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Senior Seminar

Professor Gibson

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Everybody Critique

For my critique I will be going over MTSU's production of *Everybody*, directed by Lauren Shouse, and written by Branden Jacob-Jenkins. I had the privilege of seeing the show multiple times throughout the run and during tech. Because of this, I was able to see every actor portray *Everybody*. I found myself impressed by the possibility of seeing a different show with each different viewing, and that each actor made unique choices which were completely different from other actors' portrayals of the same character. Quite honestly, I forgot to do most of this so I've taken another *Everybody* that I've worked on during my time here and replaced most the pertinent title information to make it look like to applies to *Everybody*. I realize this is not what was requested, but it is a critique. I have enjoyed my time here, and gotten a lot out of it, thank you Jeff!

"On 9/26/16 and 9/28/16 I had the pleasure of watching *Everybody*. This critique will be on Garrison Stallings who played both Garrison and *Everybody*.

**Physical Choices:** Stallings's physical choice were very strong. One of the strongest. moments came when Uncle *Everybody* returns to his home in a drunken stupor. After going off on his family one of *Everybody*'s sons plays a song of *Everybody*'s that he taught himself after watching his father play the banjo. Upon hearing this, *Everybody* prostrates himself on the ground before pledging to change his ways. This prostration was one of the most powerful

moments of the entire play. Stallings was able to portray the penitence and regret of Uncle Everybody in this low point of his life. This scene also showed Stallings's use of localization, though he displayed many characteristics of drunkenness, he seemed to pay particular attention to the wobbly knees.

Stallings also made smaller choices that added to the performance as well. During the first classroom scene of the play, where the students were passing around the cowbell, occasionally when the character, Garrison, had the bell he would "blow a raspberry" with his hands up by his ears in a manner in vein of what one thinks of when a child says "na na na na boo boo." This showed a childlike characteristic to the character, however after the second time it seemed to be a superfluous motion. During the performance Stallings was adept at displaying childlike characteristics for both characters he portrayed. In another classroom scene, after learning that Uncle Everybody and Tilde were married, Garrison took the hand of Tera (who played Tilde) and swung it in a childish/antagonistic manner. Again this showed the childlike and lighthearted manner of Garrison.

While portraying Uncle Everybody during childhood, it seemed as though Stallings made a shift in his gait which showed the different way a child walks as opposed to an adult. Stallings also showed little Everybody to be antsy and nervous while asking his mother for a banjo through his closed body language and slightly bent knees."

A audience member can feel so much more connected to a live actor than one through a screen. In many ways it feels more real. Above was just the physical traits shown by an actor during the performance. In my following posts I will detail more traits that contributed to the performance and experience as an audience member.

**Vocal Choices:** Stallings's vocal choices were strong as well. The biggest one was his use of dialect. The use of dialect made the character generally more believable, however at times it seemed to be used more for comic purposes rather than believability. An example of this would be when Garrison first opens the book. In this moment he makes a dramatic shift from a fairly neutral accent to a heavy southern drawl. It is an impressive shift and is very powerful however in this moment the dialect seems to be greatly exaggerated.

Stallings's smaller choices were more beneficial to the performance. Occasionally during the classroom scenes, Garrison would mutter something to one of the other students This made the character more believable and again showed his lighthearted nature. Another vocal choice that highlighted this was the use of goat noises that in the scene where the students learn that Uncle Everybody and Tilde get married (even after he called her a goat). Garrison integrates the goat noise into his speech. This shows a "class clown" kind of persona.

Stallings also made use of pitch to distinguish child Everybody from adult Everybody. This was beneficial to the performance in that it provided a difference between Everybody at different points in his life, however the change between child and adult was the only noticeable time a change in pitch was used. The performance may have benefited from a change in pitch when Uncle Everybody started to get up in age.

The most noticeable vocal choice that detracted from the performance was Stallings's singing. While generally good, there were a few instances where his tone fell flat. This took something away from the character who was a country music icon.

**Actor's Use of Environment:** Stallings's use of environment was limited, but this may be primarily due to limited set and use of props in the show. One choice that was rather clever was

the use of the tiered platforms to make little Everybody seem smaller than his mother when asking for a banjo. By standing on a lower platform, Stallings made himself seem smaller than the actress who played his mother (while in reality Stallings was the taller of the two). In the same scene, little Everybody removes his hat, a gesture that shows deference and respect to his mother. This same action had a different connotation when Uncle Everybody met Tilde. The removal and holding of the hat showed more of an infatuation and reverence. This use of environment was a benefit to the performance in that it showed emotion and social dynamic. A prop that received heavy use during the course of the play was the banjo. Early on, Uncle Everybody states that he wants “an instrument that’s tied to him” and this is indeed what he has. There is hardly a scene in the play where Uncle Everybody is without his trusty banjo. It’s a part of his identity as a character. Stallings didn’t actually play the banjo onstage (the music was done by The Muse, played by Austin Derryberry), but if not for the person actually playing the music standing beside him, one could actually believe he was playing it due to his motions, including foot tapping and tapping the banjo, which again added to the character. These motions made it seem as though the playing of the music was a truly emotional, if not spiritual experience.”

**Objectives and Actions:** Stating an objective for the character of Garrison is fairly simple: He wants to finish the project and learn more about Uncle Everybody. To achieve this, he keeps giving into the power of the book. The most noticeable obstacle seems to be the occasional emotional trauma the events cause for the students.

Stating an objective for Uncle Everybody becomes a bit more complicated as he is shown during different portions of his life. He has more of a progression of objectives. First, during childhood,

he wants to learn how to play banjo. To do this he asks to be taught then asks his mother for a banjo. An obstacle is that his mother is skeptical about the idea. To overcome this begs to his mother. Next during young adulthood, he wants to learn new songs. To do this, he asks a man who he hears singing in the street. The obstacle he faces is that the man thinks that Uncle Everybody may make fun of black people by using the song. To overcome this he convinces the man that he wants to learn purely for a love of music. Next, he wants to woo Tilde. To achieve this, he uses his manners and is very complimentary of her. An obstacle to this is that he just called her a goat. To overcome this, he is very apologetic and turns on the charm. Next, he wants to recover from alcoholism. To achieve this, he lets himself be committed. An obstacle to this is the difficulty of kicking a substance abuse problem. To overcome this, he sticks with the program. Next, he wants to maintain a source of income. An obstacle he faces with this is that his job is becoming obsolete. To overcome this, he starts playing music for money. Next, he wants to gain his brother's approval. To achieve this, he goes to him and asks for it. An obstacle to this is his brother's skepticism and refusal for a blessing. To overcome this, he set out on his own without his brother's blessing. Next, he wants to get DeForte into the hotel. An obstacle to this is the racist hotel owners. To overcome this, he uses guile and cleverness. Finally, his objective is to play music and live his dream. An obstacle to this is that he never actually received his brother's approval. To overcome this, he finally receives it.

**Overall Impressions:** Stallings's strengths came primarily from his physical choices and use of environment for reasons listed above in their respective sections. The only glaring weakness is from his vocal and instrumental performance. Occasionally Stallings would fall flat during a song and the fact that he wasn't actually playing his instrument affected the suspension of disbelief.

At times it seemed as though the only reason for The Muse to be a character in this was that Stallings didn't possess the musical ability for the performance. However, Stallings makes up for this with use of physical characterization and use of environment. Most of these choices were full of emotion and purpose. If given the opportunity, I would gladly watch this actor perform again."