

A man in a white shirt and tie is standing on a stage, holding a glass in his right hand and gesturing with his left. He is looking upwards. The background is dark with several stage lights visible.

Embodied Art: Movement for the Actor

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Embodied Art:

Movement for the Actor

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for working tirelessly to uphold professional standards
while passing on their knowledge and expertise.

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Cover photo credit: Paula Josephs

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ABSTRACT

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Will R. Boyd

May 2025

This thesis documents my journey as I become two different characters in the theatrical production entitled *Use as Directed: An Evening of Ten-Minute Plays*. The show was a collection of contemporary short plays directed by Scott Alan Smith at the Savannah College of Art and Design. The rehearsals culminated in a weekend of live performances in the Mondanaro Theater at Crites Hall. My research explored various acting methodologies with a focus on movement for the actor. I gathered and utilized several techniques and exercises to help with embodying the characters on stage. My aim was to develop a collection of effective tools for use in my ongoing acting process. I drew from the work of Konstantin Stanislavski, Lee Strasberg, Anne Bogart, Stella Adler, and Uta Hagen. The process thoroughly prepared me so that I could move purposefully and authentically without inhibition.

Keywords: Theater; Movement; Stanislavski; Uta Hagen; Stella Adler;

Lee Strasberg; Animal Exercise; Anne Bogart; Viewpoints

ARTIST STATEMENT

Can you imagine your life without the arts? We often take for granted how much our lives are enriched by the music we enjoy, shows we binge-watch, paintings we hang on our walls, and dancers we admire. Acting is an art form that can heal through laughter and inspire through drama. It is my hope that my work will contribute more value to the lives of others.



Fig. 1. A headshot of Will Boyd.
Photo credit: Adam Arnali

THESIS STATEMENT

For my performances as Wade and Spence in *Use as Directed: An Evening of Ten-Minute Plays*, I utilized the methodologies of Konstantin Stanislavski, Lee Strasberg, Anne Bogart, Stella Adler, and Uta Hagen to achieve authentic, purposeful movement that is free of inhibitions.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my time studying acting, I have often placed a heavy emphasis on text analysis and the psychological preparation of the character. These are the intellectual parts of acting that are often emphasized in an academic environment. My classes taught me how to thoroughly uncover the character's given circumstances and inner motivations. Once I completed this analysis, most of my focus and effort then went to memorization. While these are all important parts of an actor's preparation, there is more to work on than these things alone. There comes a time when we need to get out of our heads and up on our feet; we must work out the actual physical performance.

In the past, I put little thought into the character's movement, which often left me feeling uncomfortable on stage or on set. As I continued to train and grow over the years, physicality remained a problem because I consistently neglected this part of my character preparation. I would usually wait until rehearsals to work out my physical performance. This left me at a disadvantage when it came to auditions, because an actor needs to show up with a brilliant performance without the benefit of any rehearsals; it's not practical to arrive at an audition without having already worked out your movement choices. At some point you need to get past analyzing and memorizing and start bringing the performance to life. It wasn't serving me well to just "wing it" by expecting my inner motivations to guide me. I decided to use my thesis project as an opportunity to develop a thorough process for movement preparation.

For my thesis, I wanted to draw on as many acting methodologies as possible so that I could discover the tools that were most effective for me. Anne Bogart's **Viewpoints** method and Lee Strasberg's **animal exercise** are some of the many resources available for an actor's

movement training, but they are commonly overlooked in acting classes. To make up for this neglected part of my work method, my thesis became an opportunity to dive deeper into these lessons and strengthen my weaknesses. For my performances as Wade and Spence in *Use as Directed: An Evening of Ten-Minute Plays*, I utilized the methodologies of Konstantin Stanislavski, Lee Strasberg, Anne Bogart, Stella Adler, and Uta Hagen to achieve authentic, purposeful movement that is free of inhibitions.

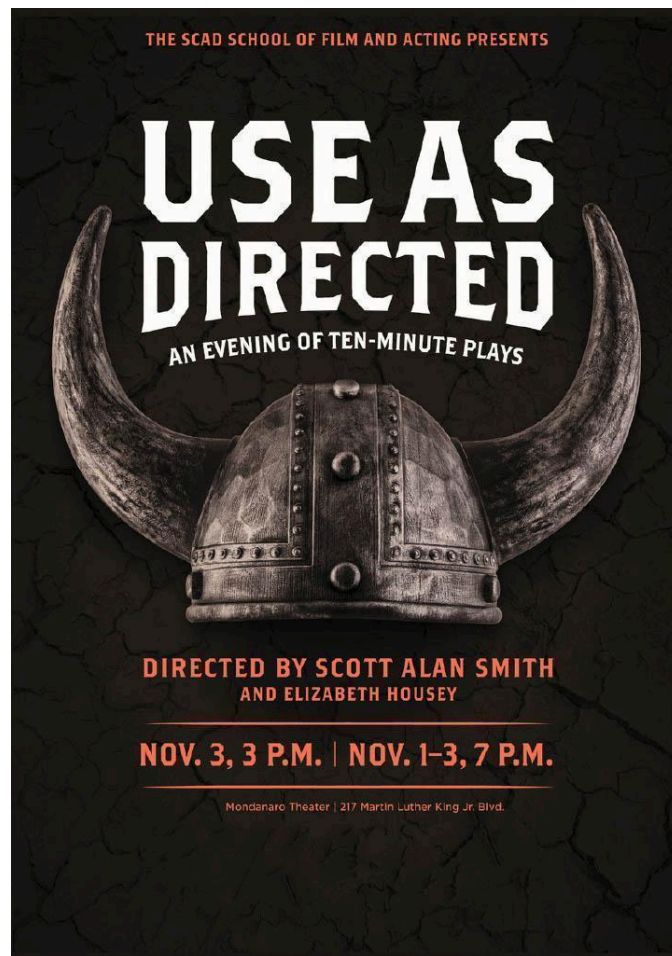


Fig. 2. A performance poster for *Use as Directed: An Evening of Ten-Minute Plays*, performed at the Savannah College of Art and Design.

PERFORMANCE PROJECT

These short plays featured characters with real world, relatable problems, but the stories also had a distinct sense of comedy. *Maraschino Red* by Steven Simoncic is a play about Spence, a husband and father who experiences a bit of a midlife crisis when he comes to the realization that his life has become mundane and unfulfilling. A midlife crisis is a time when an adult experiences dissatisfaction with their life and re-evaluates their identity and life choices. They may question whether they are in the place they thought they would be at by their age ("Am I having"). Spence is out having drinks after work with his boss, Kent, whom he doesn't like. When Kent talks about a sexual experience he had with his wife at a spa resort, Spence realizes he has no stories of his own to share. His life revolves around work and raising a child, and he no longer has fun with his wife. Taking this in, he decides to add some excitement to his life by getting belligerently drunk and committing petty theft at a convenience store. When he arrives home late, his wife, Barb, is waiting up for him. The conversation that ensues is what plays out on stage. In frustration, she reminds him to be present and appreciate what he has. She gives him a reality check that he was never as exciting as he imagines, and she also shares that she deals with similar feelings of disappointment. The openness between them helps him to connect with his wife and recommit to his place in the family.

Given that these are short plays, the given circumstances provided by the playwrights can be quite limited. Therefore, the director and I used our imaginations to fill in the details of the characters' backstories. The following information combines the given circumstances with our added details. Spence is a 39-year-old married father of a three-year-old, who works a steady 9-to-5 corporate job and lives in the suburbs, which he quietly resents for its dullness. He

is in middle management, indicating that he is a well-paid leader, but not rich. A middle manager reports to top-level executives in a company and ensures that directives are carried out; they oversee the managers who oversee staff (“Middle Management”). The boss he reports to—Kent—is likely an executive in the company. This helps explain why Spence feels the need to appease him by going out with him when invited, even though he has a low opinion of him. Spence has fond memories of when he was younger, but his wife seems to think that he is just exaggerating the good old days in his mind. Barb says that he was never really that exciting, but she fell in love with him anyway. He’s feeling like his life has lost its spark, and he’s trying to add some thrills back into the mix.

The playwright, Steven Simoncic, holds an MFA in Fiction. Many of his plays feature a theme of people trying to make changes in their lives, as is evident in *Maraschino Red*. Second City (a Chicago-based improvisation troupe) has produced his plays, indicating that he has a respectable comedy background. Considering this, the humor in this play should not be overlooked.

The second play, *Sad, Lonely People* by Seth McNeill, is a play about a young professional named Wade who struggles to connect with others. He attends a New Year's Eve party at a nice apartment in New York City, where he attempts to make a connection with a girl, Harriet. Unfortunately, his nerdy awkwardness spoils his chances of a relationship. When he goes in for a midnight kiss anyway, her rejection sends him on a downward spiral of negative self-talk and frustration.

The following is the backstory we created for Wade using the given circumstances and our own imaginations. Wade is a 32-year-old man working in accounting in a corporate 9-to-5

environment. He is single with no children and has few if any relationships in his life. His three closest friends moved away, and he is struggling to find anyone else to spend time with. He spends most of his free time playing video games and watching TV. When he is trying to be social, most of his conversations are brief and he feels alienated. He has a very difficult time communicating well with others. The thoughts in his mind are disconnected from what's going on around him, so what he says isn't always on point. His humor can also be a bit juvenile, so he may not mesh well in a professional adult environment. Because of his isolation, he struggles with loneliness and depression, and he is on medication for it. The medication, however, is not helping much because he still has the same social problems and negative self-talk.

The playwright, Seth McNeill, is neurodivergent and frequently writes dark comedies about isolation and social alienation, as is evident in this play. It is, therefore, important that we not miss the comedy amidst the suffering in *Sad, Lonely People*. While it is concerning that Wade is lonely and depressed, his awkwardness is a perfect foundation for humor. His odd behavior and comments may be funny to watch in a show, but in real life the resulting social rejection can become quite distressing. People who are neurodivergent—whether because of autism or ADHD—are more likely to have other mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression (Princing). The author has first-hand experience living with neurodivergence, so he can enlighten us on the social effects of the condition. For example, we get a glimpse of Wade's depression after he is rejected for a kiss. And we also see that in the end—true to reality—his problems don't get resolved; he just gets a bit of comfort and sympathy from the girl he likes.

McNeill's website bio reveals that he uses themes of repressed generational trauma in his writings. If someone's family or ancestors have experienced trauma—whether from abuse,

neglect, oppression, or some other source—the effects can be passed on through genetics and learned behaviors. Consequently, people with generational trauma may struggle with anxiety, depression, or forming/maintaining relationships (“What is Generational”). Wade, therefore, may be predisposed to certain conditions through genetics, or he may have learned destructive behaviors from his parents. We see this appear when Wade reacts to his failure by engaging in negative self-talk, which is a behavior that may have been modeled for him or reinforced by his environment. Negative self-talk can significantly deepen depression and anxiety and erode self-esteem (“Hidden Dangers”).

Sad, Lonely People was previously produced in The Secret Theatre in New York City for the 2016 LIC One Act Festival, and it was awarded Best Play. Our production at SCAD made use of a minimalistic set, with lighting functioning as the primary design element for creating the environment. *Maraschino Red* was previously produced at the Beckett Theatre in New York for the 37th Annual Samuel French Festival and was selected as a finalist. It was also a finalist in the 2013 Play by Play Unchained Festival at Stageworks/Hudson. Our production at SCAD used a realistic living room environment for the production design.

My purpose for using the methodologies of Stanislavski, Adler, and Hagen in this project was to root myself in truth so that my performances would be believable. I called on the work of Strasberg to rid my body of physical tension and explore the physicality of the character. And the work of Bogart was helpful in addressing the aesthetics of movement.

CHARACTER PREPARATION

While it's true that movement is the focus for this project, it's still important to first gain an intellectual understanding of the character. I did not throw away any of my analytical preparation but rather built on it. It is the goal of an actor to understand the character by stepping into their shoes; this will ensure that movement is authentically motivated. Meryl Streep reinforces this idea when she says that “if you're in your character and in the life you kind of can't make a wrong move” (“Meryl Streep” 1:03:00–1:04:30). Movement that is rooted in truth will be believable. My director, Professor Scott Alan Smith, had me answer his 16 questions to aid in this process. These questions include—and build upon—**Uta Hagen's Nine Questions**, and the work of Konstantin Stanislavski. Professor Smith also includes additional questions that dig into **dramaturgy** and the psychology of the character (see Appendices A and B).

I developed my characters by deepening my understanding of their internal conflicts. I previously discussed how a midlife crisis works and what effect that had on Spence. I also discussed neurodivergence and how Wade struggled with social alienation and depression because of his difficulty connecting with others. By taking the time to step into their shoes, I was better able to empathize with the way their minds work. This gave me a fuller understanding of why they behaved as they did, because I could understand what they wanted and what was in their way.

It is also helpful to identify themes in the writing. *Maraschino Red* deals with individuals who are struggling with life dissatisfaction and marital problems, and *Sad, Lonely People* is

concerned with social alienation, neurodivergence, depression, and the struggle to connect with others and build meaningful relationships.

Identifying the **character arc** is another way to develop the character. The character arc is a well-known literary device that is not unique to a specific acting methodology. I was able to track the change in the characters by asking what they are like at the start, and how that is different at the end. Spence starts out belligerently drunk and misbehaving, openly expressing his complaints about life. A significant transition occurs when Barb opens up about her own life dissatisfaction. This is where he stops thinking of himself and truly sees his wife. There is a connection that settles him and renews his commitment to their life together. Wade starts out anxiously trying to connect with a girl at a party, but a significant transition occurs when she rejects his kiss. He then openly expresses his negative self-talk and displays his depression.

Konstantin Stanislavski developed the concept of the **super-objective**, which is the greatest desire of the character that is consistent throughout the play. Professor Andrew Ramcharan discussed a unique approach to the super-objective in his *Performance Styles: Realism* class at SCAD. Instead of just asking what the character wants overall, I used the statement: I need to get ____ in order to have _____. Each blank is filled in with a pressing psychological need that drives the character. With Wade, I used the statement: I need to get connection so that I can have belonging. And with Spence, I used the statement: I need to get pride so that I can have self-worth.

Professor Ramcharan and Professor David Storck both made use of Lee Strasberg's animal exercise in their classes at SCAD. Strasberg tells us:

The specific value of the animal exercise is that it leads toward physical characterization...The actor observes a particular animal to discover and register exactly how the animal moves. He then tries objectively to imitate those movements. He soon perceives that this imitation demands a totally different kind of energy...The actor learns to repeat with his own body the animal's physical energy, to build toward a sensation of the physical life of the animal – the strength and power of the lion, the sleepiness of the cat, the strange way the monkey observes what the human being is doing, and so on. (Strasberg 147–148)

Storck applied the exercise to improv, creating comedy by exaggerating the animal's influence. Ramcharan applied the exercise to drama, creating more believable characters by toning down the animal's influence. This forced me to move away from my own physical habits so that I could fully inhabit the character.

For Wade, I chose to study a **pangolin**. This unusual animal appears to have a hunched over and cute way of moving (though the animal is quite ugly). As I took on its energy, I found that it naturally heightened nerdy behaviors in my body and voice. The hunched over position raised my center of gravity and made me less stable. There is a meekness to the animal that made me turn inward. By embodying the pangolin's energy, my character adopted a nervously shy but cute demeanor.



Fig. 3. A picture of a pangolin. (Conscious Explorer website, <https://conscious-explorer.com/magazine/conserving-pangolin-worlds-most-trafficked-mammal>)

For Spence, I chose to study a gorilla. This massive animal is strong and powerful in its movements. By taking on its energy, I lowered my center of gravity and heightened my masculinity. This led to hulking movements which complimented my drunken state.

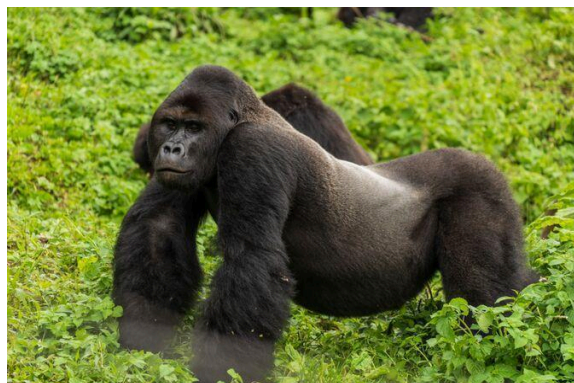


Fig. 4. A picture of a gorilla. (Rewild, <https://www.rewild.org/blog/gracefully-saving-eastern-lowland-gorillas>)

In addition to the animal exercise, I also made use of a character-building exercise I learned in Professor Storck's improvisation class at SCAD. To do this exercise, imagine a string attached to any point on your body that is pulling you in any direction. It may be attached to

your nose and be pulling you forward, or it may be attached to your rear and be pulling you backward. This molds your body into a different shape, transforming the physicality of your character. For Wade, I had a string pulling on my upper back to give me the bad posture of a shy, meek, inward person. This naturally complemented what was occurring with the animal exercise as I adopted the energy of a pangolin. For Spence, I did something a little different and had strings pulling on my ears to create a sense of drunken off-balance. This caused me to rock from side-to-side quite a bit, and it was a natural way to re-create drunken mannerisms. The animal and string exercises were both very helpful in creating clear distinctions between the two separate characters.

Viewpoints was created by Mary Overlie as a tool for dance choreography, and it was later applied to acting performances in theater by Anne Bogart. Overlie broke physical performance down into six fundamental viewpoints, and Bogart expanded it to nine. They were grouped under two categories: time and space. The concept of time consists of tempo, duration, kinesthetic response, and repetition. The concept of space consists of shape, gesture, architecture, spatial relationship, and topography ("Anne Bogart"). In her *Directing Stage Movement* class at UC Irvine, Professor Juliette Carrillo (Head of Graduate Directing) would have students employ at least three different variations of a viewpoint. I applied three variations of tempo to my work by creating moments that move slowly, moderately, or quickly. For Wade, I was able to break up my moderate pace by going slowly when moving in to make a move on Harriet, and quickly after being rejected for a kiss. For Spence, I broke away from a moderate pace by going slowly while entering drunk, and quickly when venting my frustration. These variations in pace helped add interest to the performance so that it didn't become monotonous.

In her book *The Art of Acting*, Stella Adler writes about the importance of justifying the actor's behavior. "When we act, primarily we perform an **action**. Our second objective is creating a reason for the action. This is called justification" (Adler 125). This is relevant to movement because our reasons for our actions will influence the way we move; if we do not properly justify our behavior, our movement may become artificial. Adler goes on to explain the difference between **instant justification** and **inner justification**. An instant justification is a straightforward explanation for your behavior. "Instant justification gives you the immediate reason for what you're doing. It removes the abstract part of acting... Why are you opening the window? To get some fresh air is an example of instant justification" (Adler 126). Inner justifications, on the other hand, are explanations that have to do with our feelings and inner motivations. Adler explains:

Instant justification doesn't affect me inside. Inner justification does. It arouses and moves me. Inner justification is what the actor contributes to the playwright's lines... In a restaurant a man asks a woman if she'd like some sugar. She says, 'No, thank you.' Her answer has great strength because her inner justification is that she has diabetes. (Adler 133)

I found that I had to come up with many justifications throughout my performances because my characters perform so many actions. As Wade, my *instant* justification for approaching Harriet was to have someone to talk to at the party. My *inner* justification for approaching Harriet was that I was lonely and wanted to connect with someone. I also thought she was pretty and wanted to kiss her at midnight. As Spence, my *instant* justification for stealing vodka and Yoo-hoo was so I could continue drinking. My *inner* justification for stealing

vodka and Yoo-hoo was that I needed some excitement in my life and wanted to do something bold and thrilling. By clarifying my justifications, I was adding specificity to my actions so that my acting (and resulting movement) didn't become superficial and fake.

REHEARSAL PROCESS

The rehearsal process is a time to collaboratively explore the play. Each rehearsal provides an opportunity to bring new ideas that will add specificity to the performance. I sought to bring clarity to the text by deepening my understanding of the characters' circumstances and motivations. I recorded detailed notes on our rehearsals to document our progress (see Appendix C). The first three rehearsals were a time for all the actors and the director to read through the plays together and have discussion. On the first day we discussed our general thoughts on the plays and the characters. On the second day we discussed our **objectives**. On the third day we began to break down the **beats**, and we were assigned homework to determine our actions for each beat. On day four we got on our feet and started **blocking** the play one beat at a time. We were given entrances and **marks** to hit, but these choices could change based on how things went. There was freedom to explore movement and try new ideas, following our impulses. The director gave us adjustments to enhance the performance. On the fifth day of rehearsal, we were able to move into the theater space.

As rehearsals progressed, we were able to do more detailed work on developing each moment. We clarified how things were affecting us, and the significance of what was happening. We started to refine the blocking and gestures to address the aesthetics of our movement. For example, I planned how I would pull out two cigarettes, light them, and offer

one to my scene partner. The director made sure we were **cheating out** when needed. We were encouraged to continue working on memorization, but we had not yet reached the deadline to be fully memorized.

My director, Professor Smith, discussed the **tone** of the pieces with me and my scene partners, and we discovered that they were both very comedic even though they dealt with significant issues such as depression and marital problems. A problem we faced was that we were handling it more like a drama, so the director had us do an exercise where we performed it as though we were in a sitcom. We literally had laugh tracks playing as we went through the performance. This helped us discover the silly nature of the characters and find the funny in the dramatic.

One of the other challenges we faced was being loud enough to be heard throughout the space. We were having a private conversation, but we had to be heard on the other side of a medium-sized theater. It can feel unnatural to speak so loudly to a person standing right next to you, but the director had some exercises to help us. One exercise was to imagine that the surrounding party was very loud, and we had to be heard over blasting music. Another exercise was to stand on opposite sides of the room while rehearsing so that we were forced to speak louder to be heard. This helped us to increase volume while maintaining the same intimate energy. The gap between us demanded that we support our voices so that they would carry across the room, but the way we related to one another did not change.

Another common challenge for an actor is to convincingly imagine the surrounding environment if it is not present. I had a nearly empty stage for *Sad, Lonely People*, so I was especially dependent on my imagination to be able to immerse myself in the story. I had to look

past the audience as if I were looking out a window that overlooked New York City. Uta Hagen teaches the actor to see this in their mind by imagining an invisible **fourth wall** between the actor and the audience. This helps to remove the distraction of seeing the audience so that it's easier to stay focused in the scene. When building the wall in your imagination, find real objects to look at so that your eyelines remain consistent. "Whatever object you wish to see must be anchored to something which you can see is really there" (Hagen 107). The director also led the actors in another exercise, which helped us become immersed in the imagined environment: we rehearsed in front of a large window that overlooked other buildings.



Fig. 5. Our window view during our rehearsal exercise. Photo credit: Will Boyd

My director, Professor Smith, stood outside to watch us while listening over the phone. This allowed us to experience our interaction while immersed in a similar environment so that our performances could be informed by it; we could examine how we behaved. This was helpful to me because a lot of those natural behaviors can be lost when performing on a bare stage.

Another difficulty that can come up for me is that I may feel the need to physically express myself with more movements and gestures than I would naturally use in everyday life. Something that is helpful for removing excessive movement is a **grounding exercise** I did with Professor Andrew Borba, Head of Graduate Acting at UC Irvine. Start by pressing hard against a wall until you begin to feel some exertion. Then immediately stand with your feet firmly planted and hands at your side and deliver your lines without moving. The energy generated from pushing against the wall will activate your body and add life to your performance. On the outside you are still, but subtle changes in your body show that you are clearly worked up. This allows you to communicate intensity in your performance without requiring large gestures or pacing around. This principle can be easily recalled with a saying I learned from SCAD Acting Professor John Prosky: “Outside stillness. Inside storm”.

PERFORMANCE

We had three evening performances and one matinee that took place November 1-3, 2024. Opening night went smoothly, and my performance energy was higher with the live audience. Based on feedback I received—and my own criticism—I feel that there was a lot of specificity rooting my performances in truth. My actions felt meaningful and justified—not performed for the sake of the audience.

My friend, Shane (who is a divorced father), felt a powerful connection to my performance in *Maraschino Red*. Shane loves his children, but they often make him angry with their rambunctious energy and poor behavior. Seeing me go through his experience on stage

was something he related to strongly, and it may have been a bit cathartic for him. He texted me a funny GIF of a crying man with the message, "Coming from a dad, that was beautiful."

Sad, Lonely People got a lot of laughs from the audience. *Maraschino Red* got fewer laughs, and I think a contributing factor may be that I had trouble turning my anger into comedy. There were likely missed opportunities for humor, with my delivery perhaps coming across as too dramatic. Actors walk a fine line when making intense emotions funny, with small adjustments making the difference between comedy and drama. I was teetering between coming across as a comically upset parent or an abusive father. I had to make some changes after my first performance because certain physical actions got negative reactions from the audience. For example, there was a moment when I tossed a stuffed animal in the air and it looked like I was throwing it at my wife, so a few people in the audience gasped. I later decided to plop the stuffed animal down on the sofa instead, and the audience no longer reacted negatively. This confirmed for me that small adjustments in my physicality can change the way the audience perceives me.

There was an occasion during *Maraschino Red* when I ran into a snag. During one performance I forgot to set down my lighter and cigarettes, which meant they weren't there for my scene partner to later pick up. I was supposed to stop her from smoking, so we had to improvise our way through that obstacle. We were able to continue without a problem, but it was a big reminder for me to drill my blocking until it becomes second nature. I had a lot of interaction with props, and I wasn't feeling completely solid about my blocking because we made quite a few last-minute changes. Difficulties will inevitably arise, and it's important to stay calm and improvise if needed. There was also an occasion during *Maraschino Red* when I

blanked on a line, and I immediately felt the beginnings of anxious energy rising inside me. But I deliberately took a deep breath to calm myself, and the line came to me shortly. I've often found that moments when a "mistake" is made can add interest and spontaneity if I commit to the moment, my scene partner, and my breath.



Fig. 6. Will Boyd and Kenya Ameera performing in *Maraschino Red*. Photo credit: Paula Josephs



Fig. 7. Will Boyd and Jolene Mafnas performing in *Sad, Lonely People*. Photo credit: Paula Josephs

POST-PRODUCTION

The preparation I used helped me to feel grounded and connected with these distinct characters. Nevertheless, there are still areas needing development as I continue to grow as an artist. I would have liked it if I could have brought more stillness to the work. The movement focus of this project was partly motivated by my tendency to move excessively and non-purposefully. I still had noticeable problems with this as Spence, particularly because his exasperation made me want to flail. For example, there was a lot of fidgeting in my legs while sitting and tossing of my head and arms. Some of this may have been appropriate to a degree, but the keyword is *excessive*.

Lee Strasberg teaches actors to be mindful of tension in their bodies and consciously release it even while on stage. I monitored my body for tension so that I could release it as needed. "Strasberg's relaxation exercise, when mastered, helps the actor identify the tension as it becomes apparent, then release the tension in a manner invisible to the audience" ("Relaxation for Actors"). Strasberg's exercise guides the actor in making mind-body connections so that it's easier to tell the muscles to release. He explains:

We encourage the actor to check each part of his body by moving it and then directing the muscle or nerve to relax. Without the actual movement, the actor's mental command will lead nowhere. The muscular movement aims to connect the brain to the various parts of the body, since later it will have to obey that command on stage without any real motion. (Strasberg 127)

This training is intended to transfer well to the stage, and I find that it does help me to identify and release tension. There is always room for improvement, and I will need to continue to be

mindful of my tension and fidgeting so that I can correct these problems as they occur.

Watching my performance on video has been great feedback to help me pinpoint my problem areas.

In conclusion, the techniques I explored during this project were all very helpful with creating distinct, authentic characters. The process and results reinforced that analytical preparation should never be overlooked, and physicality should evolve from a truthful inner reality. As I move toward the completion of my MFA in Acting at SCAD, I will take with me the wisdom and lessons learned from my training. I look forward to the practice of these techniques in the future as I continue to integrate them in each performance and make them my own.

GLOSSARY

Action: An actor should always be enacting something (Stanislavski 38) and should acquire a vocabulary of action verbs (Adler 114).

Animal Exercise: Lee Strasberg's Animal Exercise helps actors explore character traits by observing and imitating animal movements and behaviors ("The Animal Exercise").

Beat: Any individual instance of change within a scene. Any time the mood or tone of a scene shifts—or the characters react to something that prompts them to alter their trajectory—that's a beat (Thomas).

Blocking: The movement of the performance. Where you walk, sit, cross the stage, enter, exit, etc. A director will usually 'block' a scene early in the rehearsal process. Blocking can range from being very general (enter here, exit there) or very specific (pick the pen up on this line, sit on the sofa at this line, etc.) ("Acting Terminology 101").

Character Arc: The change your character goes through in your story. Who they are at the beginning of your narrative versus who they are at the end. ("What is a")

Cheat Out: The actor's adjustment of body position away from what might be natural to accommodate the camera or audience ("Acting Terminology 101").

Dramaturgy: Literary research and textual analysis that gives context to a production and ensures its quality and accuracy ("Dramaturg Roles Explained").

Fourth Wall: A convention that imagines a wall existing between actors and their audience, so performers act as if the audience is not there ("Fourth Wall").

Grounding Exercise: Exercises that help actors connect with their physical body, release tension, and calm the nervous system so that they can be present and emotionally available (Cross).

Inner Justification: A reason for your action that relates to your inner motivations, allowing for deeper emotional resonance (“Art of Acting”).

Instant Justification: A reason for your action that provides immediate explanation without abstraction (“Art of Acting”).

Mark: A precise location where an actor is supposed to move to (Coelius).

Objective: What the character wants, or what the character's goal is (Horwitz).

Pangolin: The pangolin is a shy and solitary mammal covered from head to toe in scales, known as “scaly anteaters”, for their appearance and diet (“Pangolins”).

Super-Objective: Stanislavsky developed the concept of the super-objective that would carry the ‘through line of action’ by converging the individual objectives, thoughts, feelings, and actions of an actor (Stanislavski 293) (“Acting Terminology 101”).

Tone: How the characters interact, talk to each other, and react to the conflicts thrown at them (Miyamoto).

Uta Hagen's Nine Questions: Uta Hagen recommended nine questions for an actor's preparation: Who am I? What time is it? Where am I? What surrounds me? What are the given circumstances? What is my relationship? What do I want? What is in my way? What do I do to get what I want? (“Uta Hagen's Nine”)

Viewpoints: The Viewpoints method breaks down performance into nine fundamental elements, encouraging actors and directors to explore movement, time, and space as integral components of performance (“Anne Bogart”).

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A

Spence Character Analysis

1. Who am I?

Spence. 39 years old. Married with a three-year-old child. Working in a corporate 8-5 environment.

2. Where am I?

I'm just getting home. We live in a suburban neighborhood. It's safe, but boring. The environment is comfortable. There are scattered child toys. My wife is up waiting for me.

3. What time is it?

Friday night, 10:30 PM. Comfortable weather in Fall. We are usually in bed by 10 PM.

4. Where have I just come from?

I got out of work at 5 PM. I went to a restaurant bar for happy hour with my boss, Kent. We then went to a billiard and continued drinking. I then left, even though he wanted to stay out. I then stopped at a small convenience store and stole some vodka and YooHoo.

5. What do I want from the other characters in the scene? (My objective)

I want to enlighten my wife so that she will understand what I'm going through.

6. Why do I want it?

I'm dissatisfied with my life as it is. I want to get back some of the excitement we used to have. I want her to get on board with me to make changes. I need to get pride so that I can have self-worth.

7. Why do I want it now?

I just suddenly realized the state of our lives together. My lame boss is doing exciting things while my life is boring. I want to recover the good old days.

8. What will happen if I don't get it now?

I'll be upset with the direction of my life. I'll get depressed and angry. I may leave my wife or cheat on her and destroy our family. She may leave me. I may become an alcoholic.

9. What must I overcome? (my obstacle)

She's upset that I stayed out without letting her know where I am. She's upset that I'm drunk. She's making light of my concerns.

10. How will I get what I want? (the tactics I will use to get what I want)

Tease. Awaken. Entertain. Enlighten. Excite. Correct. Beckon. Comfort.

11. What is my status?

My status is lower because I'm getting chewed out for my bad behavior.

12. What is my point of view?

There are people who live life well, and people who don't live life well. There are people with status and no status. I want to be a person living life well with status, but I realize I've lost these things.

13) What I say about myself:

I only quit smoking in front of my wife. (I pretended to cooperate with my wife to appease her.)

I'm trying to get drunk.

I'm disappointed that I listen to lame music.

I committed petty theft.

I lost my mind.

I'm a Muppet.

I'm scared of losing my possessions.

I'm a father and husband.

I don't like my boss.

My life is on the path of least resistance.

I have no good stories to share.

I need more excitement in my life.

I don't have enough intimacy, excitement, or fun with my wife like we used to.

I'm in the middle of everything and feel inconsequential.

What other characters say about me:

I'm smoking even though I said I quit.

I appear drunk.

I lost my mind.

I hate my boss.

I need to stay on point in conversation.

I probably gossip about my wife.

My complaints are silly.

I need to pay attention to my family.

I was never very interesting, and I wasn't concerned about it.

I'm pining for the past and deluded into thinking I was better than I was.

I have a silly sense of rebellion.

14. Research on the Life of the Playwright and write how his/her life informs the play.

Steven Simoncic is an educated writer with an MFA in Fiction. His plays have been produced in several theaters and been finalists in several play festivals (including his play *Maraschino Red*). Many of his plays feature a theme of people trying to make changes in their lives. Second City has produced his plays, indicating that he has a respectable comedy background. The comedy in *Maraschino Red* should not be overlooked.

According to New Play Exchange, "Steven Simoncic's past theatrical productions include Heat Wave, Black Coffee, Day Care, The Space Behind Your Heart, A Moderate Threat, Something Blue, and Discovery Channel. His plays have received productions, readings and workshops at The Goodman Theatre, Victory Gardens Theatre, The Second City, Pegasus Players, The Baruch Center for the Performing Arts, Stageplays Theatre New York, and The Soho Theatre in London."

15. How do you as the actor personally identify with the character you have been assigned?

I understand what it's like to feel like I've fallen from my peak when I was younger.

I understand what it feels like to not want to be burdened with responsibility.

I understand what it feels like to want more excitement and fun in life.

I understand what it feels like to feel like I need to change my life's direction.

I understand the thrill that can come from mischief.

I understand wanting more intimacy and connection in a relationship.

I understand wanting to be significant, but feeling insignificant.

I understand what it's like to be very drunk.

I don't particularly need any special work to connect with the character.

16. Describe how your character's morning began and how you came to the moment where your scene begins.

Last night I went to bed at 10 PM, and I got up at 6 AM. I went through my standard morning routine on my way to work at 8 AM. I had minimal interaction with my wife while she cared for our three year-old child. I went to work in a corporate environment and plugged away in a cubicle all day. I felt drained by the monotony of the work. My lame boss invited me to go out with him afterward (Friday night), and I appeased him to keep a good relationship with him, and to take the opportunity to drink. He then started sharing some sexual stories about him and his wife that reinforced how lame my own life has become. (My lame boss is living with more excitement and fun than me.) I decided to continue drinking with him late into the night, past my normal bedtime. We went out to a billiard after the restaurant bar for happy hour. As I got drunker, my sense of rebellion grew in an effort to prove that I don't have to be lame. I decided to go home, but first I stopped to steal vodka and YooHoo at a convenience store for the thrill of it, and to continue my adventure for the evening. I then arrived at home.

APPENDIX B

Wade Character Analysis

1. Who am I?

Wade. 32 years old. I work in accounting in a corporate 8-5 environment.

2. Where am I?

I'm at a work party for New Year's Eve. We are in a fancy New York City apartment overlooking Times Square.

3. What time is it?

11:53 PM. New Year's Eve. Friday night.

4. Where have I just come from?

Wandering around the party trying to talk to people.

5. What do I want from the other characters in the scene? (My objective)

I need to attract her so that she will like me.

6. Why do I want it?

I need to get connection so that I can have belonging.

7. Why do I want it now?

New Year's Eve is a night when you're expected to kiss someone at midnight. I'm single and getting older, but not having any success.

8. What will happen if I don't get it now?

It will reaffirm my failure in relationships and spark a depressive episode.

9. What must I overcome? (my obstacle)

She doesn't seem very interested. I struggle with my conversational skills.

10. How will I get what I want? (the tactics I will use to get what I want)

Engage her. Entice her. Tickle her. Interest her. Impress her. Welcome her. Accommodate her.

11. What is my status?

I have the lower status. I am approaching her and trying to get her to like me.

12. What is my point of view?

Not many good things will happen in my life.

13) What I say about myself:

I'm looking for new friends.

I only had a few friends and they all moved away.

I'm not drinking on New Year's Eve.

I'd like to find someone to kiss.

I wish I could just marry anyone.

My mom left my dad and I don't want to date someone like her.

I didn't expect to find anyone to kiss.

I don't expect anything good to happen to me.

Hope for something good to happen is the only thing that keeps me going.

I'm on medication for depression, but it doesn't help me much.

I can't be picky about choosing friends.

I'm not better than most people.

What other characters say about me:

I have a hangup with my mom issues.

I said I don't have any friends.

I should resign myself to bachelorhood.

I should be on medication for my psychological well-being.

I'm a bit better than most people.

14. Research on the Life of the Playwright and write how his/her life informs the play.

Seth McNeill is a neurodivergent playwright from conservative areas. He often writes about isolation and social alienation, as is evident in this play. Wade is a character who struggles to relate to the people around him, causing him loneliness and depression. His bio also talks about themes of repressed generational trauma in his writings, whiteness, and dark comedy. This play should not miss the comedy amidst the suffering.

15. How do you as the actor personally identify with the character you have been assigned?

I understand what it's like to have friends move away.

I understand what it's like to have trouble meeting new people and making friends.

I understand what it's like to struggle with making conversation.

I understand what it's like to be a single adult.

I understand what it's like to be rejected.

I understand what it's like to hang onto hope.

I understand what it's like to have negative self-talk.

I understand what it's like to not drink at a party.

I had no trouble identifying with this character. I just heightened the parts of myself that I usually suppress and hide.

16. Describe how your character's morning began and how you came to the moment where your scene begins.

I took the day off from work. I prepared my outfit. I prepared and ate my meals alone. I stayed in my small New York City one-bedroom apartment alone. I played solo video games and

watched shows. I showed up to the party alone. I wandered around having short conversations with various people. I'm now hanging out alone by the window, feeling left out and insecure.

APPENDIX C

Rehearsal Journal

Rehearsal 1

Read through

Discussion – thoughts on characters

Rehearsal 2

Read through

Discussion – thoughts on objectives

Rehearsal 3

Read through

Discussion

Break down beats

Correct mispronunciations

Assign actions homework

Rehearsal 4

Blocking beat by beat.

Measurements of the stage taped down on the floor.

Adjustments to make things land better.

Reminder to start getting off-book.

Rehearsal 5

Now moved into the theater space.

We began to do more detailed work with each moment while walking through the script.

We clarified how things were affecting us, and the significance of the moment.

We started to refine the blocking and gestures, making decisions about how each moment would be performed.

The director made sure we were cheating out at the right moments.

We were encouraged to go farther with memorization.

Common notes from the director:

Can you say the line like you're discovering it?

How are you affected by what they said?

10/3

Maraschino Red. Today we talked about the overall tone of the piece. It is rooted in truthful drama, but it is also a comedy. The director asked us to find the lighthearted silly aspects of the characters. I ended up finding more playfulness as a loud drunk, while avoiding going too over the top with drunkenness. It did make the overall performance become more fun and engaging.

We did detail work with each moment, making decisions on movements and blocking that could enhance the performance, as well as reactions that we have to each other.

10/8

Maraschino Red

We were challenged to do the scene off book, calling for lines as needed.

Given the note to respond more to her confession at the end.

We searched for the comedy of the piece by adding a laugh track to funny parts to get the pace and feel of a sitcom.

Sitcoms are grounded in reality, but with heightened reality. They are bigger.

My arc has been heightened from self-focused to compassionate. This helps to heighten the connection we share at the end.

I've experimented with the idea of using a gorilla for my character, but need to go deeper with the exploration. I'm still not sure whether it's the right animal.

The director continued to give more ideas for physical things to do that will enhance the script with comedy, such as turning my head to read imaginary CD discs, then having trouble with my balance when I come upright.

10/10

Sad, Lonely People

We are now off book. We have the stage managers on-book to note accuracy and give lines as needed.

We ran an exercise by doing the play in front of an actual window to get the feel of looking out at the city.

I experimented with moving as a pangolin before rehearsal, and integrated that into my character. My voice instinctively changed with the change in my mannerisms.

I became much more nerdy/dorky in my behaviors and voice.

My arc has been much more heightened from hopeful to hopeless. This also allows the special moment between us at the end to shine in the midst of my depression.

I was given a note to call her back when she starts yelling at a guy, then wave apologetically to him. It's a funny idea that enhances the script.

10/14

Maraschino Red

Today we ran through the scene and stopped to make adjustments. I brought much more playfulness to the character today, which the director wants, and my partner was able to play off of my playfulness. We explored details in blocking, and made adjustments to improve the scene. We added an extra moment when I can get up when I am wrestling with my frustration. When I expressed some confusion about blocking in a certain area, we adjusted it so that I stayed in place instead of moving in the way that felt awkward to me.

10/17

Yesterday we did a run-through for a designer run. Today I got feedback for *Sad, Lonely People*. The main note was that volume is being lost, and to watch consonants so that diction is clear.

The director let us in some exercises to get us speaking louder. We did the scene from opposite sides of the room, maintaining the same intimacy when performing next to each other. We then performed the scene next to each other with the audience on the other side of the room, with them telling us if we couldn't be heard. The only trouble was when a loud car drove by and we couldn't be heard. He also gave us the note to speak as if we are in a loud room and we need to be heard over the noise.

We also had an impromptu exercise based on Jolene playfully balancing the cup on her head. We ran the whole scene with the cups on our heads, which brought out a lot of silliness. It also forced us to remain very still. During this time, I focused on staying grounded. I have a habit of allowing my weight to move forward over my toes, and I have to keep bending my knees and pulling my weight back to the center of my arches.

For *Maraschino Red*, I find that I am able to re-create the sensation of drunkenness by playing with my balance. Based on the string exercise, I can imagine a string pulling me from side to side, upsetting my balance. I also find it helpful to have a soft focus, slightly glazing the eyes. Now that I've gone over the animal exercise and string exercise for both plays, I need to take some time to go over viewpoints.

10/27

I returned to rehearsal after taking a week off due to having Covid and the flu. It's best not to spread germs and get the whole show sick. Plus we were already in pretty good shape. Now that I'm returning, we are in tech and tonight we did a full dress run through. There are some changes that I have to adjust to in the set and props. When I exit in *Maraschino Red*, there is a significant height difference now that I'll be elevated above the couch, so it won't be as easy to casually brush my hand across her shoulder. We adjusted by having her reach up her hand so that I can casually grab that and it will be easily seen by the audience. There is also a small collection of toys set up that my child has been playing with. I casually kicked it during a moment of frustration, which spoke volumes about my character and got a bit of a laugh from the audience.

I've also been observing TV shows for the way actors stand in place, and I've been finding examples of people standing grounded with their hands at their sides, completely still.

10/28

I experimented with kicking the toys at different times when I felt motivated, and there was a much better moment that felt more motivated by frustration towards the child. It's the moment when I say "our kid's a biter?" It got a much bigger laugh.

There is a moment when I get up from the couch for a monologue, and I have to explore in my dialogue what is motivating me to get up. Every action we do must have a motivation. Stella Adler talks about justifying our actions with an inner and instant justification.

Justification, Inner

A personal, inner-motivated reason for why you do an action. For example, you open the window because stuffy rooms make you feel hot and uncomfortable.

Justification, Instant

A straightforward reason for why you do an action. It has to do with what is external and does not involve feelings. For example, you open the window to get some fresh air.

My instant justification for getting up is to better express my frustration and motion to the surrounding neighborhood I am speaking of. My inner justification is to put some distance between me and my wife as my frustration grows.

Today we also went over the timing of all the things I have to do at the start of *Maraschino Red*, and where I will carry all my props. We decided to get me a briefcase that I can set down when I walk in. I was asked to put the lighter and cigarettes in my pockets. I will unload the drinks and cigarette and lighter all at the same time as I'm sitting down. I will interact with physical CDs on the table instead of going to the fourth wall to save myself time so that I can get to pouring my drink right away. I worked on choreographing these moments so that they flow easily and naturally.

In *Sad, Lonely People* I was given a party blower whistle for the countdown. I only had one tonight, but ideally I will be carrying two so that I will have one for myself and one to offer to someone else. I would have gotten the second in hope of finding someone to celebrate with.

10/30

The director gave the note to everyone in general that we need to be louder. We also got the note to be faster in *Sad, Lonely People*. We also adjusted when I will turn on my sweater lights; I will turn them on just as we shout Happy New Year at midnight.

11/1

Opening night. Things went smoothly. The energy was higher. We got a lot of laughs on *Sad, Lonely People*. *Maraschino Red* got reactions, but also some negative reactions to my poor behavior. It made me think about ways to try to make the character more likable. There was a moment when I tossed a stuffed animal out of frustration, and it looked like I tossed it at my wife. This got a negative reaction from the audience that I wasn't anticipating getting there. I'm thinking I'll just shake the stuffed animal and plop it on the couch instead of tossing it in the air. There's also a moment when I kick my child's toys after getting frustrated that he bit a kid, and I need to try to do it in a funny way rather than an angry way. Perhaps more of a tap rather than a kick.

1/7

Seeing a video of my performance, I was surprised by the way my drunken movements looked like a penguin! I was playing around with stumbling around unbalanced, and it turned out looking like a waddle. Good note to either record yourself or look at your performance in a mirror!

APPENDIX D

Performance Video Link

A video of the performances can be found at: https://youtu.be/SrY_4lKAgsI.

APPENDIX E

Headshot and Résumé



Fig. 1. Headshot of Will Boyd.
Photo credit: Adam Arnali

WILL R. BOYD

Height: 5'11"
Weight: 145
Hair: Brown
Eyes: Blue

805-895-7775
willrboyd@gmail.com
willrboyd.com

DPM Talent Agency
Daniel Mulheran
818-205-9521

FILM (PARTIAL LIST)

SKELETON CREW (MFA SHORT)
TO LIFT THE BURDEN (MFA SHORT)
FINGER BANG (MFA SHORT)
ANXIETY (MFA SHORT)
S.G. JACKSON'S AMBITION
YOU OWE ME, JAMES
FINDING CHRISTMAS
THE FRAMING OF FREDERICK SEIN
SHADES OF GREEN
CROSSROADS OF LIFE
DUDE!
THE PINK SLIP
CONTROL
BREWING DEMONS

LEAD / ASH
LEAD / FATHER
LEAD / CHARLIE
LEAD / JOHN
LEAD / S.G. JACKSON
LEAD / WILMAR KORTH
LEAD / PROF. STEVEN VEGA
LEAD / FREDERICK SEIN
LEAD / ADONIS TRACE
LEAD / ROB BECKETT
LEAD / DICK
LEAD / STEPHEN
LEAD / CHRIS
LEAD / ONYX

ESTEBAN LARACH-dir
ESTEBAN LARACH-prod
ESTEBAN LARACH-prod
ZACHARY JONES-dir
JOHN AIDEN WHITE-dir
JOHN AIDEN WHITE-dir
JOHN FUENTES-dir
CHRISTOPHER RICE-dir
SOPHIE RITTENHOUSE-dir
CAMERON KOLEGA-dir
AIDAN THOMAS-dir
JACK BROOKS-dir
RAYMIE HENDRY-dir
ALEX BAZIL-dir

TELEVISION

SUITE DREAMS
WESTERN DISPATCH (PILOT)
PEOPLE MAGAZINE INVESTIGATES

SERIES REGULAR / MARTIN SMITH
SERIES REGULAR / WALT III
CO-STAR / PARAMEDIC

MICHAEL GRIMES-prod
SIMON KURCISKI-prod
RADLEY STUDIOS

THEATER

MARASCHINO RED
SAD, LONELY PEOPLE
PRETENDERS
DANCING AT LUGHNASA
THE INFORMANT
WORKING
A SLEIGH CALLED IMPROV

LEAD / SPENCE
LEAD / WADE
LEAD / HENRY
SUPPORTING / JACK
SUPPORTING / PATRICK DONAGHUE
ENSEMBLE SINGER/DANCER
ENSEMBLE IMPROVISER

SCAD, SCOTT ALAN SMITH-dir
SCAD, SCOTT ALAN SMITH-dir
THIRD ACT
SCAD, BRIAN MULLIGAN-dir
UC IRVINE, LUCAS J. NELSON-dir
MOORPARK COLLEGE
MOORPARK COLLEGE

TRAINING (PARTIAL LIST)

SCAD, MFA ACTING CANDIDATE (2025)
UCLA, ACTING FOR THE CAMERA PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATE
UCI, B.A. DRAMA, ACTING AND DIRECTING

ACTING: JOAN MCMURTREY (SHAKESPEARE, AUDITIONS), ANDREW RAMCHARAN, ANDREW WOOD, ANDREW BORBA, ELIZABETH SAMPSON, JOHN LOPRIENO (CLASSICAL), TAYLOR NICHOLS
ON-CAMERA: JOHN PROSKY (MEISNER, COMEDY), MEGAN MCNULTY (WARNER LAUGHLIN), KATIE A. KEANE (COMEDY), ANDREA BENDEWALD (COMEDY), TIMOTHY DAVIS REED (METHOD)
IMPROV: DAVID STORCK (UCB), GUY STEVENSON (GROUNDLINGS), JULIAN GANT (GROUNDLINGS)
VOICE: JENNEFER MORRIS (FITZMAURICE), ELIZABETH SAMPSON, AL MILLER
VOICEOVER: CYNTHIA BASSHAM, RICHARD HORVITZ (ANIM.), ROBIN ARMSTRONG (COMM.)
COMMERCIAL: GEORGE KETSIOS, JUDY KAIN
SINGING: MARILYN ANDERSON, JAMES STEMEN, NOREEN SMITH

SPECIAL SKILLS

PARAMEDIC/EMT, MEDICAL TERMINOLOGY, WORKS WELL WITH KIDS, ROLL COIN BETWEEN FINGERS, LEARNING ACCENTS (IRISH, BRITISH, NY), GUITAR, BARITONE SINGER WITH BELT, HANDGUNS, RIFLES, VALID PASSPORT, VALID DRIVER/MOTORCYCLE LICENSE, STICK SHIFT

Fig. 2. Résumé for Will Boyd

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