

Preachers' Kid

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the skills of personal story-telling through artistic specificity that is needed, in order to create a solo performance. The process of a solo performance includes creating a plan, gathering information, communicating with a group of collaborators, experimenting with ideas, and putting the ideas into action. The experimentation of story through the actor is examined through a rehearsal process where the actor is allowed a multi-week laboratory that will explore the lineage of the story. As a result, The actor performs a 20 minute solo performance piece that is molded through the deconstructing of the original idea and constructing of the piece. Although it is a solo performance, skills such as Objective, action, obstacle, tactics and personalization still remain key elements in the performance.

The application of the my 3-year solo performance training and movement training guided me through the creation of my process and was the most significant aspect of my solo performance process. It instilled confidence in me as an artist. Whether it was Biographical, Documentary theatre or a personal story, I knew the topic of my thesis had to be very personal.

During my time in the program I learned that using limited resources to tell a story was a skill. My process started in the rehearsal room and I experimented with the journey of my life. I collected one object that represented something significant in my life. This box included my childhood drumsticks, my medical training certification, my college degree in communication, a basketball, a microphone, a pair of headphones, and a bible. These are all objects that I have been influenced by in some way shape or form. So I begin experimenting with telling a linear version of my story with these objects. I used instrumental music as a backdrop and I set up a table with an "L" block on top of it, a folding flat in front of it, and created a story of my life by way of silent story-telling where only my hands and the objects were visible. I recorded that and was able to view which objects worked as a clear visual story. I kept gathering more and more objects like a red fedora and a plastic white mask and after two rehearsal I started to notice that a few of those objects started to stand out to me in the moment and during the playback. I started to do new things while rehearsing and build off of my own ideas. I set aside what

didn't work and used what did work. The table, "L" block, and folding flat turned into a preacher's podium/pulpit. The skill of one object being the gateway to becoming many objects brought me to this conclusion. One of my objects was a bible and between the bible and the makeshift pulpit, the ideas of my solo show started to manifest. The skill of creating a physical life around you via personalized objects first allowed me to respond instinctively and creatively in rehearsal to the imaginary environment I had created. An idea had been born. My religious upbringing had skewed my view of Christianity and the years of influence allowed me to create a psycho-physical environment in which I could truthfully respond to.

So I set up a "church" environment. This included chairs, a podium and a backdrop. The skill of tracking story events came into play. Where as in terms of church, I knew I had to create the main events of church. Another skill of the program is learning how to fit a lot of information in a tight frame or container. I also added the element of a music score to influence the story. I knew that if I told the story through music and movement it would trim down the excess "info" that I didn't have room for in my 20 minute window. The lyrics from the various influential church songs actually allowed me to create the choreography for the first half of my show. I knew that if I had 10 minutes worth of gospel songs that I could construct a story/event based movement piece that reflects the black church environment that I experienced. After that was created I came up against the obstacle of how much text I wanted to include in my solo show because I had not written anything after already creating half of my show based on movement alone. So after some advising from faculty I was able to boil down the spine of the piece

which was to “Honor and Critique” my religious experience. In constant thinking about this spine I started thinking how I could actually do that very thing on stage. I thought about how many ways there are to honor someone however the “critique” aspect had not clicked yet. So an idea popped up about doing a stand-up routine about my religious experience as a part of my show. However, that seemed like 2 separate shows so I did more research and I came up on “Comedy roasts”. Then I thought about having one that represented my religious experience but I knew to Honor and Critique someone. Then I realized that in solo work, especially, we can decide if someone is there or not. So with that, the skill of balancing your audience relationship came into play as I had to communicate with the audience as well as with my invisible scene partner being “Christian Black” who represented my religious experience.

My solo project training and my movement training was the most influential in this process because it allowed me to trust my whole self by telling a story of mine that I actually experienced. Having a solo show class in each year allowed me to build up the skill set of telling stories at 3 different times in my life, and 3 different stages in my training . I felt confidence that I had the toolkit to build a piece of work from scratch. I was also able to comprehend how to use my solo show skills in an ensemble setting.

Solo show: Preacher's Kid

On stage: CS there is a church pulpit/podium. SL there is a large chair/shrine (The Imaginary representation of "Christian Black") decorated in symbolic church memorabilia from Allen's childhood and teenage years. Downstage left of the shrine is a black holy robe laid out on the stage at an angle. Across from that, SR, is Allen wrapped up in stretchy cloth in a mime/clown like costume. Finally, CS, is a small plant that represents the innocence, reverence, experiences that is Christianity for Allen.

Voiceover 1: I recite Matthew 13: 3-8 from the King James Version Bible

Voiceover2 :

"The Christian Black Celebrity Roast now continues from the beautiful city of Angels and Devils, at the Faithful Central Bible New Grove Missionary Deliverance Ministries Center of God. And now to close out our star-studded roast, this special tribute will be by none other than yours truly, 'the preachers kid', 'the former-Christian', 'The ex-Believer', 'The semi-agnostic', 'Mister I-still-love 80's gospel music', AKA I still want my own drumset A-K-A The bible is prolifically poetic but boy has it been chopped and screwed into sexist-discriminatory-hypocritical mumbo jumbo...Ladies and Gentlemen boys and girls, children of all ages now presenting Lil' Bishop Better known as ALLEN MILLER THE 3RD!"

The first 3 songs are a mime/movement performance that reflect my experience of growing up in a "Black church"

Got faith by Kirk Franklin

God is in Control by James Hall

War Cry by Ricky Dillard

Keep the Devil off This is a movement piece that ends with Allen rising from behind the podium to begin his roast speech of the honorable "Christian Black".

Philips voiceover:

"The Christian Black Celebrity Roast now continues from the beautiful city of Angels and Devils, at the Faithful Central Bible New Grove Missionary Deliverance Ministries

Center of God. And now to close out our star-studded roast, this special tribute will be by none other than yours truly, 'the preachers kid', 'the former-Christian', 'The ex-Believer', 'The semi-agnostic', 'Mister I-still-love 80's gospel music', AKA I still want my own drumset A-K-A The bible is prolifically poetic but boy has it been chopped and screwed into sexist-discriminatory-hypocritical mumbo jumbo...Ladies and Gentlemen boys and girls, children of all ages now presenting Lil' Bishop Better known as ALLEN MILLER THE 3RD!"

Allen, with his hanky and glass of water set takes his spot in the pulpit like a minister does before a sermon.

First giving honor to God..or Gold,Oil, and Drugs. Which ever one you worship more. But givin honor to Gee-Oh-Dee who is the head of my life, well once I figure out who or what God is for ME, If I ever. anywho, **(give thanks to Val,Dre,semaj and Phil at some point in this roast routine)** I am here on tудay to give reference to the one and only Christian Black!...Christian Black..What can I say about you? Alot.20 years worth of memories. I mean clearly you've inspired me in some type of way.**(looks around)** I mean if it wasnt for you my parents probably would have never met. And you are good at bringing people together like really good. Almost as good as you are breaking people apart.. But nah you actually are the reason my father,long before I was born, was able to get off drugs and you saved my oldest brother too.Black dont crack baybee! Unless we talkin bout the 80's! But thats another topic.Anyway.you inspired my moms and sisters to be beautiful singers and ministers. And i thank you for givin them the talent and inspiration to sing like Angels. But what I **can't** thank you for is the 1,000's of people you've given the audacity to, to make them believe that they can actually sing. I mean you give people the guts to do alot bold shit in the church but that singin'..I'd rather watch TD jakes give the pope a butt naked lap dance in a mini-cooper than listenin to all the non-singers that's out there .I mean the freedom that you give to people is amazing. Folks would come in church smellin' like cigarettes,cologne and peppermints...Look I know I'm talkin alotta shit but yes I'm here to roast that ass....But seriously the bible is beautiful poetry to me..and the other 80% percent is bullshit..okay no, it's actually not. It's one of the greatest if not THE Greatest book,story,pamphlet,meditation guide,whatever you wanna call it, ever written. Now the number of translations and version that you put out? I cant back you up on that one playa. I mean you got the King James Version,American King James Version,The living bible, The New Age Sanitary Metatarsal New Blood Version.. I mean if you come out with any more versions You gon' be competin' with the Iphone. My question is, for the original version,**whichever one that is**.... I mean we all know you had to have a team of writers. You got 66 books and over 30,000 verses. I mean thats basically

shakepeare's entire canon.,Okay maybe not but you prolly hired him huh? I mean cmon we all know Bill was somewhere on that creative team. I mean he prolly told the King James,like look your majesty. ...James-Jimmy whatever you go back Im 46 and retired But since yall still owe me royalties Ima do this for you.... You know what else I dont know.. why more preachers and politicians dont auditions for shakespeare, They all good at twisted up words n shit. I mean just imagine if Obama decided to start pastoring a church. Like a bllackkk church. Can you imagine? ... "Uh..Let us pray. Father God, we come before you right now and we want to thank you. I want to thank you for allowing me to be a leader...again...and for Michelle to be a First Lady..again..I wanna thank you for getting me outta the white house, and You and I both know that those right wing whackos are all goin to hell"

.But Look I digress, I'm talkin alot of shiet but it's coming from a real and grateful place in my heart. Christian knows this but Jesus did teach compassion,love, and forgiveness. I mean you gotta have a big heart to tell 5,000 people.."Look we only got 5 loaves of bread and two fish,but *everybody will get some*"..I know Christian, I sound bitter. And for a time I was.I actually was. I mean what if when YOU were 6, your mom took your pokemon cards out your backpack because they were 'demonic' without you knowin and didnt tell you until you were 8 after she gave you a whoopin for somethin' totally differently. I mean if you(looks at christian) wouldnt have told her that they were "Demonic Pocket Monster" I would have 2,734 cards by now and I prolly coulda sold um and paid off my student loans! But it's okay. I'm 29 and I built a bridge and got over it. I mean I get to dress up and pretend to be other people for a living so I shouldnt be complaining. You cool, Christian, I mean besides being materialistic homophoic,misogynistic,racist, and money hungry I learned a alot of good things from You. I done learned a whole heap of things about life watching you. I done learned how to tell where the shit lies.How to tell it from the alfalfa. You done learned me alot of things. You showed me how to not make the same mistakes..to take life as it comes along and puttin' one foot in front of the other...wait,my that's a monologue from Fences.alright alright alright.I'm fuckin wit chu. Look dawg one thing you taught by way of my parents is Truth. "The Gospel". You instilled it into my parents and they instilled it into me. So as of late, and in the process of writing this, I been seeking out what the truth is for me. My parents planted a seed in me and now it's my turn to figure how to replant those seeds. And that starts with truth. This is all fun cuz some of the things im sayin comes from a place of truth.

So in the theme of honoring your influence on my life. I'm gonna close us out with some truth.

The truth is, My mom is a devoted christian and has been for longer than I been alive. The truth is She's a mother of 7. The truth is She's been a pastors wife twice, divorced

twice, met my dad 2 years before I was born, that was a marriage of 25 years and now she's a widow.

The truth is She's had more jobs and taken care of more people as a profession than I can fuckin' count. She's found more ways to financially support 7 kids than I could ever even fathom. The truth is She's stayed outta the bullshit that being a black christian in america comes with. The truth is she aint Never been selfish or money hungry or ever about snakin' people. All she's ever asked for is to be happy and stable enough to enjoy herself and YOU still couldnt find a way to "bless" her the way she deserves to be blessed. I mean the woman prays more than I blink durin a day. The truth is she's hurting. On every level. physically,emtionally,spiritually.

The truth is she still has faith is everything you've taught her. The truth is she still gets up everyday and thanks God for blessing her with the little that she does have. The truth is I'm fuckin pissed that someone can work so fuckin' hard and still believe in the shit that you put out there. And my Dad? I would be up here until next week talkin' about how much of a devoted christian he was. I mean the man would pray for a fuckin dog if he needed to. But chu know what, Ima stall you out. Cuz I think you got the point. I'm honoring what you exposed me to in my life. And I thank you for that..So I'm gonna do what all ministers do and take someone elses words and make them my own. I'm gonna quote one of my favorite writers. Coming from the book of Stephen Adly Gurguis, The chapter of New York City, verse 2005. He says

"When I was a kid, I had no sense of who or what God was. I did believe that God existed-I still do- but that was about it. I dont know too much about why I wrote this in particular. Perhaps it's true that the best way to move forward is go back and so, in writing this I went back. I dont know. I do know that I'm in continuous need of the Spiritual and that I usually go to great lengths to avoid it. And I think I'm not alone in that. And I think a connection to the spiritual is essential to us as individuals and to the world as a whole. I think our survival depends on it. I also think that religion gets a bad rap in this country and that non-manic-type people who are religious or spiritual have a responsibility to stand up, be counted, and gently encourage others to consider matters of faith and to define for themselves what their responsibilities are and what it means to try to be "good". It's not about joining a team or church or choosing sides or learning a prayer. It's not about man-made concepts of good and evil. It's not about "enough" or "too little". It's not about shame and guilt. It's about You. It's about the collective Us. Thomas Merton said, "To be a saint means to be myself" What if that were true? What is it we need to overcome to truly be "Ourselves"? I wont pretend that all this answers that question but if it provokes the question in you, then please let it.Ponder it.Because we need you"

(Allen walks down to center stage, grabs his plant, kneels down and looks out at the audience)

Last Line: "Fear and God do not occupy the space"

Lights out on Allen CS

