

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:

HERE I AM: AN EXPLORATION OF
VIRTUAL LIVE PERFORMANCE

A PRODUCTION BY THE LABORATORY
FOR GLOBAL PERFORMANCE &
POLITICS
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DAVIS
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER,
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Jeremy D. Bennett, Master of Fine Arts, 2021

Thesis Directed By:

Professor Jared Mezzocchi, Department of
Theatre, Dance, and Performance Studies
The University of Maryland, College Park

The following thesis is a reflection of a series of observations and explorations documenting my experiences as both an artistic collaborator, and contributor of the Davis Performing Arts Center at Georgetown University's production of *Here I Am*. The production opened April 15th, 2021 as a virtual live performance streamed through YouTube. *Here I Am* was an original performance by Mélisande (Meli) Short-Colomb with direction by Derek Goldman and Nikkole Salter, music composition and vocal performance by Somi Kakoma, multimedia design by Jared Mezzocchi, sound design by Andre Pluess and lighting design by Alberto Segarra.

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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE DAVIS PERFORMING ARTS CENTER,
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

by

Jeremy D. Bennett

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Advisory Committee:

Associate Professor Jared Mezzocchi, Chair

Associate Professor Daniel Conway

Associate Professor Mikhail Kachman

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Dedication

My memory of my grandmother, my favorite storyteller.

Acknowledgments

I would first like to acknowledge the team of dedicated co-creating artists who were a part of this process with me.

Michael Donnay, Stage Management and Research Dramaturgy
Derek Goldman, Direction and Script Development/ Dramaturgy
Jared Mezzocchi, Multimedia Design and Direction
Andre Pluess, Sound Design
Nikkole Salter, Script Development/Dramaturgy and Direction
Alberto Segarra, Lighting Design
Somi Kakoma, Composer and Vocal Performance
Alex Troesch, Original Photography

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the design faculty to whom I owe esteem gratitude for their mentorship and institutional guidance over the past three years.

Jared Mezzocchi
Daniel Conway
Helen Huang
Mikhail Kachman
Brian MacDevit
Leigh Smiley

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Dedication..... | ii |
| Acknowledgments | iii |
| Table of Contents | iv |
| List of Supplemental Components | v |
| Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter 1: The First Meeting | 3 |
| 1.1 - Notes from an Early Meeting (Script Development) | 4 |
| Chapter 2: Research | 5 |
| 2.1 - The Pinterest Mood Board | 6 |
| 2.2 - Areas of Inspiration | 8 |
| 2.3 - Research Meeting Notes with Jared’s Responses | 10 |
| Chapter 3: The Rehearsal Process | 11 |
| Chapter 6: The Ah-ha Moment | 13 |
| 4.1 - The Offering | 14 |
| Chapter 5: Content Organization | 15 |
| 5.2 - The Shared Folder | 16 |
| Chapter 6: The Painter | 18 |
| 6.1 - Content Demos | 19 |
| Chapter 7: The Technical Setup | 21 |
| 7.1 - Production Meeting Notes | 23 |
| Chapter 8: The Film Shoot | 24 |
| 8.1 - Shot List | 25 |
| Chapter 9: The Technical (Tech) Rehearsal Process | 26 |
| 9.1 - The Cue Sheet | 27 |
| 9.2 - The “Booth” | 29 |
| Chapter 10: Opening & Running the Show | 30 |
| 10.1 Production Photos | 31 |
| Chapter 11: Final Reflections | 39 |

List of Supplemental Components

The following video files were submitted to the graduate school for supplementary purposes:

- HERE I AM Production Recording
- Video Montage: Conjuring the Storm
- Video Montage: Convocation
- Video Montage: I Was Born
- The Offering – Demo Recording

Introduction

This was my first time ever working on a production where a script did not exist from the beginning. Prior to this point in my career as a theatre practitioner, I had only worked on productions where either a completed script existed, or at the very least, there was an early draft to which the production team could respond. I can recall a time when I was in my undergraduate studies at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) and I had just started working in the field of projection design receiving academic credit as assistant to Adam Mendelson, professor of lighting design at UMBC, and the appointed projection designer for two of our productions that year (our department did not have a formal projection design area of study like most universities at the time.) The university's theatre department was mounting a new play by playwright and faculty member, Dr. Susan McCully entitled *Leah's Dybbuk*. Although the script underwent several revisions during the production process, there was always a road map to which Adam and I could at least find our footing, despite our visual trajectory steadily altering with the latest revision of the seemingly ever evolving manuscript.

Now, fast-forwarding to my third year in graduate school, a lot has changed. I have assisted on several more productions, and have designed some of my own. As I am writing this, the nature of theatre itself has change as the world still wades through the plight of the coronavirus pandemic. While many theatres have succumbed to the newly enforced safety restrictions by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and have entered into an indefinite hiatus, for the few creative institutions that were determined to weather the storm, many have turned to the burgeoning fields of multimedia and virtual live performance as a means to explore new, and exciting ways of visual storytelling. *Here I Am*, intended to be performed live on stage also made

the seminal conversion to a live digital performance as the world watches a new dawning in theatre unfold, and wonders how it might be forever changed thereafter.

My role in the process was equally unusual compared to other production processes I had been a part of in the past. Although, I was not the lead designer, I was not an assistant either. Jared, my faculty mentor put it best when he said that we were creatively, and I quote, “joined at the hip,” where he was the serving the role as art director and I was his creative counterpart. This required me to think about design in such a way where I had to consider the needs of both myself as well as my creative partner. As I entered this new collaborative process knowing that we were starting without a contextual roadmap (the script), I was faced with the following new challenges:

How do I as a designer show my excitement about a new or developing work without becoming too aggressive and taming the impulse to want to “play the director?”

When presenting an idea to a director, how do I present enough information to show that I am indeed invested in the idea without being married to any of them because they might not become the finished product?

How do I take a step back from the process and take the time to develop a vocabulary with the director that will, hopefully, unite all the ideas?

Chapter 1: The First Meeting

I entered the zoom meeting as Meli was speaking in mid-sentence. I was at once captivated by her presence as she innately told the story of her ancestors. Her voice, though soft in its timbre, commanded immediate attention whenever she spoke. I knew that I was in the presence of a natural storyteller. When I looked upon her face, it was firm with a still gaze that could reach the pure essence of your soul. I thought myself, “this woman already possesses the power to captivate a room,” and so I wondered what form of multimedia, if any, could help to support that in an effective and meaningful way?

Derek, the director spoke about how the structure of the piece was meant to evoke the rituals of a religious service: invitation (later changed to convocation), invocation, lamentation, and benediction. Meli continued to give little anecdotes about her family’s unfortunate connection with the history of Georgetown University. Historically, the piece was meant to acknowledge and pay homage to the lives of the over three hundred slaves who were sold to insure Georgetown University’s survival. Dramaturgically, this was a spiritual journey for Meli as she recounted pivotal moments from her past leading up till now, while also elevating herself towards achieving total liberation by the end of the story. The script at this point was still in very early development.

I remembered leaving that first meeting unsure about all but one thing: that everyone assembled in that zoom room was there because they were invested in Meli’s story, and I wanted to be certain that I too could show how much I was invested in her story. Jared and I also knew that whatever multimedia’s role was dramaturgically in this piece, it first and foremost must support Meli and her storytelling. Secondly, it must never try to upstage her nor become a distraction in any way as she was the central focus of the piece.

1.1 Notes from an Early Meeting (Script Development)

HERE I AM - Script Development 01_11_21

Beginning Structure of the Script:

Convocation - the beginning

Lamentation - deals with the loss
the totality of the loss (meant to feel the loss)

Benediction - no healing - no cleansing
"You aren't still angry aren't you?" - question asked a cemetery

Thoughts from Derek:

We start with the sentence "Harriet decides to stay with the children" - Jesuits family day book passage
During the Convocation - photograph of Meli kneeling during singing of Star Spangled Banner (footage exists?)
Visual IDEA: veils and fog
Vocabulary IDEA: layering, exposing (or revealing)

Thoughts from Nikkole:

There is going to be a loss before there is healing
Call to the alter - after the sermon has been given - renew your vows - meant to be met with comfort and love
By virtue of being here (apart of this institution) you have already made this vow
IDEA: A recommitment ceremony - renewing our vows during a commencement
IDEA: Alter call can evolve into a testimony

Thoughts from Meli:

Ancestor Harriet Queen was married to a freeman James Queen
Meli likes music

General Thoughts/Questions:

Prelude?
Harriet's song - Harriet's decision
What are the images?
Are there any moments that are just imagery and music?

Task Orders for Jeremy:

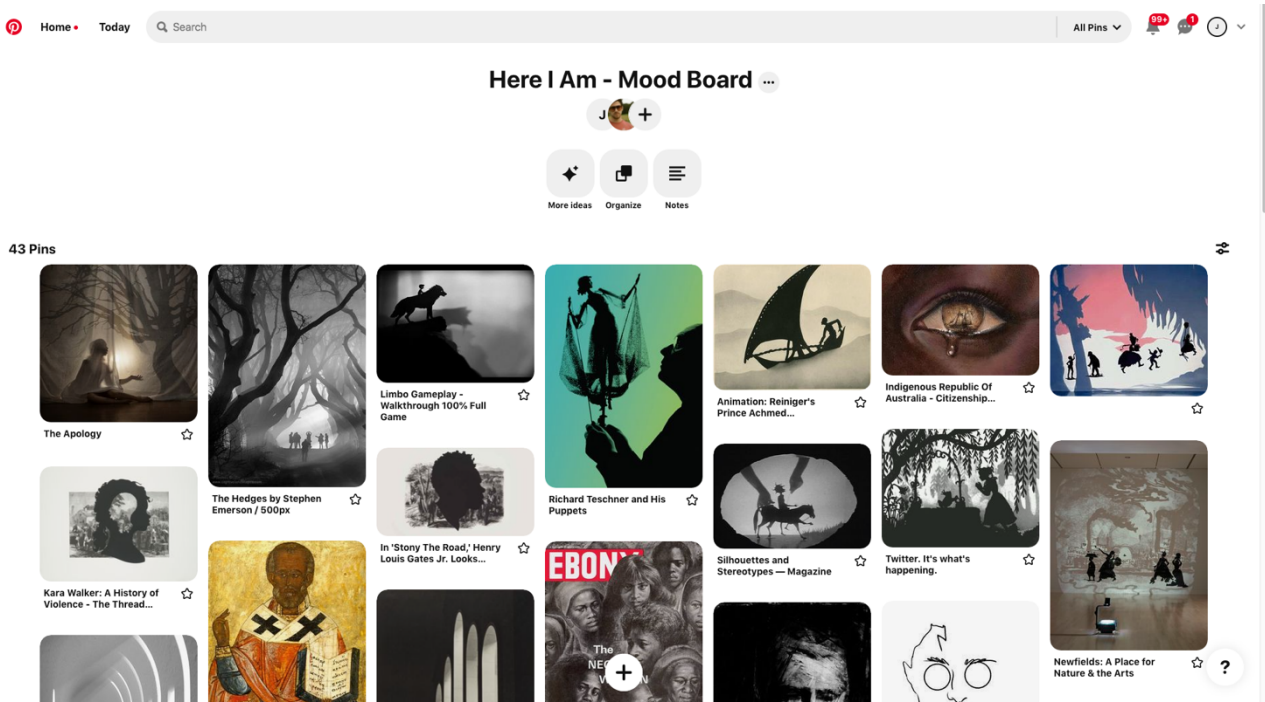
Contact Jared regarding tonight's developments
Watch the GU convocation video:
<https://www.facebook.com/georgetownuniv/videos/299541951323964/>

Chapter 2: Research

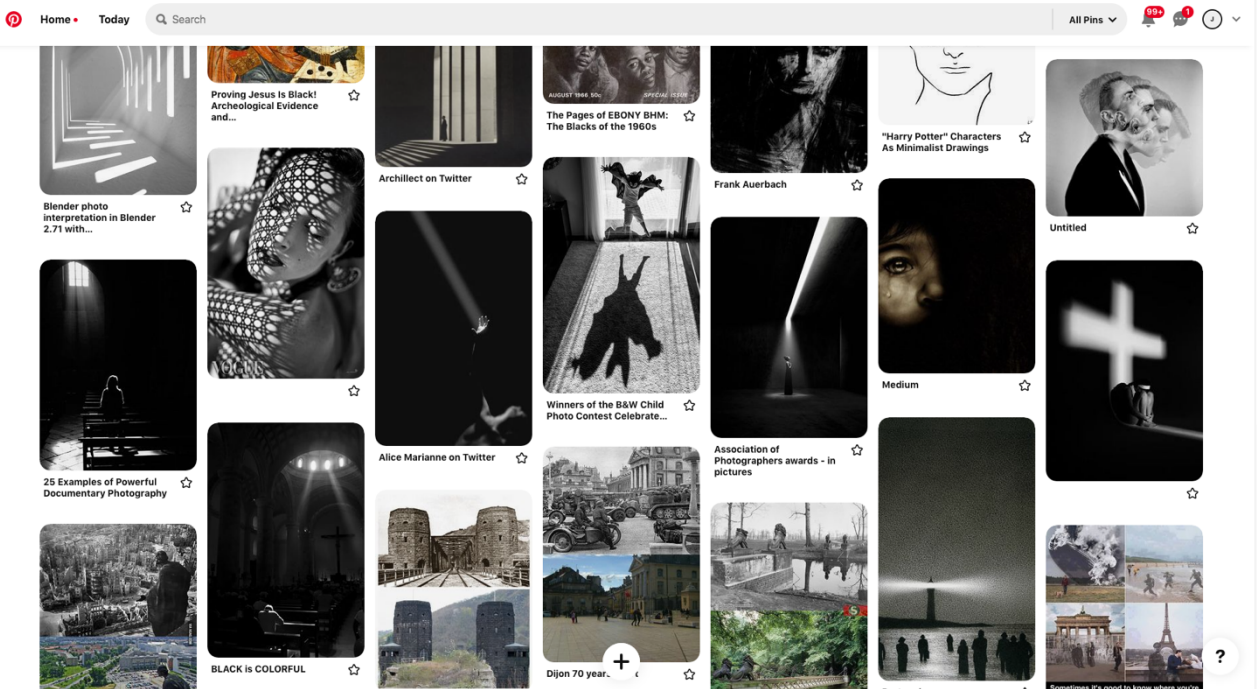
The good thing about having no script is I had the benefit of thinking freely without any predetermined text or stage directions to interfere, cloud my judgments, or cause me to second guess any choices I made long the way. So, for my research, I leaned heavily into my impulses. Whenever I thought of the history of Georgetown University and its ties with slavery, I thought of the work of Kara Walker. The stories of Meli's family and all the hardships they endured by the Jesuits reminded me of how Walker uses silhouettes to express the horrors of slavery through gruesome depictions juxtapose with these intricate cutouts, and strikingly compelling compositions.

The truth about Georgetown's history had been concealed for so long and had only recently been brought to light over a century later. In earlier conversations, Derek said he wanted the audience to associate the beauty of Georgetown's campus with the unsettling truths about its past, creating visual tension between images of the opulent campus buildings with any documented evidence about the slave sale of 1838. During my research, I discovered a collection of photos depicting various events from Europe's past ghostly layered over photos taken of the exact locations as they appear in present day. The theme of layering the past over the present was something that excited me as a conceptual idea.

2.1 - The Pinterest Mood Board

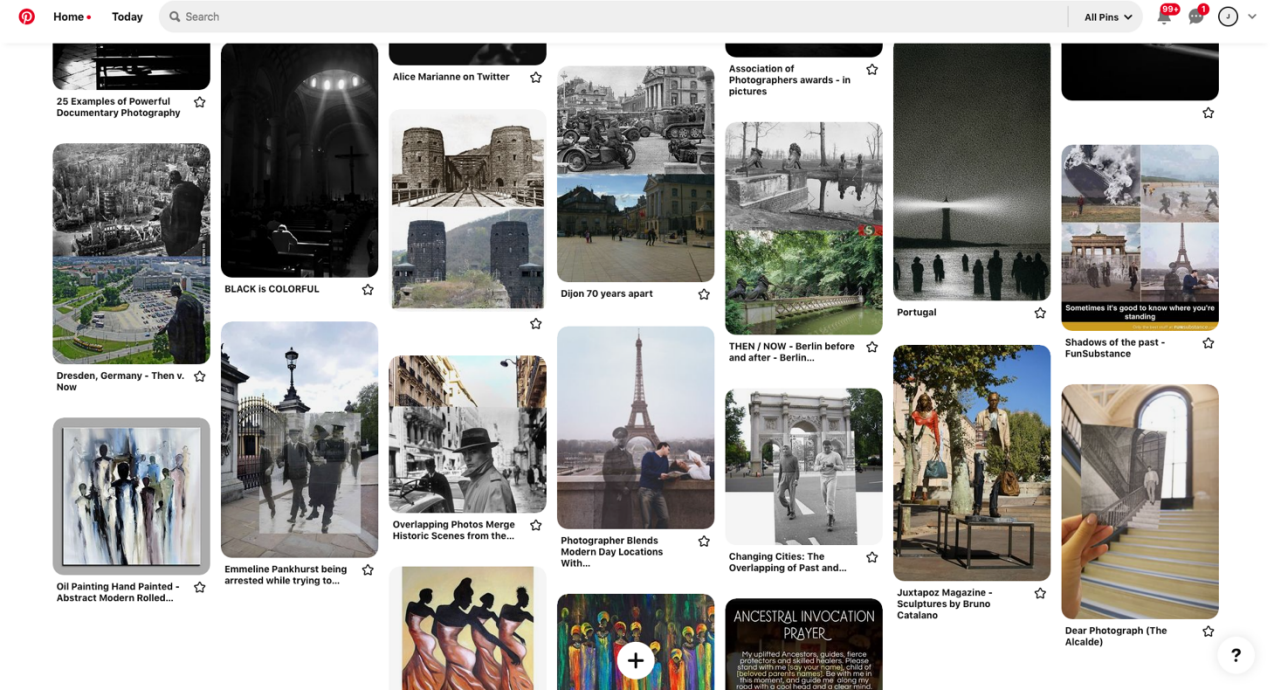


Mood Board – Part 1 – *photo credit: Jeremy Bennett*



Mood Board – Part 2 – *photo credit: Jeremy Bennett*

2.1 - The Pinterest Mood Board



Mood Board – Part 3 – photo credit: *Jeremy Bennett*

2.2 - Areas of Inspiration



“Walker uses silhouettes to express the horrors of slavery through gruesome depictions juxtapose with these intricate cutouts and strikingly compelling compositions.”

– photo credit unknown

2.2 - Areas of Inspiration



“The theme of layering the past over the present was something that excited me as a conceptual idea.”

– photo credit: Museum Of London

2.3 – Research Meeting Notes with Jared’s Responses

HERE I AM - Rehearsal Meeting with Jared 01_03_21

General Thoughts/Reflections:

- Light to shadow, past to present, silhouette to photography, what is the through line?
- who’s story is it? Meli’s
- A story of truth in a world where people tend to manipulate truth for their own cynical benefit.

Thoughts from Jeremy:

- A mother’s hands: a mother works with her hands, she caresses her child’s cheek she holds their hands, she uses her hands to take care of them.
- Stories that have been suppress for so long are now being ushered into the light through the telling of a decedent’s story about her ancestor’s troubled past
- Silhouettes feel slightly removed from the present because they represent a character without true identity until someone has given them an identity - silhouettes and shadow-play are an age old story telling device

Thoughts From Jared:

- Photography decay time lapse memory - now and then (slamming time together)
- Vocabulary IDEA: personal, historic, artistic
- Meli talking about the table and how it dates back to several generation of her father’s family starting with an ancestor who built it. Then she passes the table onto her daughter, as her mother did her and so on...
- VISUAL IDEA: Everyone she speaks about is in shadow but she brings them to “life” or clarity out of visual unclarity into form - she becomes the table.
- Photographs (or at least the ones intended for this piece) present and piece of the past that is being brought to the light by Meli’s voice - the instrument by which these stories are being told/these truth are being shown.

Moral of Jared’s Anecdote:

- Sometimes we go through several revisions of an idea during a project not really knowing that there is a central idea from all of the pervious ones that actually makes it into the final product.

Food for Thought:

- A designer should always name what excites them most about their research and what is driving them towards the choices they have made
- The thread in the needle would be to find to through-line from “here’s where I started” to “here’s where I landed” and question “how do we get there?”
- How do we as designers make sure that we are able to take our excitements or what excites us and be able to visual translated that into ideas that relate to the main idea or main objective (i.e. Meli’s story)
- At this stage, we have prepared ourselves with offerings and the readiness to either hop on board and rapidly get started, pull back and reevaluate, or start again with the possibility of referring back to pervious images as we respond to vocabulary as it is being constructed.

– photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

Chapter 3: The Rehearsal Process

The earlier rehearsals were primarily focused on script and dramaturgy development. Although, I was present for most of these rehearsals as an observer, multimedia had not been introduced at this point in the process. Derek made it clear that everyone assembled on the zoom chat was a co-collaborator, which fostered a haven where ideas were freely suggested and often explored. Despite knowing this, there were times when I didn't allow myself to completely trust these discovery processes enough because we were not yet at the point of discussing visual content. However, I would later come to realize how rewarding it was to be a part of those discovery moments, especially since we used a lot of the same language in our multimedia discoveries much later. As Derek and Nikkole edited the script, they added scene transitions and other opportunities where they felt multimedia, and sound could help enhance a particular moment or scene. These contextual impulses, however, were never prescriptive as far as visual intent was concerned. Over half the script was edited by the time we started to incorporate multimedia in rehearsals.

Our weekly rehearsal schedule was truncated in such a way to allow Derek the ability to work individually on a section of the script with each department. Thursday evenings was the time when all collaborators gathered on one zoom together to run through what we had all built individually with the director. Sunday afternoons was designated for weekly multimedia rehearsals with Derek. I equated these Sunday weekly work through sessions to an extended and painstaking stumble through. The participants usually consisted of Derek, Michael, the stage manager, Meli, Jared, Alex, the photographer, and me. Then, Andre the sound designer started joining in, but we did not begin to integrate sound in rehearsal until much later in the process. Many times before, I have relied on sound to inform tempo and rhythm, so it was challenging

having to work backwards out of this paradigm as a co-collaborator and trust the guidance of the director. Jared mentioned how he was programing in tune with Meli's rhythm in the moment, which was an enlightening way to discover tempo and mood in the absence of sound while also trying to anticipate harmony in rhythm.

Chapter 4: The Ah-ha Moment

This ah-ha moment occurred to me during a meeting with Derek, Jared, and me one Sunday afternoon. Derek started the discussion by briefing Jared on major developments of the script in his absence. Then, a discussion ensued about how we could start to establish a visual language together while in rehearsal. A couple days prior to the meeting, I had created a thirty second video clip as a response to what I had been witnessing in rehearsals over the previous weeks, layering some of the archival materials from the Georgetown University archive with photographs of Meli's relatives, and other curated stock footage. Somi, the composer and vocal artist working alongside Andre had recorded a few short vocal tracks, and made them available to the team. So, I utilized one of those tracks to underscore my montage.

After showing my offering to the group and hearing Derek speak about content and form as it related to the montage I showed him, I was then able to put Derek's visual thoughts into context, and thus, a vocabulary started to develop between us. It was also in that moment where I learned something greater: what it means to give an offering to a director while also remaining emotionally detached from the work itself. An offering is simply what it says. It was my way of showing that I am invested without conviction of artistic intent, yet it opened a way for the director and me to discover vocabulary through ideas. From that conversation, I learn that although Derek liked the sepia tone effect, he became more excited about overlaying multiple images on top of each other rather than what he referred to as the "Ken Burns aesthetic" of layering one image onto part of another with a slow fade. As our vocabulary continued to develop, it was helpful to know these things early on as we were planning to go into the discovery phase where we would start to introduce multimedia in rehearsal.

Chapter 5: Content Organization

One of the most important things that I have learned in my career as a theatre practitioner is the importance of file management and how critically it can either make or break your performance, particularly while in rehearsal where time efficiency is pertinent. This became especially important as Jared and I knew that we would be working remotely from each other for most of this process, so we needed to develop a file managing system that would serve us efficiently. We started working on our system within the first month of rehearsals, and although there was some trial and error along the way, we had eventually established an efficient file organizational system that became standard for how we worked during rehearsals. As our process developed, so did our tactical workings in our shared folder. For example, Michael would send us weekly updates of any new content added to the main production folder. So, anytime I needed to transfer updated content from the main production folder into one of our existing folders, I would create a new folder within that existing folder, and label it with the current date to keep Jared from having to sift through old content in order to find the updated content.

5.2 - The Shared Folder

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND Search Files and Folders

All Files > HERE I AM - PRODUCTION > 02_Assets

| Name ^ | Updated |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Francis Scott Key & SSB | Feb 18, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| MISC | Feb 9, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| protest footage | Feb 18, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| White Marsh Cemetery | Feb 7, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.1a_NYTimesRachelSwarns_272 Slaves Were Sold to Save Georgetown.pdf | Feb 2, 2021 by Jared Mezzocchi |
| 1.2a_Meli_Csmonitor.pdf | Feb 2, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.3_Documentary Edit- Meli NSO Convocation -.mp4 | Feb 2, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.4a_Healy Hall - 2.jpg | Feb 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.4b_Healy Hall - 3.jpg | Feb 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.4c_Copley Hall - 1.jpg | Feb 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.4d_Copley Hall - 2.jpg | Feb 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.4e_Arrupe Hall - 2.jpg | Feb 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.4f_Arrupe Hall - 1.jpg | Feb 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.4g_Anne Marie Becraft Hall - 2.jpg | Feb 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.4h_Georgetown University Campus Tour.mp4 | Feb 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.5a_Bernie - MéliiKneelingNSOConvocationPhoto1.png | Feb 2, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.5b_Bernie - MéliiKneelingNSOConvocationPhoto2.png | Feb 2, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.6_Liturgy - Pres DeGioia Remarks - 18 Apr 2017.mp4 | Feb 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| 1.7_Meli - Carrying the College Banner at Convocation.jpg | Feb 2, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |

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Shared Box Folder in Early Development (circa 02/09/21) – *photo credit: Jeremy Bennett*

5.2 - The Shared Folder

The screenshot shows a web interface for a shared Box folder. At the top, there is a red header with the University of Maryland logo and a search bar. Below the header, a sidebar on the left contains navigation options: All Files, Recents, Synced, Trash, Notes, and Favorites. The main content area displays a breadcrumb path: All Files > HERE I AM - PRODUCTION > 02_Assets. Below this, a table lists the contents of the folder, including folder names and their update dates and authors.

| Name ^ | Updated |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Archives | Mar 28, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Articles | Apr 4, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Brown vs. Board | Mar 11, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Convocation | Apr 13, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Credits | Apr 12, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Descendants | Apr 1, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Design Plates | Mar 7, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Francis Scott Key & SSB | Mar 7, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Georgetown Campus | Apr 4, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Hand Written Text | Mar 21, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| JARED ADDS | Mar 21, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Libation Scene | Mar 10, 2021 by Jared Mezzocchi |
| Liturgy | Mar 7, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Meli's Family photographs | Apr 8, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Miscellaneous | Apr 1, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Mississippi & Louisiana | Mar 7, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Osage Orange Trees | Feb 21, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Other Cemeteries | Mar 7, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |
| Photo Shoot Footage 04_06_21 | Apr 8, 2021 by Jeremy Bennett |

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Shared Box Folder by the End of the Production – *photo credit: Jeremy Bennett*

Chapter 6: The Painter

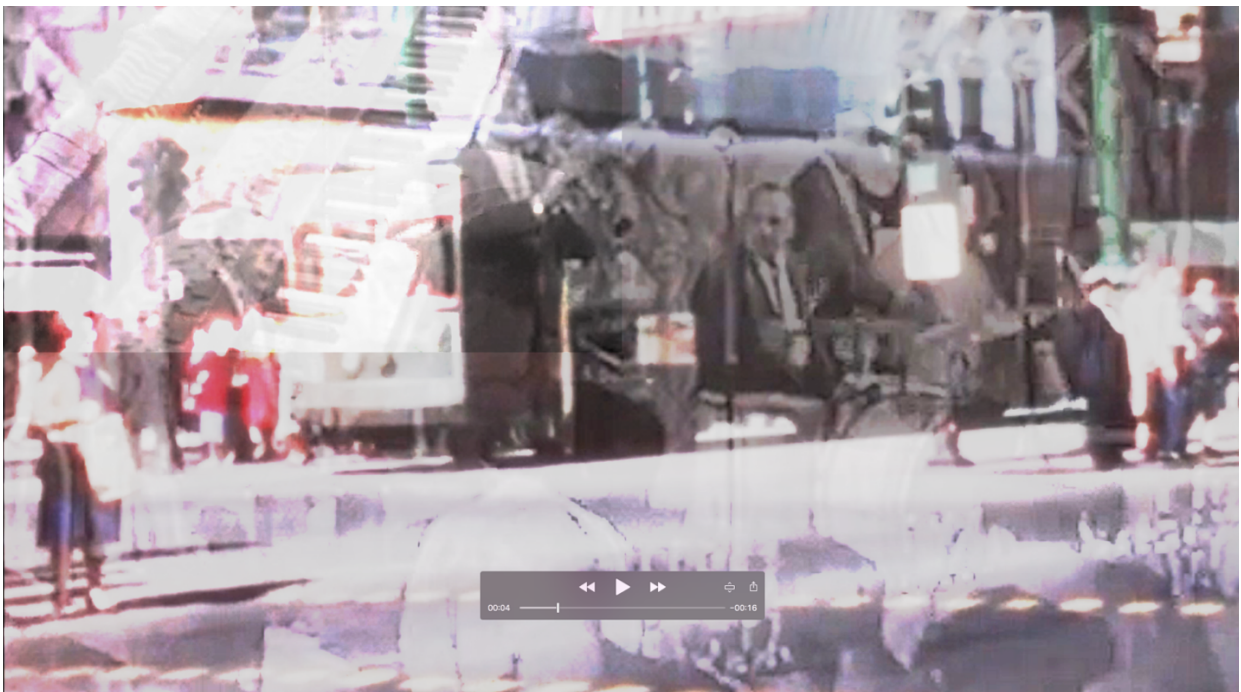
In knowing that Jared would be programming in the show using the software Troikatronix :

Isadora (aka Isadora), I had to consider the best way that we could be efficient in rehearsal. Jared was the painter in this analogy, and so it was my duty as the painter's assistant to provide the painter with the supplies necessary for him to work both efficiently, and effectively while creating his masterpiece. I thought to myself, "if I were painting this picture, what materials would I need to paint a beautiful masterpiece?" So, I flooded our shared box folder with a myriad of cutouts, collages, montages, stock footage, and over related content that might be useful in those discovery moments with the director. Although, I knew that it would be impossible for me to predict every need of Jared's, supplying some of these materials early on helped our efficiency in rehearsal overall. This also made for some interesting discoveries as we created a series of compositions that was a combination of two artistic minds coming together for the first time.

6.1 - Content Demos



Video Montage – “Convocation” – *photo credit: Jeremy Bennett*



Video Montage – “I Was Born” – *photo credit: Jeremy Bennett*

6.1 - Content Demos



Video Montage – “Conjuring the Storm” – *photo credit: Jeremy Bennett*



Still Collage – “The Ancestors” – *photo credit: Jeremy Bennett*

Chapter 7: The Technical Setup

When determining our technical needs for this show, we first had to determine our artistic needs. Secondly, we had to consider both our capabilities and our limitations as we maneuvered through these nuances when it came to understanding our needs within the confines of virtual space, and a platform that was not initially designed for virtual live performance. Fortunately, Jared was just coming off a successful run of *Russian Troll Farm*, an experimental virtual live performance, which laid the foundation for most of the technological feats attempted with this production. Meli was our leading lady, and Derek wanted to make sure that she would always be captured prominently within frame. There were early discussions of featuring Somi live on camera alongside Meli in a supporting role as the conjurer of the ancestral realm, but this idea later dropped off. The needs of incorporating sound also helped us to understand our best approach when determining the overall setup.

Our tech setup required two remotely separate computer stations: one located in Meli's apartment and the other started at Jared's house but was eventually moved to a different location for me to tech and run the show. The setup in Meli's apartment included a projector aimed at the wall behind where she was standing. This laid the foundation for the multi-layering of imagery achieved in the show. A Logitech camera captured Meli's feed on zoom, which allowed for Jared to screen capture Meli's video feed in Isadora from his computer and program the show. Using a VNC server, we were also able to control the computer in Meli's apartment remotely while also running projection cues on a secondary Isadora window on the main computer. Andre also remotely programmed and operated his sound cues in Qlab from that same computer. The feed that the audience saw (or show feed) was fed through an OBS channel onto YouTube.

The need for controlled lighting in Meli's physical space also proved essential as we quickly came to understand in rehearsals. The slightest change in intensity and color temperature mattered immensely in Isadora, and thus, required a semi-sophisticated light system that could regulate any change in natural light in the space as well as maintain continuity in color and intensity. In order to achieve this, we knew that we would need the expertise of a professional lighting designer, so Alberto was brought on board the team as our lighting systems expert. Although the role of lighting appeared subservient to multimedia in this fashion, it proved to be a critical component to our system that would not have been as successful without it. Furthermore, collaborating with Alberto in this way enlighten my understanding of color and intensity in such a way that I otherwise would never have discovered if not on this unusual platform.

7.1 - Production Meeting Notes (Tech Needs)

HERE I AM Production Meeting #2 01_29_21

Equipment Needs:

- Wide throw projector - there maybe optimas in media lab inventory
- A laptop - Jared will either supply or we'll need to outsource - TDPS may have one available
- Webcam - VidCo will supply
- Lav mics and computer input - Michael will reach out to DPAC

We will need to coordinate delivery to Meli's apartment in Georgetown DC

Have everything ready to go in a week (Feb 8th)

Jeremy's Task Orders:

- Check media lab inventory to see if an optima is available
- Reach out to Devin about possibly borrowing a laptop from TDPS

Next Meeting:

Wednesday 02_03_21 @ 3-3:30pm - TECH TALK WITH SOMI (add to calendar)

– photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

Chapter 8: The Film Shoot

Following the end of one of our Sunday multimedia rehearsals, Derek, Michael, Meli and myself met briefly to discuss the needs for our upcoming film shoot. Derek listed specific areas on campus where he wanted us to capture Meli on film. I prepared a shot list and shared it with the team prior to the day of the film shoot. On the day of the shoot, I documented every take on the list as we shot them. The film shoot itself was a breeze. Meli brought her daughter's iPhone, and we use the camera to capture the all the necessary video takes. Although, we got a lot of good takes I noted the bad ones in real time on the shot list for my personal reference later. Once Michael uploaded all the videos files to the shared drive, I combed through all the footage, renamed every video file, denoted the timecodes, and added any notes about certain takes that might be useful to Derek and Jared when watching the footage.

When it came time to integrating this footage in rehearsal, having the shot list proved extremely helpful. There were times when Derek would reference a moment from one of the videos, and using this document, I could provide Jared with the video name, and the timecode he needed to achieve the desired look. Although, I had conducted film shoots in the past, my first being for *The Visit* during my graduate career, one of the things I had learned from that experience was the importance of file and content management because failing to do so can be the difference between having a very efficient tech process, or a lot of wasted time spent searching through tons of redundant video files.

Chapter 9: The Technical (Tech) Rehearsal Process

Since we had frontloaded so much of the visual content for the show during our many work sessions early on, tech rehearsals became a time for us to fine tune certain moments in the show with sound. Therefore, our tech rehearsal schedule only required a full day and a half. My “booth” setup was a series of windows on a single monitor (see figure 9.2). File sharing and Google Docs had proven to be our savior throughout much of this process when it came to time efficiency and data management. As a cue sheet, we used an online copy of the script and added our cues outside the margins as comments. Writing tech notes in this way also became a breeze. If we were in the middle of a run and I needed to either communicate a note to Jared or add a note for myself given by the director, I would simply write a reply to the cue in the comments section. I prefaced all notes with the date to decipher old from new notes. This cue sheet and note taking system had proven to be so foolproof that I never want to work any other way again.

9.1 - The Cue Sheet

ns Help Last edit was 6 days ago

al

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My mother is holding me in her arms when she hears of the decision. My newly minted mother holds her newborn baby - me - very close, knowing in this **moment**, that my worldview and my life will be so much different from her own.

This decision by the Supreme Court effectively strikes down the Jim Crow laws that had been legislated after the abandonment of Reconstruction.

The Plessy vs. Ferguson decision of 1896 ushered in years of **domestic terrorism**, murder and disenfranchisement under the guise of law, order, and "white supremacy".

On that day in May, 1954, my mother **says** a prayer for me and all the babies like me; that things will be different.

Vocals. "Meli Ama Grandmother Theme" (A song, a prayer, a lullaby?) Montage of Imagery - including images of Meli's grandmother?

I came through my mama, but I was my grandmother's child.

As a girl, I was always going somewhere
but the most important person in my life **was my grandmother**
Geneva Ruby Taylor Lawless Smith

Image.

Big Mama, big grandma, mother, my heart.

She was my best friend.

I was with my grandmother from the time I was born until she died in 1994.
At the age of 97.

She was the one who told me who I am.
The begats, the story, the story telling,
the food, the heart, the history.
And the names, the names, the names.

My mother gave me something different.
As a little person I was very, very shy.
My favorite place was hiding behind my mama's leg.
I would sort of peep out

8

Jared Mezzocchi 1:57 PM Apr 11 ✓
CUE 22: my mother

Jared Mezzocchi 2:40 PM Apr 11 ✓
CUE 23: family portrait

Jared Mezzocchi 2:43 PM Apr 11 ✓
CUE 24: total family culture

Jeremy Bennett 5:59 PM Apr 14 ✓
CUE 25: I came through my mama

Jeremy Bennett 9:06 PM Apr 12 ✓
CUE 26: grandmother

Jared Mezzocchi 9:29 PM Apr 12 ✓
CUE 27: the names...

Jared Mezzocchi 2:52 PM Apr 11 ✓
CUE 28: mom 1

Cue sheet with cues added in the right margins – *photo credit: Jeremy Bennett*

9.1 - The Cue Sheet

dd-ons Help Last edit was 6 days ago

Arial - 11

for all of my life
as a black American child born in 1954.
I am a black woman who has inherited this righteous anger.

Visual shift 18th century Maryland. Vocal shift (maybe connected to Long Line of Queens...?)

In 1715, my ancestor of record,
Queen Mary Papow,
arrived in the Maryland colony from England,
as a free woman.
Her sponsor, Thomas Larkin,
sold her indenture contract to James Carroll.

Queen Mary served out the terms of her indenture.
And when that was over,
rather than being freed, as her contract required,
she was criminalized and enslaved for life.
That meant for Queen Mary
that all the future generations of her family
would be kept enslaved.

When James Carroll died, his will dictated that
All his property and holdings
Be donated to the Jesuits and the Catholic Church.

This gift would later serve as the foundation
for his nephew, John Carroll, to purchase the Hilltop,
on which Georgetown now sits.

What kind of people craft laws that forever consign the children
born from the bodies of Black women
to be slaves in perpetuity
for all of their lives?

And so the children of my heavenly grandmother, Queen Mary, were all kept enslaved until her
grandchildren and some of her great grandchildren sued the Jesuits for their freedom.

Edward Queen, Queen Mary's grandson, started his case in 1791.
And won his freedom in 1794.
This was good.
But what of the other grandchildren?

14

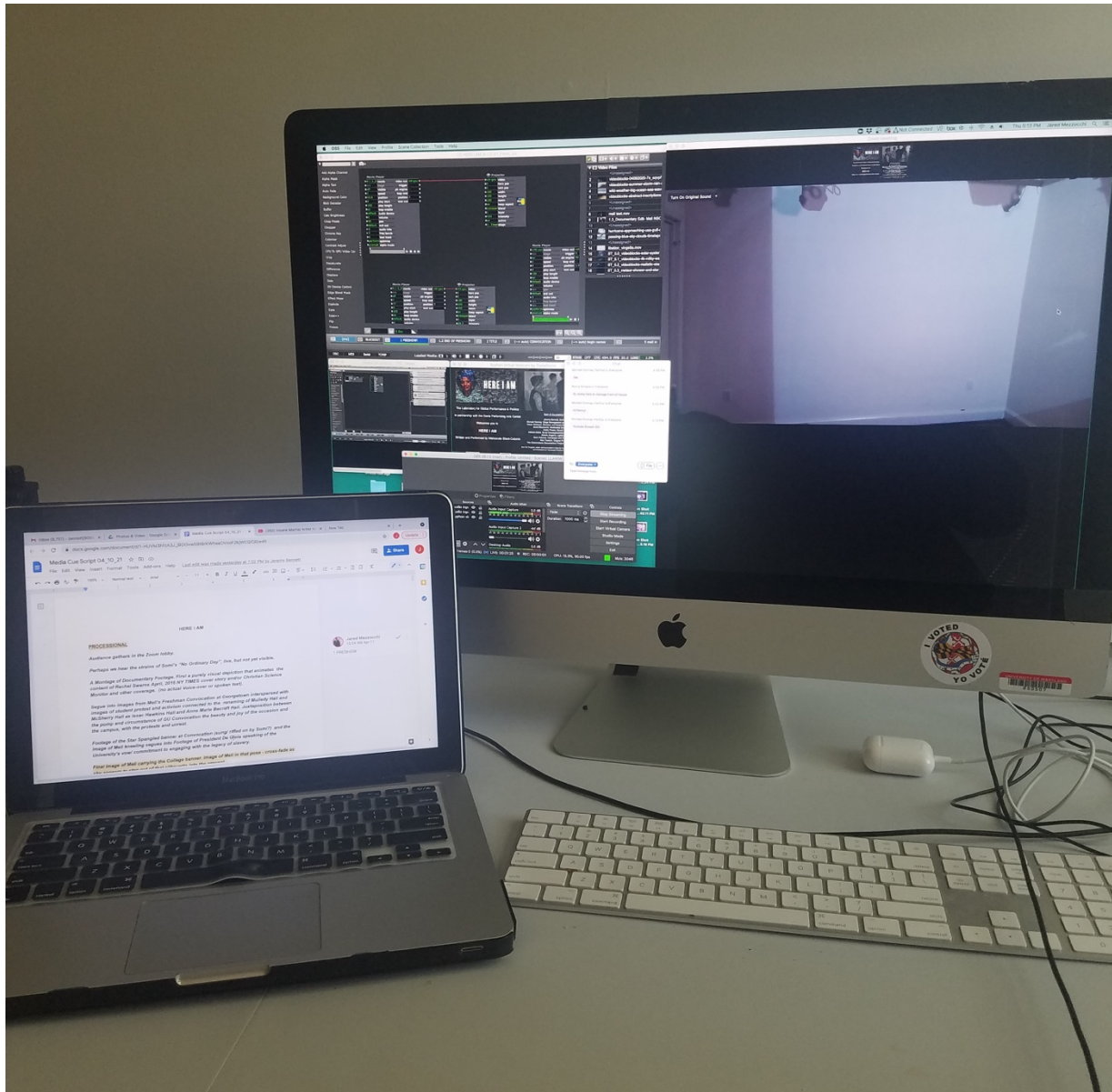
Jared Mezzocchi 3:46 PM Apr 11
CUE 46: neutral return - push in.

Jeremy Bennett 7:30 PM Apr 13
04_13_21 with sound?

Jeremy Bennett 7:31 PM Apr 13
CUE 47: IN 1715
MC: map

Cue sheet with cues and tech note added in the right margin. – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

9.2 - The "Booth"

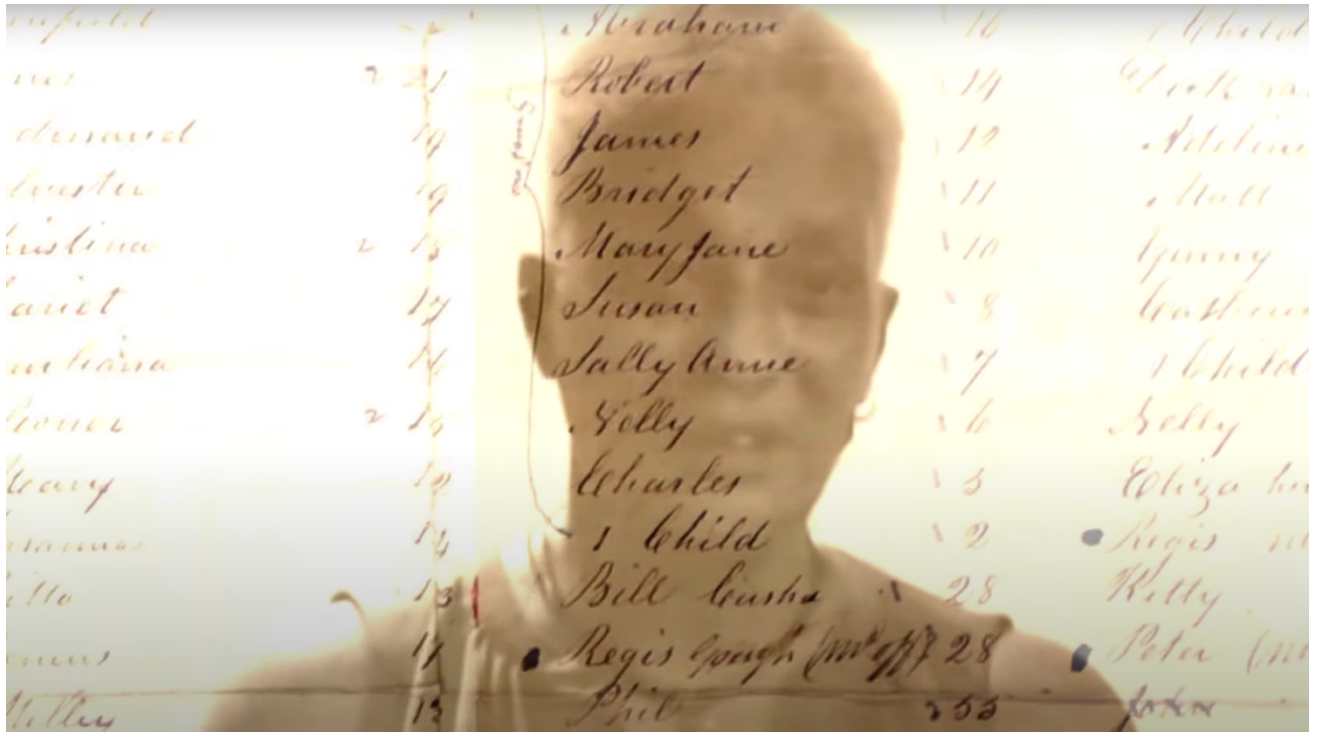


– photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

Chapter 10: Opening & Running the Show

Running the show was a feat in itself and required a new level of attentiveness, tactfulness, and accountability from everyone involved. During preshow, I had to lookout for my cue to start the show from Michael in the zoom chat. The zoom chat was also where we communicated any issues that arose, or if we needed to hold for any reason during the show (sort of like a pseudo “backstage” headset communication system.) Because the system did not allow for a stage manager to be able to vocally call cues during the show, each department was responsible for executing and keeping track of their own cues. Overall, the run went well apart from a couple of hiccups that arose on the tech side of things, which required us to hold momentarily during the show. After the first of these occurrences, we decided to add a window that we could switch to, which displayed a title card informing the audience that we were experiencing technical difficulties and to please standby. House management also made the audience aware that because it was a live performance, we may need to hold for technical difficulties in their pre-show announcements communicated in the chat. Communication to this magnitude became vital since our audience was streaming the performance and we were fearful of losing anyone due to a technical error.

10.1 - Production Photos



"I see them - these ancestors - all around me." – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett



"Because tunnel vision is impossible." – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

10.1 - Production Photos

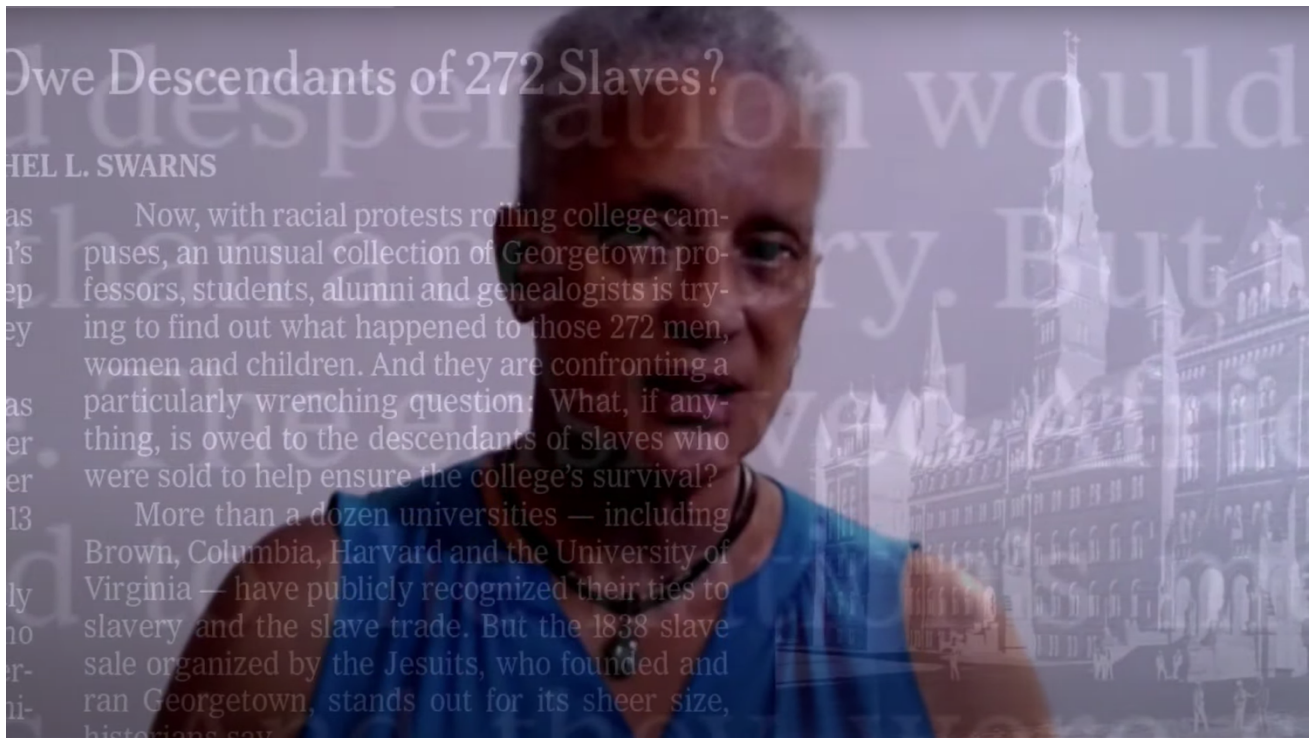


“On that day... my mother says a prayer for me... that things will be different.” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett



“She set me on a path of openness, to not be afraid.” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

10.1 - Production Photos



“I remember clear as day...No ordinary Day...” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett



“They didn't know alligators - do they have alligators in Maryland?” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

10.1 - Production Photos

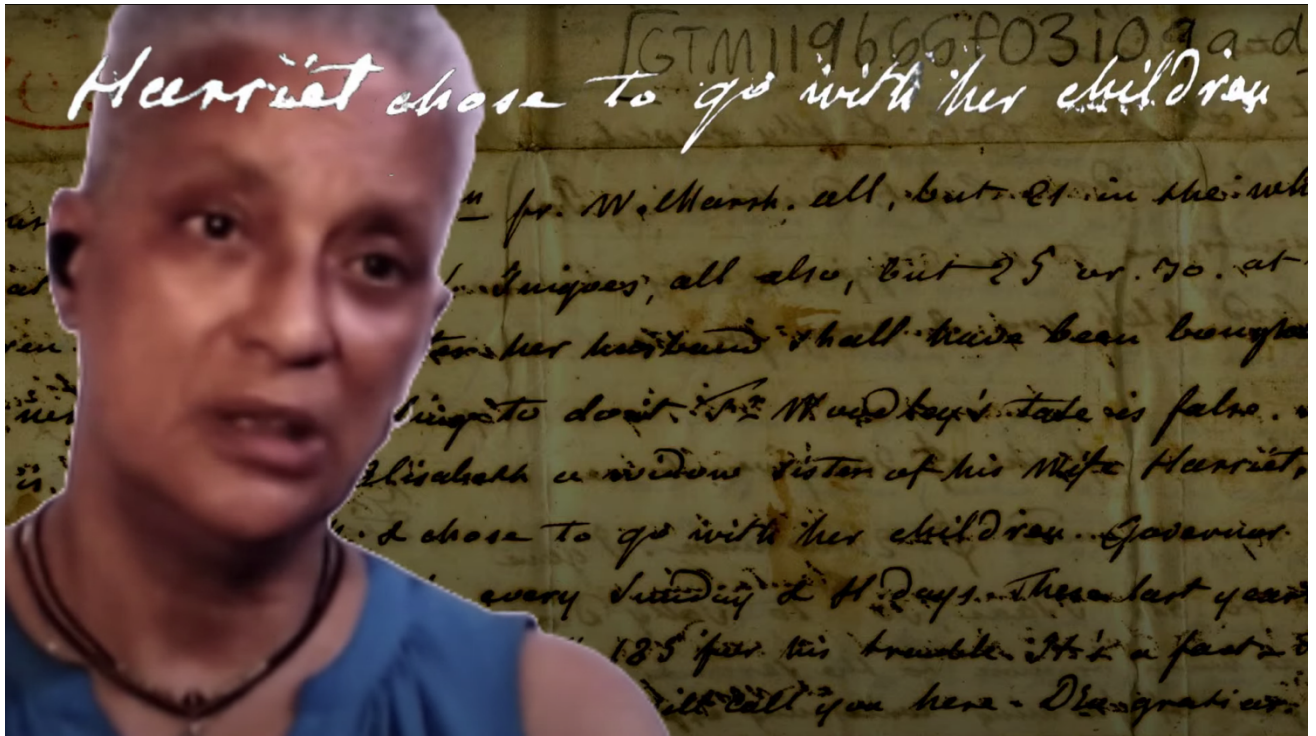


“Everybody across the eastern United States saw the meteor shower... including Abraham Lincoln.” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett



“And here I am, under the same sky, generations later... to honor their lives for time immemorial.” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

10.1 - Production Photos



“Harriet’s Decision” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett



“Where are the descendants of the people who were sold in 1838?” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

10.1 - Production Photos



“Well, where’s it at?” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett



“You’re not still angry, are you?” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

10.1 - Production Photos



“Facing this history is painful... we will tell the truth.” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett



“Anger let’s us all know something is wrong in this uncivil society.” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennet

10.1 - Production Photos



“To go out with your neighbors, strong and prepared. To speak hard truths. Here I am. Here we are.” – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

Michael Donnay, Stage Management and Research Dramaturgy

Derek Goldman, Direction and Script Development/Dramaturgy

Jared Mezzocchi, Multimedia Design and Direction

Andre Pluess, Sound Design

Nikkole Salter, Script Development/Dramaturgy and Direction

Alberto Segarra, Lighting Design

Somi Kakoma, Composer and Vocal Performance

Alex Troesch, Original Photography

The Descendants Documentary Project, Additional Videography

Closing/credits – photo credit: Jeremy Bennett

Chapter 11: Reflections

When I think back on the process of this production, I feel that I have grown in many ways as both a collaborator and a theatre practitioner. This experience has allowed me to think about process in a unique way, especially when approaching new and early-stage developing work. In thinking about how we started the process with a profound story, an idea, and not much of a script, I marvel at the momentous undertakings and the high level of artistry that we were able to accomplish under such constrained circumstances. This truly was an amazing team of artist who I respect for their commitment to create compelling and thought-provoking work with a deep passion for storytelling. Furthermore, I was amazed at how many of those early ideas influence so much of the finished design.

If given the opportunity to start this process all over again, I would allow myself to trust the process from the beginning and lean into those early moments of discovery without concern for the visual idea. In this regard, I have learned to be open to all forms of process. My only regret is that we did not have a long enough run to work out some of the technical kinks that we encountered during the run of the show. Prior to our final performance, we had only just implemented a solid contingency plan after a technical mishap occurred during the previous night's performance, which caused us to have to hold the show momentarily. Although we had a similar occurrence during our final performance, we were better prepared and able to troubleshoot the problem more flawlessly than before. However, and despite our efforts, we could not achieve a technically flawless show, but perhaps with a few more runs, this might have been achieved.