

Artistic Statement

I did not realize I was creating theatre and art from the moment I was born until I began drama club in the sixth grade. Once I began creating theatre, forming characters, and telling stories, I soon began to recognize how this feeling translated throughout my entire life. As a child I was always creating skits, songs, and scenarios, acting as the main character in the play of my life. Describing my day in the car with my grandmother was just one way for me to express my storytelling. Telling other students what to do, while most likely annoying, was my way of guiding and directing them towards a common goal in which we could all share in the wonder of achievement. It was miraculous to me to find a practice for the wonderful feeling of artistic expression that manifested in my brain, and even more miraculous as a freshman in high school when I realized this could become a career.

I was not raised in the theatre, nor have I been training in it since birth, but theatre's ability to provoke meaningful thought and action has always lived inside of me. Throughout my journey since childhood, I have found it incredibly difficult to enter and maneuver in the professional theatre world, without having a strong financial backing or a supportive artistic community where I grew up, as well as a number of familial obligations that keep me occupied. Nevertheless, I find I am able to work, collaborate, imagine, design, create, and produce theatre. A large part of this is due to my training, as I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Theatre: Acting and Directing with minors in Music and Dance from Baldwin Wallace University (May 2023), and I have completed a semester at the National Theatre Institute as part of their music theatre program (December 2022). With that knowledge and my continued work in theatre, I am crafting my artistic voice in pursuit of my goals.

In my journey so far, I offer this philosophy: art is storytelling, and as a theatre artist, my primary responsibility is to tell stories. Theatre has an incredible magic power that exists on stage, in its ability to convey meaningful messages, uplift and empower voices, and evoke empathy through authentic, humanity-based storytelling that connects people. As an artist, I work to do this through clear and effective communication, multi-perspective and open-minded collaboration, a drive and work ethic for exploring all aspects of theatre, intention-based risk-taking, and working with others to constantly learn, grow, explore, discover, and experience. I approach all of my work through a Humanist lens and as a female creator, and I use this lived experience to strengthen my understanding of artistic work.

My career aspirations are to be a working actress and director in the professional theatre world, with the eventual goal of teaching theatrical arts to the next generation of thespians. I believe that by understanding the art of acting, the various terminology, techniques, and perspectives of actors, it will only strengthen my directing. As an actor, I find understanding how to craft a director's approach incredibly useful as a way of approaching characters and analyzing the play as a whole. It is together that these positions collaborate to communicate meaningful messages and convey truthful storytelling. While those are my primary focuses, I am grateful that I have been able to explore skills in a number of different roles within theatre. Those skills include dance and choreography, devising theatre, playwriting and composing, educational theatre, radio theatre, dramaturgy, intimacy coordination, and more. I hope my career will take me down many avenues, but I will always be an artist through my role as a storyteller.

I continue to learn, grow, and develop my 'style' through every theatrical experience I encounter. My style focuses on intimate character development and engagement by crafting people

that all differ in perspectives, experiences, trauma, victories, and opinions— people that are whole-y human. Within my directing mission, my core principles center around making sure all artists feel safe and heard, practicing collaboration and clear, effective communication as the key to production, and that the best kind of theatre stems from truthful storytelling.

In my career thus far, I find myself drawn to contemporary realism, plays that speak truth to the human experience and the central themes that connect us all together: life, love, friendship, pain, death, and hope. I believe that my generation, having felt the aftermath of 9/11, seen the rise of internet technology and social media, survived too many school shootings, and existed during the COVID-19 pandemic, has many important stories to tell that I want to explore in my career. Theatre is about communicating messages and stories, and I have found the best way to do that, where it emotionally captures audiences, is through recognizable language and plot. Classical plays have a valid and important role in theatre, but I am drawn to contemporary works as they more directly reflect and affect the societal communities in which they are produced.

As my skills continue to grow and develop, it is now that I am permanently developing a personal and effective way of approaching plays. I am an organized person that survives on lists, planning, tables, and note-taking. I find the best way to understand and guide a production is to learn every detail of it, and explore the details that are not given. As an actress, my imagination exists in the choices made onstage that reflect a detailed, thoroughly examined character; I cannot embody someone else without knowing their entire past and present. As a director, my imagination guides my design instincts based on lengthy research, comprehension, and conception of a story. These skills are the foundation of my artistic work and multiply everyday as I am exposed to new methodology, perspectives, and experiences.

While the above outlines my passion for theatre, as well as my style, process, and goals, I believe theatre simply exemplifies the human experience. As a human being, I believe in kindness and compassion, that the world cannot and should not exist without empathy and care. I believe all people are equal, and should be treated as such, and that we cannot create equity until examining what divides us and creating systems that counteract discrimination. The more I learn about theatre, the more I find these principles to be at the core of all theatre-making. I believe as theatre artists we have the wonderful opportunity to explore humanity, and expose both the good and the bad that exist within our world.

I sincerely hope this statement gives insight into who I am as a person, actress, director, and theatre-maker. I thank you for your time and appreciate your consideration of my work.

Julia Cooke