

Les Rorick: Digital Portfolio and Statement of Philosophy

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Abstract

This digital portfolio showcases my preparation and readiness to re-enter the acting industry as a result of the actor training program at the University of Virginia. Included are a statement of teaching philosophy, headshot and resume, bio, filmed personal statement and monologues, and a statement on preparing the digital portfolio.

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Statement of Philosophy

Teaching Artist

Author and playwright David Mamet interpreted Stanislavski's "organic actor" in the following way:

*"The organic actor [...] strives to understand what the character wants, then go on stage every night and try to accomplish that, so that what you're seeing is an effect of improvisation—bounded by the direction, by the script, and your understanding of the action. But it's a fresh, organic life, every time."*¹

Awakening the organic performer in each of my students is my aim as a teacher. Beyond teaching, I hope to serve as a role model for continuous exploration in every performance.

The theme of experience-based learning regularly nourishes me as an artist and educator. The following quotation from author and public speaker Seth Godin regularly challenges and inspire me to refine my own philosophy of teaching and practice:

*"If you want people to become passionate, engaged in a field, transformed by an experience—you don't test them, you don't lecture them and you don't force them. Instead, you create an environment where willing, caring individuals can find an experience that changes them."*²

— Seth Godin

In my teaching, I focus on facilitating experiences over explaining theories. In this workshop environment, I am interested in students exploring the process to find (in themselves) what only they can. Students are encouraged to explore and experiment with their impulses and instincts. I use improvised games in which ideas are proposed, explored and heightened. I follow Viola Spolin's belief that no one learns anything except by experience.³

Through experiences and discussions I hope that my students find avenues to open their minds, bodies and hearts to new knowledge and mastery. To encourage deep

¹ (Mamet, *The Playwright Directs*)

² (Godin)

³ (Spolin 3)

reflection on experiential knowledge, I put the burden of learning on the students. On the first day of class, I communicate a message to this effect: *“I can’t teach you acting, but I can give you an acting workout. I will lead us in experiential exercises that will give you opportunities to think, feel and intuit creatively and critically. This is a learning environment, not merely an understanding environment. You are active, participating in mastering the concepts of this subject. You are not merely appreciating the correctness of the facts. My job is to ensure you have the opportunity to understand. Yours is to ensure that you learn.”*

At the end of a course, I ask my students for feedback. Here are a few that echo my philosophy of teaching:

“Les was able to teach me about the importance of getting out of my comfort zone to push the limits. Although I’ll never be an Oscar-winning actor, I can take that lesson and apply it to the rest of my life, and I know that it will help me in the future.” – Jenny K.

“Les has the ability to tap into everyone’s fundamental drive to be an artist. He allows the students to make their learning experience their own by providing loose structures and guidance without stifling the creativity of students. Les draws greatness out of his students and I will not soon forget my experiences in his class.” – Nigel

“Les puts everyone at ease and reassures everyone that it’s not only okay to make mistakes, it’s better.” – Marcus F

Great writers, the likes of David Mamet, are succinct and memorable. When I lose my way as a teacher or performer, when I find myself bogged down by grandiose explanations, or when I forget everything I believe about teaching and art-making, I am saved if I can remember his compact quotation from *Theatre*:

“What is the best that we directors and teachers can do? Simplify the process to allow the talented to thrive, hate like the plague any direction that makes the artist self-conscious, and end every teaching session and rehearsal on a note of happy accomplishment.”⁴

⁴ (Mamet, *Theatre* 37)

Journal of Process: Creating a Digital Portfolio

Digital Portfolio for Live Performance?

Seems like an oxymoron. And it is. But there's a purpose, and it's simple: Marketing.

Performing artists are faced with a compromise between maintaining the sanctity of live events and documenting those performances for the sake of begetting more work. Sharing space and time with the audience as the storytelling unfolds is sacred. Holding for gasps, riding waves of laughter, keeping a roomful of people on the edge of their seats—these moments make me feel not just connected, but alive. But then, as with all things, curtains falls, productions close, and performers scatter to their next jobs.

If there is a next job. Because once the play is over, all evidence of my craft has disappeared. The director of my next play didn't get to see my previous performance, so how can he be sure it was any good? In theatre, turning on a video camera and capturing the performance for later consumption is never my intention. In principal, I'm against the very idea...even for archival purposes. I am exasperated when I hear, "I can't make it. Can you record it for me?" One of the reasons I enjoy live performance is because it is ephemeral—you had to be there—those that were experienced what no one ever will again. On the other hand, casting directors need to see that I am certifiably the best fit for a role they are trying to fill. If they don't see my work, then casting me may be a liability.

Before the Digital Age, casting directors called in actors to perform a monologue in person. While this still happens, many casting directors are saving time and money by asking for digital submissions. Due to the prevalence of smart phones and YouTube, actors are expected to have a digital reel that showcases their type and essence. In this system, casting directors can watch a clip in fast-forward or even multiple times to decide if an actor is worth an audition slot. If you want to keep up with the trend of things, and I do, a digital portfolio for a live performance-performer is essential.

Incidentally, through the process of making digital video clips for this thesis, I have become more interested in the digital film medium as an expression of my art making. I had previously resisted this because I wanted to stay true to my first love, the stage. But the screen has beckoned and I am finding it difficult to resist her.

Creating a Digital Portfolio

My Brand

Strip away the *mise en scène* of any play and what's left is people behaving as someone else. In other words, acting is behavior—behaving in a manner of the character the actor is portraying. Despite my penchant for playing as many character types as

possible, I am not suited to play them all. I know this and casting directors know this. In creating a digital portfolio, it is important for me to reveal who I am, or, my brand.

In preparation for transitioning back into the profession, I created a website (www.lesrorick.com) as a landing page for agents to get a sense of me and my work. As I culled production photos, patterns of character-types emerged. The reoccurring themes were: quirky, naïve, droll, enigmatic, and hopeless romantic. With this in mind, I crafted material that would immediately give the viewer a taste of my brand.

My digital portfolio includes two monologues, scaled for film rather than stage,⁵ and a personal statement.

Monologues

As I contemplated material that might showcase elements of these character(istic)s of quirky, naïve, etc, I wrote a few short monologues. The biggest advantage to writing my own monologues, as opposed to finding them in plays, was that they would be in my voice, representing me exactly as I wanted.

The first piece, called “Germaphobe,” shows a quirky, particular, and neurotic character. It is very fun and light from the first line. The second piece, “Dental Significance” features a more reflective, somber, and ‘hopeless romantic.’ My favorite part is the punch-line when the audience sees the absurd location where the character is pouring out his heart to an unidentified listener.

Personal Statement

In addition to the monologues, part of my digital portfolio is a short personal statement shot in a documentary interview style. I kept it light and informal, and perhaps a little too hammy. I found it difficult to “drop the mask” and be completely myself with the camera pointed at me. But my hope is that casting directors and agents will still look at it and say, “What a droll fellow. I want to work with him—he seems fun.”

Between the jokes about my mustache and musings about the theatre, I selected footage from my stage combat class, from the public speaking class I teach, and production photos (courtesy of Michael Bailey and the UVa Department of Drama) to play in the background of the personal statement interview. Those images and videos did not make it into the final version of the Personal Statement Interview, but I intend to incorporate them myself for my own personal use.

⁵ The rationale behind scaling the performance for film rather than stage is because recorded theatre performances tend to look overdramatic, which can be interpreted as bad acting. Wanting to avoid this at all costs, I brought my choices down to a smaller level. There is a saying in the industry, “If they can do it close up, they can do it in wide.”

Text of Portfolio Materials

1. Original script of “Germaphobe”
2. Original script of “Dental Significance”
3. Transcript of Personal Statement Interview

“Germaphobe”
by Les Rorick

Did you just eat one of those? Ew. Ew, ew, ew, ew. You can have ‘em. I don’t want them anymore. There are billions of microscopic particles of fecal matter floating around in that unsanitary shithole bathroom and now you have them all over your skin and under your fingernails and now they are all over my fries. Your fries. Take them. Gross. *drinks soda* Did you put your lips on my straw?

“Dental Significance”
by Les Rorick

TIM:

I think about her every time I brush my teeth. She’s two-thousand miles away. We haven’t talked since I moved, unless you count Private Messaging on Facebook three and a half months ago, but I don’t.

And it has nothing to do with teeth. We didn’t share any moments of dental significance. I don’t even know if she has a toothbrush.

Anyway, when I’m brushing my teeth -- the world stops -- everything is on pause for five minutes. For five minutes, my past and future are brushed away and all that’s left...is her.

Do you think she feels the same about me?

BRAD: No.

TIM: Fuck you, Brad.

“Personal Statement Interview”

Hi, my name is Les Rorick, and I was born with this mustache.

And that’s one of the beautiful things about doing theatre and also being a teacher, ‘cause you come into class and everyday your facial hair is maybe slightly different and then stays that way for months on end. And my students always think I have very peculiar taste—and I do.

I love moving on stage. I love acting in big spaces where I get to fill the space and expand my kinesthetic sphere.

UVa is on the other side of the country from where I’m from. I’m originally from Southern California—uh—enjoyed my time there. Spent some in Chicago, where I will be returning. And, I wanted to explore the East Coast...uh... I visited UVa, and Charlottesville is incredible.

As a practitioner, being a theatre maker is an opportunity to rehearse for life. Because we get to experience what it’s like to be a courageous person, because we want to be one, and we don’t know what that’s like, so we practice being a courageous character, and we get that in our bodies, and we have the experience to be courageous when we’re out in the real world.

The different behavior that we go through, I get to study it and get into, into what the character is like.

I’m Les Rorick. This is my mustache. Thank you for watching.

Supplemental Materials

1. Headshot
2. Resume
3. Bio
4. Digital Content
 - a. Monologues
 - i. “Germaphobe”
 - ii. “Dental Significance”
 - b. Personal Statement Interview Transcript



LES RORICK

LES RORICK

EMC

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Height: 5'7"
Weight: 135

THEATRE

Murphy (u/s – performed)	<i>The Front Page</i>	Timeline Theatre, Chicago
Stache, Smee (u/s – performed)	<i>Peter and the Starcatcher</i>	Virginia Repertory Theatre, VA
Randy, Lendall, Daniel, etc.	<i>Almost, Maine</i>	Heritage Theatre Festival, VA
Herbert, Not Dead Fred, etc.	<i>Spamalot</i>	Heritage Theatre Festival, VA
Marc	<i>Dream of a Common Language</i>	Prologue Theatre, Chicago
Austin	<i>The Second Man</i>	C.U.T. Theatre, Chicago
Mark	<i>Former Self</i>	Love Nail Tree Theatre, CA

CLASSICAL THEATRE

Duke	<i>Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	Theatre Hikes Chicago
Wolsey	<i>Henry VIII</i>	Rendition Theatre, Chicago
Berowne	<i>Loves Labour's Lost</i>	Street Shakespeare, CA
Sebastian	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	Street Shakespeare, CA

EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

Harlequin	<i>The Triumph of Love</i>	University of Virginia
Demetrius, Snug (Lion)	<i>Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	University of Virginia
Professor Willard	<i>Our Town</i>	University of Virginia
Yogi, Mr. Mallory, Cadet	<i>Wonderful Town</i>	University of Virginia
Khirin, Uhov, Operator	<i>Vodka Variations, Chekhov Shorts</i>	University of Virginia
Abe, Karl, Tunneler	<i>WE: Theatrical Piece of the Berlin Wall</i>	University of Virginia

FILM / TV

Knife Henchman (Supporting)	<i>Malpractice</i>	Dir. Attar Mirza
Murderer (Supporting)	<i>Sister Crayon Music Video</i>	Dir. Karl Richter
Andy (Supporting)	<i>The Alley Cat</i>	Dir. Marie Ullrich
Jeff (Supporting)	<i>The Club Webisode</i>	Dir. Susan Athey

TRAINING & EDUCATION

MFA Acting (<i>May 2016</i>)	<i>University of Virginia</i>	(Colleen Kelly, Kate Burke, Marianne Kubik)
On-Camera	<i>University of Virginia</i>	(Richard Warner, Erica Arvold)
Red Nose Clown	<i>Movement Center</i>	(Dody DiSanto)
Masters Classes	<i>Act One Studios</i>	(Steve Scott, Nick Bowling, Mary Ann Thebus)
Commercial & V.O.	<i>Act One Studios</i>	(Anne Jacques, Norm Boucher, Joanne Sylvestrak)
Improv	<i>Second City</i>	(Kate Duffy, Mark Piebenga, Kinmie Companik)
BA Bible and Theology	<i>Biola University</i>	(Clint Arnold, David Horner, Walt Russell)

SKILLS

Stage Combat: Rapier & Dagger, Unarmed | Fitness Instructor, Yoga, Wrestling, Rock Climbing
Dance: Swing (6 years), Modern (1), Contact Improv (1), Ballet (0.5), Tap (0.5)
Circus: Handstand, Slack-Line Walking, Juggling (3 Balls)
 Guitar, Whistling | Sign Language | Photographer | Ear Prompter | Carpenter | Stick-Shift | Sourdough Baker

Les Rorick Full Bio

Les engages in theatre-making in a variety of contexts and roles.

As Director of Theatre for *Love Nail Tree*, a story-telling company based in Los Angeles provoking conversation about topics ignored in the world, he wrote, directed and acted for two seasons. He is also a founding member of Street Shakespeare, a pop-up troupe that, for one-night only, performs a Shakespeare play on the streets of Downtown Los Angeles, without any rehearsal. He played Berowne in *Love's Labour's* and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*.

In Chicago Les performed with Prologue (*Dream of a Common Language*), Timeline (*The Front Page*), and Theatre Hikes (*Two Gentlemen*). He also appeared at Currently Untitled Theatre (*The Second Man*), where he also served as Artistic Director. He collaborated with and created content for The Line Church and taught “Acting” and “Improv” courses at Act One Studios.

Before fully committing to theatre, Les studied Theology at Biola University in Southern California. He is currently pursuing an M.F.A. in Acting at University of Virginia. Recent productions in include: *Triumph of Love*, *Our Town*, *Wonderful Town*, *Vodka Variations*, *WE: A Theatrical Piece of The Berlin Wall* (U.Va. Drama); *Almost, Maine* and *Spamalot* (Heritage Theatre Festival); and *Peter and the Starcatcher* (Virginia Rep). He serves as an instructor for “Acting I,” “Speaking in Public,” and leads a section of the students in “How Theatre Works,” a theatre survey/devised theatre course.

Works Cited

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