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**The Thesis Committee for La Tasha René Stephens
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**My Journey to an Artist
I'm not a writer... but I got a story to tell**

**APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

Supervisor:

Franchelle Stewart Dorn

Andrea P. Beckham

Joni L. Jones

My Journey to an Artist
I'm not a writer... but I got a story to tell

by

La Tasha René Stephens, B.A.

Thesis

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Dedication

For the little girl who they said would never succeed... You're making it!

&

Don Boros... there are no written words that I could use to express my gratitude

& for

Camille Jansen, Matrex Kilgore & Shea Popa Wood

Thanks for being there every step of the way.

Lastly

To the one who asked what inspires me.

I'm inspired by things that touch me so deeply it steals my ability to speak.

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Abstract

My Journey to an Artist **I'm not a writer... but I got a story to tell**

by

La Tasha René Stephens, MFA
The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

Supervisor: Franchelle Stewart Dorn

This thesis tracks my journey as an artist as I developed personally and as my performance piece moved from conception to implementation. The story begins with what I understood to be a lack of material written for and about a specifically targeted audience. The thesis goes on to discuss how that need could be met, how I could be the catalyst for change and how that process could change my life forever. I have also included my experience as a solo performer whose previous training had prepared me only for collaboration with other actors. This thesis also discusses my process of creating and developing *I'm not a writer... but I got a story to tell* and concludes with reflections on my final performance.

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I'M NOT A WRITER... BUT I GOT A STORY TO TELL

Characters

Natty
Mrs. Ida
Jack
Chance

*The stage is set there is a blue wash that fills the space.
These words are prerecorded in an overlaying pattern and can be heard over the sound system.
By the end of this recording a spot center should be visible.*

Part 1

I'm not a writer but I got a story to tell/ I'm not a writer but I got a story to tell/ I'm not a writer
but I got a story to tell/ I'm not a writer I'm not a writer

Part 2

I wanted someone to write a story
One that rang true to my experiences
To the world that I lived in
A world that showed people I could have known
People like me... My friends my neighbors...

Part 3

& So I waited..... & waited.....
For someone to write their story.

Part 4

A story about people with little to no money
Struggling to keep a float

Of a 12 yr old drug dealer hustling so their younger siblings could have a place ta live & food ta
eat

A story about a family made up of mothers & daughters scorned by men continuing the cycle of
hatred and mistrust

Of a preacher leading the youth in his community toward believing that they can be somebody
When everyone in their lives say they'll never amount ta shit

Part 5

But now I say Fuck Waiting
For someone else to write their stories
If I want it done I'll have to do it myself

The stage is set. Light shift to Natty's light. Jazz music starts to play

Where I live reminds me of an old jazz club with a live band & a sultry singer who sings into the mic with such passion that the room oozes with soul

& in every nook & cranny there's people

Close talking

Drinking

Smoking

Conducting business

Anything & everything is happening all at once

Creating a vibe so strong that it makes u feel like life can't get any better then this moment

And then

A fight erupts

Causing a disruption that could bring the whole block to a stop

Music stops abruptly. We hear sirens.

It's the call of the sirens that kills the spirit of this place

Demanding everyone flee abandoning their post

It creates a quiet so still & clean

the asphalt

the cement

the bricks

the streetlights and signs seem to have the life sucked out of them

But still silently they pulse calling those they've lost

It begins with the drunk and his brown paper bag swagger

Then slowly people peeking out their windows hoping to see something left behind

As others comb the streets making sure that Nothing was left

Jazz music starts to play

It's like the band was on break & now they're tuning up ... gettin' back in their groove

Mrs. Ida's light starts to grow.

As the life starts to pour back in there's one person who seems to know everything that's happened from the first sound check to the last song

And in this neighborhood that's Mrs. Ida

Now don't get me wrong Mrs. Ida is a model citizen

She is an active member of the community

She helps with the outreach program

She goes to church every Sunday

And loves gossipin' about everybody

See Mrs. Ida knows ur business before its even ur business
& she can repeat every detail verbatim no matter how small
Always making sure to sprinkle in her own opinion every now and then

Natty is fully dressed as Mrs. Ida. Lights have totally shifted. She is perched in a window with a telephone, a cigarette, a glass of brandy, & a Bible... She is on the phone

Brenda listen
I just feel it's was my duty
As a Christian To tell that Sharanda aint no good gal
No good at all.
Ummm hmmm
Yes me na see her Sunday shouting and praising Jesus
But me also see her Monday night ripping and running the streets with that boy...
Ummm hmmm
U know his name...

She hears a click in the phone...

Brenda Brenda Shhhh... u na hear that?
There it go again...
Oh shit gal ur right
That's my call waitin'
If I hang up on ya, ya call me back
Ok ok

To Phone

Now what button me push....
I tink it's da red one

She pushes red button

Hello

She pushes red button again...

Hello

She pushes green button again...

Hel-
Shit I done hung up da phone

She hangs up phone it rings

Hello

Sucks her teeth

What the hell do ya want?
Yes that's the nicest greeting ur gonna get
Now
 What
 Do u
 Want?

Hmm Hmm Hmm Hmm
Now aint that some shit....
What ya mean, "what that supposed to mean"?
It means what it means

Sound starts

No u can't stay here!
Cause I'm tired of your shit.

*I'm conflicted in my body
Conflicted in my soul*

What?
What ya want me to
remember?

*I got bills to pay
Rent to meet ...*

All the lies ya tell me
The promises you never keep
Or maybe da nights I stayed up late prayin that nothin was wrong
& u'd come home drunk & bathed...

I say where the hell ya bathed at?
& u look me dead in my eyes & say at work
At Work!?!?
Me never seen no damn tub sittin on a corner

What?!
What am I always doing?
Fine. Fine.
What ya want ta talk about our first date
First time we kiss, held hands
First time I cook for u
Or how I felt when you said
I. Do.

Is that the kinda shit ya want me to remember?

Well. I. Don't.

Why?!

Because every breath in my body I devoted to u but it wasn't enough
And that broke my heart
I remember screaming I hate you because loving you hurt so bad

No No I loved you when
everyone told me I shouldn't

*I'm conflicted in my body
Conflicted in my soul
I got bills to pay
Rent to meet...*

But I just can't love you no
more.

*I'm conflicted in my body
Conflicted in my soul
I got bills to pay
Rent to meet
And I Just can't love u no
more*

We leave Mrs. Ida and enter back into Natty's world.

All the religion in the world can't cure what ails Mrs. Ida... She reminded me of a domesticated eagle as she sits perched in her window. Yearning to be set free.

Lights start to grow on Jack Natty notices.

There's another neighborhood fixture that I'd like u to meet his name is Jack.

Now Jack be nimble but jack ain't quick but he'll fuck ur ass up with one of his sticks.
So don't nobody fuck wit Jack.

See Jack's that old cat that sits on the corner in front of the bodega on the busiest street in the neighborhood.

He tips his fedora & slightly stands as women of mature age walk past him greetin' them with a

Good Morning

Or sometimes a

Good Afternoon

& almost always a

Good Evening

See there's no question

Jack

is a Gentleman...

He tilts his head & smiles just right

As they shake their hips on past

Some throwing a little extra back in-to-it

Warrantin' a ummm ummm Hot damn

& these grown ass women for a second smile like school girls flattered by the attention he shows them.

The lights fully up on Jack. He scans the audience as if he is looking at people walking up & down the block.

Hot damn everywhere I look fine women

He sees a woman walking by... He stands tilts his hat...

Good Evening

Oh u just gonna walk on by me & not say nothin'

How you gonna do me like that

What ya'll think...

Is that a Hoe or a Housewife?

Now I already got me a Hoe. What I'm looking for is a Housewife. Now I had me a Housewife but my Hoe done fucked it up. Now I know what u thinkin'... How my Hoe fuck up my Housewife situation. See a Hoe will sniff out a Housewife faster then a Housewife can sniff out a Hoe. Now the difference is when ur Housewife finds ur Hoe she wants you to get Rid of the Hoe... But the Hoe don't care about the others...she just wants to Be the Housewife which she can never be cause u can't make a Hoe into a Housewife (exactly).

Now when I say housewife I'm not talking about no Betty Croker stay at home baking cookies and raising kids type of woman. What I'm talking

about is a woman you wanna take out in public because she makes u look good. She's strong, independent & only takes so much of yo shit. On top of that she got good credit & most importantly yo mama like her. Now when I say Hoe I mean... she just a regular old Hoe. She in the same kinda situation yo ass in. Her credit is worse than or the same as urs & don't nobody but her other Hoe ass friends wanna hangout wit her. Now u may say... Why fuck wit-a-hoe when u got a housewife. U see ur Hoe is around to do all that dirty shit your housewife won't do... Now you can be bold if u want to & ask ur housewife to do some hoeish shit but she aint gonna do it & she wont let ur ass live it down. She'll probably say some shit like

Said in Jamaican accent

"You know u fucking wrong to be asking me to do that nasty ass shit do I look like a Whore to ya!"...

What can I say... she'd be right... she don't look nothin' like my hoe – That's why she's my housewife. It's not like I ask my hoe to do to housewife shit like... go to BBQ's, church, wedding, funerals, or u know stayin' the night... important shit... because when u do take ur Hoe will always find a way to fuck up a smooth sailing situation.

He sees another woman walking by... He stands tilts his hat...

Good Evening....

She walks by. He watches her pass. Sits down..

Hot damn... What u guys think? ...Hoe or a Housewife?

We Leave Jack and enter back into Natty's world

My neighborhood is filled with all kinds of characters...

Some of which spend their time hiding behind the shadows of building weaving in and out of alleys... Some people call them the forgotten soldiers. The ones who “Protect and Serve” in a way that doesn’t always receive positive light...

Light shift.

I have dreamed past my neighborhood but the life of it pulses through my veins.

She gets dressed in a very structured way through this next section. Far lines recorded, that is when movement happens.

& I ‘m trapped in these 48 blocks a radius that makes me feel like a caged animal

My only outlet is to write
& so sometimes I write because I have a song in my heart that wants 2 be set free

Life has taught me
That those who think I’m soft must be proven wrong

other times because the reality of life sinks in so deep & my soul feels like it needs a release.

& Those who question my abilities must be taught

I write because I’m afraid I’ll lose my humanity & become nothin’ but a slave to this grind.

Life has taught me
That there is no room to embrace my gender

I write because I have fears, dreams and desires that don’t fit into who I need to be

Chance is dressed she is writing in her notebook she puts on the finishing touches... Sound cue plays welcoming her to the stage. She steps up to the mic.

I’m conflicted in my body conflicted in my soul & all I wanna do is cry
Cry so that my tears would fall like river water at the edge of a cliff
Streaming down my face uncontrollably
With no end in sight

I want my eyes to draw water from every part of my body
Saturating any and everything that they come in contact with
Without care of who notices or who sees

I wanna cry so hard that it shakes the very core of my body
Causing me to clasp on the floor
Turning into a swirling puddle of emotions

I wanna cry so hard that my tears fill
Stream
Lakes
Oceans
Reservoirs

Cry so hard that my tears cure drought

I want to cry all the pain and hurt out of my system
Cry till there is nothing left
Until my soul lay limp and unrecognizable

I wanna cry until all I want to do is Laugh

But life has taught me...

We leave Chance and enter back into Natty's world

That there is no room for these stories
These people
These places
How often do we drive by these neighborhood and think nothing but negative
Believing only the stereotypes
Never looking deeper
There's history here
Stories waiting to be told
So I say Fuck waiting...
I wanna hear

Music plays

Blackout

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

I can't talk about my journey to *I'm not a writer... but I got a story to tell* without talking about *the7*, and I can't talk about *the7* without mentioning *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbows Enuf*. So let's start at the beginning.

The roots for *I'm not a writer...* actually began way before I got to the University of Texas at Austin. It began with a question that started to plague me during my undergraduate studies at SUNY Binghamton. The question was "where are the plays written about subject matter that speaks to the people I grew up around?" The plays about lively preachers or about struggling single mothers or even about people who live in projects desiring a life that would allow them to at least live paycheck to paycheck.

At the time when I asked these questions people pointed me towards August Wilson and Lorraine Hansberry; but the vessel that their plays came in seemed dated and even the subject matter was more relevant to things my Aunt's and Grandmother's generation experienced. I couldn't understand why there wasn't anything written between their era and mine that would speak to a younger generation. Especially since I was reading some "not so old" and newer plays written about middle to upper class suburban families on a somewhat regular basis. A few examples are *Proof*, *Bus Stop*, *Lend Me a Tenor*, *Betty's Summer Vacation* and *Mercy Seat* – which, by the way, none of these plays ever included any people of color. I was puzzled and started to question if I and other minorities were being etched out of theatre. I started to feel voiceless in a field where talking and being heard are major components. I needed to know where the plays about minorities were hiding. I started to think that even if people were writing present day stories about minorities they weren't getting much traction. When would I get the chance to do plays that represented the people I knew and grew up with? I wanted to

know why this demographic of people were under represented. They were leading lives as interesting as the middle and upper class people that I was reading about. I wanted to know when I would be exposed to people writing plays that would attract different types of audiences, making theatre more acceptable and relevant to multiple communities.

At the time, I was still fairly new to the formal ideas of studying theatre. Because there was no faculty of color and hardly any students of color in my department it was hard to find anyone who understood what I was going through and/or who could give me advice on what would or could be possible in the larger theatrical community.

In the end I started to question my path. I felt abandoned in the world I loved because that world seemingly had no place for me. Then I found *For Colored Girls*... . Finally, a play written with subject matter that spoke not only to my neighborhood, but also to my generation! Shange's script, written in the style of a choreopoem, seemed timeless. I knew people like *the Lady in Red*, *the Lady in Blue*, and *the Lady in Orange*. These characters were much closer to my neighbors than those depicted in the suburban plays I was studying. Not only had Shange provided me with text that could bring in a more diverse audience, she opened my mind and turned my presumptions of what a play could be upside down.

Until that point I believed that a play had a certain formula from which there could be no deviation. Yet, here in my hands was a piece that seemed to break all those rules. First the idea that movement and poetry together could make a play blew my mind. Also the fact that the characters did not have "normal" names was radically different from what I was use to. Even the way the words were displayed on the page didn't conform to the standard model, but was instead used as a map for creating the world of the play and giving the reader insight about the inner workings of the characters.

I was fascinated with how Shange had created a piece that showed how a fusion of different artistic disciplines could work together in order to enhance the telling of a story. This was an amazing artistic “ah ha!!” moment for me. Unfortunately, the excitement was short lived. This was only one play out of the many I had read, this piece had been written in the ‘70’s and I couldn’t find anyone else writing in this style or at least writing subject matter that felt similar. Before I knew it I was back to square one asking myself the same questions as before. The difference this time was that I knew the answers didn’t live in my undergraduate community. I needed to know more about myself as an artist and where I, as a black woman, fit in the world of theatre. So, I prepared myself for graduate school.

Chapter 1: I Want...

I began my artistic journey as a graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin with many preconceived notions about theater and the role of the actor. I had been taught that as an actor, my job was to breathe life into a story that the playwright had written and the director had chosen me for. Living within the confines of those limitations often seemed stifling, especially when I looked out into the audience and saw few people who looked like me. Based on these rules I felt there was nothing else I could do but wait for someone to write stories that would attract a more diverse audience. However, I quickly realized that the idea of waiting for someone else to write these stories was absurd.

Numerous professors had asked what I wanted to do as an artist. I'd say that I wanted to tell stories that would speak to people who weren't average theatergoers. I wanted to tell stories about people living in difficult financial, emotional, social and physical situations; people who lived in my neighborhood and ones like it. Ultimately, I wanted to do pieces that minorities would identify with. I was challenged to do so.

Chapter 2: The Style

For Colored Girls... has been a major influence on the structure of my writing, as well as the form. I loved Shange's use of poems as dialogue. I also loved how music, dancing and singing easily meshed with the words she created. Shange's work is what inspired me to start paying as much attention to how the words look on the page as well as to the words themselves. I hope that when people read my work the picture the words create on the page helps them to fully enter the world of the play as I did into hers. She helped me to realize that it is not just what you say that gives information to the reader about the characters or the story, but the way it's presented to you can also inform.

This discovery of an alternative playwriting style is what brought about the creation of *the7* and *I'm not a writer...*. When I write I hear a melody or a rhythm or I see a pattern of some sort that I can express only by the way I display the words for the reader. My text must become a visual map, because the words and the form together are what create the subject matter.

I have a hard time explaining to people how I actually get words on the page. It starts as a basic idea. Then the things I hear and see influence me. It provokes a stream of metaphoric imagery that is at times nestled in poetry, or cradled by songs, or even enthralled in a dance. I can write day or night, inside or out but there must be music. Now when I say music I don't simply mean songs. Music could be the sounds of birds chirping and a light breeze blowing through the trees. It could be cars whizzing down a highway or police sirens in the distance. I hear music when people speak or when waves crash against the rocks. I hear words, see beautiful images, and feel movement everywhere I go. I can stare at the smallest, most insignificant object in a crowded room and create a beautiful story about it. There is something about sitting and listening to life

that causes me to write. I make choices based on the rules the story demands. Sometimes that manifests itself through dialogue between two people, but sometimes it isn't enough and poetry is needed to get the point across. Then there are times when the rhythm is so strong that it must be sung in order to fully express what is happening in that moment. At other times the characters' feelings can't be expressed with words alone, they must dance. I can't explain why my plays are structured the way that they are. I write what I see and hear in my head.

Chapter 3: *the7*

Challenged to wait no longer for someone else to give me a story to tell *the7* was born. The basis came from a poem I had started writing in high school called *These wounds I have*, and an idea I had in undergrad for a duet between two females called *My Soul*. Thanks to Shange I felt no need to conform to a “norm” and this gave me the freedom to tell my story any way I wanted to. Suddenly, there were no limits to structure. I told it the way I heard it in my head. Some was in poetry with rhyming patterns and others in prose. Some of it could only be told through movement and others with song. By the end, I had a play that relied on movement, music, spoken words, subway sounds, and projections.

I remember that getting started was easy, but staying started wasn’t easy at all. I had never written anything before and, unlike in acting, I had no tools to rely on. I would find myself staring at the screen for hours trying to get my creative juices flowing, but to no avail. It was like pulling teeth some days to get one word or phrase down on the page. Then I’d have days where it would flow out of me like water at the edge of a cliff. I discovered that these blocks sometimes derived from forgetting who I was writing for. I was spending way too much time trying to spell things out for people who might not understand instead of just writing what I heard in my head or what I felt in my heart. It was during that time I learned to listen like a playwright.

THE BIRTH

Originally *the7* was supposed to be my final thesis project but after the Cohen New Work Festival I realized that there was no possibility of making that play a one-person show. It was a hard pill to swallow because the memory of how scared I was when I started writing *the7* was still fresh in my mind. I was ecstatic by how well *the7* was received, but I wasn't sure I was really ready to pour my soul into another piece. Even though I was afraid, the actual writing of the second play seemed a lot easier than the first. I had gained a set of tools that were helping me with that process.

Picking a new topic was the hard part this time around. I was having a hard time figuring out what to write about and then it hit me like a ton of bricks. Why not write about the people in my neighborhood? It seemed so simple. They were the reason I started writing in the first place. Why not take this opportunity to tell their stories? So that's what I did.

The first character created was "Jack." He was a mixture of three of my uncles and a few other men I knew from the neighborhood. When constructing Jack I relied a lot on the work we did with movement over the past three years. I needed to find his center. I quickly realized that he was a pelvis mover. He also had a very lyrical and flowing quality to him that was grounded. Once I started to move like him I naturally found his vocal placement. He is a chest resonator with forward mouth placement.

Jack being the comedian in the piece also allowed me the chance to use some of the techniques we learned about comedy. A lot of Jack's writing was set up to create patterns and then break them, messing with the audience's expectation. I also had to really pay attention to the set up and the punch line. When the jokes aren't obvious, there must be a heavily reliance on the delivery.

Next, I created “Natty” as the audience’s guide. She has the ability to bring the audience into a space where these characters live and not disturb the environment - just like the children in my neighborhood. They had the ability to see and hear everything because they lived under the “you better not say nothin’” code of conduct.

Navigating *Natty* through this world was a little tricky because I wanted her to have an opinion about things, but I didn’t want her to take away the audience’s ability to form their own opinions about the neighborhood and the characters they meet.

The next character created was “Mrs. Ida”. I based her on a few ‘church going’ women I know. They are the type of women that smile in each other’s faces and then talk about them behind their backs. I spent a lot of time thinking about how these women moved and what they wore. They reminded me of a flock of birds. There is always movement, a flick or a flutter, some kind of weight shift. I took that image worked it into how Mrs. Ida moves in the world.

The choice to make *Mrs. Ida* Jamaican was not something I started with. It evolved from feeling like she was missing something. I was having a hard time finding her voice, i.e. where it resonated, placement. Then I remembered all the work we’d done with dialects and how much I enjoyed learning about them, so it only seemed natural to add one. I chose Jamaican because it just seemed to fit *Mrs. Ida’s* personality. The next step was to go back through the text and change phrasing/words/sentence structure so that it supported the dialect. It seemed once I made this change to Mrs. Ida it became easier to make specific choices about her in rehearsals.

The last character I created was *Chance*. Many people think she is a man because she has many masculine qualities, but she is indeed a female. She was the most elusive character for me to write. As a playwright her words seemed clumsy to me, and as an actor, I had a hard time finding the essence of her. Her inner rhythm was very confusing,

border line mind-boggling. Sadly it seemed the more I worked on her the farther I seemed to get from understanding her. I was getting frustrated so I decided to take off my 'writer's hat' and only look at the piece with the eyes of an actor. It was through this process that *Chance* became clearer to me. She was trapped living a routine that she didn't want to embrace. I had to really listen to what I had written for the character. There was one line that made it very clear to me how Chanced believed she could escape her situation. "My only outlet is to write & so sometimes I write because I have a song in my heart that wants 2 be set free..." It was this line that helped me to become more specific about Chance, her space and what her role was in this story.

Even with all the work I'd put in, creating and developing this play, I was still unsure if I was 'ready for this.' I hadn't figured out how to use all of the rewriting tools I needed to help me finish developing the play. Before, I had had other bodies to read the work so I could listen critically and I could move them around in the space creating the visual picture I wanted. Now I had only myself. I realized that inviting other people to help in this process was a must, because I had lots of questions that needed answering. I needed to know how things were landing and what an audience would take from it? Had I developed sound characters? Was the show interesting and/or entertaining? So many questions needed answers as I was coping with my first foray into solo performance and all that it demands.

Chapter 4: I'm not a writer...: *Frontera Fest 2010*

In the beginning of the rehearsal process I was on an emotional roller coaster. I kept thinking about the three possible places where I could fail. First: the writing. What if it was weak? Lacked interest or maturity? Next: the staging. Was it supporting the text? Did it enhance the story or did it just detract from the overall arc of the piece. And lastly, which was extremely terrifying to me was: what if the acting sucked? What if I hadn't developed these characters fully? What if I butchered my own script? I'm trying to get my master's in acting how is it going to look if everything else is great and my acting is horrible? I was full of worry and self doubt about the work I had created, but with a week before the opening of the show I realized that I had to strip away the writer and critical thinker that dominated my psyche and approach this play with all the knowledge and tools I have been cultivating as an actor. I had created these characters but now it was my job to breathe life into them.

The day of my performance I had never felt so naked in my life. Up to this point my training as an actor had prepared me to work well with a partner. We spent time working on listening and reacting to what your partner was giving you. We focused on being present and discovering the moments together. Being on stage alone seemed like a whole different beast. During the performance, I talk only to the audience and they are not there to act with me. I started to think about how terrible it would be to look out into a sea of disinterested faces within the first five minutes knowing that there was another twelve minutes to go. Would I start to push? Would the piece start to control me? Would people just get up and walk out? My brain swam with all kinds of horrifying scenarios. I took a deep breath knowing that I had worked as hard as I could on this play. I exhaled and stepped out on stage. It was an amazing feeling when all was said and

done. I could not have been prouder of myself and of the work I had created. I got three more opportunities to perform my play. Once for “Best of the Week” and then two more times for “Best of the Fest.”

Chapter 5: Again, From The Top

It's a weird feeling to be both writer and actor. You develop this understanding of the characters that no one else will ever be able to. It's kind of mind blowing. There is a difference between making up events, having to create back-story for a character and actually knowing exactly what the playwright intended for a character. It becomes so freeing. I know exactly how this line is supposed to sound or the type of physical qualities this character should have. Now I can just enjoy the work.

Looking back I'm so grateful that I performed my thesis prior to my final performance. It has allowed me the opportunity to work out some kinks and has given me the chance to develop the piece further. I changed a few things. I started with the beginning sound track. The base line was too hot and the meaning I was trying to convey was getting lost in the layering of the tracks. Next I worked on *Mrs. Ida's* monologue. I felt that there was a little too much poetry in the second half of her piece. People were having a hard time following the jump from the phone conversation with Brenda to her heart broken one with *Jack*. And speaking of *Jack* I hadn't built in anything that bluntly connected *Mrs. Ida* to *Jack* and both of them to *Chance*. In this version I left bigger breadcrumbs hoping that the audience will have an easier time discover the connections. I also changed how the piece begins. I think it was a little much to have me set up each of their worlds so I'm going to try placing one important item for each of them. I slightly altered *Chance's* location giving her a clearly defined 'stage' that way people who aren't familiar with the spoken word jams can clearly follow. I have also added two sound cues. One of which was in the original version that I couldn't do at Frontera Fest due to limitations on sound cues, and the other was added to help the audience understand the change of space for *Chance*.

Officially the writing is done. The over all shape figured out. Now I have the ability to dig deeper into these characters and work more from the point of view of an actor. I'm look forward to the final performance.

CURTAIN

Friday the 16th of April at 6pm was an exciting time. I don't think I have ever felt so nervous before a show in my whole life. Though I am not one hundred percent pleased with my work, I'm extremely happy with the response I have received. People were moved and took something from it and that is what I set out to do.

With that said, there are some things I would change. First, I really imagined *Natty* as more of a mover/dancer; I wish I had pushed the envelope more in that direction. Secondly, I would separate the sound cues. Putting them together was a necessity for Frontera Fest but it could have given me more flexibility as an actor to deal with some of the imitate parts of the text had the cues not been built together. I'm also still not pleased with the opening sound cue. It's missing something; it needs more texture, variety and musicality. I think this can be achieved by layering the tracks differently. Lastly, I thought *Chance* was underdeveloped. The transition into her character also seemed a bit awkward. With more time I can make those corrections.

There are also some things I'm still on the fence about. For instance, do I need the connections between the three characters? Do I need to add more characters or should I simply expand the three I have chosen? Another thing that I'm unsure about is *Chance's* paper in the spoken word part. Is it coming across as a character choice or that the actor is unprepared? I want to know if there is another way of getting dressed and undressed on stage that would work better or if the characters just need to be wearing fewer clothes?

Now, on to the positive! There are lots of things that I believe worked very well, starting with my use of different centers and vocal qualities to help differentiate each of the characters. I also feel the new *Mrs. Ida* section was a good step in the right direction,

though it still needs tweaking. I think the *Jack* section is extremely solid. The writing in his section is strong and it always seems to be received well. *Chance's* "I Wanna Cry" poem went really well. I found something in it that I hadn't before and it created a great honest moment on stage. Also I really liked only placing one object at each of the characters places but I think there needs to be something a little more ceremony involved and/or maybe different objects.

All in all, I've had a wonderful experience, not just with the process of putting this piece together but also with all that I have experienced over the past three years. The journey I have traveled here has not only made me into a better actor but a complete artist.

Appendix DVD Reference

Disk 1 Frontera Fest Jan 2010

Disk 2 Official Thesis Showing April 2010

Bibliography

Shange, Ntozake 1975. for colored girls who have considered suicide/ when the rainbow is enuf. New York; Scribner Poetry.

Vita

La Tasha René Stephens was born and raised in Queens New York. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree from Binghamton University in Theatre with an emphasis in Acting and Directing.

Email: Stephenslr@aol.com

This thesis was typed by the author