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Main Line

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MAIN LINE

A Thesis

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Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and
Mechanical College
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Masters of Fine Arts

in
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Abstract

Main Line was developed as a 20-minute solo performance piece by the influence of my graduate training at Louisiana State University's M.F.A. acting program. The writing and the performance of this project served as a graduation requirement as well professional experience and exploration of my personal aesthetics of storytelling, actors craft, production design, and independent theatre making. This thesis acts like a guide to my process of devising theatre. I was inspired and determined to produce work that was meaningful, political, and entertaining. Main Line explores the narrative of black experiences within a New Orleans culture that centers the movement of Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, The Jazz Funeral, Mardi Gras Indians, and Benevolent Societies. Chapter One explores narratives and key historical references that influenced my research and development process, and documents my rehearsal period. Chapter Two includes my working drafts and performance script; I will also analyze the shortcomings of the working draft and the constructive changes I made in the performance script. In Chapter Three, I will outline the performance process and include post-performance feedback from my peers, faculty, and the wider community. Finally, I will conclude with my reflections on solo performance, community theatre, and possibilities for my future development of the piece.

Introduction

As the culmination of my graduate acting training at Louisiana State University, I researched, wrote, and performed a 20-minute solo play. This paper will be a detailed analysis of my process of devising a theatrical performance. The play, *Main Line*, is an ode to life and death, as well as an unapologetic celebration of both harmony and dissonance. This thesis also pays homage to my Afro American identity. The research and development of this piece aims to preserve the indigenous cultural heritage of New Orleans that is endangered in a time of rapid globalization and change.

I am a native of New Orleans, a historical city whose cultural influence centers the American enterprise. I feel a deep pull to understand my ancestors' experiences. I am curious about the experience of early-American descendants from the West African enslavement, about black socialization in the Reconstruction Era, and about black emergence in the 21st century. I explore this fraught history in my solo piece. Set in a funeral home, the protagonist, Willie, attempts to pay tribute to his lost friend Mr. Twostep Johnny, a beloved New Orleans jazz musician. But when Hurricane Katrina descends, Willie finds himself in the eye of the storm; he is confronted by the past and must reckon with the future.

The origin of my thesis topic was my fascination with Benevolent Societies. The tragic narratives of enslaved Africans in the late 1700s led to the forming of mutual aid organizations, that were dedicated to help free and enslaved Africans cope with hardships like illness and proper burial rituals. These groups became a space for education, support, and connection with ancestral practices. Eventually an unexpected harmony developed within the group. What began as a group's coping device eventually led to legitimate historical landmarks. Some examples are: The New

Orleans Jazz Funeral, Second Lines and Parades, and the Wild Mardi Gras Indians. These remarkable thematic spectacles have become a part of the New Orleans that we know and love today.

My devised solo performance explores such black experiences in New Orleans. In this paper, I'll document the process of developing my play from its development through post-performance reflection. Chapter One explores narratives and key historical references that influenced my research and development process, and documents my rehearsal period. Chapter Two includes my working drafts and performance script; I will also analyze the shortcomings of the working draft and the constructive changes I made in the performance script. In Chapter Three, I will outline the performance process and include post-performance feedback from my peers, faculty, and the wider community. Finally, I will conclude with my reflections on solo performance, community theatre, and possibilities for my future development of the piece.

Chapter 1: A Somber March Home: The Impulse

This section explores the research and development phase of creating a solo play called *Main Line*. This chapter defines the nature of my theatrical process.

Until now, I had only worked on existing plays in collaboration with a team of other artists. I realized that working on this solo devised performance was going to be a challenge. I've never experimented with theatre that would wholly represent my own artistic aesthetic. I started by brainstorming meaningful themes about which I'd like to write. What kept coming up were lingering questions of identity that desperately needed to be answered. I returned home to New Orleans and conducted several informal conversations with members of my family. It was especially helpful to speak to my Grandmother Genovia. Born in 1939, she recalls her native roots as much as her memory allows. Genovia briefly recalls the 1960s when she was in her twenties. A faint smile began to appear as she remembers the birth her first child, Lisa. She then recalls the dissonance of the Civil Rights Movement:

Genovia says the 1960s were tough and full of highs and lows. She experienced injustice firsthand, while also being part of an inspiring social movement that was propelling of change and unity around the world. She also told a short story of her first attempt at driving. "I was shaking in my boots," she laughs. "Uncle Ned took me to City Park and had me get behind the wheel. I couldn't get anything right". Her daughter, Lisa, had to be a few months old and "she was in the back seat," which made Genovia even more nervous. She laughs and cries while describing her inability to maneuver the car's clutch. "I ran over curbs, and almost hit a tree. Uncle Ned was losing patience, and it was getting dark out." Suddenly all laughter subsides as "a cop showed up," and Genovia dramatically pauses at the height of the story (G, Pepp).

I could tell that any tragic memories had long been replaced, but I was still completely enamored by the theatricality of Genovia's storytelling. That moment reminded me of a basic model for "epic theatre", as seen in Bertolt Brecht's *The Street Scene*. I first learned about Brecht in a Script Analysis course at Louisiana State University, instructed by Dr. John Fletcher. Bertolt Brecht was

a German poet, playwright, and theatre director in the early 20th Century. His version of “epic theatre” makes use of a natural incident that could be seen on any street corner: an eyewitness demonstrating to a collection of people how a traffic accident took place (Fletcher, “Brecht”). John Willett's translation of Bertolt Brecht's basic model invites us to consider the demonstrator as not an artistic one, but whose powers of transformation go unnoticed (Brecht 2). In Genovia's case, she is the demonstrator, and need not imitate every aspect of her character's behavior, but only so much as gives the audience a clear picture.

Then, Genovia, like an eyewitness, continues her story, “A police officer,” she says. “pulled up next to us and it startled me to death.” She moves past the details of the event but she ends her story by saying she never got behind the wheel of a car again. I have always wondered why but never bothered to ask. I became even curious to know what she was like as a child and who her parents were. It takes a while as she stumbles to find a name. “Chitimacha, Chitimacha,” comes rushing out. Her mother was from that Native American tribe. Although she's never able to conjure the full tale, she shares that her father was of Creole, African, and French heritage.

It became clear that my family's identity had long been dismantled. I attempted to fill the gaps in the family history by researching culture and events of the period. During this historical research, thematic impulses for my play began to arise. I became fascinated by the effects of time and by my grandmother's approach to storytelling. I began to draft a plot that featured her name as a main character. I was unclear where the writing would go, but I knew that time and its effects could be a powerful theme in the play.

I was also inspired to observe other storytellers in New Orleans. I began to immerse myself more into the action of the city from which my family originates. I made frequent visits on the weekends and holidays, sitting in coffee shops on Bourbon Street and the backyard stoops of the

lower Ninth Ward. I meandered through jazz bars on Frenchmen street, danced down Tchoupitoulas Street like it was the 1970's, and visited late night holes-in-the-wall along the mighty Mississippi River. Yet, there was still something inside of me radiating outwards. The dark matter of New Orleans' ancient tales seeped through the pores of my nervous skin. I felt exposed like the mighty Mississippi River under the moon's gaze.

Mardi Gras was just around the corner and it was the spectacle for which I'd been waiting. Crowds of people quickly began to fill the streets in anticipation of the parades. Neighborhoods began to transform into arenas for street performance. A flood of memories stunned me. I had been to every Mardi Gras since I was born until Hurricane Katrina happened when I was fifteen. Since moving out of state for college, it had been at least five years since I had partaken in the event. I missed it so much. My recalling of these distant Mardi Gras memories began to make me feel whole again.

The spectacle of the season had always been a family affair. I interviewed my aunt, who shared this memory:

Every year, when Zulu would roll around, your maw-maw [Genovia] would take all her kids to St. Charles and Felicity to see the marching bands and beautiful floats. Well this year, the two were acting out so bad, fighting each other and just doing things they weren't supposed to, most of it was annoying the hell of me, your aunt Judy and Vernisha. When Mardi Gras came, we had this idea to play a little trick on them. Once we were out there, Zulu started to roll and as they came barreling down St. Charles we grabbed your mom and uncle and tossed them around our necks, they didn't think nothing of it, other than the fact of catching some Mardi Gras beads. The two began to kick, scream, and cry as the parade got closer. When the King of Zulu finally approached us, we began to tell the babies that he was there to take them away from home after misbehaving (L. Pepp).

Lisa was fully alive reenacting this tale and I found myself inside of the story. I responded to its images and imagined my mom's fear of the intimidating mystical warriors. Zulu carried spears or daggers and had wild, barbaric hairstyles.

Lisa's energy began to shift. She took a beat, searching for a way to apologize for Hurricane Katrina's demise. "I used to have a ton of family videos of your mother growing up." I recall the Mardi Gras video from when I was a newborn and my mother was holding me in her arms. Lisa replies, "Yep, that was your first Mardi Gras and had to be Katherine's last." My mom died in 1992, just two years after I was born; there's not much really said about her. I suppose it is easier to allow these kinds of memories to fade away. I noticed a pattern; every time my grandmother or Lisa told a story about the family, it was filled with harmony that soon led to dissonance. Sometimes it took the energy out of her and other times the details of certain events had just gone missing. Maybe this is a family coping device that we each inherit.

As I returned to my first Mardi Gras parade in years, my adolescent experiences of Zulu were wiped away. It was time for me to grow up. I had never questioned these cultural spectacles or the nature of an all-black social club. With a newfound curiosity, I went to second lines where Mardi Gras Indians chanted and raved. I saw jazz bands and the hundreds of people, parading behind and dancing to their every tune. I was suddenly clear; I had finally found myself in the dead center of the story I wanted to tell.

1.1 Zulu & the West African Influence: The Research

Mardi Gras has been a ritual for centuries and its origins trace back to Medieval Europe, according to *History.com*:

The holiday stems from the Catholic Church and is a celebration before Lent, where merrymakers binge on all the meat, eggs, and cheese that were left in their households. Thus, Mardi Gras translates to Fat Tuesday. Many historians believe that the first American parade took place on March 3rd, in 1699. Rex formed in 1872 and is one of the oldest krewes in New Orleans; a krewe is any group or organization of revelers to band together to host a Mardi Gras ball, or ride on a parade float (Mardi Gras).

As krewes grew throughout the city, more groups developed social platforms, regulations for parades, and the accompanying spectacles. Since early societies were exclusively male and white, women and blacks formed their own groups. One such group, the Zulu Social Aid and Pleasure Club, was formed in 1909.

There are several theories about the origin of this group. One is that in early in 1909, a group of laborers who had organized a club named “The Tramps,” went to the Pythian Theater to see a musical comedy performed by the Smart Set. The comedy included a skit entitled, “There Never Was and Never Will Be a King Like Me,” about the Zulu Tribe. According to one legend, that is how Zulu began. Years of extensive research by Zulu’s historian staff seem to indicate that Zulu’s beginning was much more complicated than that. The earliest signs of the organization were that most these members belonged to a Benevolent Aid Society. Benevolent Societies were the first forms of insurance in the Black community where, for modest dues, members received financial help when sick or when burying deceased members (Zulu).

1.2 Social Pleasure: The Origins of the Club

Traced back to the 19th century, these groups were formed from benevolent societies. Social Aid and Pleasure clubs provided health care and burial services for their parading members. As I began to structure my story, it was important that I speak directly with members of these traditions. I reached out to Ronald W. Lewis, the Director of House of Dance and Feathers, a museum in Mr. Lewis' home in the Lower Ninth-Ward that was restored after Hurricane Katrina. I spent all day with him, recording our conversation and the contents of the Museum. He supplied me with historical data and shared home videos of his own Social Aid and Pleasure Club, The Big Nine. Ronald Lewis has partnered with the Neighborhood Story Project, so his museum and its history can now be viewed worldwide. I purchased a copy for myself and was an invaluable resource in

developing my solo performance. Below is some historical background from the Museum's website on *Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, Parades, and Second Lines*.

Parades

All Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs represent their local neighborhood and the parades celebrate their organization. The parades invite street participants to dance and sing and celebrate the group's establishment. By this, these social clubs invite outsiders to venture through the cracks and backroads of their neighborhoods.

Second Line

Second lines are the event of people joining together in a safe space from all walks of life. It's a combination of shared dance, music and chanting, these second lines are led by a jazz band.

Since Mr. Lewis' museum focuses on preserving this history and culture, he was able to speak authoritatively about the group's historical roots. However, in New Orleans today, Social Aids and Pleasure Clubs are a fragment of what the group's initial mission and focus were. Therefore, I reached out to the Tremé Sidewalk Steppers in-order to learn more about what the culture is like today. I had the opportunity to interview Mr. Hollister Williams, (HW) the current reigning King of 2017. I proceeded with the following questions:

MP: What type of fraternal societies and neighborhood organizations are in the community today?

HW: *New Orleans has several Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs. Many of the original groups, before Hurricane Katrina have been outsourced with several members still scattered across the country. But some of the main popular ones alike the Tremé Sidewalk Steppers and The Lady Bug Jumpers are still parading strong.*

MP: How are Social Aids and Pleasure Clubs supported today?

HW: *Many of members are business owners. We often hold banquets and affairs to raise money for the organization.*

MP: Do you own any businesses?

HW: *I own a Bed & Breakfast suite called A Taste of New Orleans.*

MP: Wow, what an amazing transition! By the end of the Civil War, blacks did not have proper access to life insurance, and now here you are with a black owned business. Are the obligations of these pleasure clubs still dedicated to the neighborhoods around them today? Or has the turn of the 21st Century altered such organizations like the Tremé Sidewalk Steppers?

HW: *Of course, the needs of the communities have changed since then. But it's not too far a stretch to imagine that there are still African Americans in neglect, and who can fortunately use the aid of our pleasure club. But yes, more people today have life insurance, but every so often the organization would provide service for an unfortunate community member. What we tend to do more of these days are community outreach projects. We supply children with proper school uniforms, supplies, and meals. We always do a Thanksgiving meal for the homeless, and Christmas toy giveaways.*

MP: How were you introduced to this type of culture, and community advocacy?

HW: *It was passed down to me by a family member who was an Indian.*

MP: To be clear, do you mean Native American?

HW: *No, well, not quite. But I do mean Mardi Gras Indian... the tradition of the Social Aid and Pleasure Club was birth from those who began the Mardi Gras Indian.*

Interesting, I now have further research to delve into. I have always been amazed at the vibrant attire of the Mardi Gras Indians. Their culture and presence at Mardi Gras was always my family's favorite aspect.

1.3 Gangs of Mardi Gras Indians

I found an online article that had some interesting history about the Indians. Below is a summary on the culture.

Comprised largely of the African American communities of New Orleans's inner city, these traditions were passed down orally through generations. They are inspired after the Native Indians of southern America who often helped freed and runaway slaves. These tribes compete through dance and song performance art. The prettiest costume usually determines the winner. Their elaborate attire takes about an entire year to construct, costs thousands of dollars, and have significant detailed hand sewing and beading embroidered on their fabrics. In the past, these groups were very violent and Mardi Gras or St Joseph's Night was a time considered to settle their scores (Woodward, Pontchartrain).

1.4 Main Line: The Development

The development of the script was soon underway. Mardi Gras Indians, Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, parades, and second lines soon began to feature in my working drafts. However, the challenges of writing solo performance began to appear. I found it hard to tell this story alone; solo performance somehow defied the brotherhood that's at the core of these cultural hubs and groups. I felt like I was cheating them. Several characters began to surface in the play, which is possible in a solo performance, but they begged for dialogue and physical interaction. I was truly stuck because the directive was to create a solo performance, but my story focused on Mardi Gras culture, which is all about community and connection.

By my final draft, a single voice, Willie, emerged. I had to find a way to build an entire life for Willie; I gave him dreams and occupations, friends and enemies, revelations and regrets. My actor voice became strong here. When working on other playwrights' material, the language is the world and all-of the information comes from the data provided by the script. It was important to give my character Willie all-of the necessary conditioning traits of a real human. Even though Willie is technically the only character in the play, by the ritualistic aspects of storytelling, the characters Willie speaks about come to life.

New Orleanians are unique storytellers and performers in their own right. This is evident in the vibrant roles they perform in the streets during carnival, their animated nature, and their strong ties to community. I had to be conscious of these qualities. Stripping the main character of his community during these funereal rituals became crucial to the story. Willie is at a funeral home; he truly wishes to gather with his community, and participate in a second line that celebrates the life of his friend Twostep. In a Jazz funeral, the second line is essential; the parade guides the deceased soul from the dissonant chains of mortal life into the spiritual harmonic gates of heaven. This is the highest honor to celebrate a friend's legacy. But because of a hurricane, Willie finds himself all alone. The interfering storm in *Main Line* ends up creating conflict for the character and the conditions for him to be alone, justifying a solo performance. I was thrilled to be able to incorporate my idea of time and its divisive power.

In passing, a dear friend uttered to me "New Orleans is stuck in a time warp." Suddenly all the pieces of my play fell into place. Merriam Webster says, a time warp (device) is a distorted imagining of a space in relation to time, whereby people or objects of one period can be moved to another. I was going to use the event of a hurricane to access it.

1.5 The Lens Through Which I Worked

While writing my play, I often referred to Dr. Fletcher's lectures from the Script Analysis course. I needed to ensure that every piece of data within the play had some sort of significance. This was a way to keep the dialogue tight, the actions supported, and ensure the necessary dramatic momentum. Another highlight of Dr. Fletcher's course was studying Aristotle's *Poetics*. Aristotle was an ancient Greek philosopher and scientist, and his *Poetics* are the earliest surviving work of dramatic theory. What he calls "poetry" is a term in Greek that means "making" and in the context of drama, includes comedy and tragedy ("Poetry"). These are elements that are closely connected to the themes of Mardi Gras, so I found it useful to revisit Aristotle's work. Undoubtedly, many of the narratives shared by the local Black communities and their histories have this "poetic" quality. It is important to know that the *Poetics* is not a "how-to" guide for playwriting; rather it provides a basic structure for the script. In theatre, *story* (events and characters comprising stuff that happens), plus *dramaturgical choices* (made by the playwright in creating the script) equals *plot* (a story pared and shaped into a specific form by an author or playwright) (Fletcher, "Aristotle"). Using Aristotle's six elements of tragedy, in order from most important to least, I attempt to structure the play to achieve some significance and catharsis.

The first element of tragedy is *plot*, the arrangement of events ("Plot"). Following is a brief description of the plot of *Main Line*. In the beginning, it is revealed that a storm is approaching. The information comes through a radio announcement while Willie is sleeping. He is then awakened by an intruding phone call. The funeral home is empty; he's alone. Willie shares a promising dialogue with his friend Blue, and hopes to begin the service, but Blue reveals that he's stuck in traffic. Willie threatens his friend and demands that he arrive with the corpse and casket.

As the phone call ends, Willie prepares his remarks for the memorial service. Ironically there is a statue of a head on the table before him. Amid Willie's eulogizing, the radio uncontrollably turns on. He shuts it off. The phone rings and he answers. It is Shanko, another expected and much needed guest at the funeral. Willie asks about the banner that should lead the funeral's Second Line. But when Shanko reveals that he has lost it, Willie again threatens another friend. Willie shrugs off the encounter and returns to his eulogy. During his speech, it is revealed that Willie, Twostep, Blue, and Shanko were childhood friends who first met at The Beauregard Boys Asylum. Willie reaches for a trumpet that once belonged to Twostep but the telephone rings again. Blue is calling to reveal that the corpse has disappeared. Blue urges Willie to turn on the radio; Willie ignores the radio's warnings about an impending storm. The phone rings again; this time it is Shanko who is refusing to show up. Willie loses it and threatens to blow Shanko's head to pieces. Willie clings to the phone, demanding an answer. Suddenly a loud thunderclap disconnects the phone lines. Willie angrily turns his attention back to the trumpet, and recalls a few unhappy memories of their past. He recalls running away from the boys' home, turning to theft to make ends meet, and connection to a Sicilian mob boss, Carlos Marcello. Outside of the funeral home, the thunder has grown twice as loud. Willie ignores the signs of Mother Nature. But when the lights begin flicking the tone of Willie tales' changes. As the group's affiliation with Marcello grew darker and dangerous, Willie reveals that Twostep's wise decision to leave the boy's group led to the success of his music career. The radio intervenes for one final time; Willie becomes hypnotized by the second line music heard playing in the distant intersecting radio channels. He gives one last ode to complete the eulogy. Finally, he realizes that no one is coming to the funeral and, he seizes the opportunity to speak truly and openly to his beloved friend. As he speaks, he becomes consumed by rage, disappointment, and jealousy, shouting and demanding to be heard

by Twostep's statue. When Willie reaches the end of his speech, it is too late. The radio announcement about Hurricane Katrina ends, and Willie's tirade prevented him from hearing the warning. The light fades as Willie turns to leave the funeral home, stepping out to meet his unknown fate.

Aristotle writes that the plot requires a single central *theme* to which all the elements are logically related to demonstrate the change in the protagonist's fortunes, with emphasis on the dramatic causation and probability of the events (Fletcher, "Aristotle"). It seems in *Main Line's* plot; the single central theme revolves around the event of a series of intrusions. The themes of interruptions appear to be calling out to him, literally or figuratively. These include: the intrusion of the radio while Willie sleeps, the insistent telephone calls, and the sounds of the hurricane. These intrusions warn Willie multiple times of his fate. Also, Willie's own pity for Twostep overshadows his denial and fear of death. Willie's proper beliefs, rituals, and convictions of life eventually betray him. Willie is left stuck, abandoned, and ultimately alone, just like his friend. The reversal of circumstances seems to be the very event of Twostep's unfortunate funeral. Since the community can't properly celebrate the ritual of the passing of one's physical body, then the soul can't cross over into the spiritual realm. Ultimately, Twostep's funeral becomes Willie's funeral.

Second in the six elements of tragedy is *character*. Aristotle writes that the tragic hero must be a higher sort of person ("Character"). In *Main Line*, Willie could be someone in a higher position. In one of his passages, he equates his gang to the tribal members in a Mardi Gras Indian Krewe: "Marcello had us lined up like a bunch of Mardi Gras Indians. First, there's the Spy boy. Me, there to spot a potential enemy. Then the Flag boy. Blue was to let the town know who Carlos Marcello was." (M. Pepp, 4) With this language, Willie establishes a position of power for himself.

Throughout the play, it becomes clear that Willie has power over both Blue and Shanko. It is said that the tragic hero be neither too good, nor too bad. (“Aristotle on Plots”) *Main Line*’s protagonist is a fine mixture of the both. His intention to honor his friend’s life is noble and honest. Driven by ritual and respect, Willie clings to performing this dedication leaving him vulnerable and exposed to some ugly realities. Lastly for the tragic character, being in the wrong place at the wrong time creates an inescapable fate, or the *tragic mistake*. If Willie were to truly conquer his circumstances, then the main line of the funeral ceremony would have taken place. But by the *tragic mistake* of nature's design Willie never stands a chance, he never gets to the second line, perhaps even the title of the play reveals his fate.

The third element is *thought*, the expressive theme found throughout the speeches (“Thought”). In *Main Line* the very action of a hurricane is expressed through the language. Willie’s thoughts have a dizzying momentum and a destructive power throughout his speeches. Willie’s final speech destroys any hope that the audience may have developed for this tragic hero.

The fourth element is *diction*, which means the medium of language or expression through which the character reveal their thoughts and feelings (“Diction.”). Willie’s unstable use of diction reveals so much of his inner truth. Sometimes he speaks with a clear American dialect, but in other moments his diction is a mixture of the “hodgepodge” akin to tribal chanting of early Africans in the Benevolent Societies. Willie’s inability to stick to one tone, truly speaks to his inability to change his fate.

Music is the fifth element, which can be a part of the diction, the kind of musicality that is lives within Willie’s speech pattern (“Song”). Also, the radio becomes a tool for music. Several well-known local songs play on the radio and create the ambience of New Orleans. In addition, sounds of the outside world like thunder, wind, and rain contribute to *Main Line*’s soundscape.

Lastly, the sixth element of tragedy is *spectacle*, which is the theatrical effect presented on the stage (“Spectacle”). Willie’s extremely colorful garments are over the top and larger than life; he wears a red body suit that is covered in diamonds and jewels. The stage is cluttered with large set pieces that make up a funeral home: four empty benches; flowers that decorate the space where the missing casket should rest; grand candlesticks; a ghostly telephone; large poster boards with images of Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs, Mardi Gras Indians, and parades. There is also a door that is framed by plants, a large stone statue of Twostep’s head that lives dead center stage, trumpets, and platform walls upon which silk red fabrics drape. This clutter obscures naked, painful truths. These familiar ornaments either comfort the audience or they find them oppressive. In a tragic way, the space was abandoned long ago and paltry remnants of mortal possessions are left behind, just as Willie finds himself lingering amongst the objects almost like a ghostly figure that does not belong in the space.

Chapter 2: Procession of the Second Line: The Development

In this chapter, I will discuss the metamorphosis of my solo performance. First I will analyze the language of the working draft and its relationship to the final script. I'll provide an annotated script to document how the core themes and references from the research informed the play's text and plot. Finally, I will conclude with a detailed report on the performances.

The process of shaping the research into a narrative play was thrilling. I was certain that the storytelling needed to be authentic to New Orleans and to the locals that I would be portraying. What was exciting was making dramatic choices as both playwright and actor. As the playwright, I needed to create an authentic representation of a Social Aid and Pleasure Club.

As an actor, I like to imagine that the character's internal life is controlled by the playwright's design, and the character's external life (or actions) are released by my impulse to respond. Therefore, the actor delivers more than plot, but is more like a secret decoder, translating the clues of the text into meaningful behavior.

My actor awareness heavily informed my playwriting choices. I knew I couldn't directly address specifics like: West African Enslavement, The Civil War, or the effects of black emergence after the Jim Crow Era. Nonetheless, the play's protagonist alludes to such events that shaped this African American history.

2.1 The Brainstorming Phase

My first step was to begin to jot down notes that were possibilities for the play's themes, plot, and characters, which are included below.

- Willie and the guys were all once close friends; they grew up together and looked out for each other. When the guys invest in their very own local Social Aid and Pleasure Club, tensions began to arise amongst the group. Perhaps there is a mystery death that unravels as the truth is revealed.

- Willie and his boys once worked for the mob. Pride, jealousy and riches began to separate the life-long friends. Maybe they all invested in a piece of land. And now, they all are fighting for it; who will win?
- Willie was the only child. Went off to a Boys' Home. Met his three lifetime friends, Shanko, Blue, & Twostep.

Based upon these notes, plot lines began to develop and character relationships began to form. It was important to me to include that in Benevolent Societies and modern Social Clubs, status plays a key role in how the group functions. Each member has a purpose and their individual duty serves the group's core mission. One parallel to describe this is an ecosystem, which is constantly shifting and adapting to ensure its sustainable growth and survival.

Now imagine the decay of that ecosystem, shrinking, denying growth, and ultimately dying. Similarly, I wanted to portray a world that was strong and powerful but that was also on the brink of destruction. I found it most exciting to explore conflict within a group whose initial design alters due to a change within their ecosystem. I researched numerous groups throughout history, trying to find a starting place for characters within my play. I was searching for a specific context where the characters' narratives became the core of the conflict. With the pressure of time, I discovered that each character has an important symbolic position in the timeline.

Because of the script's time warp device, it was crucial that the characters could coexist in a distorted time. For example, if the play was solely set in the past, then the characters would embody early Native American and African American encounters during the late 1740s. This was a time where slaves fled to the deep southern bayous and formed bonds and families with the early natives. Ironically, after civil war, descendants of the slaves began to honor the natives and their traditions by wearing traditional native headdress and attire, chanting, and storytelling. Soon groups of four formed and began to call themselves: Spy boy, Flag boy, Wildman, and Big Chief. I was thrilled to discover this history that related to my grandmother's native heritage.

Unfortunately, the story of the two separate organizations was hard to manifest in a solo performance. Additionally, the wardrobe of the Mardi Gras Indian ruled itself out, since the spectacle of their gorgeous costumes would have been crucial for the play but too expensive to obtain.

2.2 Character Reference & Relation to Time

While I was building the play and the relationships between Willie, Shanko, Blue, and Twostep, I realized that I would have to create a fifth character to the plotline. Because of the brotherhood of being in a Social Club, I considered it would be impossible to make these people turn on each other. From there I began to group the main four characters into sectors of time. I wanted to explore fallen groups throughout history, such as from myths and civilizations alike. I considered Greek gods, and what it would be like for Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, and Kronos if a fifth unknown entity intruded on their mythical band? Then I even considered the four characters as tribal Indians of the 1700s in southern Louisiana, each a member with an important position within the group: Spy boy, Flag boy, The Wildman, and The Big Chief. My pattern was finding connections of harmonious unities of four and exploring ways that would be disruptive to their social group. I used the symbolism of *past*, *present*, and *future* to designate where in time the plotline references and how I could use time directly as a dividing force amongst the four characters in my play. I needed something or someone that pointed to change; I used the ideology of the future and its secret intrigue to suggest an irreconcilable change. For the Black community in New Orleans a most identifiable change in their social structure after the Civil War was what happened between 1960 and 1972. This is when the African American community officially began to be incorporated into the American south social structure. For instance, insurance platforms began to open and accept coverage for people of color. During the Jim Crow Era, many local Black businesses were

formed due to “*separate but equal*”; black communities had to form their own establishments of insurance, movie theatres, banks, and schools. When Jim Crow ended, soon their local economy began to decline as their group inducted themselves into the modern American system. I sourced a figure named Carlos Marcello. Carlos is best known as the mob boss of New Orleans and for the FBI’s investigation into his possible involvement in JFK’s assassination. From 1910-1993 Marcello was a force to be reckoned with. I feel like he was the perfect figure to represent change and structure in the modern American Dream. He was born in North Africa and immigrated to the United States. Carlos Marcello represents the decline of the old social order and eventually the divide within the social group in my play.

Important Dates

•1700-1800•

•1939 1968 1993 2000•

<u>PRESENT</u>	<u>FUTURE</u>	<u>PAST</u>
<u><i>Twostep</i></u>	<u><i>Luke</i></u>	<u><i>Spy boy</i></u>
<u><i>Willie</i></u>	<u><i>Mark</i></u>	<u><i>Flag Boy</i></u>
<u><i>Shanko</i></u>	<u><i>Matthew</i></u>	<u><i>Wildman</i></u>
<u><i>Blue</i></u>	<u><i>John</i></u>	<u><i>Big Chief</i></u>

Below are two final impulses that spurred the creation of my working draft. I began to grapple with thematic fragments of impromptu dialogue and storylines took form.

Title: The Second Line

Dissonance & Harmony

The Time Warp Device: escaping through space

2.3 The Final Draft

MAIN LINE

by Michael Pepp

Character: Willie

Unseen Characters: Shanko, Blue

The play takes place on the eve of a late summer Sunday in a visitation room of a funeral home
in New Orleans, Louisiana.

ACT 1

An empty, run-down visitation room in a funeral home located in the 7th Ward of New Orleans. Peeling plaster is covered by large drapes of ruby red silks that frame the shotgun walls. Burgundy and red flowers cascade over a catafalque that is cluttered with artifacts. A rusted bronze trumpet, a wooden bongo, and a dusty tambourine rest against a jazz trophy dated 1960. A skinny door leading to the front porch splits the room in two. On one side of the room a vintage space age retro transistor radio sits on top a side table that supports a 1928 marble telephone and a sculpture bust of Johnny Johnson made of crackling stone. On the opposite, a floral reef hangs in the center of a golden steel frame. In the lower portion of the room, an unfinished collage of Mardi Gras Indians sporadically falls onto the funeral home's floor; piling photographs collide at the soles of Willie's red dress shoes. He uncomfortably sleeps in a pair of satin red trousers and a diamond-studded suit decorated with silk red ruffles.

A classic 1939 local radio jingle plays through the transistor radio and a woman sings.

"Known as the city that care forgot, they call it New Orleans. Red beans and rice and Creole spice, po'boys and voodoo queens. Basin, Bourbon, streets are renowned.

Crescent city that's my hometown, crescent city that's my hometown." (Jack B. "WNOE") Static arises amidst the harmonious tune. Alerting digitized beeps pierce through the jingle ending its

chorus. "Direct strike of potentially catastrophic and life threatening hurricane expected late tonight and early Monday. Rush protective measures to completion." The telephone rings as the transistor connection becomes lost. Sharply, Willie awakens to loud echoing pitches of untuned bells. Taking the room in as a disappointment.

WILLIE

Twostep gonna be devastated when nobody show up. In all my time, I ain't never seen nobody not show up. Twostep ain't never deserve nothing like this. *(Crossing to answer the call.)* Whatchasay. The casket? Blue! Please tell me you on the way with the casket. What traffic? So, you haven't even made it to the parlor. Get your country ass down to that parlor and then over to this damn home right away. Boy I swear, your head on a statue. Get the Casket Blue. And you better really shuffle your ass too. *(He hangs up the phone. Noticing the stone statue of Johnny Johnson's face, Willie stoops to get a closer look)* To be loved and adored by many, naturally too. *(Picking up the statue)* Not no stupid muthafucker either. Smart. *(Crossing to the catafalque)* Been smart. Street smart. *(Placing the statue in center of the catafalque)* Ever since Beauregard Boys Asylum. Boys' home. *(Addressing the statue of Johnny Johnson.)* Twostep, man you were real. A loyal dreamer. *(The transistor radio tunes back on. An array of radio stations clash together, startling Willie. Cautiously crossing to shut it off. The telephone suddenly rings, halting Willie's inspection of the radio, he soon answers the call.)* Yes? Shanko? Where you at brother we need the banner. *(Hard to make clear)* I said we need the banner. The banner, yes. Shanko, It's the same damn banner. Blue Monticello's Social Aid and Pleasure Club. No, Shanko I don't have it. You have it, you've always had it. Wait a minute now just hang on, breathe, don't work up a fit. We need the banner for the second line. It goes before the casket. Call back when you find it. *(Interrupting)* Write this down in case we leave before you get here. Saint Philip & North Robertson Street. Up North

Robertson to North Villere. Right on North Villere to Basin Street. Right on Basin... I said Basin.... Hello? Shanko you there? Hello? *(He hangs up the telephone)* *(A small crackling of thunder echoes through the railings of the outside porch, He slowly places the receiver beak on its hook.)* Shanko. That boy can lose his head if he wanted to. Shanko musta came to the asylum 'bout a year after Twostep. Blue scary self-had to be the youngest, he didn't say much. He had almost like a stuttering problem. Didn't matter none to Twostep. He loved his friends like family. We were close brothers of the sort. Even though we gone through some rough patches. Found our separate ways. New lives. Had babies thicker the blood than the four of us combined. Went on to have glorious golden careers. *(He picks up the trophy. The telephone rings, Willie places the trophy back on the catafalque then crosses to answer.)* Hello? This better be good. Blue, did you make it to the parlor? And so? How can he not be there Blue, it's not like he got up and walked away...a dead body don't just get up and walked away! Well what the hell you scared for Blue? Them people on the radio ain't saying shit. Is there a number on the door? ok call it... no! Don't hang up. *(Willie clicks on the transistor radio, digitized voice pierce through the speakers. "Hurricane expected late tonight and early Monday. Rush protective measures to completion.")* Alright then, just bring the empty casket and Shanko should on his way with the banner. *(He hangs up. As soon as he does, the telephone rings again, he answers)* Yeah. *(Beat)* You ain't on your way with the banner? Shanko. I swear to god man if you do this. I will raise all kinds of hell, beefs. You won't that, uh. War? Listen, just do it for Twostep. Your brother, you remember, right? Yeah that's right. Beauregard Boys' Asylum. How Twostep put his life on the line for me, Twostep put his life on the line for Blue, Twostep put... and after all this, after all your shit Shanko? Twostep put his life on the line for you. Marcello would have had your ass. Your head like a statue. Blown straight to pieces. So, don't you dare lose focus. I don't care if you gotta make a damn banner, you better

bring something. Well...well say something..... Hello? (*Slams the phone down. Medium size thunder rattles the furnishings of the of the funeral home. Willie is furious. Pacing Between the aisle of the benches, he aggressively changes his gaze onto something else. Returning to the catafalque, he notices the trumpet, discovering an engraved message.*) To Twostep, from your Uncle Carlos Marcello. (*Aside*) No good from the start. When we were all in that home, it's like you even knew it then. That's why you said we had to get out. (*Reads*) 1968. I remember just being a kid, folks were talking about Zulu having their first major parade. About three months done passed, then we ran away, slipped through Zulu. Said Sister Katherine wouldn't be able to tell us apart, said we would blend right into the crowd. Later that year. We met Carlos Marcello. What a shame. Learned some tricks while we were out on the streets. Twostep was so fast; his hustle was on the account of his sharpness. By the time, it would take you to realize he done pulled one over on you, you'd be two steps too late and he'd be long gone. (*Addressing the statue*) Four-to-five wallets, jewelry, coin purses filled with silver dollars, fur coats and shoes. Know you was working the quarters, and it was easy for you, on the account of all those drunk white people. I could see in your eyes, that you did not approve nor like stealing from others. I suppose it was because we always had food and clothes on our backs. You steadily trying to teach us things, how to read, write, recycle cold-drink cans for pennies. But all Shanko and Blue come to know was how to steal. By the time, Carlos came pulling up to us in his Bulger Chevy Malibu, it's like you even knew it again. Was it too late? (*Thunder louder than before*) Carlos, can't lie, was-a-smooth-ass-Sicilian-Mafioso dude. I think we was running a hit you know the one, when Blue stuff apples and stale bread in his trousers, while you, Twostep would be pretending to buy some tomatoes, then would fake accuse Shanko, as if you never seen him a day before in your life, fake accuse him of stealing, then y'all both get into this big fake commotion, to where the clerk and you end up tossing

Shanko out. The clerk be so happy, that he'll end up letting you keep the tomatoes and whatever else Shanko was fake stealing. We would walk away with pounds of produce. We'd go to the corner of Esplanade and Elysian Fields, set up our own market "fresh from the cargo". That's right, sell the food right back to the clerks. That's how come the bread was always stale. Here comes Carlos, pulling up to us in his Chevy Malibu. Holding his Cuban cigar in one hand, and a tommy gun in the other. "I know y'all stealing and turning a profit from my merchandise." We look at this motherfucker like he crazy. Blue slow ass, steadily trying to sell the man the stale bread. Not seeing the gun below all the cigar smoke. We didn't know what to do, everybody just looking to you. You saved us, told him we just trying to survive. Told him we can work out debts. He told us if we do a good job and gain his loyalty. Watch his back and so he'll even watch ours. It was all good in the beginning. We began making mad money, it was like we were royals, and Carlos was king. Turned our petty tomato handlings into a real booming business. (*Laughs. The lights of the Funeral Home begin to flicker.*) Then the jobs got dangerous and that's when you got the hell out Twostep. You went off and started your own second line band. But Blue, Shanko, and myself stayed. The worse decision I ever made in my life. We didn't last long, I hope you know. And you were right to get out when you did. It got so bad Twostep. Carlos turned us against each other, one by one, destroyed us. After you left, Shanko and Carlos got close. See Marcello had us lined up like a bunch of Mardi Gras Indians. (*He moves to the unfinished collage, using the photos to illustrate his memory*) First, there's the Spy boy. Me, there to spot a potential enemy. Then the Flag boy. Blue, was to let the town know who Carlos Marcello was. The territory. On the account of having to pistol whip a couple of Marcello's bitches who stepped out of line, or even those who dared to step in line. Can't lie, did Blue some good, got rid of his stutterers for sure, what mothafucker you know yields around pistol whippings that has a stuttering problem, no fucking body, that's who.

After flag, soon comes the Wildman, he sorta the wildcard. The Wildman hides in plain sight and right before you think you've reached the chief, the Wildman comes out from under and knocks you on off your feet. And that was Shanko. Finally, once all is said and done. In comes the Big Chief, Carlos. Blue's confidence overshot itself the day he and Shanko got into it. See, Blue called Shanko out for stealing from Carlos. Carlos had some huge drug exchange in the works that went belly up. Long story short. Marcello was missing money, and Blue was to go down for all the unfinished business. But see Blue swore he didn't know what happened to the money. Said he never handle profit. We all knew Shanko lost his mind once drugs came into play. He was always strung out, became sloppy, Carlos even had to warn him once. No doubt Blue was gunning for that Wildcard position. So, the two started a beef, and it was nasty. Blue began to hang out with cats from uptown. Started to build his own clique. So Shanko did the same, got half of downtown involved in a shootout. It was truly a dark time in the city. Became hard to trust anybody. Couldn't even trust your own shadow standing behind you on the corner. You had Marcello against Shanko, who was against Blue, and any other party caught in between, was just considered dead. Bloodshed ripped us apart for months. It all came to a timely halt when the FBI got hold of Carlos. Took him in for that, uh...Alleged John F. Kennedy assassination. Then we all had to lay low. Had to completely cut ties from the mob. It took years to restore our community, to trust in each other again. That's when you showed up again Twostep. Like a single shimmering sequence at a bottomless pit of darkness. It was your music, you were all over the radio, won all kinds of awards. *(A slow medley of raindrops begins to hit the tin roof of the shotgun building. Willie, for the first time acknowledges the weather. The collective sound of rain and thunderclaps gradually increase in momentum, turning the soundscape of the funeral home into a brass band on a second line Sunday.)* "Yeah-you-right" That's what I'm looking for. We need to send my boy off right. Big

Blue Monticello's Pleasure Club, along with Shanko House Foundation, and Carlos Marcello lone tribe of one dedicates this second line to our dear beloved friend, Mr. "Twostep Johnny Johnson".

(Beat) You know, since, it's just me and you brother, nobody around, nobody here, and ain't nobody coming. I figure no use of me trying to "make up" this speech. No mainline, no second line, no nothing. Nothing but the storm outside these walls, listen, you hear it? "Yeah-you-right" I think, you deserve better, supposedly Mother Nature has other plans. I suppose I should take this is a sign and to just leave, just leave, and get out of here like everybody else, just like the way you left me with Carlos. I suppose the truth is, I despise you. I despise you Johnny, I figure I've always known. I despise your courage, I hate your success, who you became. Mainly hate the person I had to become, all the blood you left me to drown in. Fuck you Johnny, fuck you for everything, I swore on my life if I ever had the chance to do it, that I would. I told you that I would goddamn it! Now look who's head it is to be a statue. You made me motherfucker. You see this trumpet, *(Willie tries to blow the horn, but no sounds escape.)* Carlos should have never given this to you! This should belong to me. Everything you had was always given to you, and taken away from me! And I always supported you Johnny, always, and look what you left me. Nothing!!! How dare you give a weak motherfucker like Blue his own social club, uh? I wasn't sociable enough for you Johnny? Uh? Is that it? Even that two timing scumbag of a Shanko. You gave Shanko a foundation house, after all the shit he put us through? And where is he now uh? Where is he now I say? Look at me motherfucker! He's not here, none of them, nobody, not your boys, not your band, not nobody but me! I'm glad you're dead, I waited a long long time! *(After a crescendo and explosion of sounds, Willie gasp to catch his breath, allowing his senses to catch up to him. He is mortified by his actions, with shame Willie learns over onto the catafalque, whispering into the stoned ear of Twostep's statue.)* I'm so sorry. But I'm taking the trumpet. *(With horn in hand, Willie crosses to*

the narrow door, exiting out into the streets of New Orleans, as the door close, a dim light frames the statue.) The transistor radio clicks on just as the door seals the room to the outside world, Willie is gone. "DEVASTATING DAMAGE EXPECTED. HURRICANE KATRINA, A MOST POWERFUL HURRICANE WITH UNPRECEDENTED STRENGTH RIVALING THE INTENSITY OF HURRICANE CAMILLE OF 1969." A classic 1939 local radio jingle plays as the lights fade, a woman sings. *"Mardi Gras and the Sugar Bowl, coffee with chicory. The whitest part of the Mississippi and WNOE. When it comes to radio most of them agree. New Orleans, turns to WNOE, crescent city what a sight to see." (Jack B. "WNOE").*

Blackout.

Chapter 3: Performance and Post-Performances

In this chapter, I will give a rehearsal report of the performance, an overview of the thought process of the post-performance critiques, then lastly conclude with reflections on the feedback of peers, faculty, and of my personal observations.

3.1 Entering the Space: The Rehearsal was the Performance

The staging of Main Line primarily happened during the week of the performances. This was due to two major factors. First, I constantly judged the writing, so the script was in constant revision up to the curtain call. Second, I struggled with inhabiting the rehearsal space as an actor.

I recognize that the text that makes up the world of the play and it should be fully studied, internalized, and realized. The actor must trust and accept the playwright's building blocks. But in my case, it was immensely challenging to complete the piece as a playwright and to take ownership of it as an actor. During the rehearsal/performance week, several of my instructors had similar comments and feedback. The most common critique was "who am I talking to?" They noted that the piece lacked an active drive and clear relationship to the audience.

A rehearsal with Stacey Cabaj largely solved these challenges. We worked on specificity of character and relationship. First, Stacey made clear to me that each telephone conversation should have separate stakes and meanings. Second, when it came to the direct address, like the eulogy of Twostep, Stacey recommended that I should physically select an area of the stage to speak from and denote that I was eulogizing. Finally, it had been very difficult to make clear who I was talking to. Obviously, I was speaking to the theatrical audience, but since Willie was alone, to whom was he soliloquizing? I was so frustrated with this note because my play is inspired by a culture of storytellers who often have open-ended conversations. Stacey suggested a very simple solution: that I speak directly to Johnny's statue.

Throughout the week, I addressed the faculty's feedback by making clearer choices. I finally began to own the blocking and I discovered a sense purpose and direction. Necessarily, I continued to revise the script to make it more active and address the rehearsal feedback. I began to allow my acting choices to be driven the needs of the character and the actions that benefitted the story. Anything that did not move the story forwards was cut.

Overall, I would have benefitted from more rehearsal time. There was a lot happening in my play and everything needed to be specific. It was the perfect opportunity to incorporate some major lessons from my graduate acting training. For example, in our Acting Studio that focused on Sanford Meisner's Approach to Acting, I learned about the Reality of Doing, yet I struggled during rehearsals to really explore all the activities within the play. Nevertheless, by the opening performance I could transcend the lack of rehearsal time and was able to live fully in the story and the character.

I thought that my opening night performance was very successful. I had a solid warm up that consisted of a full voice and body workout, then I put on my costume, and set a meditation timer. I found it helpful to lay on the floor, to connect to a center, and to ground my focus and energy to a solid foundation. The audience was very receptive; they seemed to understand and respond to the piece exactly as I, the writer and actor, hoped they would. I was thrilled to have such a positive response to the show and felt proud of my achievement.

However, the closing performance of *Main Line* was frustrating and scary. I failed to bring the same energy as the previous performance. Time began to move slowly, I became unfocused, and I began to lose the text. This resulted in a lack of momentum and a disconnection between the audience and the material. Nevertheless, there were a few successful moments in this performance. I could remember and execute some of the core lessons taught in our graduate training including:

easy, effortless awareness of the actor's physical and vocal instrument. In retrospect, I feel accomplished that I did not: allow tension to creep into the body, stifle my impulses, or hold my breath.

In conclusion, I have mixed emotions about the performances. On one hand, I am very proud of the script. In some ways, my accomplishments as a writer on this piece were greater than my accomplishments as an actor. The opening performance was a thrill, my acting abilities could shine through, and I felt a great connection with the audience. On the other hand, I acknowledge that my work needs more space and time for growth and development. I can only imagine, with more space and time, how the piece could grow. I am eager to further explore solo performance beyond this thesis project.

The Conclusion

As a conclusion to the theatrical practices as a MFA acting candidate at the Louisiana State University school of drama my growth as an artist has been tremendous and leads to a promising future. Before graduate training my techniques lacked skilled foundations in body, voice, text, and language control. Over the past two years, my ability to showcase such facets of the well-prepared actor has been a flux of both highs and lows. But it is through the curriculum that my repertoire of the actor that has now become aware of and prepared to meet theses dualities of the performer. I have so much work to process and define that for a lifetime it will become my duty. I have gotten to stretch and extend myself and my artistic authority in such a demanding and necessary way.

Graduate school allowed me to expand my ways of preparation for the artist work, detailed attention, and for fully realized commitment for the goal objective. I find it hard to stay the same, even though I am very much stubborn about it. But I am understanding now that growth is always in support of me, what I represent as a theatre artist and actor, and most importantly for the humanity of my actions and beliefs within my community. It is important to challenge and motivate ourselves, find new heights and creative explorations.

Through this solo experience of a devised 20-minute performance, I gained a much deeper respect and honor for theater makers and goes everywhere It takes so much courage and dedication to come together as a community to share and to participate in this kind of activism that globally represents who we are as a people and society. I have always been inspired to give back locally to my environment, and through this experience I believe my work has the possibilities to give back to my community in ways I haven't dreamed of before.

Theatre I believe is a vessel for unity and organization within our social structures, often setting an escape for others who often feel outside of themselves and comfort zones. As for the future, I

intend to do just that. To create a haven of artistic and scholarly work that often reflects its communities and occupants of its time. New Orleans is such a special place to me, it's my home, it's my come from, and it's what made me the artist I am today. I believe *Main Line* could be a foundation for activism within the Black community, focusing on youth and inner city dilemmas. I plan to create platforms for young writers to share their voices and to tell their stories. As a graduate master, I intend to inspire movement through change in health so that these young bodies have a fighting chance to survive in a world that often excludes them. It's through the stage and all the work that goes into creating theatre, that these communities feel like they have a family and a stable home, no matter where their art takes them.

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Appendix



mainline



12/01 @ 7:30 - Part 1
12/03 - Part 1 @ 2:00
LSU Studio Theatre
Music and Dramatic Arts Building,
Dalrymple Dr., Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70802









Vita

Michael Pepp is a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. He is the proud son of his late mother Katherine Pepp and grandson of Mrs. Genovia Pepp. At a very early age, Michael turned to art and performance theatre as a way of communicating. Michael took 3rd Place in a *Paul Robeson Acting Competition* geared towards local youths and the public schools of New Orleans. Pepp researched and wrote a monologue based of Louis Armstrong. In the monologue, Michael plays an ode to Armstrong with a few trumpet scales of “When the Saints go Marching In”. Michael earned a small acting role alongside one of his acting hero’s Wendell Pierce. Pierce is *HBO*’s mega star of *The Wire* and *Treme*. The two performed in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The production was produced by *Creative Time of New York*, and *The Classical Theatre of Harlem*, it was designed to be a social platform for engagement and community activism, with emphasis on Hurricane Katrina. Michael Pepp graduated from the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts in 2009. Wendell Pierce personally presented Michael with the Kuumba-Keener Award in Theatre, in recognition of outstanding achievement in NOCCA’s drama division. He then earned his Bachelor's Degree in theatre performance at the Santa Fe University of Art & Design in 2015 under the renowned mentorship of theatre legends Jon Jory and Robert Benedetti. The dual powerhouses directed Michael in starring roles as Demetrius in *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*, Scapin in *Scapin*, Sal in *Den of Thieves*, and Speed in *The Odd Couple*. Michael Pepp entered the graduate school at Louisiana State University (Professional Acting Training Program) in the summer of 2015. He continues to seek ways of using theatre as a social platform for community and activism. When He completes his Masters in Fine Arts degree, Michael aspires to write and act for stage and film.