

32/0: A Solo Performance Exploration of Vulnerability, Masculinity, and Hunger for Fun

Jerik Fernandez

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Committee:
Jeffrey Fracé
Catherine Madden
Scott Hafso

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University of Washington

Abstract

32/0: A Solo Performance Exploration of Vulnerability, Masculinity, and the Hunger for Fun

Jerik Fernandez

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Jeffrey Fracé

School of Drama

32/0 is a solo performance exploring vulnerability, masculinity, and the reconnection to my inner child-like fun through clown, dance, and melodrama. Set in the current day, the character of The Cool warns the audience of an impending enemy, The Sun. Through slander, coercion, and interrogation of The Sun, The Cool is reminded of the beauty The Sun used to provide. In the end, he surrenders to The Sun and is reunited with his child-like playfulness once again. Inspired by American depictions of cool, World Wrestling Entertainment, hip hop, and 90s pop music, the piece asks the audience to check back in with their inner child and rediscover their whimsy.

Jerik Fernandez

Graduate Thesis — 32/0: A Solo Performance Exploration of Vulnerability, Masculinity, and Hunger
for Fun

Jeffrey Frace

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As an actor, it's hard to look at yourself in the mirror and think "I'm an artist". I'm not an artist. How can I be? A painter will mingle paint with their brush and make me feel wonder. That's an artist. A musician can find dissonance in two notes to remember a lost friend. That's an artist. Photographers will capture a moment in time. The Culinaries will feed. But me? How could I do any of that? I speak someone else's words, stand where I'm told to stand and I attempt to live in circumstances that are not fully my own. To me, the best art always felt impossible to be replicated by another. It always felt personal, specific, and unique to that artist. Though we are taught in acting training to personalize every choice, it is always integrated with someone else's idea. No matter how hard I worked to make my acting choices personal and specific, nothing ever felt fully my own. Nothing felt mine. My time with the University of Washington's PATP program slowly but surely gave me the tools, the space, and the courage to create a piece that explores my journey investigating my soft side, my vulnerability, and what "cool" really means. More importantly, the program helped me make something that is mine.

I had done some years of actor training and have been lucky enough to get consistent work in Seattle but there was always something in me that felt missing. I would be referred to or have even at

times called myself an artist but acting never fully scratched the artistic itch even though I was doing it often. I auditioned for UW's PATP program because the head of acting, Jeffrey Frace, pitched that it would be a half traditional acting conservatory and half devising curriculum. I had already spent two years at the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts for professional acting training with a supplemented BFA from Cornish College of the Arts. I've spent many hours in "traditional" conservatory style studios so the prospect of learning how to devise my own work was an immediately intriguing idea.

The two and a half years at UW had provided me with deep acting and devising training. Viewpoints, Clowning, Suzuki, Alexander Technique, and many other classes helped my classmates and me grow into thoughtful and deliberate actors and theatre makers. My cohort and I were constantly generating theatrical original work. Whether it was good or bad, it did not matter. We were making things. We made plays, musicals, puppet shows, clown shows, comedic skits, dance pieces, etc. We experimented with what felt like every theatrical medium to express our ideas. To make things with them felt like magic time and time again. We knew how to make things together. We felt like artists together. I felt like an artist with them. In our 3rd year of the program, we were tasked with creating one more thing. A solo show. I quickly realized this was something I could not make with them. Would I still feel like an artist on my own?

"What do I even have to say that can break the silence in our world?" This was a constant question through my two and a half years in the program. Coming up on our solo shows I started to reflect on my time at UW. There seemed to be a theme running through my training here. There was a

missing ingredient in my process, performing, and life. That missing piece was Fun. I gave it a capital F because it felt like someone was hiding from me even when I looked for it.

In our first quarter, we took a class called Play with Bradley Wrenn. In the syllabus he states “You can’t fake play. You’re either enjoying yourself in a game that’s delicate, unpredictable, and compelling to play, or you’re not. Whether you’re in a high drama or the wildest physical comedy imaginable, if it doesn’t feel alive and absorbing to you while you’re playing it - how do you think it’s going to feel to the audience?” We explored how to play. Like an imaginary friend, tag at the schoolyard, build a fort at a sleepover type of play. I played the games, followed the rules, and I played to win during many of these games. There was an exercise I did with my cohort member, Minki Bai, where we imagined ourselves as two office employees stuck at a dead end job. Brad made us face away from each other about 10 feet apart. The rules were simple. Try to turn and face each other at the same time, and when that happens, go play. Seems simple enough. Minki and I disappointingly were not on the same page for the first 5 or so tries. After a few more failed attempts, Minki and I figured out a system pre-signaling to each other when we were gonna turn. The next turn was successful and we proceeded to play. We laughed, made dumb noises and continually checked in with Brad while we were on stage like “Hey we’re doing the exercise! Look at us! We’re playing!” He disappointingly stopped us and told us we were faking it and it was clear we were not having fun. How could he know? We were laughing and running around and I’m sure it looked fun for the audience. During a conversation with Brad about how I started doing theatre, he nodded and said “I don’t know if I should say this right now.” He continued nodding his head in deep thought and just decided “Fuck it. I’ll say it. Can you remember that this is fun?”

In my Solo Performance class, Valerie Curtis Newton said to me during an evaluation “Jerik, you have skill but you need to stop being Hamlet.” She then proceeded to ask me who my favorite actor was. I’m always embarrassed to say this to anyone but I replied with “Adam Sandler. He makes me giggle every time.” “I would have never known that about you. I’d like to see that more” Val replied. I love Adam Sandler movies. He casts all of his friends. He makes things about sports. He writes dumb one liners. He basically plays himself in every role. There is nothing about Adam Sandler that screams Hamlet.

The final nail that solidified the recurring theme in my performance feedback was during a performance evaluation with Adrienne Mackey. After some small talk about how I’ve liked the program so far she looks at me with some hesitation and says “Tell me if this resonates with you. I once had a professor tell me that I bulldoze through everything with golden virtuosity.” I did resonate. Honestly, this would be an amazing compliment in everything but art making. She was right, I try to do everything correctly, impressively, and with by-the-book technique. But I muscle through it to an almost painful degree which ultimately creates a shield between the audience and I. Again, she was telling me that I needed to find the fun and joy in what we do. She was right. All of the professors that spoke to this were right.

I think my piece started forming in my mind because of jealousy. My cohort member, Yeonshin Kim, was not a very big fan of sudden loud noises. We’d be sitting in class and something like a chair would knock over causing a huge banging noise which made her whole body react. She’d even let out a scream sometimes. While learning how to integrate the Alexander Technique into my daily life, Cathy Madden continued to gently remind us to “renew our desire to be affected by stimuli.” I wanted that. I

wanted to be affected so I could share humanity with the audience. All my life, I had to keep an armor of “cool, calm, and collected”. “Don’t let anyone see how you feel”. “Keep the mystery, don’t let anyone in”. I’m not sure why now. Maybe it was for survival. After a few years of training at UW, I started to laugh at that version of me, which sparked the creation of the character “The Cool”.

I wanted to explore the shedding of my “cool” and the reconnection with fun for my Solo Show. “You’re so cool”. This is something I hear a lot and it makes me feel uneasy reiterating it. I secretly enjoyed it though. Who doesn’t want to be “cool”? “Cool” is idolized, sought after, and a valuable social currency in our society. In graduate school, I quickly realized that the veil of “cool” was keeping me from growing in my acting. It was stopping me from being affected by stimuli, being a collaborative cohort member, and ultimately it was stopping me from finding the fun on stage. Bradley Wrenn says “we want to see you have pleasure on stage”. I started practicing this on stage and in life. Whether it was poking my scene partner to giggle, wiggling my hips because it feels good, or maybe yelling a funny sounding word like “CUCUMBER!” down the halls of Hutchinson Hall. I found the more I was doing things I found pleasurable, the more I could feel the audience leaning in. Fun was my missing piece. It was a journey to get here and I continuously have to practice and investigate what fun means to me. The more I practiced, the more I would notice how silly my “cool” armor was and the more *32/0* became clear.

An imagined beginning and an imagined ending. This philosophy DRAMA 490: Special Studies in Solo Performance taught by Professor Valerie Curtis-Newton launched me into the beginning stages of writing *32/0*. I closed my eyes and saw two things: an epic entrance that made the crowd go “Wow that was cool!” and a single spotlight on me laying on the floor. These two images

helped me get started on finding the narrative for my experience. Two characters emerged: Me as the personification of The Cool and an antagonist. The Cool would represent myself the emotional armor I've built before grad school and The Sun would be my antagonist. The Sun would represent eagerness, whimsiness, and ultimately the child-like fun I used to have before the bullies came for it.

During the making of *Omnia*, an hour long fully devised piece for our main stage season, Adrienne Mackey taught us to think of devising a show in pieces. She had index cards of the different little pieces of the show we already made and started putting them together. We suddenly had a whole show by making smaller pieces of it over an amount of time. I learned that I didn't need to think of a whole piece of theatre as one whole artistic endeavor. So I started to make my show in pieces. I needed an epic entrance, an introduction to who The Cool is, The Cool needed to address a problem, The Cool needed a breakdown, and The Cool needed to rediscover genuine FUN.

The sonic landscape of a show is something I can easily connect to coming from a DJ and sound design background. I knew the entrance music was important and could gain me a lot of mileage in introducing who the character of "Cool" was. I wanted a major scale stadium-like entrance but was limited to the humble theatre-in-the-round Glen Hughes Penthouse. Due to the limited physical size of the space, I figured I could give the illusion of a big entrance through the sound design. I wanted something loud, abrasive, and ground shaking. I clicked around some YouTube, Apple Music, and Spotify playlists when I got to a remix of Cold as Ice by Kanye West. It starts off with an 808 drum signaling the start of the song, a bad ass guitar riff by Mike Dean, cut by a melodic piano piano intro, ultimately leading to the original Cold As Ice by Foreigner. The song contained an

aggressive beginning, a melodic piano alluding to my yearning for softness, and the song's hook literally declaring:

“You're as cold as ice
You're willing to sacrifice our love
You never take advice
Someday you'll pay the price, I know”

These lyrics were so on the nose for my artistic journey they started to inspire the rest of the show. Inspired by Michael Jackson's Super Bowl XVII Halftime show, I rehearsed center stage moving one body part at a time to the beat of the song. In *Viewpoints*, we were taught that everything you do on stage physically is being read in a way that creates story. I found gestures like slicking my hair back, pulling out a cigarette, turning my head to the sky to show how cool this character is. After a few experiments with the song and these gestures, I found an ending pose. This pose caused my mind and voice to create the first words of the show. “I'm so fuckin cool” That was going to be the first words spoken. At UW, I've learned “body first, then speak”. I found that my body knew what I wanted to write before I even got to sit down and think about it. Up and on my feet were the most efficient and truthful ways I wrote this show.

After I found how the character of The Cool would be introduced, I needed the character to have a conflict. Valerie Curtis Newton told us to think of art as “metaphors”. What is dangerous to coolness and ice? Heat. What makes the most amount of heat? The Sun. The Sun was dangerous to

The Cool because heat can melt ice. Metaphor. I'll seduce the audience with how cool I am and make the audience hate The Sun.

The absurdity and grandness of what was manifesting in rehearsals started reminding me of WWE Promos.

“In wrestling, a promo is short for “promotional interview”, a dialogue or monologue used to advance a storyline. The act of delivering such an interview is known in the business and by fans as cutting a promo. A promo targeted to denigrate or insult another individual, stable, or a rival promotion is said to be cut on the target (e.g., “Triple H cut a promo on Batista”). A promo is designed to help the audience identify or dislike a wrestling persona.”

I started to write in the style of a WWE promo. I imagined “The Cool” as a superstar wrestler calling out The Sun to get the audience on my side. The character would have long declarative statements drawn from our Melodrama unit in Embodied History class with Jeffrey Frace. I called on our Suzuki training for the character’s slow and sustained movement. And finally drew from our Clown training with Bradley Wrenn for pleasure on stage and the connection with my audience. The Sun will suddenly make a surprise entrance. The Cool is reminded of how much fun I used to have with it. I connect with the audience as not The Cool, but as Jerik.

I was missing my final piece. Genuine Fun. I didn’t even have this moment until we started tech. The final piece came just in time. Before Youtube became extremely popular, I uploaded a video of myself lip singing to Aqua’s Barbie girl. The video is still up. It’s 11 year old me having all the fun in

the world. I wanted to recreate the moment for the audience, myself, and my inner child. I found my ending and Fun.

Performance. Performing. That's the thing, right? To spend countless hours understanding character, story, breathing, voice, body, and audience in hopes of finding a new understanding of something else.

The performing part is the element I had the least on my mind for our solo shows. I had the privilege of helping produce all of my classmates' solo shows. I took on scheduling, design hires, prop management, and building access. I love acting. But what I love more is helping this seemingly impossible task of theatre-making possible. I think this helped me leading up to my own show performance. I tend to overthink before opening night. Allowing myself to be immersed in other things allowed me to just accept that I did my work. I wrote something that I wanted to do. I realized that it had been a long time since the last time I genuinely wanted to perform. I wanted to perform this piece.

My entry to understanding the Alexander Technique was the concept of desire. My desire to do something directly affects my body's performance in life and on stage. I always desired a grand entrance. I always desired to have a killer outfit in front of a crowd. I always desired to be a rock star. *32/0* made me feel like a rock star. I had the ultimate pleasure of performing something I always wanted to feel. The 10 years of training behind me were already there. I felt the sensation of desire when those lights came up on me, setting up a playground for 20 minutes of my Fun.

I wrote myself into performing things I had fun doing. I think it showed up as soon as I hit the stage. As soon as the light slowly came up on me perfectly matching the entrance music, I could feel the

audience clap, scream, and giggle. The entrance was so epic and stupid at the same time. As a performer, you live for the moments of “I got them”, luckily for me it happened in the first 10 seconds. I knew I had the audience and the challenge was keeping them there. As a performer, I tend to have a habit of rushing through language and moments. I’ve found in Suzuki training, that you want to take things on stage one at a time so the audience is able to read the story. Every moment must be intentional and clear. There were moments on stage where I would hold a sentence or a gesture for what felt like an eternity but I challenged myself to fight the impulse of immediately jumping to the next thing. Moment to moment, I could feel the audience lean more and more in. The Cool has a moment of explosion. A huge tempo shift. It only feels earned if I did the work of committing to the slow tempo in the first half of the show. The Cool curses The Sun while shedding all of the armor. I am on my hands and knees as Jerik. I reveal the good times I had with The Sun. As I confessed to the audience why I hate being called “cool”, I called on The Alexander Technique to help my whole body live in this moment with the audience. I cried. A real cry for help. Whether it was The Cool or Jerik I wasn’t sure, but it was truly something I did not expect to happen but felt truthful for the moment. Every moment of the show was fun. I lived out my childhood dreams of cutting a WWE wrestling promo, I made people laugh uncontrollably, I wore a crazy fly costume, and I danced and wiggled my butt. I had fun, and I think the audience did too.

Bibliography

Contributors to Pro Wrestling. (n.d.). Promo. *Fandom, Inc.* Retrieved February 10, 2026, from <https://prowrestling.fandom.com/wiki/Promo>

Notes: My show is cut into two parts. 1 very short part and then we insert the rest of my show after another PATP solo show.

Sound 1: Cold as Ice (Yeezus tour Remix) plays.

Light cue 1: Slow cold look fade in with music

An actor slowly is revealed.

Should feel like a Super Bowl Halftime show entrance

Cigarette blow

I'm so fuckin cool

0 celsius

32 fahrenheit

Solid state of matter...fuckin cool

People always ask me who I am

But honestly...

I'm still deciding...

who deserves to know

Cigarette blow

Some call me mysterious

Some call me trouble

But you can call me...

You know what?

Nevermind

Moves to exit

Stops

Actor Exits

ONE OR TWO PATP SOLO SHOWS WILL HAPPEN HERE

Sound 2: Cold as Ice (Yeezus tour Remix) plays.

Light cue 2: Slow cold look fade in with music

An actor slowly is revealed.

Should feel like a Super Bowl Halftime show entrance

Oh hey didn't see you there...

Right...

Almost forgot...

I came back to let you in on a little secret...

Because I think I like you

you guys seem....fuckin cool?

And beautiful

Something suave to an audience member

And I wanted to make sure you guys were safe

Because around here?

You don't wanna be caught dead...

Hanging around...

The Sun

And I know what you're thinking...

How do I get my hair to look like this?

But we're not here to talk about me right now...

It's all about you

And protecting yourself...

From The Sun

So here's some advice...

The Sun is relentless with its radiation, size, volume

Barging into every room like "Hey! Good Morning! Look at me!!!! I'm the Sun!!!!!"

The Sun has a diameter of about 865,000 miles and its volume could hold the equivalent 1.3 million Earths.

How fucking cringey taking up all that space?

Doesn't it have any SHAME coming into every room with all that all that size?

Cigarette blow

But no worries

Get you a pair of these?

Indicates Shades

Without a doubt you'll be able to dim it's light

keep your cool

Cigarette blow

I like you guys

Very still

In your place

In the dark...

Very mysterious

Very fuckin cool....

Unlike... The Sun

Because The Sun is always moving, in motion, shuffling its feet...

With its eagerness and enthusiasm

At a rate of 450,000 miles per hour

The sun is always ready and eager...

and ON TIME?

You know, I once invited the Sun to my birthday party that started at 7:30 and it showed up at 7:30!

What a try hard!

I could almost melt from the second hand embarrassment...

The Sun is always impulsive and excited about things...

Wasting all that energy!

Cigarette

And that's why you get a pair of these

Indicating boots

Because these...

will have you moving at a fuckin cool 41 beats per minute of easy like a Sunday Morning

Your energy will never go to waste

Cigarette mush

Believe it or not

Me and the Sun..

Used to be best friends...

Before I became so fuckin cool...

We used to be reckless

and run fast

and make stupid loud noises

playing around and have lots of fu-

lots of fuu-

But then I got these sunglasses

these boots

And this... *indicates jacket*

Because Having fu-

Because Having fuuu-

LOOK THE SUN CAN HURT YOU AND I KNOW BECAUSE IT HURT ME!

The sun used to make me eat my boogers!

And morph into a power ranger!

The sun cut out photos of the Backstreet Boys and NSYNC and put it up on my wall!

The sun made me want to memorize my times tables!

And dress up dolls on the internet!

The sun used to make me dance when music came on!

And dance when there was no music at all...

AND YOU KNOW WHAT HAPPENED?

“IT” HAPPENED

They laughed...

They laughed...

That sharp, loud, piercing laugh AT ME

“Look at you. Hanging with the Sun. Don’t you see the heat is burning everyone and making it unbearable to be around you”

And this heat started building in my chest and in stomach and my muscles and my skin

And I needed to get as far away from the sun as I possibly could

So I got these

And these

So this god damn leather jacket to keep me so fuckin cool....

Is it getting hot in here?

Takes off jacket

People always ask me who I am

No that's a lie

They tell me who I am

Jerik you're so cool

You're so cool Jerik

Jerik you're so fuckin cool

No...

I'm cold

and hard

and tense

An I'm and asshole

And I'm a bully

And I don't know how to have....fun....

Does that make sense?

Yeah? Thank you

One time...

The sun...

MADE me....lip sing to Aqua's Barbie Girl

and MADE me film it

and MADE me post it on YouTube

It got 4,000 views

For 06 YouTube I was basically viral

That was fun

There were a lot of mean comments...

but it was fun

I'm a Barbie girl

In the Barbie wooorld

Life in plastic

Light Cue 3: The Sun

There you are

Sound cue 3: Maybe Barbie Girl fade out?

Light Cue 4: Fade Sun to black

END OF PLAY