

“Contemporary Ethnographic Performance Methodologies in London”

Foreword: With the support of the Graduate Research and Creative Activity grant, I plan to travel to London, UK during the fall/winter of 2016 to research the works of contemporary theatre artists and performance scholars. This research is a continuation of the terms and performance concepts defined in my written article published in *Theatre and Performance: Guide and Guru*, a quarterly UK publication, in 2011 on the subject of male burlesque performance. My graduate studies will lead me further on a path towards exploring the intersection of the multiple identities I represent as a: first generation Mexican-American, transgender performance artist, orchestral musician, classically trained dancer, and qualitative theatre arts and performance studies researcher. I am uniquely qualified to administer this project as a result of my undergraduate focuses in: queer avant-garde nightlife performance, dance composition, and theatre studies. The scholarly works I have produced and the performances I have staged have laid the groundwork for this continued research.

I first traveled to London, UK in 2010. My initial research started by exploring the presence of drag performance in Shakespearean theatre at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. I then return to London via Yale University funding to continue my exploration of gender and sexuality performance studies. London is positioned as one of the cultural art centers of the world; the exposure accessed by this research travel will provide an educational experience not afforded locally. My performance past is diverse and varied, spanning the following performing arts: symphonic orchestra (double bass), classical ballet, Mexican Ballet Folklorico, and Drag Performance. My past performances involve site-specific compositions, live musicians, and dance choreography.

Project Description

I will research the academic and performance work of the following scholars and artists because of their contributions to the field of theatre arts and performance studies via contemporary ethnographic performance methodologies. All of them create a dialogue between gender and sexuality and performance in either their academic and staged works. These individuals are internationally recognized artists and engaging them in academic discourse will affect the breadth and impact of my research. My two primary research questions are:

1. What contemporary ethnographic performance methodologies affect gender and sexuality performance studies, productions, and academic literature?
2. What theatrical elements do contemporary performance artists and scholars use to translate academic topics to the stage?

My theatre research will study the works of Joseph Mercier (Royal Central School of Speech and Drama), Madison Alexander Moore (King's College London), Emily Carson Coates (Yale University), and Matthew Bourne. I will learn about their works and research through in-person interviews, literary review, and ethnographic research. Joseph Mercier is leading research on the contemporary theatrical representation of gender, sexuality, and the body. Madison Alexander Moore's areas of expertise are in nightlife culture, fashion, queer studies, contemporary art, alternative subcultures, and urban aesthetics.

Upon the recommendation of my faculty mentor, Cindy Melby Phaneuf, I will pursue the works of Tony Award winning choreographer Matthew Bourne. Bourne created a profound production of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* performed by an all-male ensemble. Bourne executes

his works by incorporating the following themes: the restructuring of classical, canonical works for the modern audience, the investigation of gender performativity, and choreographic and aesthetic elements. Emily Carson Coates was my undergraduate faculty advisor from Yale University. I plan to include her insight as much as possible in my research findings. Professor Coates specializations include post-modern dance and interdisciplinary studies between the arts and sciences. My project will create a lexicon and pedagogy for avant-garde nightlife performance and male burlesque.

Product of the funded activity: This research will prepare me to create a staged performance project planned for the Spring of 2017. The results of this GRACA research project will be disseminated through presentation at the University of Nebraska at Omaha Student Research Fair. Furthermore, the results will be distributed through thesis and manuscript publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Contribution to the student's graduate studies: This research will further my studies in the Master of Arts in theatre program by examining the presentation of gender and sexuality in theatrical performance and contemporary ethnographic performance methodologies. The knowledge and information gathered from this research project will prepare me in creating a future theatrical production and culminating manuscript.

Contribution to the field or conceptual importance: The academic subject of gender and performance in theatre is an ever growing field. I am inspired to legitimize this field through my graduate research. Understanding the contemporary ethnographic performance methodologies of these theatre scholars will be key in creating groundbreaking work in my future productions at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Many of the topics and performance concepts are still being defined in the field. Producing theatre for marginalized communities is the foundation of my graduate research.

Activities, Process, or Methodology

In-Person Interviews: These personal interviews will be the most valuable component of my research. I want to bring this type of performance art to Omaha, Nebraska and the United States. Spending time with these individuals will provide professional and academic networking that will serve as a catalyst for my artistic career. I will determine appropriate methods of capturing these interviews with my faculty mentor, Cindy Melby Phaneuf. In my initial planning, Madison Alexander Moore, Joseph Mercier, and Emily Carson Coates have agreed to participate in my research. Secured funding and participation stipend allows me to compensate interviewees for their participation in this research project.

Literary Review: In the planning phase, I will correspond with Joseph Mercier, Madison Alexander Moore, and Emily Coates on gathering an exhaustive bibliography on relevant themes and find common topics to extrapolate for our interviews.

Ethnographic Theatre | Ethnographic Research: The field of performance studies is ever evolving and ethnographic research is key in capturing the cultural elements and techniques. Many times the most productive way of examining and documenting a performance style is to engage with the performers, and attend rehearsals and movement workshops.

Supplemental Faculty Mentors at University of Nebraska at Omaha and Yale University: I will share my research with UNO Faculty, Cindy Melby Phaneuf (primary faculty mentor) and Valerie St. Pierre-Smith (identified-supplemental faculty mentor) and Emily Carson Coates (Yale University). Their research and fields contributions will help me translate my research into a future production with the necessary dramaturgical and academic grounding.

Project Timeline

February 2016	Confirm interviews with Joseph Mercier, Matthew Bourne, and Madison Alexander Moore in London, UK arrange travel travel to New Haven, CT (on personal funds) to meet with and interview Emily Coates
Spring/Summer 2016	Literature review
Fall 2016	Begin independent study with Professor Cindy Melby Phaneuf, identify terms, nomenclature, and pedagogy
December 2016	Travel to London, UK for interviews with Joseph Mercier, Matthew Bourne, and Madison Alexander Moore
January 2016	Prepare findings from interview into manuscript and begin to prepare findings for use in future theatrical production planned for the Spring of 2017

Description of Student and Faculty Mentor Roles

Graduate Student | Alejandro Bustillos, Jr. | Field Researcher: Travel to London, conduct interviews with Joseph Mercier, Matthew Bourne and Madison Alexander Moore. Travel to New Haven, CT to interview Emily Coates, student will use personal funds. Prepare necessary literary review to ensure academic credibility and relevant context. Produce manuscript and presentation that will summarize findings. Collaborate with faculty at: UNO, Yale University, King's College London, Royal Central School for Speech and Drama. Prepare findings as dramaturgical groundwork for future production planned for the Spring of 2017.

Faculty | Cindy Melby Phaneuf | Mentor: Supervise the student's literature review and preparation for travel to London, UK. Ensure the student has correspondence with the necessary faculty members and performing artists at collaborating institutions. Review collected research data and assist student in translating finding into an academic manuscript and future theatrical production planned for Spring of 2017.

Budget Justification

Travel to London during the fall/winter of 2016 for a 10-day research trip. Funding will be used for travel, living stipend, and room and board. Conduct interviews with Joseph Mercier, Matthew Bourne, and Madison Alexander Moore, modest compensation in exchange for their time and contribution to my academic research.

Hotel Costs in London, UK:		
	10 nights x \$180/night	\$1,800
Roundtrip-Flight: Omaha, NE to London, UK		\$1,500
Daily Stipend:		
	10 days x \$50/day	\$500
Tickets to Academic Events and Theatrical Performances in London, UK		\$400
Participant Compensation Interview and Academic Collaboration		\$600
	Joseph Mercier	\$200
	Madison Alexander Moore	\$200
	Matthew Bourne	\$200
Ground Transportation in London, UK		\$200
	7 Day Tube Pass	\$50
	3 Daily Tube Passes	\$30
	Ground Transportation from Airport to Central London	\$40
	Additional Ground Transportation	\$80
	Total costs:	\$5,000

Closing: Ethnographic performance studies is an ever changing field. I want to create the lexicon and pedagogy that scholars will use to discuss this subject in the future. Ethnographic narratives need to be informed by the people they represent—I have the necessary background and professional connections needed to develop this academic field via this project. All identified scholars are established and serve as inspirations for my project and academic research. Their academic work and bibliographic knowledge will provide guidance in composing my project and essay. The Graduate Research and Creative Activity grant will benefit more than my graduate research—it will benefit my professional and academic future as I seek candidacy in Ph.D. programs in theatre arts and performance studies.

References | Biographies | Items for Literature Review

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- Bronski, Michael, Ann Pellegrini, and Michael Amico. *You can tell just by looking" : and 20 other myths about LGBT life and people*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2013. Print.
- Bustillos, Jr., Alejandro
 - <http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2011/01/21/criss-crsd-and-mismatched-in-strcrsd/>
 - <http://yaleherald.com/arts/pose-until-you-die/>
- Coates, Emily:
 - <http://theaterstudies.yale.edu/people/emily-coates>
- Coates, Emily, and Sarah Demers. "Three Views of the Higgs and Dance." *Vimeo*. Yale University Press, 20 Dec. 2013. Web. 13 Jan. 2016.
- Mercier, Joseph:
 - <http://www.josephmercier.com/>
 - <http://www.cssd.ac.uk/student/joseph-mercier>
- Moore, Madison Alexander:
 - <http://kcl.academia.edu/madisonmoore>
- Saldaña, Johnny. *Ethnotheatre research from page to stage*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2011. Print.

January 19, 2016

Dear GRACA Selection Committee,

It is my pleasure to write a letter of support for Alejandro Bustillos for his GRACA proposal, "Contemporary Ethnographic Performance Methodologies in London." Alej just began his Graduate Program in Theatre, and he has proved himself to be an ambitious, bright, and highly creative individual. Alej attended South High School before being accepted to Yale University. His diverse background as a dancer, musician, researcher and drag performer make him uniquely qualified to do this study.

The field of ethnographic performance studies has exploded in recent years, and Alej is on the cutting edge of theatre research. Rather than studying the field from the outside, like some researchers do, he has been a creator in the field, both as a performer and as a director/producer. He came to our UNO Theatre program to broaden his technical knowledge of the field so he can create the kind of work that both represents his identity on the stage and allows others deeper insight into avant-garde nightlife performance and male burlesque.

The artists and researchers that Alej has chosen to interview and observe their work and processes for creating the work are the top in their field. They have been recognized in England, the United States, and internationally. The fact that three of the artists have agreed to participate in this study is a terrific achievement. Alej is already thinking about how his research will inform his own creative project planned for the Spring of 2017.

It has been a pleasure working with Alej on this proposal as it went through several drafts. I have no doubt he is ready to put his plan into action if given the GRACA grant.

If I can provide further information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



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