Interviews On Main

Amanda Rose Forstrom

University of South Carolina
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by

Amanda Forstrom

Bachelor of Arts in Theatre
The College of St. Benedict, 2010

Bachelor of Arts in Hispanic Studies
The College of St. Benedict, 2010

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Accepted by:

Steven Pearson, Director of Thesis

Robyn Hunt, Reader

Richard Jennings, Reader

Lacy Ford, Vice Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies
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Dedication

Dedicated to Grandma “Dot” and Great-Grandma Rose.
Abstract

*Interviews On Main* is the script of a one woman performance piece. It was conceived as an exploration and process of how to develop and write a working script, and later, see the piece come to fruition by producing, acting, and directing it. This solo show process has allowed me to delve into discovering my personal aesthetic in order to make a strong, individual artistic statement. Additionally, this process has helped me to learn how to be a solo creative artist, and to have cultivated individual material to perform when I am not cast professionally.

This thesis includes a table of contents detailing the order of the parts. Firstly, this thesis contains a practical documentation of the artistic process; the description of early ideas, research and development of *Interviews On Main*, the editing process, and the final working script. It also includes a chapter of script and performance analysis, as well as a vision for possible expansion to a longer piece, and how to revive it. Finally, the thesis includes the sources consulted, or pertaining to, the process of development.
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Upon being accepted to the University of South Carolina, and interviews with the head of the Graduate Acting Program, Steven Pearson, I knew that I would have to complete a thesis that would include writing, producing, acting, and directing a short play. Unlike some of my peers, I had not determined a direction or aesthetic for my artistic voice. Hence, my research and development of my solo show process really began with a series of free writing experiments in Professor Robyn Hunt’s class. These included taking objects, photos, past memories, conversations, and free writing about them for a designated amount of time; sometimes short at ten minutes, and longer for a little over 30 minutes.

These writing explorations really surprised me and had reopened a creative outlet that I had not delved into for quite some time. I distinctly remember a very freeing moment while writing an excerpt of that would become “Johnny Blues;” the solo show could be anything that I wanted it to be. It was not for me to plan or orchestrate the audience into “feeling” something, or to create something they would like or approve of. My job was to generate material from things that inspired me, and in the editing process, shave away what I eventually would deem as “disposable,” to discover the story I had constructed underneath – akin to that of a woodcarver.

Once I had compiled a bit of written material from free-writing on my own, and expanding what we did in class, I became very interested in a few different ideas for full-length exploration that would result in the solo show. One idea consisted of an out of work actress who finds a job working at an antique store. She realizes that certain objects are attached to
spirits or souls that speak to her, and she must help them find a good home, or resolve unfinished business. This presented a huge problem of not having any other actors as customers, and creating a set that looked like an antique store that could easily transition on and offstage during production. Another idea came about as a movement piece with little or no dialogue, but I recognized that I as an actress wanted the possibility of telling different people’s stories, not just one, and being able to converse one on one with the audience. Other ideas included delving into all the gender roles and stereotypes a woman must choose or embody, and a more see-through version of Interviews on Main which took place in an asylum. A further possibility that had captivated my imagination and inspiration after performing 1942, seeing Mizu No Eki and visiting my grandfather in a nursing home, was to interview him, along with his neighbors, about their childhoods or events that held a special place in their hearts, and to combine these into some sort of storyline. This led to conversations with my grandmother and researching my great-uncle, her brother, who died in The Battle of The Bulge in WWII.

After mulling over these possibilities, and with a lot of assistance from Professor Hunt, I made cuts to strip away redundant writing, areas where I was “spelling” out moments for the audience, and other such edits that I deemed were “giving too much away” to the audience, I began to see glimpses of what would become Interviews On Main. Once this idea began to take shape, I commenced a sort of “rehearsal” with different types of shoes, relating them to gender roles, and writing down thoughts I had when I was wearing them throughout the day. How could I incorporate these shoes? This idea or excerpts of writing that were more important than others to me and my vision, and would somehow find a way into my show. Then I began to read through my stories, conversations, observations while wearing different shoes, and I began to feel more comfortable in some than others, or discovered a new walk, attitude, mentality, accents, and eventually, characters. From there, I stripped down, combined, mixed
and matched even more of my writing to a certain amount of characters that I liked best; thus the first few formal drafts of my scripts were written.

The next part of my process was how to stage my play, what props are a MUST, and what, if any sound or music would serve my aesthetic. I found that certain characters began to be very personal “parts” of me and my personality, but these parts were components that were (as Irving Goffman would say) “backroom” traits or facets. I found this extremely compelling after watching a documentary on the portrayal of woman in our culture today; the media sexualizing women and causing them to compete rather than support one another, the scarily low statistics of women in politics, science, and business, women’s self-confidence (or lack thereof), finding a balance of family and work, and finally, what it means to be born a girl in the United States and around the world. I initiated a search into my 24 years about what made me, me; what memories shaped me, where I’ve gotten some values, pictures of myself at different ages. This spurred a need for an auditory exploration, and I began to find songs that incurred huge impacts on my life. I chose certain songs because of certain artists as well – for example, my good friend Ryan composed the song “Star Light, Star Bright.”

Next I began to rehearse and block the finalized script. This was strange, seeing as that this was the first time the words were my own and not another playwrights; however there was a switch in my brain that became the “actor,” and I found new ways of moving or reading the lines that I had written, which was very unexpected. The formal rehearsal process was a bit rushed, and reflecting back, I wish I had had more time to polish the blocking and memorization.

Finally, it was time to incorporate the tech elements, which went pretty smoothly. The songs were downloaded on a CD playlist, and the lights were simple and repetitive. I wanted to make sure these were fairly simple, to make it more challenging for the actor, not having to rely on fancy technical aspects of the production.
Interviews On Main

Stage contains a chair downstage, front center; a large table upstage, right; and a small, circular table with chair upstage, left. On the large table a cleaning rag and gun are set. On the small circular table a notebook and pen, along with a pair of Pointe shoes. Underneath the large table are a pair of black Converse shoes, and a cigarette. A shoe box containing multi-colored, sparkly shoes are downstage right (“Dorothy’s” shoes, only multi-colored), and a prism on a string is downstage left. The stage is dark.

Music starts and a blue wash comes over the stage. The song “Blue” by LeAnn Rimes plays, and J comes through audience, singing. Music fades and she sits in chair, center stage, and a spot comes up on it. She is wearing a black tank top and leggings with black heels, and a white jacket. One actress plays all characters.

INTERVIEW:

D: It is a pleasure to finally get the chance to sit down and talk with you, Ms. Andrews. I am big fan of your writing, and am anxiously awaiting the new book.

J: Thank you so much. I’m happy to be here.

D: We are happy you’re here as well. We know you like to stay out of the limelight.

J: Yes, not everyone is a fan.
Spot fades out after interview, shoes / jacket come off during change. Lights come up on a young girl lying on her back, downstage left. She is holding a prism and it is making rainbows in the light. She is barefoot.

RANDOM:
Stars, light, fish. My favorite place is standing on the front porch of a dream, looking inside. Dance, dance, dance. Catch them before they pass away. Check the carpet, lay by my liebchen.

Can I keep them?


Lights fade and return back to interview spot.

INTERVIEW CONT:
D: So – let’s start at the beginning. How old were you when you first started creatively writing or when someone started taking notice of it?

J: I remember writing a piece on Harriet Tubman in the second grade for Black History Month. My teacher Miss Knapper showed it to the other teachers and faculty. I remember her calling me up to her desk; she said did your parents help you with this? I said no, and she said, I didn’t think so. You are a very good writer Jean. You should be proud and show this to your parents.

D: Did you?

J: I did indeed, and they were very proud. Surprised, but proud.
Lights fade and “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” Big Band Karaoke music plays. Lights brighten again on the large table upstage right and a woman stands behind a bar cleaning a handgun. She is back in her black heels.

TRANSITION:

De är inte alla karlar som bär byxor. (Swedish saying: All are not men that wear trousers)

Citizens Alliance Bank was originally chartered as the German American Bank on November 15, 1902. The bank continued to operate with this name until 1918 when, due to adverse feelings toward the German people as a result of World War I; the name was changed to Citizens State Bank of Clara City, later Citizen’s Alliance Bank.

My grandpa always said if you’re going to bring home a man, he needs to fulfill three requirements: one, he has to be a Lutheran. Two, he needs to be a Republican, or at the very least, an Independent. Three, he has to own a gun.

Calvin Ronald – 2nd son of a house painter and a beautician/homemaker. Born Jan. 18th, 1930. Grew up in the aftermath of the Great Depression, never wore jeans again once he could afford not to – they set a poor man apart in the 40’s and 50’s. Got a lucky break working in a bank. Married a schoolteacher, had four sons (the eldest my dad).

The perfect Manhattan: 2 parts Southern Comfort, 1/2 a shot sweet vermouth, 1/2 a shot dry vermouth, a dash of bitters and grenadine, a topped with a cherry.

Grandpa Kelly pulled hard on his bootstraps, and then was interrupted by a little conflict over in Korea. Lost a best friend but brought home a pearl necklace for my Grandma.

He came back, became a Bank President. Eventually retired on Dec. 19, 1980, giving all
control of the company interest to his four sons. “If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck – *(pulls back gun action to loaded)* - shoot it.”

Over the past 100 years, we have experienced many events and regulation changes affecting the banking industry. Most notably, the bank survived the Great Depression of 1929 and the Great Recession of 2008 and throughout these periods in American history (which saw numerous bank failures) we remained open.

In the past 100+ years, Citizens Alliance Bank has grown substantially; evidenced by asset growth that started at $10,000 in 1902 and now exceeds $485,000,000.

Vart jag mig i varlden vander

Lyckan kommer lyckan gar.

Tusen tack. Skal!

*(Swedish: Wherever the world will take me, luck comes and luck goes. A thousand thanks. Cheers!)*

*Music fades, lights for interview resume. She no longer has heels on.*

**INTERVIEW CONT:**

D: Was anyone else in your family an artist?

J: I believe my great-grandmother’s cousin was a singer of some sort. Church choir singer, maybe, or something. Ironically enough, her husband of no relation developed a very impressive painting hobby.

D: Very interesting. So how did your parents react when you were expressing interest in becoming a writer?
J: *(Laughter)* As most parents do with children in the arts. They try to discourage you, ask if it’s REALLY what you want ... Try to convince you that it’s something you can do on the side of your real job, convince you that you are so talented, you could do anything you wanted – why this?

*Lights fade from interview and Chopin’s “Prelude No. 15 In D Flat Major, Opus 28 (Raindrop)” is playing in the background. Lights brighten downstage right. This monologue is performed barefoot, during a dance of sorts. At some point, the sparkly shoes are revealed and put on.*

**DANCE:**

Click, click, click, click. CLICK, click click click.

Enter.

I haven’t talked to my older sister in quite some time. We aren’t very similar, we live far away – the nature of growing up could be growing apart, if we were ever close to begin with.

One Mississippi, two Mississippi, three Mississippi, FOUR.

Take it out, peel it, dice it – put it in the jar for later.

I remember how it felt to hug you.

“I want those shoes because they sparkle like Dorothy’s but they’re better cuz they have ALL the colors, not just red – like rainbow sparkle shoes!”

SSsssssssssssssssssssssssssss ...... ding! Hurry up! And for gosh sakes don’t put your dirty fingers in the jar! Sweat and smiles. Ok.
You don’t need them – where would you wear them? Church? No, it’s not gonna happen, let’s go.

But ....

I like how you put on your lipstick. “Burnt Fuschia.” I can do that too. Watch me.

Sarah: Are you my best friend?

Me: Sure

Sarah: Good, cuz if you’re not, Alison will be.”

Me: “Well, you asked me first! Can cousins be best friends too?

Sarah: Duh.

(Smack, lick) Just a taste? You’re gonna get burned...

- Amanda Rose! Come here, I have something for you ...

- What is it?

- Look in the box.

- The box?

- Yep. (Explosive giggling)

Hot tears down cold cheeks.

Dancing the tango at Riverluna.

Iced soy vanilla latte’s with a shot of amaretto. I always did love amaretto. You fucking asshole.

You were so beautiful.
Pearls, sweaters, shells, glasses, twin beds and a one bathroom house. I wish you would make me mashed potatoes and corn and I could tell you for the 100 millionth time I don’t like corn. Remember grandma? Remember?! WHY CAN’T YOU REMEMBER? Can I help you make jello? With fruit in it – raspberries in watermelon jello. Raspberries.

Can I live with you?

I can go to school here – I drew a cartoon. I’m in a play. Sing, draw, dance, REPEAT.

And you watched.

*Music fades, interview lights come up again.*

**INTERVIEW CONT:**

D: You also have a degree in Psychology, do you not?

J: Yes, an acceptable pairing with most other degrees. I also minored in Spanish.

D: During your undergraduate education, who influenced your writing the most?

J: I was in a relationship for three years and he was the biggest influence, good and bad.

He was also a writer.

*Spot fades and lights up come to reveal a girl in untied sneakers sitting on a ledge (large table upstage right), smoking a cigarette. She has a British accent.*
WATCHING:

This is my spot – sounds weird, but I like to watch people. In the city, in apartments, people are all stacked into nice little blocks - little living boxes. A rubix cube with a pulse.

Every morning at 6, coffee and a crush. Fuck if I stay awake after that, but ... there’s this episode. This woman comes home, all exhausted; scrubs on, the whole thing. Looking fucking terrible of course. Like it was the longest shift of any doctor or nurses’ life. But at exactly 6:17 every morning, her boyfriend comes out and meets her at the car. Brings her something to drink, tea almost always. Fuck tea. Real nice, though. Handsome – hair all pulled back, clean face, Armani suit, you know. And they have this moment where they kiss, -sometimes it gets all *(mimes really bad kissing)* and it looks like they’re gonna start goin’ at it- *(cat purr noise)* - but mostly he just gives her a real long hug. All protecting like. She goes back to their apartment, and he takes the car to work. I think he might work for a bank. Who knows. He just seems like a nice guy, you know?

*(Notices cigarette is out)*. Out.

*Lights fade and actor exits offstage right, lights return for interview, spot on empty chair.*

D’S ENTRY:

D: June 13th, 8:17 pm: Made a breakthrough today - as it stands, patient has fully recognized her reality, that the voices in her head are not characters, but symptoms of psychosis…. that dissociation or lapses in memory are due to alters taking over during times of duress. Previous diagnoses of OCD, and depression with the sudden death of
the patient’s father resulted in what we believe to be Dissociative Identity Disorder. Full
diagnosis to follow. Prescribing Xanex, Ambien, and behavioral therapy until visual
improvement and further inquiries can be made into medical and family history. At
minimum 36 months institutionalization. Suggestions for psychological treatment
include encouragement to write, although in the first person only.

*Lights fade and come up on small table and chair, upstage left. An Old Woman with a
wooden cane enters, and water is heard in the background.*

**JOHNNY BLUES:**

Let me tell you a story – the story of Johnny Blues. Johnny wasn’t never anything
special, just good ole Johnny Boy, found anywhere from the tracks linking Omaha to
Kansas City, to the stacks of Chicago, low in the valleys of sun-soaked California, or
looking out over the always twistin’ and swingin’ Delta. My story begins there; no
better place seein’ how’s the Mighty one brought steamboats, people looking to
change, and all kinds of something’s to the pot.

I met old Johnny on that bridge, almost losing the battle and my heartache to my
faithful Mr. Beam. The year was 1947, almost 3 years since my Stanley had lost his life,
thousands of miles away, in a forest called Ardenne. I was a working girl – didn’t know
where that was, didn’t care too. Didn’t care about the medals and honors, papers, that
triangle flag; only that they said it was terribly cold. No food- mortar shell or not, my
Stanley should have at least died warm.
“This wasn’t how it was supposed to go. This ache is never-ending, lives in my bones and guts - a part of me,” I says to him.

“Aw, miss – you gotta be like the river. Just keep on going. Something new be brought your way you ain’t expecting. Always does.”

And he started to play. I didn’t notice nothing in his hands at first – maybe the trumpet was his hand. And the river started coming out in music, surrounding me, hugging me, filling me until I lost myself. I was the river. My heartbeat, the current. I had no room for heartache, the brush of waves that swept through my hair took away thoughts of The Big Red One and late December letters. And it was so cold, it froze my soul. Freezing. I’d never known this kind of cold. Stanley, will I finally be with you again? It was as if the universe itself was going to turn to grey ice, and there would be nothing left. Stanley didn’t answer, he never did. I was lost, another ice woman in an ice world.

I started to cry and couldn’t stop. I was melting! I felt the music coming out of my eyes, down my cheeks, filling my hands with pools of warmth. When I opened my eyes I saw shimmering light. Twinkles, slivers, tear drops of light above water and me. Me and water.

Suddenly, someone was pulling my hand out of the water. I took a deep breath and I was back. Back in my rented apartment room, 2 blocks south of the French Quarter. My Johnny Blues had come and gone. He always does.
The Old Woman walks around chair and table in a café. Café sounds are heard. She becomes young and begins to speak in a Spanish accent. She has ballet shoes on the table next to her coffee. She writes in a diary.

A YEAR FROM NOW:

I’m sitting in a café somewhere in Europe, relaxing, people watching, waiting for someone, something, or nothing in particular. I’m excited about having the day off, but I am anxious to get back on the stage. Prague tomorrow – or was it Budapest? I don’t know, and for the first time I don’t care, and this makes me incredibly happy.

You sit down next to me, and I taste the last cigarette you smoked. “Tan cerca, que tu mano sobre mi pecho es mio.” How am I here? Joder. Hell of a lot of work. But I’m here. My hair is short – No, still long. I want the convenience but need the cajones to pull it off.

Lights fade and Interview lights come up for the last time.

INTERVIEW CONT:

D: Any chance we could he have a name?

J: I’m sorry D, but I’m going to have to protect his privacy as well as mine.

D: (Laugher) I figured you might say that, so I have my next question ready. Who or what influenced your new book the most?

J: (pause)

D: For the fans?

J: (pause) You. You are D. Well, men in general.
Music “Star Light, Star Bright” fades in slowly during the monologue. Girl is running around and around, through the different sets, in circles and finally slows to slow tempo walk, looking far.

DREAM:

I’m running out of the forest to a clearing, where the beach is waiting for me. (slow to walk) I know they are behind me and they are coming, but all my sisters are here, so I know I am safe. This is where I need to be. They see me and I see my favorite, the girl with the mermaid hair. They are coming, one by one, out of the woods – and the lush rainforest has turned into daffodils, as far as I can see. Golden yellow, a delicate lace carpet of petals stretched out to meet the sea. (Stops). I am walking on the water. This is impossible. (Smiles) Everyone is gone. He is waiting for me.

Music plays and J exits. Blackout.
Performance and Script Analysis

After the three performances of Interviews On Main, I was content with the outcome of the piece, but not completely satisfied. I don’t think that I as an artist will be “satisfied” with my work, and I do not think I ever should be; I believe that becoming satisfied with my work means that I have reached a plateau of complacency instead of always having an insatiable appetite for new creation and constant discovery. My final performance was by far the best of the three; I believe that I should have rehearsed more to feel comfortable in the dress rehearsal. It takes a great deal of courage (despite having acted in many shows before) that is unique in presenting your own work. I think my second performance was somewhat disappointing, and my first was satisfactory. I think that because of my Suzuki training, I could better channel the energy and adrenaline of a first performance, which served me well.

The current state of the script Interviews On Main is complete in the sense that it was a first attempt. I have considered that this could be expanded into a larger piece, which would require many more extensive writing experiments, allowing other characters in the piece and the ability to drop other “solo show” constraints. I think that there are a lot more things I would incorporate that I would continue to research as well. It would also require a lot of time and editing; and at the present moment, I know that I am not ready to set this process in motion, but at some point in the future, I will. I am certain, however, that I will draw on this script to develop further projects, or ruminate over my individual voice as an artist and how to extend
and strengthen this in my next playwriting (or other writing) endeavor. I am still very much attached and connected to certain seeds of origin in this project, and am confident that I have much more to say.
Sources Consulted


