

Out Of The Woods: An Actor's Philosophy & Digital Portfolio

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ABSTRACT:

Carolyn Demanelis is an actor, educator, and director graduating from The University of Virginia's Department of Drama with a Master of Fine Arts degree in Acting. Her thesis details the experiences of the two-year program, culminating in the filmed performances of two monologues, *A Letter To My Dead Father* by Ari Eastman and *I Don't Do Drugs* by Brad Pike; the song "Someone To Watch Over Me" by George Gershwin; and a conversation and explanation of her work as an artist and theatre practitioner. The filmed performances were a preliminary entry into film work, and the work led to discovering the nature of film acting contrasted with theatrical acting. The monologues also represent two-years of training informing the performance of an actor. The work includes an artistic statement, a teaching statement, a journal about the process of an actor choosing monologues and filming as a student and performer, and materials necessary for a career in acting.

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ARTISTIC STATEMENT

The biggest transformation for an actor is the full acceptance of that label as part of the soul. Before coming to graduate school, I would tell people I was an actor, in the same breath and with the same level of importance as my other job titles. But being an actor is not just my job, it is truly the only label that embodies and connects my soul to my waking life. While I knew that before this journey of artistic rigor a part of me apologized for choosing to be an actor. A little part of me has always felt that I owed it to my family to embark on a more lucrative career, or choose a responsible job that would allow me to spend time with my future family and husband, or even choose a career at which people don't 'roll their eyes'. I hated myself when in conversations I'd make jokes about being an actor. I would lie in bed at the end of the day, stare into the darkness, and question, why would you belittle the thing you love most like that?

My training at The University of Virginia has illuminated and connected the name of actor to my being. When I first arrived here I was scared, insecure, and questioning why I was invited to join my seven colleagues. I regretted not having as much experience as the others, not being brave enough to live in New York City or Los Angeles, and not doing everything in my power to make acting my sole work. Insecurity for my age and experience made me despair that I wouldn't be at the level to collaborate and create with the others. Fortunately, the more doubt I experienced, the harder I worked, and the harder I worked, the more connected to the art form I felt. I began communicating about acting in a way that surprised me, and I could tell that my students were receiving a much more vulnerable me, who was willing to share the soulful part of theatre.

The lesson I had to learn, to move past insecurity and live a fuller life sans self-doubt, was forgiveness. I have always put tremendous expectations on myself, and I have driven myself to achieve. What I neglected to learn in my life was forgiving myself when I failed. Learning forgiveness of self was the breakthrough that made my second year so fruitful, and made me a bolder, truthful, and fully alive actor.

Now, as graduation approaches, I know, whole-heartedly, that I am an actor. I speak to my students about vulnerability, and the courage one must have to be vulnerable everyday of their lives. I speak about vulnerability now as a virtue I attempt to live everyday. I will strive to always be vulnerable, in order to communicate the highest truth, on stage and in life. Before entering this program, I do not think I was living courageously or vulnerably, but now, I can say with absolute certainty, that I am an actor. An actor with an open heart, a desire for truth, and an empathetic soul.

TEACHING STATEMENT:

It takes courage to be an actor. It takes courage to be vulnerable. Acting communicates the highest level of truth through honest human experience. My skill as an acting teacher lies in my ability to illuminate the courage in each of my students. Training them to befriend vulnerability, embrace empathy, and find truth through theatre. Theatre is the incarnation of empathy and imagination coalescing to communicate truth. Personal truth, human truth, even communal truth, occurs because an actor has journeyed as another and strived to find honesty. Not every student who takes an acting course will become a professional actor, but every student of theatre gains insight into truth through the study of empathy and the ultimate desire to find honesty on stage, and in our everyday lives.

Because I demand vulnerability from my students, when I teach, I first create an environment in which my students feel open enough to share and perform without fear of judgment and falsity. Encouraging them to act with boldness and courage, and emboldening them to live as fully as possible in the classroom: laughing freely, crying without embarrassment, and experiencing the fullness of emotion that the script or character demands. To train the body and mind to be able to live in that heightened world, I begin with physical exercises and games. Everyone is active from day one of each course, and this immediate physicality opens the body, soul, and mind to learning and courage. We break the ice with Lip-Syncs, solo performances of their own design that offer a glimpse of their character, and then Animal Etudes. They study an animal of their choosing, and I coach them through physical exercises and ruminations and they find the animal in their own body. This Lee Strasberg exercise trains students to observe details on another being, and then manifest those qualities in themselves for a full performance. The performances are magnetic, and it is the part of the course that I witness the greatest growth into the realm of transformation and empathy. I urge students to expand their scope of vision and perception in their everyday lives. Observing the behavior of fellow human beings, teaching them to take the time to think about a stranger, and trying to understand their life with awareness and mindfulness.

My students' revelations surprise and move me. For some students, even enrolling in an Acting course is an act of courage. In their class journals, they speak about the gratification they receive from performing and acting, and how it feeds a part of their life that rigorously academic courses do not fulfill. Others speak about the joy of building an ensemble, knowing every person in the class. What emerges in all of their discourse is their longing. They long for personal attention; they yearn for a professor to hear their voice, even if it is through the lens of a theatrical character. Caring very deeply for students, making it known to them that they are valuable, affirms their work as courageous and meaningful.

Many students I have taught have grown and understood the value of vulnerability in theatre and in life. It is a testament to the power of theatre to educate, heal, and inspire; and I aspire to be a mindful, insightful, and challenging educator that will foster growth as an actor and as a thoughtful human being.

JOURNAL: *An Actor Prepares...The Voyage Of Artistic Growth vs. The Sojourn Of Monologue Preparation*

The prospect of finding monologues causes an actor tension, anxiety, and stress. The constant sifting through plays, searching the internet, finding specific words that resonate, or fit the show or role you are auditioning for can strain even an experienced actor. Many an afternoon I have been crumpled in a heap on the floor of Clemons library, surrounded by stacks of plays, none proving inspirational. The inner tumult is even worse when tracking down a funny piece, God forbid.

Before the spring semester, in preliminary talks about our theses, the dreaded discussion of monologues began. Two?! Original material?! Copyrights?! Thirty seconds?! The requirements were laid out, and the tension began. The real fear came from the restriction of time. We had to find two pieces, thirty seconds each, filmic sensibility. Whenever I have stumbled on a monologue that resonates with me, I get excited about speaking sharing that character's language. There is a likeness that matches an aspect of myself, and I work to craft the honesty and connection, and transform to the differences of the character.

Film is transparent. And since that is so an actor is required to be transparent. All those windows that you attempt to hang some drapes over, or close the shutters to, all of those crevices must be open in film, or you look like an overacting, dishonest shell of a person. Adjusting for film is difficult when you have been trained in theatrical acting. Theatrical acting requires an actor to live in an energy level large enough to read on a stage, for audiences of hundreds; whereas film requires energy, catered to a small lens that captures every inch of an actor. Having limited experience in film, when I have made attempts expand into the realm of film, on film I have a tendency to be 'too big'. Film requires the precision of a technician, truthful communication, and maneuvering the subtlety of that balance.

When a senior in college, tasked with finding monologues for my Audition Seminar, I found work that resonated with me on creative writing websites. Websites that were pools of short stories, essays, and letters from writers with fresh voices and who were writing from deeply personal places. Obviously, not all creative writing is active enough for a monologue, but I found pieces that 'clicked' when speaking the language. One such website I frequented was called Thought Catalog. Brad Pike, whose voice is quirky, bizarre, and candid is one of my favorite writers. His, *The Inner Monologue of the Rat in My Ceiling* is a personal favorite, and best captures his unique voice. Because I have often been told that I would be cast as the 'Zooey Deschanel' type character in film, his *I Don't Do Drugs* monologue felt like an interesting piece to explore. I particularly appreciate his artfulness with language in creating vivid imagery from pop culture references and a twenty-something outlook.

Scrolling through titles, looking for a piece to contrast the tangled nonsense of the Brad Pike writing, I saw Ari Eastman's *A Letter To My Dead Father*. I read his letter and felt immediate connection to his words. My father is still alive, but for many years I have

been pained by our strained relationship. We used to be close, watching *Desperate Housewives* and *Lost* together, listening to the same CDs; but some time during high school, we drifted, and we have never really returned to that place of friendship. Ari Eastman's writing struck a chord, immediate, painful, and full.

Since arriving at The University of Virginia, my artistic process, mostly through the guidance of professors, is navigating my readiness to emotionally connect with the need to communicate the story and serve the text. Often, I am very self-conscious and see emotional readiness as the novice actor that does not have any other tools at their disposal. During grad school, my skin has become thicker, and I now find the emotion of the character through the language first, instead of a vague emotional wash.

In the weeks leading up to the final filming of our pieces, there were several sessions of direction, filmic choices, and voice and body quality work. Kate Burke worked with us for some days in class, speaking about what the pieces were saying about ourselves as actors and the sort of characters we wished to play. These sessions also included one indelible class in which we brought in our own self-taped footage of the two pieces and all spoke about the work we saw. There is something nerve-wracking about showing friends and colleagues film of myself. I filmed one monologue in front of the chenille bed spread, sitting on the Oriental rug. And the other, I filmed in the closet, with several garments encompassing the frame. Over these past two years of study, I have come to know my cohort as some of the most talented, and I respect their opinions and insights enormously. Their advice proved invaluable, and I was better able to separate the anxiety of watching myself on film with the very technical and specific adjustments they recommended.

Working with Michael Duni was also instrumental. In spite of having years of experience and working on critically-acclaimed projects, Michael is kind and supportive of our work, and I found to be particularly beneficial on the day of shooting. I was filled with nerves and anxiety, mostly about the stress of what this performance would ultimately look like on film, and Michael was a consistently calm, Zen, and supportive presence - like a cinematographer Yoda. And of course, worrying about what I 'look like' is not my job. My job is to know my lines, perform honestly, and tell the story. Thankfully, I did my job, and Michael did his. Looking back on the experience, I wish that Michael spoke more about what he was looking for, and what was really reading on camera; simply because I am interested in pursuing film further, and would like to know, obviously, what works and what definitely does not work. But, what he did very well was speak minimally with exact direction you needed in the moment. He never bombarded me with five new things to do at once, and he never just let it settle if there was something that could be improved upon.

I am happy about the pieces that I chose, and I believe that both works capture a part of me, as a person and actor. I think the emotionally resonant piece really shows a piece of my relationship with my father and family, and I am pleased that, at go-time, I could feel the complete journey of what Ari Eastman intended. Similarly, I think that Brad Pike's words were a delight to speak, and I hope that my performance evokes a

twenty-something, stuck in a quagmire of a party and desperately trying to circumvent social expectations.

In watching the final product, I am pleased with my work and thrilled at the beautiful cinematography Michael contributed. Looking back on the experience, I kept thinking of this event as a solo performance, which is so far from the truth. Film is collaborative, and in the moment I felt alienated, like it was just me and the camera; but Michael was there with me, and working so hard to capture a strong, captivating, and stirring moment. It is evident that I need more experience with on camera work, but as a preliminary foray into this realm of performance, I am more excited to work with film more, and less trepidacious.

COPIES OF PORTFOLIO MATERIAL

A Letter to My Dead Father by Ari Eastman

Today, I thought about your laugh and came to the horrifying realization that I can't remember what it sounds like. I just don't remember. I felt paralyzed with this shame and disbelief, as if I couldn't recognize my own face.

I closed my eyes, tried to quiet the rest of the world. I took a deep breath. I saw your smile. The gap in between your two front teeth, just like mine. The reason I won't allow the cosmetic surgeon to touch it. This imperfection in my smile that reminds me of you. But I couldn't hear your laugh. No matter how hard I tried, I couldn't hear it, Dad. I tried, I *really* did. I feel like it's not so much to ask that I just hear it once more. Just *once*.

I Can't Do Drugs by Brad Pike

I don't do drugs.

I have nothing against people who do, and I wish I could be part of the countercultural iconoclastic subversive type cool kids, but no, this is my weird personal hang-up.

Like lots of people I know have tried hallucinogens and enjoyed them, but I expend enough effort dealing with this frame of consciousness; I don't need one with giant spiders and liquid carpet whales.

And it doesn't help that my friends who try mushrooms say things like, "It's completely changed the way I think." That's what an optimistic victim of brain damage says.

And the people presenting me with these substances aren't pharmacists or botanists — they're sweaty men in ponchos with Hagrid style facial hair.

So no, I don't want to see your abstract expressionist art! Why do you have three rabbits in the living room? And why does it smell like burnt hair in here?

SOMEONE TO WATCH OVER ME

Words by
IRA GERSHWIN
French version by EMELIA RENAUD

Music by
GEORGE GERSHWIN

Scherzando

mf *un poco rit.*

Moderato

p a tempo

There's a say-ing old Says that love is blind, Still we're of-ten told, "Seek and
Un pro-ver-be dit l'a-mour a-veu-glé, On nous dit aus-si: "Cher-chez

ye shall find." So I'm going to seek A cer-tain lad I've had in mind.
pour trou-ver." Je cher-che ce gail-lard qui m'est res-té dans l'i-dée,

E♭ E♭ma7 E♭9 E♭7 A♭ma7 Cm
 Look-ing ev-'ry-where, Have-n't found him yet; He's the big af-fair I can-
 Re-gar-dant par-tout sans le ren-con-trer; C'est un gars que je ne puis

F7 Fm7 Gm B♭7 E♭ A♭
 not for-get. On-ly man I ev-er Think of with re-gret.
 ou-bli-er. Le seul homme à qui je pense a-vec re-gret.

E♭ D-9 *mp* Gm C Gm
 I'd like to add his in-i-tial to my mon-o-gram.
 Mon nom pour ses i-ni-tia-les, je le chan-ge-rai.

C7 *mf* B♭ B♭6 Cm7 F7 E♭ A♭ *un poco rall.*
 Tell me, where is the shep-herd for this lost lamb.
 Pour la bre-bis per-due, où est le ber-ger?

REFRAIN

p a tempo $E\flat$ $E\flat 7$ $A\flat 6$ $A\flat \dim.$ $E\flat$ $E\flat \dim.$ $B\flat 7$ $B\flat \dim.$

There's a some-bod-y I'm long-ing to see. I hope that he Turns out to be
 Il est un quel-qu'un que je veux re-voir Cha-que ma-tin et cha-que soir,

p a tempo

Fm $C7$ Fm $Cm6$ $Fm7 B\flat 7$ $E\flat$ $G7+5$ $A\flat$ $B\flat 7$ $E\flat$ *p* $E\flat 7$

Some-one who'll watch o-ver me. I'm a lit-tle lamb who's
 Et qui me pro-té-ge-ra. Je suis la bre-bis per-

p

$A\flat 6$ $A\flat \dim.$ $E\flat$ $E\flat \dim.$ $B\flat 7$ $B\flat \dim.$ Fm $C7$ Fm

lost in the wood. I know I could Al-ways be good To one who'll
 due dans le bois. Je don-ne-rai Tou-te ma foi A qui me

$Cm6$ $Fm7 B\flat 7$ $E\flat$ $E\flat 7$ $A\flat$ $B\flat 7$ $E\flat$ $A\flat$

watch o-ver me. Al-though he may not be the
 pro-té-ge-ra. Quoi-qu'il ne soit pas un hom-

mf

man some Girls think of as hand-some. To my heart he car-ries the
 me pos - sé - dant gran - de beau - té De mon cœur il por - te la,

Chords: F^b, D7 +5, D7, G7

key. _____ Won't you tell him please to put on some speed,
 clef. _____ Qu'on lui di - se donc de bien se hâ - ter

Chords: C, C7, F7, B^b7, E^b *p*, E^b7, A^b6, A^bdim.

Fol - low my lead, Oh, how I need Some-one to watch o - ver
 J'ai tant be - soïn De ce quel-qu'un, Quel-qu'un pour me pro - té -

Chords: E^b, E^bdim., B^b7, B^bdim., Fm, C7, Fm, Cm6, Fm7 B^b7

1. me. _____ 2. me. _____
 ger. _____ ger. _____

Chords: 1. E^b, E^b7, A^b, G7+5, Fm7, B^b7+5; 2. E^b, E^b7, A^b, A^bm, E^b

TRANSCRIPT OF ACTOR'S PHILOSOPHY FROM FILM

Hello my name is Carolyn Demanelis, and I am one of the UVA MFA Candidates for the Class of 2016.

Acting is something that I have always wanted to do, been attracted to, something that has fed my soul. I am that person that can cry at the drop of a hat. My growth as an artist has been how do I use that inherent vulnerability that I have and have it be something that affects other people and not just affecting me.

That has been a lot of my growth here at UVA has been how do you take emotions and harness it in order to really have the audience take that journey with you.

I love UVA, there is something about the atmosphere here, and being in the history, but also being surrounded by so many people who are so passionate, in so many different fields.

I have three of my core professors are women that have excelled in their field and have done exceptional work. And to have those kinds of role models immediately from day one is inspiring.

Thank you for watching, and this has been Carolyn Demanelis for the UVA MFA Program.

CAROLYN DEMANELIS

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THEATRE

Summer & Smoke	Alma	Virginia Repertory Theater
Our Town	Stage Manager	UVA Drama Dept.
Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson	Rachel Jackson	UVA Drama Dept.
I Love A Piano	Sadie	Heritage Theatre Festival
9 Parts Of Desire	Amal, Umm Ghada	UVA Drama Dept.
WE: The Berlin Wall	Grad Ensemble	UVA Drama Dept.
Macbeth	Lady Macbeth	The Wit Theatre Company
A Chorus Line	Diana Morales	The Curtain Playhouse Theatre
Alice in Wonderland	White Rabbit + 6 others	Theatre-Hikes Colorado
Beth	M. Leblanc	The Betsy Stage
Gifted	Anjali	The Edge Theatre
Oliver!	Nancy	The Curtain Playhouse Theatre
Mythbusters Exhibit	Actor	Denver Museum of Nature & Sci.
Snow White	Snow White	Theatre-Hikes Colorado
The Singing Room	April	Horse & Cart Theatre Company
Hamlet	Ensemble	ND Shakespeare Festival
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Hippolyta/Titania	ND Shakespeare Festival
The Taming of the Shrew	Featured Singer/Ens.	ND Shakespeare Festival
Titus Andronicus	Tamora	Not-So-Royal Shakespeare
Rosencrantz & Guildenstern...	Player	Not-So-Royal Shakespeare
Angels In America	Harper	University of Notre Dame
Twelfth Night	Olivia	The Globe Theatre, London
The Children's Hour	Mary	The Dover Players
Rossum's Universal Robots	Helena	The Dover Players

FILM

Escrow	Kristina	dir. Robert Holden
Hitting On The Break	Lexa Hodges	dir. Dagmawi Abebe
Testimonials	Anita	dir. Kimberly Te

TRAINING

The University of Virginia, MFA Acting Candidate 2016
The University of Notre Dame, B.A. Theatre, B.A. Arabic; May 2012, Magna Cum Laude
The Globe Theater in London, Spring 2011
Carnegie Mellon Pre-College Program, Summer 2007
Acting: Siiri Scott, Colleen Kelly, Tony McKay
Shakespeare: Susan Felder, Wendy Mortimer
Voice: Kate Burke, Natalie Baker-Shirer, Cheryl Turski, Bob Chapel
Stage Combat/Movement: Marianne Kubik, Kevin Asselin, k. Jenny Jones, Cheryl Turski
Viewpoints/Suzuki: Jay Paul Skelton

SPECIAL SKILLS

Southern/Russian/Irish/British/Iraqi/French, Intermediate French & Intermediate Arabic, Vocal training: Alto/Mezzo-soprano, French horn, Piano, Intermediate Ballet/Jazz, Licensed driver, Horseback riding, Quarterstaff, Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed, Smallsword, Kali sticks



ACTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Carolyn Demanelis is a recent graduate of the University of Virginia's Master of Fine Arts Acting Program, (Cohort of 2016). Hailing from Cleveland, she found her passion for theatre in her first grade production of *The Nutcracker*, playing Clara, and also in attending several performances at the Cleveland Playhouse. Her passion for performing and music led to her study of voice, piano & French horn. At the Carnegie Mellon pre-College program for Acting, she decided that theatre was the career path for her.

Carolyn attended The University of Notre Dame, and while there received her Bachelor of Arts in Theatre & Arabic, and participated in several theatrical organizations, as well as the Marching Band. She acted in several productions, but her focus was more on directing. Developing this skill afforded her the opportunity to direct a production for the Notre Dame Theatre Department's season, work in London on a production of William Shakespeare's *Pericles*, and collaborate with the English Department and Cripslam in Chicago on a production of *Samson Agonistes* by John Milton. Working with The Notre Dame Shakespeare Festival proved a formative and cultivating experience. She worked with the festival for three summers.

In Denver, Carolyn found a loving, supportive, and thriving theatre community. Working at small and large theatre houses, indoors and outdoors, with children and adults, she grew as an actor and expanded her talents as an actor and performer. She worked full-time as an actor at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science and then taught as the K-8 Aspen Academy Drama teacher.

While at the University of Virginia, having a more thorough and in depth look at Voice, Movement, and Acting. Incubating for two years of intense study, with seven of the most talented and kind people has been an inexpressible honor. She performed in several productions at the University of Virginia, and will perform as Alma in Tennessee Williams' *Summer & Smoke* at Virginia Repertory Theatre.

She is grateful for her loving and supportive family, her inspiring friends, and her constant rock, Zach.