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Jason Tze Hsin Ko
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**From Austin to Seattle, from Jason to Tree-Ear: My Journey of
*A Single Shard***

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Franchelle Stewart Dorn

Lee Abraham

Stephen Gerald

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*A Single Shard***

by

Jason Tze Hsin Ko, B.A.

Thesis

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Dedication

To that kind-hearted, innocent, young and energetic kid living in all of our hearts.

Acknowledgements

To Linda Hartzell, the director of *A Single Shard*, who guided me with infinite love and support throughout the entire journey.

To Geoffrey Barnes and Alexis Scott, my two most important allies from start to finish.

To the friends and mentors at Austin.

To my family.

Abstract

From Austin to Seattle, from Jason to Tree-Ear: My Journey of *A Single Shard*

Jason Tze Hsin Ko, M.F.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2013

Supervisor: Franchelle Stewart Dorn

Abstract: This is a written report of my experience on rehearsing and performing the production *A Single Shard* in Seattle Children's Theatre from January to March of 2012. The essay documented my working process and the challenges I've faced throughout rehearsals and performances. This is also a reflection of my education from the graduate acting program in Department of Theatre and Dance.

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Prologue: How Did It All Start

I remember that night we were having a party in Robert's house after rehearsal. We were sitting by the stove surrounded by his exotic art collections, chatting with paper plates in one hand and plastic cups in the other, exhausted from a long day's work. Despite the fatigue, our eyes were shining and our spirits were floating in the air. We had been making tremendous progress. We were happy and satisfied, and we knew that each step we took would be a step higher than the previous one.

At one point we were chatting about how we became involved in the show. When it was my turn, I said: "When my professor told me I was going to Seattle, I felt that my career has just peaked." And everyone roared with laughter.

Everything happened, in my opinion, in miraculous fashion.

In 2011, during the second semester of my first year, as part of the MFA acting cohort in University of Texas at Austin, the faculty suggested we make audition tapes and send them to the regional theatres across the country seeking work. Seattle Children's Theatre (SCT), the second largest children's theatre in America, developed an interest in the school after they received the tapes and decided to come to Austin. Among the visitors were Linda Hartzell, the artistic director of SCT and director of their upcoming show *A Single Shard*, Robert Schenkkan, the playwright and an accomplished actor, and Carey Wong, the set designer for the production. At that time Linda was determined to have the faculty and students from the design area involved in *A Single Shard*, but she had not made any final decisions on the casting since Robert had just finished the first draft. For the purpose of testing the script and the graduate actors, she used the workshops she had with my class to rehearse a staged reading. I was cast as "Tree-Ear",

the protagonist of the show who is an orphaned boy. It was a rare moment in my education to play a role specifically written for an Asian. It was an exciting experience.

The presentation of the staged reading was a success with many faculty and students in attendance. The responses were highly positive. Linda was pleased with the outcome and told me that I had portrayed “Tree-Ear” convincingly despite my age, which made her re-think her previous decision of casting a teenaged actor for the part. Talks continued after Linda returned to Seattle about who and how many of the actors would be involved in the production, but the decision was not finalized until the beginning of our second year in late August. Eventually it was Prof. Franchelle Dorn, my acting mentor and the head of the graduate acting program, who told me that I would be spending the first ten weeks of the upcoming spring semester in Seattle.

What encouraged me the most about this news was that Linda eventually chose me after numerous auditions in Seattle and elsewhere after Austin. Fran said that I had not only made a strong impression on her, but I’d also changed her initial thoughts on her casting choice. In other words, I’d created my own opportunity. At the end of the meeting, Fran hugged me and congratulated me and said, “Don’t screw up. Be great.”

From there, my journey began.

Chapter 1: All the Backstory

A. TREE EAR AND *A SINGLE SHARD*: A SUMMARY

A Single Shard was originally a Newberry Award-winning children's novel written in 2001 by Linda Sue Park, a Korean-American writer. The play follows the basic story. The story is set in 12th century Korea in a potter's village called Ch'ulp'o and focuses on the orphaned "Tree-Ear". Tree-Ear becomes an apprentice of the talented and ill-tempered "Master Potter Min" by accident. "Crane-Man," a homeless elder who lives under a bridge, takes care of him and teaches him how to deal with the challenges and difficulties he meets as he embraces his new responsibility. As the relationship between Tree-Ear and Min develops, an emissary from the Royal Court in Songdo comes to Ch'ulp'o to assign a commission to the best craftsman whose pots will be used by the king. Min prevails despite heavy competition from another potter named Kang. Kang tries to win the emissary over with inlay work; a difficult decorative technique that allows the pots to have multiple colors by using different clays.

The story then takes a sharp turn when Min declines Emissary Kim's request to bring his work with inlay technique to Songdo due to his old age and the long, treacherous journey between Ch'ulp'o and Songdo. Tree-Ear, who has developed strong emotional ties to Min and his wife, promises to bring the work to Songdo by himself. Unfortunately, a pair of robbers assault Tree-Ear and throw the pots off the cliff before he can reach Songdo. After a long internal battle during which he considers committing suicide, Tree-Ear recovers a large shard and determines to finish the journey in order to keep his promise.

A Single Shard concludes with a bittersweet ending after Tree-Ear's return from Songdo to deliver the news of Min's commission. Min, who always held his distance from Tree-Ear, breaks that formality when he tells Tree-Ear that Crane-Man has passed away after an accident. The melancholic Tree-Ear runs away and spends an evening under the bridge where Crane-Man used to live to mourn for his friend and father figure. In the end, the Min couple decides to adopt Tree-Ear and rename him after their deceased son. Tree-Ear goes on to become a master potter.

B. DIRECTOR, LINDA HARTZELL

Linda Hartzell has staged over forty-five plays and won multiple awards since she became the artistic director of SCT¹. Linda has a warm and approachable personality, a trait she demonstrates both in and out of the rehearsal room. She is also light-hearted and sensitive. Possibly due to her long working experience in SCT where she has frequent contact with children and family-friendly material, her style is to treat the cast and crew as a large family. There was never a moment when she raised her voice or became visibly upset when I was there. As a director, Linda values both specificity and simplicity, and she works patiently and diligently with actors during rehearsals.

Because this was my first professional experience, I was surprised to find my time with Linda to be pleasant and fruitful compared to stories I'd heard about other directors. We had positive chemistry when we were working in the room, and she was always open to discussion; there was constant communication between us during off- hours when we could share our thoughts and get consensus on our progress. The only time I found the rehearsals to be difficult was when I received acting notes during blocking runs. At first I

¹ <http://sct.org/About/Our-Staff>

was overwhelmed and confused, but I learned to write down the notes for later and not to worry too much about incorporating them right on the spot unless being instructed otherwise. The biggest lesson I'd learned from her was finding simplicity and staying in the moment by embracing the circumstances and the words. These were not necessarily new ideas, but they finally resonated with me because I was focused solely on the production without the distraction of classes and other responsibilities.

I'm very thankful to Linda. I treasure the time I worked with her and I would gladly work with her again. I also find it humbling that her impression of me remained unchanged. She was always positive and complementary whenever I saw her. It was truly a blessing to be able to work with her.

C. PLAYWRIGHT, ROBERT SCHENKKAN

Started up his career as an actor, Robert Schenckan is also an accomplished playwright. His trilogy play, *The Kentucky Cycle*, helped him to garner Pulitzer in Drama in 1992. According to Robert, he and Linda were the driving forces of *A Single Shard*'s transformation from a novel to a play, and he felt that the story and the lessons it teaches are perfect material for SCT.

Robert was very invested and involved in the production from the beginning, and his frequent revisions of the script made the rehearsal process a unique experience. Fortunately, I was able to keep up with the revisions because I had a similar experience when I was involved with UTNT's (University of Texas New Theatre) production of *Rivers of January* during my first year. I hardly had any trouble connecting to the lines since every revision was refreshing and effective. I was most impressed with the way Robert wrote the lines: the language was simple enough for younger audiences, but the

poetic quality made me felt like I was performing Shakespeare. There was never a moment when I was distracted by the language style, and I believe that Robert's acting experiences made him able to write the plays that work well with actors. It was truly a blessing to have an opportunity to perform his work.

D. SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE

i. The Facility

SCT is located in Seattle Center, which serves as the city's cultural and recreational core. It is the second-largest theatre for young audiences in the country, and is has won numerous awards under Linda Hartzell's leadership. The physical dimensions of the space are enormous with two stages, independent scenery and props construction shops, and multiple classrooms for the theatre's youth drama program.

Before *A Single Shard* opened, I spent most of my time in the main rehearsal room which was a luxury working space for actors. The room was situated on the 4th floor with a large outdoor patio complete with glass walls. This prevented people in the room from feeling claustrophobic and, helped everyone to maintain positive energy during the long rehearsal process. The only downside of the rehearsal room was the lack of depth compared to the actual size of the stage in the Charlotte Martin Theatre. This is especially true when we had to imagine the upper stage area during the second act of the play where a bridge was suspended off the ground about seven feet tall. I will talk more about this challenge later in this paper.

ii. The People

Other than Linda, the person I had the most interaction with was Amy Gornet, the stage manager of the production. Amy happens to have been an old acquaintance to my

cast-mate and classmate Geoffrey Barnes. Working with her was a wonderful experience since she kept everything in a timely and orderly manner. Along with her assistant Ruth Eitemiller, she made sure the actors could focus on the rehearsals and not worry about anything else. Like all other stage managers, Amy took control of the show after the premiere, and was the go-to person throughout the run. It is from her that I learned about the duties of an actor such as being punctual and asking questions to prevent mistakes, accidents and confusion. Ruth's job was also essential since she acted as the backstage coordinator. We developed a strong relationship.

Geof Alm was the fight choreographer whose influence expanded as rehearsals continued. He was very patient and thorough with me much like Linda, and his presence became even more essential near the end of the rehearsal process when we started to run the show in the performance space. Elizabeth Friedrich also came in frequent contact with me as the head prop master and designer, along with Nanette Acosta, the costume designer. There were also Sinae Cheh the dance choreographer, Annett Mateo the puppeteer and designer and Chris Walker the sound designer to name a few. I didn't get to spend too much time with them due to the structure of the show and the rehearsal schedule. Nonetheless, all of them, without exception were friendly, helpful and professional. It was because of them that the rehearsal process and the entire run of this production were done in a nearly flawless fashion. I admired them and learned an invaluable lesson from each of them to be both passionate and devoted to my profession.

E. THE CAST

i. Who went with me: The Austinites

I was extremely fortunate to have my classmate Geoffrey Barnes and Alexis Scott with me in Seattle for both professional and personal reasons. Their presences alone reminded me about the craft and technique we learned in the program. We were able to meet together on multiple occasions to do check-ins and share our thoughts about the rehearsal process. With this being my first professional experience, I found our time together to be beneficial because it not only made me able to connect the production to the training, but it also made me more mentally prepared to carry myself as a professional actor instead of an acting student.

On a personal level, I was glad to spend time with them since we didn't have many opportunities to work with each other in school. Geoffrey worked with me only in *Rivers of January*, whereas Alexis and I had hardly ever worked together before. This production also gave us an opportunity to temporarily put aside the "graduate acting student" mentality, and we were able to connect to each other more intimately without the challenging school schedule. As my friends and, at the time, neighbors, Alexis and Geoffrey provided great emotional support throughout this entire process, especially during the first days of rehearsal when I felt the pressure of the heavy workload, the high expectations, and the newness of working with people I'd just met. It was also because of them that I was able to have a positive mental state during the challenging eleven-shows-a-week run. They, other than my family, were the people who gave me the courage and the power to go on. I wouldn't have been able to finish this show without them.

ii. Who I met: The Asian American ensemble

There were eight other actors including the understudies besides the three Austin-ties in *A Single Shard*. This ensemble was incredibly talented and supportive from day one until the final show closed. Most of them were Asian Americans and had graduated from acting programs, although some were teachers, like Scott Koh from Seattle Repertory Theatre and Joseph Steven Yang who teaches in his own independent acting studio. We had an unusually strong bond with each other that gradually evolved into a family along with other people from SCT under Linda's tutelage. Together we have managed to maintain a positive and professional working environment, and some of us stayed in close contact with each other.

Chapter 2: All the Work

A. PREPARATION

During the time between August and my departure from Austin to Seattle in January, I prepared myself mostly by reading the script and the notes Linda had given to me during the workshops. I used the novel more as a reference because I feared that its overly-descriptive narrations might interfere or even become distracting for my process. I concentrated instead on embracing the words Robert wrote. I needed to have a thorough understanding of how each section of the play related to the overall story. The latter turned out to be a challenging task since the story had numerous sub-plots. It took a considerable time for me to put everything into perspective. It was not until Robert's revisions that I started to have a more coherent understanding of how all the moments connected to each other.

One unusual factor of my acting process throughout the entire experience was the stylistic choice of portraying Tree-Ear. Linda was against the stereotypical indications such as high-pitched voices and cartoonish body language, and in turn I had to approach the character from inside. I tried to keep my portrayal of Tree-Ear "simple" and "pure." The filter between the mind and the voice – what he thinks and what he speaks – is small if not non-existent. He carries himself with a strong code of ethics which is to be respectful of others and work hard. My version of Tree-Ear was unselfish and guileless. Yet, his wit and intelligence were prominent features that enabled him to survive. This was the rough structure of how I portrayed Tree-Ear based on Linda's notes and my understanding of the character. Later the character would become more layered as the rehearsal process went on.

B. IN A NEW PLACE WITH NEW PEOPLE

i. Seattle, Washington

Aside from living in an unfamiliar city with limited transportation resources, the gloomy weather was biggest challenge of being in Seattle. Seattle had just experienced one of the biggest snowstorms in recorded history when I'd arrived. For the rest of our stay the weather was cloudy and rainy with an average temperature of forty-five to fifty-five degrees. I had a challenging time trying to be mentally and physically prepared for rehearsals or performances every day, and I believed the lack of sunlight contributed to my depressed mental state similar to winter blues. To fight this, I would wake up early to stretch my body with deep breathing much like what my movement teachers Prof. Andrea Beckham, Tom Truss and Quetta Carpenter had taught us. The vocal warm-ups taught by my voice teacher Prof. Barney Hammond were also an important tool to keep myself in check with my body. My roommate Geoffrey and I also developed a daily routine of checking each other's mental and physical state, and we used our time together during off-hours and after rehearsals chatting and playing games to release the pressure.

A lot of credit should be given to SCT who provided all the out-of-town actors with very comfortable housing. With the theatre and grocery stores within walking distance and dozens of different restaurants nearby, I was able to relax and recuperate every day after work. Moreover, the close proximity of the theater allowed me to go back to the apartment on two-show days. This really helped me to preserve my energy.

Unfortunately, I didn't have much time to see other theatres in Seattle, but I did see one show at the Seattle Repertory Theatre entitled *How to Write a New Book for The Bible*. I was impressed by the actors' works in this difficult play filled with monologues

delivered directly to the audience with minimum scenes between the characters. It reminded me of the importance of technique and process.

ii. Breaking the Ice

I tend to be introverted and awkward when I meet people or when I become the focal point in the room, and therefore I was really taken aback when we had our first meet-and-greet event in SCT two days after we arrived to Seattle. The rehearsal room was transformed into a reception hall with actors, crew and people from the board of directors. I was nervous during our individual introductions and the PowerPoint presentations. I also felt shy around the other actors who all had more experience than me. I spent the first days of the rehearsals working as hard as I could and trying to avoid any mistakes. This resulted in my being too tense to be in the moments and to enjoy the process. What eventually warmed me up were the chats in the green room and the little get-togethers after rehearsal. The chemistry between us really improved as the days went on.

C. CHALLENGES AND SUPPORTS

The challenge for me being in *A Single Shard* was enormous: I was playing the lead in the world premiere of a play adapted from an award-winning children's novel in one of the largest theatres across the country. This, combined with the grueling performance schedule and my always being on stage felt like a Herculean task especially because there were so many "firsts" in this experience. Although I tried not to think about it, I felt that expectations are high. There were days when I felt discouraged.

What saved me from being overwhelmed with negativity was the support from Linda, Geoffrey, Alexis and the rest of the cast. Joseph, the actor who played "Master

Potter Kang” and understudied Crane-Man, became one of my closest colleagues. Joseph continued to encourage me throughout the rehearsal process, likening my character to “Hamlet” and helped me to shed my fears and worries through humor encouragement. Joseph, along with Naho Shioya (Mrs. Min) and Richard Sloniker (Emissary Kim), was an alumnus of University of Washington’s MFA acting program and shared similar language and experience as my two classmates and I. They talked to us about how they re-adjusted after they finished the program and gave us suggestions on what to keep in mind and what not to worry about. For example, they told us to stop behaving like students by imagining the teachers are in the room and employing all the techniques we’ve been taught to get their approval, but just pay attention to what the director wants. They also said that it takes time to digest everything we’ve learned, and don’t get discouraged if you don’t find some of it to be effective; it’s about picking the most effective ones and let it be part of our own individual processes.

What was even more important was Geoffrey and Alexis’s presence. They made it possible for me to go to them for emotional support, or to ask for help or suggestions without hesitation. We would compare our rehearsal notes with what we had learned in school and try to readjust our work through craft and technique. For example, I referred to my Meisner and Shakespeare training about the “intention” and the power of the words in order to release the physical tension Linda noted as “use less hand gestures” and I used some of the Laban terms to help me go through some of the physical work.

There were also other notable physical challenges such as walking on a raked stage and doing stage combat on a raised walkway without railings. Linda had a physical consultant from Pacific Northwest Ballet teach us how to prevent injuries and Geof

taught and assisted us in stage combat. There were a number of times when I worried about my physical well-being and the risk of injury, but fortunately everyone at SCT listened to my concerns and did everything in their power to improve the situation. I did not overwhelm myself with fear because I had their support.

D. CLASHES WITH CAST-MATE

It's an understatement to say this whole experience has been a blessing since almost everyone involved was friendly, supportive, professional and talented. However, I did have difficulty with one actor in this production. Unfortunately that actor played "Crane-Man", the character I was closest to in the play. Ho-Kwan Tse, a Cantonese actor, had been cast in Los Angeles and his credits were mostly film and television. The issues I had with Ho-Kwan however were not necessarily about his comments about devaluing technique, but his aggressive personality that could break the professional boundaries and make it difficult to connect with him on stage. I tried to maintain a level of professionalism hoping that he would do the same. We remained respectful but until the following incident happened.

One day when the morning show was over, Ho-Kwan came to me and said that I was "lip-syncing" his lines back to him during the show and he hoped that I can find a way to stop it. I was surprised when I heard it because it had never been mentioned during rehearsal or the run, nor had that note ever come up since I started acting in college. I apologized to him and said I would do my best, but later my frustration and anger overtook me and I went to Naho in private to ask her what she thought about this. She calmed me down and told me not to worry about it too much. During the next show later in the day I decided to make sure my lips were closed whenever Crane-Man spoke.

Ho-Kwan didn't say anything else afterward. However, I noticed later that he would start to "lip-sync" my lines sometimes in the show. I ignored it and tried to keep myself in the moment to avoid possible confrontation. Eventually all of it dissolved.

To this day I still don't know whether the lip-syncing was truly my mistake or a misunderstanding, nor do I know if Ho-Kwan was trying to retaliate afterwards with his own lip-syncing. Thinking back on it now, I should have handled this incident differently. I chatted with Geoffrey and Alexis about this after our return to Austin, and both of them said that I should have passed this information to Amy. One of them even suggested that Ho-Kwan was out of line by giving me notes. He too should have gone to Amy as the stage manager. Nonetheless, I learned a valuable lesson on how to work with difficult people: maintain the level of professionalism, and try to not let the personal feelings interfere with the process.

E. GETTING ILL

I started to get ill from a cold as we begin our third week in the four-week, forty-six-shows schedule. What troubled me the most was the gradual losing of my voice. My overall physical and mental energy were also deteriorating, and I had asked on multiple occasions for a microphone because I didn't want to strain my voice. But Amy and the rest of the crew continued to assure me that my vocal energy was fine even though I could feel that it would eventually go out. I was at the lowest point after the first show on Saturday when I felt dizzy and had a fever. My voice could barely be heard in casual conversation. I asked Ruth the assistant stage manager desperately for a microphone. At the time Amy was away and another replacement stage manager who I was not familiar with was in place for her, and I had long given up on asking for an understudy. When

Ruth brought the stage manager backstage to meet me, I warned her that I might not have a voice at all by the next day if I didn't have a microphone. She finally made the decision to send me home to rest upon seeing me fighting fatigue and fever.

As with the incident with Ho-Kwan, I asked my classmates and professors their opinions about whether or not an actor can ask for an understudy when he feels ill and knows his condition will get worse unless he has time to recover. A lot of my classmates supported what I did and said it doesn't hurt to ask; on the other hand, Fran did point out that some directors never plan to make an understudy perform even if the principle is severely ill. "Sometimes a director would tell you, 'you are the show.'" Fran said. "They would say 'there will not be any show tonight if you can't make it.'"

I admit that I was feeling emotional throughout that week because at the time I felt as if the people in SCT were forcing me to be on the stage with no regard to my physical well-being. Now I understand that they were hoping to avoid the dreadful situation of pulling out the principle actor since that would have an enormous impact on show's quality. I still believe that it never hurts to ask because I should do what I can to protect my instrument, but I still have much to learn about performing with limited physical capability.

Thanks to the vocal training by Barney and Dr. Pamela Christian, I relied on breath support and muscularity to carry myself without straining my already weak and shallow voice. This turned out to be a memorable learning experience. I was also pleased to find out later that Timothy Wong, my understudy who in the end performed three shows, did a remarkable job! What was even more beneficial was that his parents, long dismayed by the professional path he chose, saw him perform, and subsequently changed

their minds about his career choice. This whole turn of events was arguably the most endearing accident I have ever had.

Chapter 3: All the Feedback

Before I begin this segment, I would like to take a moment to recount how this performance paved the way to another pleasant surprise in my career. Kenneth Washington, director of company development at the Guthrie Theater, was the head and mastermind of “A Guthrie Experience of Actors in Training.” Each year, Ken visits all the major graduate acting programs in the country to recruit the second-year graduate actors and invite twelve of them to stay in Minneapolis for a two-month intensive workshop before they begin their third year.

It turned out that Ken came to Seattle to see the performance because Richard was an alumnus of the program and maintained a close relationship to him. With many thanks to Richard, my two classmates and I were able to meet with him one day after the show, and he pitched us the idea of coming to Austin to audition everyone from the program. We relayed that information to the faculty as soon as possible and, as promised, he visited the school only days after we returned to Austin. The audition process went well, and later I found out that Ken had selected me and my classmate Antoinette Robinson for the Guthrie summer workshop.

For a while, I didn’t know how to put things in perspective because my once-in-a-lifetime opportunity had paved the way to another unbelievable one. I tried to make sense of how I was able to get chances that some other actors would never have. My opinion about it now is that aside my extraordinary good fortune and other things not within my control, this taught me to be a kind but dedicated actor who is willing to extend his network. There are always opportunities, but I must be ready to present the best of me

when it comes. I couldn't rely on luck to be successful. The key to success is thorough solid work.

A. FROM THE FAMILY

My experience doing *A Single Shard* also stands out because it was the first time my family got to see me on the professional stage. My parents remained in Taiwan when I went to college and they never had the opportunity to see me perform in either college or graduate school. The reasons are simple: my father's busy schedule and the overwhelming costs of travelling. All my parents knew about my acting experiences was through numerous Skype chats over the years. They were eager to see what my personal journey had been like. For *A Single Shard*, my father worked hard to clear up his schedule so he and my mother could fly to California to meet with my older sister Tammy before coming up to Seattle.

In contrast to my parents, Tammy was able to see me in multiple performances and had been my most dedicated supporter. From college to graduate school, she would find the time to see me perform and offer positive response and criticism to what she had seen. I remember the emotional moment when we met backstage after the performance. We were all overwhelmed by the experience. Later that night, as we gathered in a restaurant next to their hotel, I recounted my entire acting "history" and I felt enormous amounts of support and love from them. I asked them, "So, do you think I should be an actor?" Tammy responded, "You have to be. There are no excuses not to be one anymore." That summarized how much they all trusted and supported. As that support grows it will be my biggest motivation.

B. FROM DR. BRANT POPE

Unfortunately, none of the UT faculty could see *A Single Shard* in Seattle, but the head of the Department of Theatre and Dance, Dr. Brant Pope, got to see one of our final dress rehearsals two days before the premiere. Brant had previously directed me in *The Cherry Orchard*, but I didn't have the opportunity to spend much time with him since I was not in the principle cast. Since Brant was on a layover and he needed to return to Austin the next day, his comments were brief when Geoffrey, Alexis and I met with him in the theatre after the rehearsal. He expressed his admiration for the theatre and the story itself, and he was proud of our work which paved the way for future collaborations between the theatre and the school.

One of the first things I did when I returned to Austin was to have a personal meeting with Brant, which was very fruitful and encouraging. When I asked him about my performance, he said he was proud to see my improvements and he was particularly pleased with my moments with Ho-Kwan / Crane-Man. As an experienced director, he said he saw Ho-Kwan's lack of real response and not being "in the moment" which could cause the death of acting. But he thought I maintained a personal connection to him throughout the play. Brant applauded me for my work, and I was grateful that he provided me this opportunity and saw my growth as a graduate actor.

C. FROM THE AUDIENCES YOUNG AND OLD

At the end of every show, the cast would initiate a talk-back with the audiences. Every time I was amazed at the young audiences' strong reactions and responses to the play. They remembered the important lessons "Crane-Man" taught "Tree-Ear"

throughout the play, and they were able to understand the morals behind the stories even though I worried that the story was too layered and complicated.

I remember an occasion when a little boy came to me during the meet-and-greet session after the talk-back. He asked me as I signed on his program, “Why were you sad when Crane-Man died? He looked happy when he was dancing in the clouds” I thought for a moment for a simple and coherent response, and then I said to him, “I was sad because although I know he’s happy and in a better place, I would still miss him because I would not be able to see him again.” He nodded his head thoughtfully and said to me, “Like my grandpa” as his father patted his head to comfort him. That remains a powerful moment for me to this day.

I made this mission statement when I decided to become a professional actor in college: “My job is to tell a story about people through my mind, my voice and my body, and if one out of a hundred audiences can see the moral of the story through my performance and that moral makes him or her to become a better person, then I have fulfilled my purpose.” This certainly had come true during my time in Seattle. I was nervous before every show as I stood backstage listening to the chatter from a packed room. But, every day I reminded myself of how the story can have an impact on the audiences’ lives, and how that could change them for the better. This is the reason why I do this and I’m proud of it.

Chapter 4: All in All

A. CLASSES AND PROFESSORS

My acting classes with Dr. Lucien Douglas and Prof. Lee Abraham were the cornerstones that marked my transition from an inexperienced acting student to professional actor. Lee's fundamental script analysis technique made me understand the important questions to ask myself every time I approach a character, and Lucien's Meisner-oriented class taught me to use my heart and gut more instead of my brain, which I had a long time struggling on. Fran's Shakespeare class was encouraging because it made me appreciate the power of the words and enabled me to go through my fear of the poetic and intimidating language. It made me able to embrace heightened language and shed the nightmare of having been told I would never succeed with such material while I was in college.

I mentioned the influences of Pamela and Barney and how the training had helped me in the previous section, but I will also point out that their classes also made me able to overcome my accent. Pamela's technicality and the exercises on dialect / accent works and voice studies gave me the chance to intellectually explore all the different sounds, while Barney's actor-supportive vocal techniques directly influenced my performances and made them more truthful. I was also able to explore other poetic works under Barney's tutelage including Wilde and Beckett. His Shakespeare coaching sessions provided valuable opportunities for me to explore the work outside of acting classes.

One long-standing issue I had with my own acting before graduate school was the rigidity of my body, and my first year with Andrea and her Pilates- / Feldenkrais-inspired technique aided me tremendously on freeing the tensions. My time with Tom and Quetta

honored that and took it to different places. For Tom, the one-on-one Alexander sessions were extraordinarily helpful in locating my own tensions and releasing them. Quetta's sessions on miming and mask work honored what Andrea taught us and made me understand the power of movement and more importantly, the power of no movement. Coach Paul Schimelman's stage combat class was a bit too short and intense, but it was very fruitful and refreshing.

There were also other classes like Prof. Stephen Gerald's acting / writing class and Prof. Steven Dietz's Collaboration class that helped broaden my range as an actor. They gave me tools to promote myself and to be more versatile.

B. PRODUCTIONS: FROM UTNT TO BRUCE NORRIS, FROM YASHA TO TREE-EAR

The *Rivers of January* production during my first year had been an interesting and challenging experience. I didn't plan to perform during my first semester because I was feeling overwhelmed by the amount of work, but I was swayed because it was, like *A Single Shard*, one of the few opportunities when I could portray an Asian character. It turned out to be a great run with tremendous support from colleague Geoffrey and John Smiley. I didn't get the chance to apply much technique, but the production made me understand the caliber of my colleagues and how much I needed to improve my craft.

The Pain and the Itch was another great challenge in that I got the opportunity to play a character I would rarely get considered for. It was also a time I started to have serious doubt on my acting ability because of the difficulty of relating myself to my character "Cash." Thanks to Lee's direction and patient counseling, I was able to find the confidence again and use different ways to approach my character such as animal mimicking and watching standup comedians for inspiration. The show turned out to be a

successful and unique experience, and thanks to the process I'm no longer afraid to approach different characters.

My regret with *The Cherry Orchard* was that I didn't have much opportunity to explore the Chekhovian text because my character only had very limited time onstage, and I was not involved in many rehearsals because I was an understudy. Nonetheless, the experience to be able to play with professional actors like Lauren Lane and to have the opportunity to perform such challenging text made me grow and pay more attention to the nuances of the characters, specially the parts that were beneath the printed lines.

C. COLLEAGUES AND OTHERS

Since I'm one of the youngest of my groups, I often look to others for guidance and inspirations, and some of them had become essential parts of my own maturing process. I especially admire the work ethics and the wealth of experiences coming from Geoff, John, Dan Lenzian and Liz Kimball who were all in New York City working as professional actors before they came to Austin. They always make the character their own and bring them to life, and I'm always amazed at how they keep their characters' inner lives rich and provocative for audiences - something I'm still learning. I also admire people who bring intensity and passion to their work like Mykal Monroe, Amanda Morish and Nickclette Izuegbu; they find their ways to not only become their characters but also to embrace their characters' desires, and that is always a breathtaking phenomenon. One thing that I'm fascinated and jealous of Alexis is how she finds humor in every character and employs them with ease and truthfulness, and that always makes her character solid and truthful. Antoinette and Kyle Schnack are closer to my age than

my other classmates, but their work has always been solid and their support for me is, again, something I could not live without.

There are also important people from other parts of the department who have been encouraging me and made me able to pursue this career with confidence, like my former classmate Christopher Reese and Cassidy Browning to name a few. I believe their compliments and words of encouragement are genuine because I believe they care and love this form of art as much as I do, and I'm able to move forward to be as good as I can be because of their support.

Epilogue: All the Things to Come

As I stand on the edge of the cliff and the end of my student life, I look forward with both excitement and fear. Acting is a competitive, unstable and at times unfair occupation, and life can very much be tough. But, with the craft and techniques I've been learning, with all the love and support from the people around me, and most of all with the passion I have to act, I believe I will be fine. Moreover, there are no regrets. I will not regret it if somehow I find myself unable to be a "professional" actor because I know I will always find an alternative way to continue to act. I already have so many fortunes. I will have no regrets. Like Crane-Man said to Tree-Ear: "One hill, one valley, one day at a time. That is how long journeys are walked." I will take it one step at a time.

Onwards and upwards.

References

["Our Staff." Seattle Children's Theatre. 1 March 2013. <<http://sct.org/About/Our-Staff>>.]