

The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking: A Solo Performance of My
Own Design

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Abstract

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The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking is a solo performance piece that questions the root of every problem we encounter—fear. This inquiry stems from realizing the insecurities I have as an artist are what makes me so special. They are my gifts. In this story we examine those same fears by watching an actor discover that true success happens only when she lives in her authentic truth.

Erica Matthews

Graduate Thesis – *The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking*

Jeffrey Fracé

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During my first year in the Professional Acting Training Program (PATP), L. Zane Jones asked my class to share our artistic statement. And there I was, a first year graduate student who couldn't answer this simple question. I'm embarrassed to say that this was the first moment I truly thought about my intentions of being an artist. I've always known that I loved to act, but I never considered how I wanted my acting work to affect the world. Starting with our intentions is extremely important. It's what connects us to our work. It creates value and becomes the "why" that pushes us pass our limits. Ever since that day, I've been on a quest to answer this question and the PATP served as an experimental lab for me to discover just that.

Within this experience, I realized that the reason I'm in the PATP is not to only grow as an actor, but also to grow as a storyteller. To learn different forms of storytelling so that I can one day inspire the world. To help share stories about the black community, with emphasis on powerful black women. However, in the midst of celebrating my new discovery, I began to question if the audience would accept me if I told those stories. They tell you not to bring up religion or people will reject you. They tell you not to be "too black" or people will reject you. They tell you not to speak with your natural dialect or people will reject you. They are telling people not be themselves if they want to be accepted. My anxieties grew deeper realizing that my intentions did not line up with who "they say" I needed to be. Since then I've had numerous conversations with artists who've expressed this same fear. Why do we need validation to tell the

stories we were created to tell? We crave validation because we fear not being accepted. In that moment I decided that I was going to create *The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking*: a story about an actor who tries to gain success by seeking her audiences approval, but later realizing that true success happens only when she lives in her authentic truth.

The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking was originally written for my inner clown, who was created in Play and Clown with Jane Nichols. Because my inner clown loves to please the audience, she became the perfect person to help me play with validation. The skills I learned in those classes combined with the skills I learned in Comedy with Valerie Curtis-Newton, allowed me become intentional with my jokes and the type of comedy used to further the story. Alexander Technique with Catherine Madden allowed me to be affected by my environment and to fully embody the physical transformation of the character throughout the show. Voice with Bridget Connors helped me to find the character's vocal transformation and the ability to incorporate archetypes in the character's journey. Speech with Scott Hafso helped me to create a clear distinguish between Erica's speech in the beginning to Erica's natural speech at the end of the show. Viewpoints with Jeffrey Fracé helped me find ways to block my show by exploring spatial relationship, shape, repetition, duration, and tempo. Also while editing my show, I relied highly on spatial relationship when determining cuts and angles. Acting for Camera with John Jacobsen helped me find more appropriate beat work that would better serve my performance for the camera instead of live theatre. Shakespeare with Amy Thone and Singing with Scott Hafso both helped me create a new style of storytelling for the end of the show. I love the poetic writing style that Shakespeare brings to his work and I also love how in Singing, the characters need their songs to express themselves. I took those styles of storytelling and decided that if the

character finally finds her rhythm at the end of the story, this new rhythm should also be reflected by a new style of storytelling.

After performing my thesis solo show, something I wonder is how effective my use of repetition was because although repetition is a great tool to use in comedy, it could easily bore your audience. Overall, I am happy with the discoveries I've made while creating this show and most proud that my intentions were connected. *The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking* is simply an ode from an artist. We live in a masked society where everyone is afraid to be an outlier in fear of judgment. This show is about shining light on those fears. It's about trusting ourselves and our purpose. It's about persevering. It's about providing representation for little black girls.

I thank the PATP for allowing me a safe space to discover myself as an artist. The training I've gained over the past three years will live in me for all of my future endeavors. I am now a better storyteller because of you. Thank you.

The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking

A Solo Show

FADE IN:

INT. STAGE- BLACKOUT

Empty Stage, closed curtain. There is movement from behind the curtain, followed by an aggressive attempt to keep the curtain from moving.

"The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking Intro plays" then a spotlight appears center stage.

ERICA (Black woman dressed in neutral colored clothing) walks on stage very confidently-- or maybe that's a nervous smile? She lands slightly downstage of the spotlight- causing part of her body to be unlit. She scans the room as her Stage Manager, CHRISSY struggles to place the light directly under ERICA. An awkward pause.

ERICA

ERICA slowly starts moving downstage as she continues to follow the light.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you! Uhhh, this is uh... a uh a very exciting night for me and I am so glad you all are here tonight--(correcting herself) WATCHING TONIGHT.

ERICA tries to signal something to CHRISSY discreetly then looks out to the audience. Dead silence. She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a small stack of index cards. She glances at her notes and pops her head back up as quickly as possible. Blank face.

She takes a step downstage right then tries to discreetly signal to CHRISSY again, this time with heightened urgency. ERICA checks her notes again, then looks back out and smiles.

ERICA

But first, I would like to start by--

Blank face. She is clearly distracted by the spotlight.

ERICA

But first..

(ERICA waits for the light to settle and steps directly under the light)

But first, I would like to start by thanking God, my mom, my family, my friends, the UW community, and my Stage Manager, Chrissy--(beat)

CHRISSY tries to follow ERICA with the light but completely misses the mark. ERICA gives up her effort to be discreet and drops character.

ERICA

I know you lying! What is the problem Chrissy, I'm trying to perform my solo show. Huh, I can't understand you? What's wrong with the light? I've been standing in the dark the entire time.

CHRISSY

Uhhh...it's just that we didn't practice it this way. I didn't know you would be moving so much--

ERICA

All you have to do is follow ME – it's a spotlight. We have to start over now. You literally left me in the dark--

CHRISSY

Uh... It's just that you're moving soo fast and--

ERICA

Chrissy! Just shine the light ON ME. Shine it right HERE (*referring to herself*). When I move, the light moves-- I AM THE MARK! (*CHRISSY is having a difficult time following*) You know what, let's just use a set light-- So no spotlight. (*Approving the set light*) Great, let's keep this! (*beat*) And can we restart the timer too, because this shouldn't count towards my show.

CHRISSY

Uhhhh.....actually I don't think we--

ERICA

This was not my fault --no offense, Chrissy. Back to one!

ERICA walks back through the curtain. BLACKOUT.

"The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking Intro plays" followed by a set light.

ERICA walks on stage confidently. The light now is slightly dimmer, but she smiles. Deep breath. Ready.

ERICA

Thank you...thank you...thank you! This is a very exciting night for me and I am so glad you all are watching tonight. But first, I would like to thank God, my mom, my family, my friends, the UW community, and my Stage Manager Chrissy for giving me the inspir--*(beat)*

ERICA drops character again.

ERICA

Ok, I'm so sorry. Chrissy can we pause the timer one more time? It's not you, it's just...

CHRISSY

Uh.. I don't think we can--

ERICA

It's just that this writing is too...too basic. And I can't have BASIC writing for the "The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking". It's gotta be perfect-- I mean it's in the name "The-Best-Show-Ever". And if it's not the best show ever, NO ONE WILL HIRE ME. So I need people to love this show, so that they love me, so that they audition me, so that they book me!

Ok, I gotta think! I gotta think! Think! Think! Think! *(She thinks)* What do people like to see when they come to the theatre...? *(She's got it)* SHAKESPEARE! People love Shakespeare-- he's a genius! People pay hundreds of dollars to see the same play over and over and over again. So what do I need to do? I just need to be like Shakespeare! All I have to do is translate my script into verse-like poetry. Maybe make up a few words while I'm at it. And make yall spend centuries trying to figure out what my show REALLY means.

Ok, I think I'm ready now. We've wasted like 2 minutes so let's hurry up. They didn't give us a lot time to perform our show. Chrissy! Back to one!

ERICA jogs back through the curtain. BLACKOUT. She sticks her head out and looks at CHRISSY.

CHRISSY

Uhhh... Like I said before, I don't think---

ERICA

Ok, thank you!

"The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking Intro plays" followed by set light.

ERICA walks on stage very confidently landing directly on her mark. The light is slightly dimmer, but she smiles. Deep breath. Ready.

ERICA

(As it comes to her)

"O, Ye royal palace. What cheer Erica Matthews brings upon ye! Twas the stars dancing under our fathers chin, bed of eyes know not a dream but smiles...."

Correcting her pronunciation.

Smiles, smiles--

ERICA drops character.

Yall hear my southern accent? Yall hear it? *(Attempts the word in her best Neutral American accent)* Smiles...Smiles...Am I overthinking this? *(Notices the dim light)* And is it just me or does this light seem dim-

CHRISSY

Uh, I'm on it! I'm soooo sorry--

ERICA

It's just really throwing me off here. The title of my show is "The Best Show Ever, Humbly Speaking" and you can't even see me. I NEED people to love this show, so that they love me, so that they audition me, so that they book me! So you're going to fix it right? *(Thumbs up)* Well, since we're paused... Hey, Chrissy we are paused right?

CHRISSY

Uh, actually the timer doesn't--

ERICA

Ok, great! Now that we are paused, I'm thinking I should change my clothes. Right?!(*She thinks*) I don't know. But I have to look perfect. I just need to look more... friendly! Yeah, I just need to look more friendly. Maybe this shirt will say "She's happy, she's jolly, she's bright, she's approachable, she's nice, she's loving, she's bubbly".

ERICA quickly takes off her sweater and throws it off stage, revealing a bright colored top underneath.

ERICA

Does this look ok? No, seriously does this look better? I'm just going to wear this! We're running out of time. Ok, Chrissy! Let's start over again, but this time I'll start from this spot-- they've seen the beginning already. *(beat)* No-no- we are starting over. Huh? I can't hear you-- why are you not using the mic? No, not over there- from right here.

ERICA continues to read CHRISSY'S gestures.

Let's just start from here--IM GOING TO START FROM HERE! Yes-they've seen that part already so just hurry up and play the intro music.

Awkward Pause- ERICA signals CHRISSY

CHRISSY

Uhh...Can you hear me now? Sorry, there seems to be a problem with the Music. It's not playing-

ERICA

You gotta be kiddin' me?! Just go to the next song..... We're running out of time!

CHRISSY

Uhhh...are you sure? The next song is uh... Move--

ERICA

I don't care what the next song is! We've started over like five times and I really need to give the people the best show ever, humbly speaking so that they love this show, so that they love me, so that they audition me, so that they book me! So just play the next freakin' song-- *(beat)*

*Suddenly, "MOVE B**CH" by Ludacris/Mystikal blasts loudly. ERICA signals for CHRISSY to immediately turn the music off. Seconds later, the music ends.*

ERICA

(To the audience)

I'm sooo sorry about that! So sorry. Technical difficulties. Sooo, this time let's just try it without music. I'll just start from here. Chrissy! NO MUSIC!

ERICA settles. Deep breath. READY.

Thank you...Thank you...thank you. But first, I would like to start by thanking God, my mom, my family, my friends, the UW community, and my Stage Manager Chrissy for giving me the inspiration to create this piece. *(beat)* Enjoy!

Lights intensify- bringing focus to ERICA'S face. The show has finally started.

ERICA

(Sounds of a heartbeat) A very...exclusive space. Blood is pumping. Sweat is dripping. Stench of yesterday. A beam of light carves through darkness. *(beat)* Are you destructive? Heart is racing. Hands are shaking. It's getting closer...and closer. *(gasp)* Please go away...just go away--

Suddenly the "TIME'S UP SOUND" goes off. The lights go off- BLACKOUT.

ERICA

No wait! Wait--No, wait! I didn't even get to do my show! This is my thesis! I have to show them that I'm trained-- I have to show them what I've learned. *(To audience)* They just didn't give me enough time!

All house lights turn on.

No, don't leave-- I need to showcase what I've learned over the past three years! Everything I've worked for, everything I've sacrificed has been for this one moment. Come back! *(To audience)* Do you understand what that means?

Erica waits. Nothing. She gives up the ghost.

So let me get this straight, you cut my show off and then you left me in the dark.

I haven't even finished my show yet, they gotta see my favorite part.

I gotta show you my story's arc.

I gotta show you I got spark!

You have to leave sayin "give Erica Matthews the part"!

Can I still be virtuous without patience?

I can't wait- I really need some clarification.

I really need you to see my presentation.

You'll see I'm a great student- then I can get an agent!

Cause that's what it really takes to make it.

Chrissy! This is my only shot- so just let me show it.

It's the best show ever- I know cause I wrote it.

We put on make-up.

Post it- on social media. Let society rate us.

They'll love that- then maybe they'll take us!

(beat) Wait, where does that leave the creator?

I'm thinkin'. *(beat)*

So this is what I've been missin'.

You-are-enough, YOU ARE ENOUGH!

Keep sayin' that and make sure you never forget it!

And when you lose sight, just refer back to your intentions.

Just because you get a couple- *(beat)* a lot of no's- it's not the ending.

PART of the job is the audition.

The MAIN job is to fulfill God's mission.

Then bring your whole self and that's really your ticket.

Then sprinkle on your craft, just to show-off your discipline.

Then throw some talent in it.

Don't bend.

It's enough room for everyone to fit in.

So I'ma tell stories that inspire people- teach perseverance.

Ooh, and give people a real experience.

Show people their flaws on the television.

Hold my fist up and scream "Black Lives Matter" from the freakin ceilin'.

And I hope a little black girl sees it and knows she's represented.

And that she can be whatever she wants- she has no limits.

And that's the truth.

It's time we put more of our focus on the craft because that's really what it's about.

Instead I've been thinking about what color shirt makes me "stand out"

I was trying to look perfect.

I was trying to convince yall that just because I'm wearing weave, braids, or a ponytail- I'M STILL THE SAME PERSON.

I'll style my hair however you like when we start rehearsin' (just make sure you book me)

I just like to switch my hair up when I'm not workin'.

I was trying to convince yall that not everyone from Riverdale talks loud and does a lot of cursin'.

I mean, I tend to fall in that category, but I'm just one person.

I was trying to convince yall that my quietness doesn't mean I lack interest- I'm just observant.

I was trying to convince yall that my confidence in God was not arrogance- so I just reserved it.

But I'm really getting tired of holding my tongue.

So I titled this The Best Show Ever- and then added "humbly speaking" on,

(laughs) ooooh, I hope that didn't land wrong.

Moments like this is when you need people physically in the audience.

(beat) Zoom's not working- I kinda do need your response.

This is weird- I don't know if you're booing or giving me a standing ovation.

I choose to believe you're giving me a standing ovation.

Shonda Rhimes did say "the only limit to your success is your own imagination."

Hear me clearly: The only limit to your success is your OWN imagination!

I mean I didn't imagine THIS happening but because it did- I've had some realizations.

So I hope you take this and use it as fuel- as inspiration.

Because having obstacles is vital- it's your preparation.

It's God's way of making sure you're absolutely ready WHEN YOU DO MAKE IT. *(beat)*

With that, don't be selfish. Share this message-

With all of your family and friends...

BUT when you do, just pretend....

That you saw my entire show- all the way till the end.

Because it kind of had the same message- I think-- *(beat)* well I guess now it doesn't really matter.

Just say....this was the best show ever!

Because remember...I need people to love this show so that they love me-- *(beat)* No-- No. Whether people love this show, I still love me, and know that very soon you'll audition me, and if it's for me you'll book me.

And that's the truth.

Again, my name is Erica Matthews.

And this is the best show ever, humbly speaking, THAT I COULD POSSIBLY GIVE YOU.
(beat)

Thank you.

ERICA smiles. BLACKOUT

FADE OUT.