A DIRECTORIAL EXPLORATION OF SAM STEINER’S
LEMONS LEMONS LEMONS LEMONS LEMONS LEMONS

Honors/ BFA Directing Thesis

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By

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Honors Thesis ................................................................. Error! Bookmark not defined.
Director’s Statement ......................................................... 1
Play Analysis ................................................................. 1
  Identification ............................................................ 1
Given Circumstances .......................................................... 2
  Geographical Location .................................................. 2
  Economic Environment .................................................. 2
  Political Environment .................................................... 2
  Social Environment ....................................................... 2
Previous Action .............................................................. 3
Action Sentence ............................................................. 3
Character ............................................................... 3
  Bernadette ............................................................... 3
  Oliver ................................................................. 3
Vision and Concept .......................................................... 4
Spectacle and Design .......................................................... 5
Process ................................................................. 10
Process Photos ............................................................. 11
  Process Journals ......................................................... 20
  Auditions- February 24th .............................................. 20
  Callbacks- February 25th .............................................. 20
  Rehearsals: Week One- March 2nd- 6th .......................... 20
  Rehearsals: Week Two- March 9th-13th .......................... 21
  Digital Rehearsals- April 1st-15th ................................. 21
  Filming- April 16th-22nd ............................................ 22
  Final Product ............................................................ 22
Works Cited ........................................................................ 23
  .................................................................................. 23

*** Note to the reader: If you would like to view the video of *Lemons* ...
please contact Maddie Roth at roth.maddie@gmail.com or
honors@salemstate.edu to access the video via the honors archive.
Director’s Statement

“I can’t know you in one-hundred and forty... …Try.” -Sam Steiner,

Lemons...

Theatre has this magic effect on people. It can change the world with something as minimal as silence. People feel challenged by it, for it can make us confront things as a society we would rather not. The great effect that theatre has on the people who come into contact with it, whether it’s a negative or not, is something special.

As a director, I am fascinated by the human condition and seeing how our relationships can be affected by things that happen in our lives. When first reading this play I was immediately drawn to the world of this play. Learning to have to navigate through daily life and relationships with only 140 words or less per day was utterly fascinating. Once in quarantine, the play started to take on a whole new meaning when I in my personal life started to value my relationships with people who I could no longer see every day in a different way.

Especially now language is as important as ever. We would be losing our minds more than we are already in this quarantine if we only were allowed to speak in 140 words or less per day. The silence and isolation that is already being felt would be amplified. We now are valuing our relationships with people in a different way than we did prior to this pandemic. Bernadette and Oliver are already feeling isolated from each other as they are now learning to navigate this new world they are living in. Similar to the way that we are now. Things drastically changed over the course of three days and when it becomes real either knows exactly how to cope.

The value of our relationships especially during a time of crisis and drastic change, go from 0 to 100 real fast. We start to cherish the people in our lives in fear that we will lose them. Romantic relationships become important in ways we never thought since we have the time to reflect and ask ourselves what we really want. In the play, Oliver says to Bernadette, “I can’t know you in one-hundred and forty.” in which she responds, “Try” (Steiner 5). Think about how we are living now and can you get to know someone without being in their physical presence? This play asks you to try.

Through this, we are learning the power of speech and how important it is to have our voices heard. How important words are to human connection and how isolated we feel when it is taken away. When watching this piece, keep in mind how important it is that we have the ability to freely speak to our loved ones, coworkers and acquaintances without a limitation on how much we can say to them. Especially in a time such as this. How lucky we are to have the freedom of speech that we do.

Play Analysis

Identification

Title of Play: Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons
Author: Sam Steiner

*Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons* first premiered in January 2015 at the Warwick Arts Centre. It then headed to the National Student Drama Festival March of 2015 where it won three awards for writing and directing. *Lemons*... then went to the Latitude Festival in July of 2015 before going to Zoo Southside at Edinburgh Festival Fringe and returned again to Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2016. The show also travelled to Camden’s People Theatre in November of 2015 (Steiner 1).

**Given Circumstances**

**Geographical Location**
The play takes place in London England.

**Date: Year, Season, Time of Day**
This play takes place over the course of 18 months. Following Bernadette’s and Oliver’s relationship. This play is non-linear and jumps around these 18 months going from the start of their relationship and examining other milestones throughout.

**Economic Environment**
Bernadette and Oliver are both middle class. Bernadette did, however, come from a working-class family and this is something that gets brought up while they argue. Bernadette has risen up the social ladder by becoming a lawyer and she would rather forget that portion of her life where she was of the working class. “I know you hate me for that and for not understanding that your mum worked in Tesco and your dad barely worked so you have this thing about achievement” (Lemons, Steiner).

**Political Environment**
The United Kingdom operates with a constitutional monarchy. In this structure of government, the monarch is the head of the government but can’t actually make any of the big decisions. All of the major government decisions are made by Parliament. Parliament is split up into two houses, The House of Commons and The House of Lords. The House of Commons is the lower house and is more powerful. The House of Lords is the upper house and can vote to amend proposed laws through the House of Commons can usually vote to overrule those amendments (Kishlansky).

**Social Environment**
Bernadette and Oliver both are in different social circles. From the script, Bernadette doesn’t really have a lot of close friends. She is friends with Steph, who is the owner of the cat Dennis, and she is close to her brother. Other than that her social circle is rather small and this could be due to the fact that, being a lawyer, she works a lot. Oliver’s social circle is different from Bernadette’s. Oliver is a musician and hangs out with other artistic type people and activists who feel stronger against the hush law. Oliver is also friends with his ex-girlfriend Julie who you find out in the play he slept with after the protest where they threw a brick through a window.
**Previous Action**

The play opens with Bernadette and Oliver post hush law. It is evident that they are struggling to communicate. Prior to the hush law and them being together Bernadette was working her way through law school and Oliver was working as a jingle writer for ad companies. Oliver was attending the protest marches with Julie who is his ex-girlfriend though at this time he did not care about them as much as he does later in the play.

**Action Sentence**

Due to having a word limit Bernadette and Oliver must learn to navigate how to communicate with one another.

**Character**

**Bernadette**

Desires → Bernadette wants to be understood by her partner.

Will → Bernadette has a very strong will. She has worked extremely hard to be where she is.

Moral Stance → Bernadette has a lot of insecurities especially when it comes to who she is at her core. She wants so desperately to be a good person.

Decorum → Bernadette stands tall and holds the posture you think a lawyer would have. She wants to be seen as an equal to her other law cohorts.

**Oliver**

Desires → Oliver wants to make a difference in the world.

Will → Oliver can be lazy though he does care deeply about the things he is passionate about and will work hard for those things.

Moral Stance → Oliver means well at his core but sometimes he can be a little arrogant. He wants to make a difference in the world around him.

Decorum → Oliver has a stoner personality which causes him to have a slouch in his shoulders. He doesn’t hold himself as high as Bernadette does and he tends to carry his insecurities in the way he holds himself.
Vision and Concept

The original concept of the *Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons* was to have the play take place in two different apartments of Oliver and Bernadette. The apartments would very clearly be two separate rooms with two separate styles. As the play slowly unfolds, so will the rooms as they become one apartment combining the styles with it. There was also the concept of having two TVs on stage and they would be hooked up to cameras that would turn on at different moments in the play to show the actors on stage through the monitors. Implying that, “big brother” is always watching and keeping count of the words used. Along with this, I wanted to try and keep the actors on stage for as much time as I could and try not to have them go offstage. We were going to hide the costumes and props they would have needed around the stage making them feel as though they appear from thin air.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, our production of *Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons* was unable to open in the intended space along with the initial concept and design. However, after rereading the script again in the circumstances of our world, the play took on a whole new meaning. I started to question what would happen if the world of Oliver and Bernadette and the world that we live right now collided. How our relationships would be affected not only having world limitations but also having to be isolated and quarantined. The play now started to take on a whole new meaning.

We had to move our rehearsals and the production fully online. The question then became, are we going to ignore the fact that we are on a Zoom call or are we going to lean into this. As a team, we felt that setting the play in our world now made the most sense. It was all something that we could identify with and felt it was something our audience would be able to connect with.
Spectacle and Design
This is one of the inspiration images I used for the play pre and post COVID-19 outbreak.
This was the image we used for inspiration for Oliver’s protest, specifically the Space Noise March.
I will love you through it all.

bliss
Process

I operate with a feminist directing model in my show processes. At the start of every process, I like to sit down with the cast and management team to create company goals and systems to keep us on track.

Lemons Company Goals

- Fostering an environment for vulnerability
- Respecting Limits
- Self Care!!
- Trust yourself like a professional
- Foster an environment that allows growth
- It’s okay to say I don’t know
- Stay on track

Lemons Show Goal

- Be Güd!
- Make an impact/ them cry
- Spark Conversation

Systems

- Say I don’t know
- One word check-in at the start and end
- Consistent line of communication of individuals
- Anyone can put the train back on track
- Personal warm-ups after the group warm-up
- Feminist Model
- Leave your s*** at the door
- Fun Fact of the day
This is from our first rehearsal on March 2nd when we made our company goals and systems.
This is a table work photo where we were mapping out the relationship and when things take place within the relationship.
This photo is from the day we physically cut and pasted the play into chronological order.
This another rehearsal photo doing tablework.
This is from character development rehearsal.
This is another character development rehearsal photo.
Oliver:
- Insecure
- Bernie Supporters. (for inspo)
- Stoner
- Musician
- Class Complex
- Stubborn
- Ambitious
- Eva Cassidy
- Passion
- Affirmation
- Pride
- Needs Validation
- Codependent
- Yellow Lust
- Anti-Establishment
- Friends w/ Ex.
- Masculinity Issue
- Thinks he’s funny
  (A ball buster if you win)

Affirmation
- Physical Touch
- Acts of Service
- Gifts
- Quality Time
This is another character rehearsal photo.

This photo is from the day we put the show in chronological order and we had the actors read through it.
This is from the last rehearsal we had before we went digital and we block some of the play.
Process Journals

Auditions- February 24th

Today I was genuinely surprised with the turnout of people who came to auditions. I was a little nervous prior to auditions that not enough people would audition. I was very pleasantly surprised and as a director, it has made my choice very difficult. I am very happy with our callback list and I’m excited to see what they bring to the table tomorrow.

After auditions, Laura, Megan and I sat down with all the headshots and went through every one. Pairing people together who we thought would look nice together and creating our callback list. Once we had our list we pre-paired people together to make our lives a little easier for tomorrow. I am very lucky to have the supportive crew that I do have and I think they are going to be a great team that will really support this process.

Callbacks- February 25th

Callbacks were incredible. Such a talented group of actors and they are making my life so difficult. I really enjoyed being able to play with them and see how people take direction. Everyone was really willing to play and make big choices which were amazing. Towards the end, I think Laura and I knew who we wanted to cast and had it narrowed down to a few people.

We really loved Ryan and Michelle from the start. I loved their chemistry and they played off each other very nicely. I loved the softness that Michelle brought the Bernadette. She was the only person who really brought that softness that I was looking for. I know that Michelle and Ryan just came off a show where they played significant others but I think this play is so different from that world that it will be different. I think that might be one of the challenges is getting them to drop Nick and Jan and fall into Oliver and Bernadette.

Another slight problem is that Ryan is involved with a Netflix series and there is a chance they could be filming during the run of the show but Ryan doesn’t know for sure yet. Since this is the case we needed to cast someone as a swing to take over for Ryan just in case but also could take over for Michelle if something were to happen. Having worked on processes where swing has needed to be put into play they can be a saving grace. Especially with a show like this I felt it actually could be very beneficial to the process.

Once going through all the factors we decided to cast Ryan Doyle as Oliver, Michelle Moran as Bernadette and Mat Stanley as the swing.

Rehearsals: Week One- March 2nd- 6th

The first week of rehearsals has been overwhelmingly amazing. I could not ask for a better team. Everyone is so open to ideas and discussing this world we are going to build. The first day of rehearsals we discussed the feminist model of directing and how we were going to apply that to the process. For everyone in the room, this was their first experience working with a feminist model of directing. I explained the process and how it is more of a linear hierarchy style. Where not one person is more “important”
than the other. We are all equal artists in the process and it is okay to openly question or disagree with things. It’s all about an open line of communication between everyone.

Part of the feminist process is creating a list of company goals and systems that we can follow to help us reach our goals. We created ours and put them in our shared google drive that everyone could see. We start each rehearsal with a one-word check-in and a fun fact of the day. Something that was fun and would help the actors also get to know each other better and make everyone feel comfortable with one another. We also end each night with another one-word check-in.

This first week we had our first read-through and talked about some rough design ideas that the designers had already. The designers later next week are going to come in and sit down with the actors to try and cater their designs to how the actors view their characters.

Since this play is nonlinear we also decided to put the show together in the order we thought it went in. We had a physical copy of the script that we cut up into pieces and then taped together as a company the play in chronological order. We then did a read-through of the play in that order and table worked the whole play in chronological order.

**Rehearsals: Week Two- March 9th-13th**

This second week we started off with some improvisation of some scenes that don’t exist in the play but in the world. We did Bernadette and Oliver’s first date. It actually helped us to discover a lot about the characters. We started making lists on the board about different characteristics and personality traits that the characters had. This became extremely helpful when we were building these characters and finding their voices.

This week we also found out that our production may get cancelled due to the outbreak of COVID-19. This is quite devastating news for all of us involved. Though I am hopeful that things might settle down and we could maybe still have a show. However, I started brainstorming alternatives just in case.

As a company, we decided to support the cast of *Much Ado About Nothing* in their performance before we went back and recorded the sections of the play that we had blocked.

We camera recorded the, what I call, *I LoveYou Montage* and the five minutes until midnight section.

**Digital Rehearsals- April 1st-15th**

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, we had to move our production fully online which included our rehearsals. This was something I was nervous about since it is very different having to be in an online space rather than in person. It was really nice to get back into the groove of things with the actors. We talked a lot about our original goals and how we could transfer those to this new online version. We decided that as a company we were going to lean into the current climate of the world we were living in and see how that can translate the play.

We also read through the script for the first time since the school had closed. We all collectively after reading it felt this play had a completely new meaning than it did before and we felt that people would connect to it. In a time like this, we need art that can help us cope and we all felt *Lemons*... was that and could be catharsis for a lot of people.
Being that everything was going to be filmed through Zoom our rehearsals were structured differently than they would be in person. We would run through scenes and make filming gameplan for our anticipated filming schedule later in the month. It definitely feels more relaxed since with film we can do as many takes as we want however that’s part of the reason why I love live theatre so much. The spontaneity and unexpectedness that can happen on stage.

Filming- April 16th-22nd
Filming was hectic and inspiring and exhausting all in one swoop. We got everything done that we needed to and kept on discovering new things about this play. I felt that our exploration went further and we were able to flesh everything out that we needed to. It definitely is the weirdest thing to film through Zoom. We had to get creative with angles though I found myself drifting to this quote by Mark Rothko, “We favour the simple expression of complex thought” (Rothko). I thought rather than trying to overcomplicate this with crazy angles, filters and blocking stick to the simplicity for it will give the greater themes of this play a chance to shine through more. I found small ways to break it up and make it feel less redundant but I like the simplicity of it. I wanted viewers to focus on the words and message of the piece rather than the spectacle. What is weird about that statement is that I usually rely very heavy on spectacle as a director and for the first time I did feel I needed to. I let the play really speak for itself. This project is really what I needed to help further me as a young director. I feel like I learned so much about simplicity and how effective it can be.

Final Product
I could not be more pleased with the final product. I think that with the circumstances we really made lemonade out of lemons. I could not be more thankful for my team. They put in an incredible amount of work and helped to make something beautiful. The amount of positive feedback I receive from friends, family and faculty alike was really heart warming. My ultimate goal was to make a piece people could resonate with. I wanted to do the play justice and tell this story that from the beginning I felt was one to tell. I am happy to say I think I completed my goals. As of right now the future is very uncertain but all I know is I want to keep making art and continue to make art that people resonate with.
Works Cited


“Mark Rothko Quote: ‘We Favor the Simple Expression of the Complex Thought. We Are for the Large Shape Because It Has the Impact of the Unequ...’.” Quotefancy, quotefancy.com/quote/1392906/Mark-Rothko-We-favor-the-simple-expression-of-the-complex-thought-We-are-for-the-large.
