laugh*. I observed him in performance constantly working and re-working his timing as well as his relationship with the audience, and learned that the actor controls the timing of the joke and, by extension, what the audience will find funny. Keeping track of what gets a laugh and then repeating it in the next performance if possible can be very effective, so if I can find the “formula” for the laugh I will repeat it over and over as long as it works. Sometimes it may take a few performances of timing-experimentation to get it just right. Trial and error, basically, is the thing to fine tune certain moments for the laugh. Getting the laugh is satisfying so I want to do what it takes to get it. **Status:** Understand the character’s status, physically embody it, know when it changes which it most likely will and *use* it. Status is key to the character relationships in farce. Usually the high status characters get ridiculed or humiliated, as with Antipholus of Ephesus being bound with a rope by Doctor Pinch and treated like a lunatic. An example of a status transaction between Luciana and Adriana took place in the opening scene, Act II, scene 1. I am reassuring my sister that if she would just be patient, Antipholus would come home and all will be well. At that moment I equal Adriana’s high status. At the end of the

scene Adriana teases me by pointing out that my philosophy of patience and forbearance will get me nowhere:

But if thou live to see like right bereft,
This fool begged patience in thee will be left.
(lines 42-43)

Here, Helena Ruoti and I added a bit of physical stage business to “button” the end of the scene. After she delivered her last line of our exchange, Helena grabbed my chin with one hand and held it in place while sticking her free index finger in her mouth and then smudging my glasses with her wet finger. This funny but humiliating gesture is of the oldest sibling tricks in the book. It served as a funny piece of slapstick-style business and clearly illustrated the status relationship between us, that of older versus younger sister, Adriana clearly being the winner, leaving me fuming after her. **Physical Legibility:** Farce is realistic, not naturalistic, so make your physical choices clear and avoid extraneous or naturalistic, “ambient” movements. In group scenes, synchronize with the other actors; reacting as one unit is very funny when done well. An example of this is in Act V when Emilia, the Abbess of Ephesus, in a sudden moment of realization, reveals her true identity to Egeon as his long lost wife. There was an audible group gasp as we all looked to the right at her, to the left at Egeon, then randomly at each other.

Situation: Farce characters are governed by the situation not by

their inner psychology, nor does the play itself carry any deep message about life – the characters are generally the same at the end of the play as they were in the beginning, just less confused and befuddled. They are jostled around for a while by the circumstances before society as they know it is restored to its previous order. **Slapstick:** Farce is a physical medium. Physical bits of comedy and violence are a large part of farce and our *Comedy of Errors* was no exception. The Dromios, twin brothers and servants to the Antipholuses, received countless, ruthless beatings, and engaged in a loud fart competition through a mail slot, the Act V sword fight was accompanied by metallic sound effects, there were a number of chases around the circular stage area, slide whistles and general chaos and hilarity. **Set-ups and Payoffs:** Set-up/pay-offs are a device to let the audience in on the impending joke ahead of time--if Antipholus threatens his servant Dromio with a sound beating if he does not return immediately with the money, we already know that the wrong Dromio will enter the scene with no money and receive his beating.

Ted's notes to us about playing the piece were not to "work" the comedy too hard but to always come back to the play; not to slide under the jokes or let reactions overwhelm the lines; not to be seduced by easy laughs ("milking" it); to climb the ladders present in Shakespeare's texts; to tell the audience what is funny rather than ask for its approval. I think of farces as elongated,

moving comic strips told in colorful “graphic” pictures. I wanted my visual contributing pictures to be as legible and concise as possible. As Corrigan reminds us,

Farce is always acted. For its effects it concentrates on the actor’s body-on his facial expressions, his mimicries, and his physical gestures...The dialogue of farce is sound and movement. (240)

Shaping The Character: *Physical and Vocal Life*

After completing the initial text analysis, and, once in rehearsal, understanding our particular production concept, the next layer was to get up on my feet and find Luciana’s physicality. In this process, her physicality grew step by step, like building blocks, as each costume piece or prop was added. I built the character from the inside-out because I established her intellectual life through the text analysis before I found the outward expression of Luciana’s essence. I took what I knew from the text and contemplated the kind of woman who might quote the Holy Bible or lecture her sibling about marriage when she herself has no spouse or fret about upsetting her temperamental relatives. I was able to reasonably assess Luciana as sheltered, religious, virginal, naïve, nervous and probably a bit self righteous. With those elements established, I could then make a strong

argument for physical attributes encompassing an overall rigidity symbolic of following the rules of society and the Bible. Those were some of the initial ideas I came up with which were supported by the text. The contemporary, urban setting of the production would inform and influence my character's physicality, vocal life and also my overall performance style. I would have to build a contemporary character whose physical and vocal life was informed by our New York/Ephesus setting.

In rehearsal I had requested a book to carry as a hand prop and Ted agreed that a book made sense for my character. At first I used a prop book but was later given the most recently released Harry Potter book to carry at the top of the play. The cover of the book was very visible to the audience, which made for a clever and appealing pop-culture reference in keeping with the set design. This was also a very subtle joke about the references to sorcery in the play, as Antipholus of Syracuse, the visiting Antiphous looking for his lost brother, cannot otherwise account for all the bizarre things that happen to him, such as being taken for Adriana's husband and falling in love with

Luciana:

There's none but witches do inhabit here;
And therefore 'tis high time that I were hence.
(Act 3.2 166-167)

The Harry Potter book invited additional inferences for Luciana: that she was youthful, curious, whimsical, and even mischievous giving her personality a nice “philosophical” inner contrast: she loved the Bible *and* witches and wizards, too. The notion that everything Luciana knew and believed came from only two sources, The Bible and Harry Potter, felt useful and fitting for the character as well as the style of our production. Now that I had gathered facts from the text and created inferences directly connected to Ted Pappas’s directorial concept, the next part of my process was developing Luciana’s **Physical Life:** Shakespeare did not provide much in the way of character descriptions. Therefore I would need to originate a legible physical life that defined *my* Luciana: one that fit our modern context and setting but that made sense for the character Shakespeare wrote. Of course, it is often not until I see the costume renderings or put on the shoes I will be using that I have a sense of how the character feels from a physical standpoint. I started by viewing the costume renderings which portrayed a very feminine and soft Luciana, a fair, slender woman wearing a somewhat frilly pastel-colored blouse and flowing skirt. Her hair was blonde and wavy, about shoulder length (I have short hair and was fitted for a longer wig but the idea was scrapped early on in the process as it conflicted with the costume design), and she was wearing glasses. From the rendering, I would describe Luciana as a

soft, quiet, feminine type with the glasses adding a studious “buttoned-down” quality, in stark contrast to Adriana’s darker colors and tailored, “power-suit” profile. Ted had wanted the sisters to appear as a light and dark contrast. I began working right away in a skirt and a pair of shoes with a medium heel which at once shifted my posture into an upright position. As my character tended to lecture people, I found that a “teacherly” finger-pointing gesture came very naturally to Luciana, as I had taken it upon myself to lecture Adriana about life and marriage. I also played around with using different physical “centers” --a technique I learned in my early physical theatre training, for discovering a character’s physicality through accessing different key centers in the body (forehead, chest, gut, groin) and exploring text and movement using the chosen center as the “initiator,” in other words, discovering where the character “lives” in the actor’s body and what “drives” the character from a purely physical standpoint. Working from a center usually elicits an immediate, corresponding emotional response in the actor, which ultimately leads to strong, clear characterizations. For example a character who is analytical, intellectual and bookish may lead with his forehead while a character like Stanley Kowalski from *A Streetcar Named Desire*, leads with his gut area--the area of animal instinct, physical desire, food, sex, confrontation. I worked with the **head and chest centers** for Luciana: the **head** area resonated as a place of buoyancy and curiosity for me,

and also as the area of intellectual detachment which worked for her as an analytical, intellectual type of character. The **chest** area elicited a feeling of authority and superiority which supported Luciana's role as an "educator" to the other characters. This upright posture was informed, in part, by the costume shoes, so being in touch with my chest area in terms of deportment was logical. I kept my arms and hands close to my body in a contained manner, with fingertips meeting at the center, which also felt right for the character. On occasion I fluttered my hands rapidly, in a nervous manner, as a response to uncomfortable moments such as when Antipholus of Syracuse was pursuing me or when Adriana was interrogating me about Antipholus' romantic advances. My gait for Luciana was executed in clipped and precise steps as opposed to long and more relaxed strides. I wanted to embody a person who thought of herself as more graceful and high status than she really was, one who tried to take charge but got easily flustered by the unexpected. A common gesture I used exclusively with the Dromio twins was to lower my chin to my chest and glare disapprovingly over the top of my glasses, librarian-style. I wore a modest set of pearls which gave me the additional physical gesture of fiddling with them as if worrying a rosary. At first I did not work with glasses but expressed to Ted that I wanted to try working with a pair, and he agreed. I was presented with several options and

chose a pair of delicate tortoise shell-style frames. The glasses immediately gave me the option for a kind of “nerdy” gesture which was to adjust the glasses. I did not choose a gesture of aiming my index finger toward the bridge of the nose to adjust the glasses, but rather to grasp one side of the glasses between my thumb and middle finger to push the glasses gingerly into place. I found the first gesture to be cliché-nerdy and opted for the alternative, inferring that Luciana probably wore expensive frames which needed to be handled with care. Once I had endowed these external accoutrements--the eye glasses, the book prop, the spine-straightening pumps, the pearls--and incorporated them with the physical character traits I had discovered, I had found the physical life of my character--the logical sum of her visual parts.

The next layer was to develop Luciana’s **Vocal Life**: I used “Standard Stage” speech, also known as “Good Speech for Classic Texts” in my vocal portrayal of Luciana. Standard Stage Speech, as taught to me by Bonnie Raphael, utilizes certain sound substitutions based on Edith Skinner’s¹⁸ speech method i.e. the International Phonetic Alphabet¹⁹ to create a slightly more heightened sound that is somewhere between general American speech and standard British. The key elements I made use of were as follows: minimizing /r/ colorization in the medial and final positions of words; employing the

intermediate /A/-a more open, full and “proper” sounding /a/-“basket”- than the “flatter” sound /ae/ as in “pat”; using the “liquid U /ju/(duke, illusion); using the “voiceless” /hw/ initiation (what, where, when); activating medial /t/ sounds so that they do not degenerate into a /d/(water, little, city). There are two reasons for this choice. First, I was trained to use that technique for all classical or heightened texts such as Shakespeare so it simply was the appropriate choice, and second, being an upper-class character supported the use of that more proper, heightened delivery.

Although some of the international characters in the production used accents (Hindu, Russian), dialects (Brooklyn) and even foreign language (the Act V Messenger speech was delivered entirely in Spanish) our family, Luciana, Adriana and the two Antipholus twins, used Standard Stage speech. For the most part, I spoke at a medium pitch, keeping voice production focused in the mouth and head resonators as opposed to lower in the chest resonator.

My daily vocal and articulation warm-ups were key to maintaining these choices as well as making sure the audience could hear and understand every word and every argument, with a flow of thought and opinion. Before every performance, I sequestered myself in a backstage stairwell to practice a voice and speech exercise I have been incorporating in my work for years: The exercise is to speak through my text while resting my tongue on my lower lip,

outside the mouth, in a relaxed manner. The challenge is to speak every sound and syllable precisely maintaining meaning and inflection while keeping the tongue stretched forward. This exercise wakes up the articulators in an amazing way and also deepens and warms the tone of the voice. I never do without it.

A vocal character trait I developed was to utter little bursts of sounds in reaction to various circumstances. For example in my long scene with Antipholus of Syracuse, Act III, scene 2, he has suddenly proclaimed his love for me and seems to be determined to chase me about for an embrace and I am trying to ward off his advances. With each compliment he threw at me I responded vocally, with little sounds of surprise or displeasure or fear. I made these sounds very high in my vocal register, using head and face resonators, to create the effect of being dizzy, nervous and unsure, and “married” the sounds to my jumpy movements. Ted’s note was to *build* the sound reactions, which led to the kiss. In this scene I made a discovery, a contribution which would prove to be the funniest moment in the scene and, I’d like to think, a memorable moment from the whole show. At the climax of the scene, Antipholus grabs me and says, “Give me thy hand.” At this moment he flings his arms around my waist and pulls me against him. Before I can protest he kisses me passionately on the mouth. My reaction was

a scream, the sound muffled by his lips pressed against mine. After a beat, I transformed the scream into a moan of pleasure. The moment of the kiss was a very significant yet unusual moment for my character. I made an earlier reference about farce characters not experiencing “arcs” but I think this moment was in fact Luciana’s arc, representing her transformation through the discovery of love. The farcical aspect of this was that she believed she was kissing her brother-in-law, Antipholus of Ephesus. It was a complex moment: Luciana, who had no interest in the “troubles of the marriage bed,” suddenly discovers she might actually *enjoy* things marital. When I tried that vocal transition in rehearsal it worked beautifully and Ted loved it. My direction was to “keep it. That moment got a laugh every performance. The kiss was also a really nice set-up for the final pay-off in the show when peace has been restored: Adriana and I kiss our respective Antipholuses unaware that they are still reversed. An awkward moment of hesitation follows as, embarrassed, we sheepishly, simultaneously pull back, skeptically examine the men we have just kissed, acknowledge the “error” with a nod of our heads then switch partners to be reunited with the correct lover--Antipholus of Ephesus for Adriana and a Syracusan Antipholus for Luciana.

Moments Before

In every performance I always make the “moment before” any entrance as clear as possible so as to enter the scene from an inferred “previous scene” rather than an inactive or neutral “no man’s land” type of space. In this section I will simply go scene by scene and describe the moment before that I created. The Comedy of Errors is written in five Acts. In our production, the intermission break took place between Acts III and IV.

Act II, scene 1:

Entering from “The Phoenix,” following my sister Adriana into the street.

The moment before is the middle of a tense and frantic discussion about the whereabouts of Adriana’s husband, Antipholus, who is late for dinner. I am trying to reassure Adriana that she should not worry, and also that I am very hungry and want to eat already! Adriana will not listen to me and decides to go out into the street and look for him and I am trying to convince her to stay in the house when she flings herself out the door and I follow, book in hand.

Act II, scene 2:

Entering again from The Phoenix and standing on the stoop observing Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse entering the square in front of the house. Having convinced my sister to return to the house and eat, we

are just settling in, when we hear voices in the street. We rush to the door to see who it is and I cautiously follow my sister out onto the stoop. It is, of course, Antipholus and Dromio but we are unaware that they are the wrong ones.

Act III, scene 2:

Entering from The Phoenix with Antipholus of Syracuse, who we have all mistaken for our Antipholus of Ephesus. The moment before is that Antipholus has behaved very strangely before dinner, denying that he is married to Adriana or that he even knows her at all. I am appalled and bewildered by this behavior and have insisted that as soon as the coast is clear he must speak to me in private. As soon as my sister was occupied with one of the servants I grabbed Antipholus of Syracuse by the arm and pulled him out the door into the street.

Act IV, scene 2:

This scene takes place at the top of our "Act II," entering from the Phoenix, pursued by Adriana. Playing with the "moment before" was especially fun in *The Comedy of Errors* because my excellent scene partner, Helena Ruoti who played Adriana, shared my enthusiasm for creating a truly active moment

before. In this scene Adriana is interrogating me about Antipholus' strange behavior. The moment before is my very fearful confession to Adriana that Antipholus not only professed his love but kissed me as well. In our production the act began with a "dumb show" staged in the second story window of The Phoenix. We played the dumb show during the top of the Act II music, and then had to literally run to position for our entrance, up stage right, the front door of The Phoenix. In this particular case the audience actually sees the moment before, which consisted of Adriana and Luciana engaged in a heated argument, our animated figures silhouetted against the window shades of the upstairs apartment. After the window the lights went down, we continued the scene with Helena pursuing me, down four flights of stairs and through the backstage hallways to the entrance point, "whisper-shouting" a lively improvised dialogue consisting of her angry threats and my declarations of innocence. Many of the entrances in this show were timed to "inter scenic" music and I often had to open or close a door to a precisely timed musical cue, opening a door just as the music stopped, for example. Helena and I timed our backstage fight perfectly so that the fight would spill out onto the stage on cue. This improvisational partnership greatly enhanced our onstage relationship as sisters and I was extremely lucky to have Helena as my scene partner. Helena and I shared such moments before each scene we had together.

Act IV, scene 4:

Entering from Down Stage Left vom with the Courtesan, Adriana, and Doctor Pinch. Antipholus of Ephesus, my brother-in-law, has been arrested for allegedly refusing to pay a debt owed to the Angelo the goldsmith for making a gold chain for Adriana, claiming he has not received the chain. Angelo, in fact, gave the chain to Antipholus of Syracuse, mistaking him for his twin, expecting payment to follow. Five minutes ago The Courtesan came to The Phoenix to complain to us that Antipholus, acting like a madman, went to her house and took her ring by force. My sister Adriana has decided it best to call in the doctor and so we have all come to observe Antipholus of Ephesus and hopefully cure him through the workings of Doctor Pinch. My specific moment before is shock at hearing the Courtesan's story and wanting to tag along to see for myself.

Act V, scene 1: Final scene in play.

Adriana, the Courtesan and I have fled from Antipholus of Ephesus who, in his incredibly angered state, threatened to tear Adriana's eyes out for bringing all this trouble upon him. We had watched previously as Antipholus was bound with ropes and then reappeared (it was his twin of course) as if by some kind of sorcery. In this final scene we arrive just in time

to see Antipholus of Syracuse, in a duel with the angry merchant who thinks he lied about the chain. I have just told my sister that I will come along for moral support and to defend her against Antipholus' accusations of being a bad wife. This moment before was about supporting Adriana and insisting that she set things right to save her marriage.

Rehearsals

Our production of *The Comedy of Errors*, directed by Ted Pappas, marked the opening of the thirty-third season of the Pittsburgh Public Theatre.

Rehearsals began September 11, 2007 and took place at the Pittsburgh Public Theatre's third floor Rauh Rehearsal Hall. The production stage-manager was Ruth E. Kramer. We rehearsed from 10-6 daily with individual scenes and costume fittings scheduled as needed. Invited Dress took place on October 3, previews began October 4, and the show opened October 12, ran for 37 performances, and closed on November 4, 2007. Our LORT B contract allowed for eight shows a week with matinees on the weekends and the occasional 11 am student matinee during the weekdays.

The rehearsals were structured very tightly with little or no changes added. We were expected to check in daily after rehearsal by phone at the automated "rehearsal hotline" on which the following day's work line-up was recorded

naming each individual called and his/her corresponding scenes. There is nothing unusual or outstanding about how rehearsals were formatted. After the first day's reading of the play, one was called in for blocking or "staging" rehearsals according to scene chronology and had that section memorized by the time it came up again.

As with all comedies, especially farce, this process began with very formal blocking rehearsals. The show was choreographed down to the minutest action from a turn of the head to an appropriately timed gasp of breath so a good deal of my process with this particular show dealt with committing to the choreography and finding ways to incorporate the detail work in a realistic manner for my character. For example, my first entrance, Act II, Scene I, has me entering from the Phoenix following my sister Adriana into the town square to discuss the whereabouts of Adriana's husband Antipholus of Ephesus. I was staged following Adriana towards center stage, with my book then crossing to the stage right bench (see photos) where Ted wanted me to put the book down on a specific line. At that point there was no real motivation for me to put the book down except to fulfill the direction which would serve only to empty my hands of the prop before crossing center stage to deliver a speech but it would have made just as much sense to walk and

talk *with* the book in my hand. I could reasonably argue that Luciana would have simply put the book down inside the house before taking their sisterly debate into the street. My moment before went something like this: I am in the middle of a particularly good passage of *Harry Potter and The Half Blood Prince* when Adriana storms by me in the living room, declaring that she is going out into the street to find Antipholus. I don't have the chance to put my book down as I jump up to try and stop her. In the onstage argument I put the book down out of exasperation and cross to her to make my point about how the world works. Otherwise, my carrying a book into this scene must have served as another piece of clever art direction, *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* being current, at the time of our production, and the book's cover-art unmistakably recognizable. I have no particular argument with art direction for its own sake, but I needed to justify all of my moves.

All of our entrances and exits were timed to recorded music, so we had to open and shut doors on cue, which is, stylistically, very typical for farce. Physical business within scenes was timed to specific lines and the slapstick violence was synchronized with sound effects. The entire piece had an almost mechanized rhythm, like an Austrian cuckoo clock with its colorful characters peeking through doors to the time--only much faster, louder and bawdier!

The atmosphere in our rehearsals for *The Comedy of Errors* was highly focused and, in many positive ways, embodied the kind of high standard work environment I became accustomed to in my professional training. Naturally, rehearsal atmospheres may vary greatly from the very relaxed to the not-so-very-relaxed to everything in between. Part of my process was to be flexible and adapt to the established environment. Our director preferred to set the staging without having to review or repeat in the moment. After the first day when I stopped once or twice to “rewind” and was asked not to do so unless requested, I shifted my actor/mind/body into hyper “quick-memory” mode and committed to following that paradigm as it was the preferred method of our director. For me as an artist, the ideal professional working environment consists of uncompromising artistic standards combined with an atmosphere of trust, shared between the actors and director, an environment of playfulness and collaboration yet one that is highly focused.

Self-Critique and Feedback

Overall, I am satisfied with my work on the role of Luciana in *The Comedy of Errors* not only in creating the character but also in holding my own in a cast of sixteen actors. I would evaluate my performance throughout the run as successful: I stayed true to the direction, the staging and the choreography

with no careless or inappropriate changes, maintaining the individual pitches and dynamics of my role within the story. On a daily basis I was able to listen to my fellow players, reacting truthfully while trying to remain open, given the tight parameters, to the subtle, ever- changing nuances that occur between actors during live performance. I believe I was clear in my intentions (playing actions) as well as line delivery, demonstrating a command of Shakespeare's language while being ever conscience of filling the theatre to the back row with my voice and giving the words their full sound-value. My physical life on stage was legible, not cluttered with extraneous movements, while some movements were intentionally exaggerated for comic effect, such as bending my upper body out of the way to avoid a punch thrown at one of the Dromios, being in tune with the cast for a perfectly timed, group head-turn or setting up a running escape by lifting one knee and cocking the arms just so. I consciously tried to maintain a gracefulness and openness in my body while onstage in order to execute my staging with precision as well as being consistent with any repeated character gestures I had created.

I think I demonstrated a strong instinctual and technical understanding of the theatrical style of the play while staying in the moment with my fellow actors.

I was a supportive player in the ensemble scenes giving and taking focus only

as directed as well as remaining fully engaged in the longer scenes where I had no text. I treated my fellow actors and my director with respect, and was very professional throughout the entire process. I am a perfectionist, and have a tendency to be self critical so in my work on this role it was very important for me to focus on my purpose as a character in Shakespeare's play, let go of negative thoughts or missteps that occurred, and stay in the moment. During performance I consciously stayed in contact with my body, releasing any muscle tensions that crept in especially in the shoulders or knees, and making other necessary adjustments to stay physically free while playing. My classical, conservatory training, my extensive past experience on stage and my absolute love for acting gave me the tools to maintain a consistent performance throughout the run.

There was one performance I wish had gone differently, about mid-run, during which the actress playing Adriana went up – forgot – her lines. It happened in Act II, scene 2 where Adriana and I encounter Antipholus of Syracuse and his servant, Dromio of Syracuse, mistaking them for Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus. At the end of the scene Adriana, angry at Antipholus who has arrived home late, orders him inside and Dromio to guard the door. It was here Helena went up completely. I knew her lines and

could have taken over her speech seamlessly, delivering the following cutting of the lines:

Come, sir to dinner. Dromio keep the gate.

Skipping the marriage-specific line:

(Husband, I'll dine above with you today
and shrive you of a hundred idle pranks)

Picking up with:

Sirrah, if any ask you for your master,
say he dines forth, and let no creature enter.
Come, sister. Dromio play the porter well.
(lines 222-227)

I opened my mouth to speak and then--I hesitated. A whole debate took place in my head in the span one second: I know the lines, should I just step in? What should I do? Maybe it's not cool to take over the lead actor's speech. The trouble is I can't just say one line; if I start I have to take her whole speech. While I stood there covered in clown sweat, the moment passed and Helena began to improvise enough to get us back on track. I regretted the moment and later realized that the hesitation I experienced was about not fully trusting my instincts in the moment. If I had ignored the judge in my head, I could have seamlessly covered an awkward moment on stage and my scene partner would have felt a lot more supported. I pride myself on my "word-perfect" line memorization skills usually knowing

everyone else's lines as well as my own. In many a production I have come to the rescue of a fellow cast member and have been saved in turn. So that moment from *The Comedy of Errors* is something I will carry with me as a reminder to stay relaxed, open to the moment and above all to trust myself without question. This is part of my process that is still evolving and always will be: I must keep working toward staying relaxed and in the moment and trust myself fully.

I may have missed out on another opportunity which was to subtly play into the many mentions of witchcraft and sorcery that come up in the play. For example in Act II, scene 2, Antipholus and Dromio of Syracuse think that Adriana and Luciana must be witches since they seem to know them.

Dromio exclaims:

This is a fairyland: o spite of spites!
We talk with goblins, owls and sprites:
If we obey them not, this will ensue,
They'll suck our breath or pinch us black and blue.
(lines 204-207)

The direction given to me was to treat with skepticism the boys' ridiculous excuse of a "witch story" when they come home late for dinner. I think I could have added some additional colors to Luciana: her secret excitement

about being thought of as a witch or the idea that witches lived in Ephesus. Another opportunity to make this logical connection for my character was in the Doctor Pinch scene, in Act IV, scene 4:

Mistress, both man and master is possessed;
I know it by their pale and deadly looks.
They must be bound and laid in some dark room.
(lines 103-105)

These details could have perhaps been played through certain physical reactions, but having not tried it I have no way of knowing if it would have worked. That being said, if the choice was not incorporated in my process at the time of the production it probably wasn't needed.

As a general rule, I am not in the habit of reading critical reviews until after a show closes and I have never been truly comfortable hearing about the content of reviews in the greenroom or dressing room. I prefer to read through the press packet privately after the project is behind me. I go onstage because I love what I do so it would be counter-productive for me to allow an outside opinion to have any bearing on my work or how I view myself or my talent. At the same time, it would be disingenuous of me to claim that I don't like receiving compliments or positive reviews.

The following is what a few of the critics had to say about my portrayal of Luciana. Theatre critic Christopher Rawson of the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* said: "Amy Landis is fetching as the unmarried sister who has the temerity to lecture Adriana on marital politics. Ann Miner, contributing writer for *Talkin' Broadway Regional Theatre News and Reviews* said: "Amy Landis shows a true spark of comedic skill. Theatre Critic Alice T. Carter of *The Tribune Review* said: "Amy Landis is pleasingly articulate as Adriana's sister, Luciana. The critical reviews I received satisfied me because they reflected the various aspects of my preparation and process: the character's intentions came across clearly, there was attention to the style of the piece, and my speech and language was understood.

I received some personal feedback from director Rodger Henderson who, at the time, was one of my professors at the Conservatory of Performing Arts at Point Park University. Rodger told me he liked my work as Luciana because I seemed "real. He also appreciated the way I modulated my voice to a speaking dynamic rather than the fortissimo levels which tended to dominate the show. I have been very pleasantly surprised, in fact, to have received this same comment about my performance from several theatre colleagues in the time since I did *The Comedy of Errors*. I attribute this type of feedback to my

training, which gave me the techniques to sustain a performance physically and vocally throughout the run of a show and to my process, which works well for me. I wasn't looking for compliments or expecting a lot of feedback, so hearing those specific comments, consistently, reaffirmed my belief that having a viable process is an essential part of the craft of acting – that the craft *is* the process.

Conclusion

The process of working on the role of Luciana in the Pittsburgh Public Theatre's 2007 production of *The Comedy of Errors* was exhilarating, challenging, exhausting and ultimately, satisfying. I truly feel I was successful in my work and I really enjoyed playing with my fellow cast members in every performance. Ultimately, I was there to act, to do my job, to be successful in my portrayal of Luciana and to give the paying audience a good show, and I showed up every day to accomplish that end.

In the beginning of the rehearsal process I was unsure who Luciana was and did not think I would be able to discover her, being swept up in the high-stress and, sometimes restrictive choreographic aspects of the production. By trusting in my process, a combination of preparation, performance technique, and the physical accoutrements that were provided for me, I was able to

create a sustainable, appealing, contemporary character that made sense for our production. I was able to access a Luciana who was not only three-dimensional but actually experienced an arc of her own, defying, in a sense, the traditional farce character. She was the “modern Luciana” our story called for--a twenty-first century character from a sixteenth-century Shakespearean farce who read Harry Potter books and managed an Italian restaurant in the present-day city of “Ephesus, New York”. If I ever have the opportunity to work on the role again in another production of *The Comedy of Errors* I assume *that* Luciana will be very different but created following the much same methodology I used for this 2007 production.

As I stated at the beginning of this exploration, I am still evolving as an actor. There will always be areas for improvement as a performer, so I am continually *watchful* about certain things: reading the text daily for deeper understanding during process, staying relaxed on stage, trusting myself, staying active and in the moment, listening to my scene partners and being totally engaged in the given circumstances at all times. It’s about remaining open to growth while reinforcing my skills as I deepen as an actor. This “deepening” happens not only from continued experience on stage but from the human experience--simply living life. The more I experience in life, the

more my emotional vocabulary will increase, expanding the “arsenal” I have at my disposal when developing a role. I don’t know that my process will ever be complete, and I’m not so sure an actor’s process *should* feel that way. I hope my actor’s process is something I will always continue to refine. In the most recent fortune cookie I opened, the message was:

When you’re finished changing,
You’re finished.

That one was worth saving .

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Appendix A: Content Notes

¹**Actor's Equity Association (AEA):** The union of professional actors in the United States founded in 1913.

²**Barry Pearl:** Broadway, film and television actor and dear friend whom I worked with several times in summer stock at the Mt. Gretna Playhouse in Eastern Pennsylvania.

³**Donald Ewer:** British/Canadian actor (see original film version of *A Child's Christmas in Wales*) who played Mr. Bennet to my Jane Bennet in a production of *Pride and Prejudice* at the Fulton Opera House, around 1990. Donald gave me constructive acting pointers all of which aided in strengthening my performance. Although it is not generally an accepted practice for one actor to give another notes, as young performer starting out I was open to guidance from Donald who really knew the craft of acting.

⁴**Jack Willis:** Broadway, regional theatre, film and television actor whom I met while a student at the A.R.T. Institute at Harvard University-1992-1994.

Jack and I became pals when we performed together in the 1994 World Premiere of Paula Vogel's play *Hot N Throbbing* at the American Repertory

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Theatre and were fellow company members at the Wellfleet Harbor Actor's Theatre (W.H.A.T.) in their 1994 repertory season. Jack was very knowledgeable and gave great advice about the business of theatre. He was also a trusted friend who looked out for me when we worked together.

⁵**Helena Ruoti:** Renowned Pittsburgh actress who played the role of my sister Adriana in *The Comedy of Errors*. I could not have asked for a better acting partner than Helena. A very supportive fellow actor in the show, she was also wonderful company in the dressing room. Before performances, we ran the lines from our first scene before going on, which became a sort of "ritual" we practiced when we weren't pressed for time.

⁶**Arden Shakespeare:** Established as the most authoritative, scholarly edition of Shakespeare's collected plays, edited by David Scott Kastan, Yale University, Richard Proudfoot, Emeritus Professor, King's College London, Ann Thompson, King's College London, H. R. Woudhuysen, University College London, and published by Methuen. New York. Date. Print.

⁷**First Folio:** Dated 1623-The first unedited printed collection of Shakespeare's plays, except *Pericles*, published by two of his colleagues from the theatre company the King's Men, after his death in 1616. *The First Folio of Shakespeare:*

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Based on the Folios in the Folger Shakespeare Library Collection. The Comedy of Errors, Prepared by Charlton Hinman and published by Norton in 1996.

⁸ **Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary:** This is an invaluable research tool I use whenever working on classical texts or teaching Shakespeare. It provides play-specific, line-specific, contextual meanings of all the words in Shakespeare's plays

⁹ **Kristin Linklater:** Renowned for developing the voice methodology known as Freeing the Natural Voice. I was trained in this voice method at the A.R.T. Institute at Harvard University.

¹⁰ **Bonnie Raphael:** Designated Linklater Teacher, Bonnie Raphael was the resident voice and speech coach of the American Repertory Theatre and head of the Voice and Speech unit at the A.R.T. Institute when I was a student there from 1992-1994. The voice and speech training I received from Bonnie informed my acting more than any other technique I studied at A.R.T.

Working with Bonnie was my introduction to voice and speech training and I would not have been as well prepared for my life as an actor without her instruction.

¹¹ **Alvin Epstein:** Senior resident actor at American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts and veteran Broadway actor best known for his work in premiere productions of Samuel Becket's plays. Alvin was one of my Shakespeare teachers at the A.R.T. Institute and instilled in me the habit of reading the play every day throughout the run of a show.

¹² **The Independent Eye:** An internationally known experimental theatre company with whom I had a long affiliation starting in 1985 when I was cast in a production of *Under Milk Wood* directed by Conrad Bishop. I worked continually with "Eye" from 1984-1990.

¹³ **Deva Associates:** My first post-graduate theatre job was with this theatre company. I was an apprentice actor with this physically-based theatre company founded by actress Terri Mastrobuono. Deva Associates created several successful, small scale touring shows in the commedia and street theatre tradition utilizing circus, mime, clown and mask techniques.

¹⁴**Camilla Schade:** Camilla was my long time mentor while I lived and worked as an actor in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. A core member of The Independent Eye, and a gifted director, she specialized in devising original

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full-length plays. Over the years I collaborated with her and fellow ensemble members on several successful productions and was a founding member of The Eye Comedy Works, a live improvisational comedy ensemble. Camilla was extremely influential in my physical work as an actor.

¹⁵**Conrad Bishop:** Conrad is the founder and artistic director of The Independent Eye theatre, an internationally recognized company that has been creating theatre for over thirty years. They are now based in Los Angeles, but I worked with the Eye when they were in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I was a member of the “Eye Theatre Lab,” which served as a training ground for actors, a place for creating original theatre, and a performance venue for readings and play workshops. Through the lab I worked under Conrad’s direction in Harold Pinter’s *The Birthday Party* and Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People*.

¹⁶**Terri Mastrobuono:** I worked with Terri as an undergraduate theatre student at Chatham College Drama Department in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

when her theatre company, Deva Associates, did an extensive performance residency in Graphic Mime, a technique which she created. I later became an

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apprentice with her company. Terri is a director, actress, and theatre educator. She nurtured my work as a physical storyteller.

¹⁷ **Ingrid Sonnichsen:** Although I was not more than barely acquainted with her at the time, Ingrid was on the acting faculty at A.R.T. Institute when I was a student from 1992-1994; she taught the second year students when I was a “first-year. Since then she has become my teacher, friend, mentor, fellow actor and colleague. Ingrid is an actress and also serves on the faculty at Carnegie Mellon University School of Drama.

¹⁸ **Edith Skinner:** The famous speech teacher who developed the “Good Speech” method for stage actors known as the Skinner method, and who wrote what is considered to be the definitive text on stage speech, *Speak with Distinction*.

¹⁹**International Phonetic Alphabet:** A notation system of using standardized symbols for all the sounds of spoken English, often used in speech training for actors.

Appendix B: Supporting Materials